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**CIRCULAR MIGRATION TO AND
FROM JORDAN:
AN ISSUE OF HIGH POLITICS**

Françoise De Bel-Air

CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2008/20

Circular Migration Series

Political and Social Module

Cooperation project on the social integration
of immigrants, migration, and the movement
of persons (CARIM)

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Circular Migration to and from Jordan: An Issue of High Politics
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Abstract

CARIM

The Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM) was created in February 2004 and has been financed by the European Commission. Until January 2007, it referred to part C - “*cooperation related to the social integration of immigrants issue, migration and free circulation of persons*” of the MEDA programme, i.e. the main financial instrument of the European Union to establish the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Since February 2007, CARIM has been funded as part of the AENEAS programme for technical and financial assistance to third countries in the areas of migration and asylum. The latter programme establishes a link between the external objectives of the European Union’s migration policy and its development policy. AENEAS aims at providing third countries with the assistance necessary to achieve, at different levels, a better management of migrant flows.

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Abstract

This paper describes various aspects and patterns of circular migration in Jordan from a socio-political perspective. It particularly sheds light on the debate of migration against the background of Jordan's political transition since the 1990s. In addition, it discusses how circular migration is viewed by public and private authorities as well as by the public opinion.

Résumé

Le papier met en exergue différents aspects et formes de migration circulaire en Jordanie et analyse les enjeux socio-politiques qui régissent ces mouvements. Le papier tient compte particulièrement du débat général sur la migration à la lumière de la transition politique du pays depuis les années 1990. En outre, les attitudes des autorités publiques et privées ainsi que celles de l'opinion publique à l'égard du phénomène de la migration circulaire sont analysées.

Historically, Jordan has always been an immigration as well as an emigration country. International and regional conflicts made it a hub for the settlement of refugees; its wealth during the period of the rentier State in the 1970's allowed it to import numerous foreign workers. At the same time, the effects of domestic political instability, of its lack of natural resources and productive economy were controlled by resorting to an "open door" policy left to emigration of local, educated and skilled manpower.

The 1990-91 Gulf War, which followed the collapse of Jordan's rentier State from the mid-1980's onward, however, put an end to the settlement of Jordanian emigrants abroad, while that of foreign economic immigrants in the country became an issue. Laissez-faire policies in terms of migration were progressively reviewed, in an attempt to control and channel flows to fight unemployment of locals through "Jordanization" of the work force, as well as to abide by Structural Adjustments Programmes' requirements in terms of implementing economic liberalisation, opening of capital, development of export-led production through the attraction of Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs). Circular migration is now promoted by Jordanian public actors and decision makers. However, political factors lead to conflicts of interests which counter the successful implementation of such policies. After briefly reviewing the context of migration to and from Jordan, this report will emphasize the political stakes of promoting and implementing such policies regarding immigration. Concerning emigration, a controversy emerges on the issue of the brain drain vs. political stabilization, as will be described.

Migration, economics and the political transition

From 1973 to the first Gulf War: Labour migration and the rentier welfare state

Since 1973 and the oil boom, Jordan had enjoyed rapid growth rates and development based primarily on private funds, the remittances sent by some 300 000 Jordanian workers expatriated in the Gulf (approximately one third of its labour force), as well as on public funds, the important amounts of aid granted by oil-producing countries to Jordan. These external revenues amounted to 50% of GDP around 1980. Jordan could be, then, defined as a "rentier" or "semi-rentier State" (Beblawi, 1987) or "rentier economy" (Brand, 1994). Moreover, the increase of families' average income through the remittances of expatriates has increased the money supply, thus enhancing the standard of living and allowing for the emergence of a consumer society in Jordan, without the economy becoming productive.

Following the departure of a bulk of its manpower to the Gulf countries, Jordan resorted to the import of labour migrants, a process officially labelled "replacement migration"¹. Immigration responded to the upscale mobility of non-expatriate Jordanian labour force (may be also stimulated it), even though its education and qualification levels were low, because the influx of the rent into the economy raised its ambitions, in terms of wages as well as in terms of status: a process called "job ladder effect". Until the mid-1980's, the Jordanian work market can be described as "segmented", in favour of the local manpower. Labour-intensive, productive and service-oriented professions, or even what is called the "3D" jobs, i.e. "dirty, dangerous, difficult", thus socially not rewarding, as well as badly paid, were left to the immigrant manpower.

However, the gradual return of Jordanian expatriates from the oil producing countries, from the mid-1980's onwards and the Gulf War which forced back to Jordan some 300 000 nationals employed in the GCC area upset this relative equilibrium. Unemployment levels became very high: they reached 30% of the active population (ESCWA, 1992).

¹ In reality, most of the foreign laborers in Jordan were "secondary labor", "semi-skilled and unskilled casual employment in low-status occupations at discriminatory wage rates" (Seccombe, 1986: 383), in the construction sector or in agriculture for instance, allowing for the local rural manpower's emigration to the urban areas as well as the upscale mobility of local workers. Moreover, it has been showed that, the sectors employing foreigners mainly developed from the end of the 1970's onwards, stimulated by population growth, implementation of new development plans (in agriculture for instance) and mostly by the new prosperity which developed during Jordan's rentier years (Czichowski, 1991).

The 1990's and beyond: liberalisation of the economy and political transition

Moreover, due to the return of the Jordanian expatriate manpower and the collapse of the Jordanian rentier State in the mid-1980's², Jordan had to enter a drastic reform process of its economy, supported by a series of agreements with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, signed in 1989, 1992, 1995 and 1999. "These agreements called for [...] far-reaching reform measures [...], including stronger stabilisation, trade liberalisation, financial deregulation and privatisation" (El-Said, 2002: 254). After the signature of the peace agreement with Israel, Jordan reaffirmed its will to pursue an active process of social, political and economic reform, but the process of agreements' implementation was slow until 1998. After 1999, however, it started picking up dramatically. The new SAP signed that year was putting "stricter conditionality on the new loan"³, in terms of implementation of a clear strategy towards privatisation of State's assets (see Knowles, 2005: 150-155). In 2005, it can be stated that, within that process, "State organisations have moved from an objective of outright control to one of facilitation of investments and exports, [...] of facilitation of the efficiency of the markets, in particular the financial markets [...], State control moving from ownership to regulatory control" (Knowles, 2005: 179). Apart from the privatisation process, the issue of unemployment alleviation is on the agenda, through the encouragement of Foreign Direct Investment, to be channelled for the development of productive economic activities, for instance, the industrial and IT sectors.

However, such reforms bear great political sensitivity within the Jordanian context, as it disrupts some of the clientelist links tying the regime to some sectors of the population since the 1930's, on an "allegiance for food" basis⁴. Cancelling subsidies, cutting down on public expenditures and rationalising the public service objectively hit severely those regions dependant on state assistance but also, were interpreted in political terms as a drop-out of former allies by the regime⁵. Also, economic reforms and the changing nature of the resources (development aid, direct and indirect foreign investments) notably changed the modalities of redistribution and saw the emergence of new interest groups. Some former ones however were unable to insert themselves in the new channels of access to capital and resources, while the progressive increase in direct levies and taxation, the regular deterioration of public services take their political toll since the early 1990's.

In such a domestic context, the political liberalisation process pressured for by the international agencies as a natural consequence of economic reforms⁶ is to be controlled for the regime to keep upper hand on politics. And this, all the more so that the 1990's and the turn of the 21st century saw a wealth of events shake the region, which have deep implications for the stability of the country: the signature of the Oslo agreement between the PLO and Israel in 1993, its failure which postpones the creation of a Palestinian State, the terms of the agreement itself, as well as those of Wadi Araba Accords signed in 1994 between Jordan and Israel all raise fears over the settlement of the 1948' refugees in host countries in some sectors of the Jordanian opinion⁷. The sparking of the second

2 After a decrease of oil prices, Arab aid started declining, while Arab workers were to be progressively replaced by Asians in the Gulf countries in the early 1980's. Jordan resorted to borrowing to keep up the strong public sector, charity-State system of redistribution and the newly acquired standard of living and consumerist habits of its population. Thus, "its debt service then exploded from around 300 million \$ in 1983 to a peak of 1150 million \$ in 1988 at which point it had no choice but to open negotiations with the IMF as a first step towards debt rescheduling" (Wils, 1998: 100-101).

3 Due to some domestic resistance to privatisation by some sectors of the former rentier elite, the process of global liberal reform was slowed down.

4 The mainly rural regions in the south and, to a lesser extent, the east of Jordan have been tied to the Hashemite regime by a social contract, in which allegiance is offered in return for protection (Tell, 1993; 1994).

5 This led to the sparking of violent riots in the south of Jordan in April 1989.

6 Market-impulsed democratisation, or the belief that liberalisation is bound to bear political risk for authoritarian regimes, in the sense that "liberalisation was taken as a shift from [...] patronage and rent-seeking to transparency, accountability and property rights" (quoted in Catusse, 2006: 231), a paradigm underlying the action of the international development agencies at the end of the 1980's.

7 By recognizing the State of Israel in Oslo and Wadi Araba Agreements, Palestinian authorities and Jordan implicitly acknowledge as impossible the return of the 1948' refugees to territories admittedly belonging to Israel. Also, as Israel keeps control of occupied lands in the West Bank, the Palestinians hold a political identity without a territorial one. The question of the political representation of the Diaspora's members, in the Palestinian institutions as well as in the host countries (they are full citizens in Jordan since 1950) is raised, along with fears of double allegiance.

Intifadah in September 2000, the deepening of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the growing instability in Lebanon and Syria and, most of all, the war raging in Iraq at Jordan's borders as well as the struggle against terrorism following September 11, also force the regime to tighten public expression, for fear of regional conflicts to penetrate its borders and population. The socio-political challenge of the economic transition in Jordan is thus the following: market attractive economic opportunities on the labour market for the locals, as well as for foreign investors, in order to protect domestic stability and keep away the threats of the volatile regional environment, while at the same time, abiding by the international demands in terms of opening of the economy, by conceding all the more liberal measures that political opening cannot be on the agenda.

The debate on immigration: embodying the political stakes of economic reform

The peculiar history of Jordan has been deeply marked by the short decade of welfare State, which has been designing the characteristics of its labour market, a State-run, non productive economy, based on a segmentation between local and foreign manpower. Nowadays, even though economic liberalisation, opening of capital, development of export-led production through the attraction of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) is high on the agenda since 1999 and the coming to power of King Abdallah II, these politico-economic characteristics and the political outreach of the liberalisation of the economy remain the most important pattern of understanding the terms of the social debate focussing on immigration. The difficulties encountered by the regime in the passing of reforms, the contradictions in policy implementation is manifested in the paradox of persisting high amounts of unemployed citizens⁸, side by side with foreign workers. Indeed, with the collapse of the rentier State, disappears the redistributions of the regime to its population. Having to join the work market where the most rewarding activities are left to a fringe of educated and well-connected people, having to perform a productive activity, thus takes the very political significance of a disruption in the above-mentioned clientelist State-society links, based on an "allegiance for food" basis. Consequently, the so-called "culture of shame", i.e. refusing to join the work market to perform activities formerly left to foreigners, an attitude leading to poverty, embodies the political stance of refusing the change of system, from a rentier (thus unproductive) and State-led economy to a deregulated and privatised one. As a matter of fact, neither unemployment levels nor amounts of guest workers have been decreasing: for mid-2004, the figure of a quarter of a million legal foreign labourers in the country became official⁹, while all foreign workers, legal and illegal were later (unofficially) estimated to reach almost a million¹⁰. The reluctance of locals to join the changing work market and perform productive activities, their low productivity levels in comparison to that of imported labourers, an issue regularly raised by investors and business owners, makes it difficult for the Jordanian authorities to stop resorting to immigrants. Abiding by the latest SAP's demands in terms of attracting FDIs thus comes in conflict with the claims of the citizens, who call for an upgrading of work conditions and salaries for locals, as well as for their replacement of the foreigners.

8 The rate of unemployment ranges from (officially) 14% to (unofficially) 30% of the work force.

9 Ministry of Labour's Statistical Abstract.

10 Interview with Dr Haydar Rashid, Assistant Director General at the Jordanian Trade Association, in: Karaki, L. "905 thousands Arab and Foreign Manpower in Jordan", *Al-Dustour*, 26/10/2006.

Immigration: enforcing circular migration policies?

Jordanian authorities did enforce drastic measures towards controlling more tightly the entry, stay and employment patterns of foreigners in the country, with the aim of addressing the contradictory claims of the population and, ultimately, "Jordanize" the work force. Migration to Jordan is, more than ever, made as temporary and work-oriented as can be.

Throughout the 1990's, measures taken included incentives given to the employment of locals and a progressive restriction of almost all the economic sectors to foreigners except the building sector, domestic services, cleaning and agriculture, after the passing of 1996' Labour Law. As early as 1984, it had also become mandatory for Egyptians to hold a residency permit and to all migrant workers in Jordan to have valid work permits, for which they must pay an annual fee or risk deportation¹¹. Over the last five years, fees levied on foreign workers seeking work permits increased notably¹², in order to discourage business owners to employ foreigners, as well as to provide funds for the training Jordanian manpower. Also, efforts are made by the ministries involved in the design and control of immigration patterns and policies (Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Labour), to provide estimates pertaining to the actual figures and location of foreign workers, legal and illegal, and to enforce work permits' fees collection¹³.

Mechanisms enforced in order to import manpower, nowadays, are increasingly monitored at the highest political level. Decision making process regarding immigration/ employment policies stems from the King (who provides the vision) and the government ministries (the Labour Ministry coordinates with other public sector institutions¹⁴ for the implementation of the process, as well as with semi-public investment promotion corporations, investors and business owners). Regular bilateral agreements govern the entry of each nationality on the Jordanian labour market, design employment conditions and minimum salaries, for instance. Since 1999, work contracts have to be obtained before departure, from the Jordanian diplomatic and economic representations in the country of origin. Private recruitment agencies in Jordan and sending countries only act as middlemen to settle administrative procedures, organise the trip and "delivery" of the domestic worker to the employer. These measures, on the one hand, aim at linking new immigration flows to job offers; on the other hand, they involve the sending country in the process of control of immigration flows: all in all, they maximise the benefits for Jordan. Migration is, more than ever, a political tool as well as a financial asset, even though official discourse, as said above, emphasizes the migration as transitory, preliminary to a nationalisation of the work force.

It is then clear that immigration policies are monitored and negotiated for the benefit of Jordan (the regime and public institutions, investors and business owners), and do not explicitly take into consideration the benefits of the migrants themselves, let alone the sending countries. Migrants are employed for their professional flexibility and specific capacities. They do not exist in the public sphere and lack legal protection: though Jordanian Labour Law applies to every worker in terms of minimum salaries, work schedule, etc., non-Jordanian are excluded from professional associations and union membership. Moreover, the sectors where they are most numerous (agriculture and domestic

11 Until then, Arab workers enjoyed quasi-free access to Jordan, as well as to the Jordanian work market. In the name of Panarabism, existing regulations were left non-enforced for Arabs, especially Egyptians, the biggest community of Arab expatriates in the country.

12 A government project unveiled mid-2006 was to raise the fees for non-Arabs from 450 US\$ to between US \$900 and 1300 and the fees for Arab workers from US \$200 to between US \$500 and 700 (quoted in Jordan Times, May 25th, 2006). Increases actually did not reach such high levels.

13 This move towards outward control of the movements and stay of foreign workers should not, however, hide the benefits which Jordan enjoys in keeping a share of this manpower in illegality. Iraqis, for instance, make most of the illegal workforce in menial jobs, as many stay in Jordan without residency and, if acknowledged as refugees, they are not entitled to work (as Jordan did not sign the Geneva Convention on Refugees). They receive much lower prices than other workers, if they get paid, and suffer a lot of abuses which they cannot report, for fear of being deported back to Iraq.

14 Even though the kafala system enforced in Jordan, like in Gulf countries, still imposes on each foreign worker the necessity of depending on a local guarantor.

services) were until 2003 evicted from the provisions of 1996's Labour Law¹⁵. Yet, public debate on the issue mainly calls for more restriction on migrant workers' sojourns¹⁶. The issue of enhancing circulation, if not circularity, of migrants is left to the public sector as said above (under the umbrella of the Labour Ministry), and to the business community fighting for their needs in terms of manpower.

Illustration of circular migration patterns in Jordan: the QIZs

One sector of the Jordanian economy is particularly emblematic of this trend towards top political levels-led increasing reliance on the circularity of immigration flows to Jordan which, however, does not take into consideration the partnership aspect of the phenomenon: the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs). This peculiar type of export-processing zones set up in Jordan in the aftermath of the peace process with Israel, under United States' close and active monitoring, can be seen as an incubator of the reforms' implementation process and, especially, of the development of export-led, labour intensive industrial plants, mainly in the sector of textile and garment. Its declared aim is to serve as a tool of regional integration with Israel, as well as to attract and channel Foreign Direct Investments, mainly towards rural, poverty-stricken areas of the country, in order to provide job opportunities for local unskilled workers. Born in October 1995 at the Amman Economic Summit, the process of QIZ' implementation sped up with the entry of Jordan in the WTO (2000) and with the signing of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the US and Jordan in September 2001. Within this agreement, QIZs offer duty- and quota-free access to the United States market for products manufactured by "qualifying" enterprises located in those enclaves, which must meet certain criteria regarding foreign participation to qualify under the program¹⁷.

The entry of foreign capital into Jordan through the QIZ programme did create some job opportunities, but has actually mostly channelled increasing labour immigration flows into the country, to meet private investors' demands in terms of provision of a skilled and motivated workforce¹⁸, as 90% of QIZs' companies operate in the labour-intensive, semi-skilled garment manufacturing sector. The share of foreign workers in QIZs' workforce increased from 39% to 60% between 2001 and 2006¹⁹, mainly Asian women directly recruited by the owners or managers of companies operating in QIZs, themselves Asians in majority (58% according to the Ministry of Labour' data). The economic benefits of QIZs' implementation in Jordan and, subsequently, the benefits derived from the opportunity of resorting to immigrant workers, have been tremendous²⁰. Yet, the disrespect of the Labour Law' provisions by QIZs' factories managers and, in many cases, human rights abuses towards the foreign labourers are frequently reported²¹.

15 Jordan's Labour Ministry, in cooperation with UNIFEM, endorsed in 2003 a Memorandum of Understanding to incorporate foreign domestic workers within the realm of the Labour Law. They also endorsed the "Special Working Contract for Non-Jordanian Domestic Workers", a new standard work contract guaranteeing every migrant worker rights to life insurance, medical care, rest days, and repatriation upon the expiration of the contract. A limitation and control over the recruiting agencies' registration patterns and practices towards workers was also implemented. In 2006, the "Booklet for Migrant Women Workers in Jordan", providing information on Jordan's Labour Law, living conditions in Jordan etc., was prepared by UNIFEM and Ministry of Labour and distributed in embassies, licensed recruitment agencies and among employers.

16 One of the very few interventions in order to provide workers with a minimal protection was performed by the textile workers' union, the GTUWTGCI.

17 Out of a minimum 35% of its value added, 11.7% has to be of Jordanian origin, 7-8% of Israeli origin, the remainder necessary to reach 35% can be from the US, Jordan, Israel, the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. US and Israeli companies, as well as Arab, south Asian and Far East investors, are involved in the remaining 65%.

18 For details on the inability of Jordanians workers to abide by QIZ' companies requirements, see Kardoosh/ Al-Khouri, 2004.

19 From 7310 to 30751 persons, according to the Labour Ministry's Statistical Yearbooks.

20 A boom in exports could be witnessed, a 170% surge since 2000 (Oxford Business Group, 2005: 44). Through QIZs, the US became the main trade partner of Jordan. Exports to the US from Jordan's QIZs reached 920 million US\$ in 2004 (Ministry of Trade and Industry data) as compared to 33 millions US\$ in 1999.

21 Ranging from frequent overtime, bad housing and deplorable working conditions to default of payments, physical abuse, etc. See for example Glanz, 2003.

On paper, the conditions of immigration of QIZ' workers fit the model of circular migration: a limited duration contract (until the local manpower can be trained to replace the foreign one), within the framework of a clearly defined bilateral agreement (the Jordan-US Free Trade Agreement), with the guarantee of social protection (within the FTA, the US imposed that foreign workers would be covered by the Jordanian Labour Law's provisions, in terms of work contract, minimum wage, work schedule and conditions, social security and health coverage, for instance). Institutions involved in the setting up of the flow are high level public and semi-public institutions (the US administration and the Jordanian government, the investment promotion corporations generated by the Agreement), as well as private investors attracted by the latter and the conditions granted to investors in QIZs. In reality, however, benefits of such recruitment policy are limited to the Jordanian regime (which captures the FDIs), and to the private investors. The above-mentioned specific context of Jordan, that of a post-rentier economy and a fragile social contract which deprives the political power of the authority and legitimacy to implement the economic transition while abiding by minimal labour regulations, thus paralyses the possibility for all parties to benefit from the circular migration process. Moreover, the foreign manpower is instrumentalised as a scapegoat in the public discourse towards local population (its presence is presented as an obstacle to enhancing work conditions and providing job opportunities to locals), and as a tool to make Jordan attractive to profit-driven transnational investors (it provides a pool of cheap, flexible and skilled workers). Circular migration, in that case, is derived from its purpose and becomes synonymous with extreme precariousness²².

Emigration: the "open-door policy" versus the brain drain issue

As for emigration, its view by the public institutions and the opinion differs greatly from that of temporary immigration, even though its specificities also derive from the peculiarities of the Jordanian politico-economic context.

As said above, the period of the mid-1980's saw the gradual return of Jordanian migrants from the Gulf countries, before the 1990-1991 Gulf War which forced back to Jordan some 300 000 national expatriates, a share of whom had been described, yet, as rooted in the Gulf region (Gorokhoff, 1985; Fargues, 1991).

This movement started reversing as early as 1995, just after the signing of the peace process between Jordan and Israel. Since then, it hasn't stopped increasing, as shown in chart 1²³. The officially acknowledged amount of Jordanians abroad nowadays is estimated at 750-800 000²⁴, which is a guesstimate because Jordan does not keep a record of its expatriates, their profiles and destination²⁵.

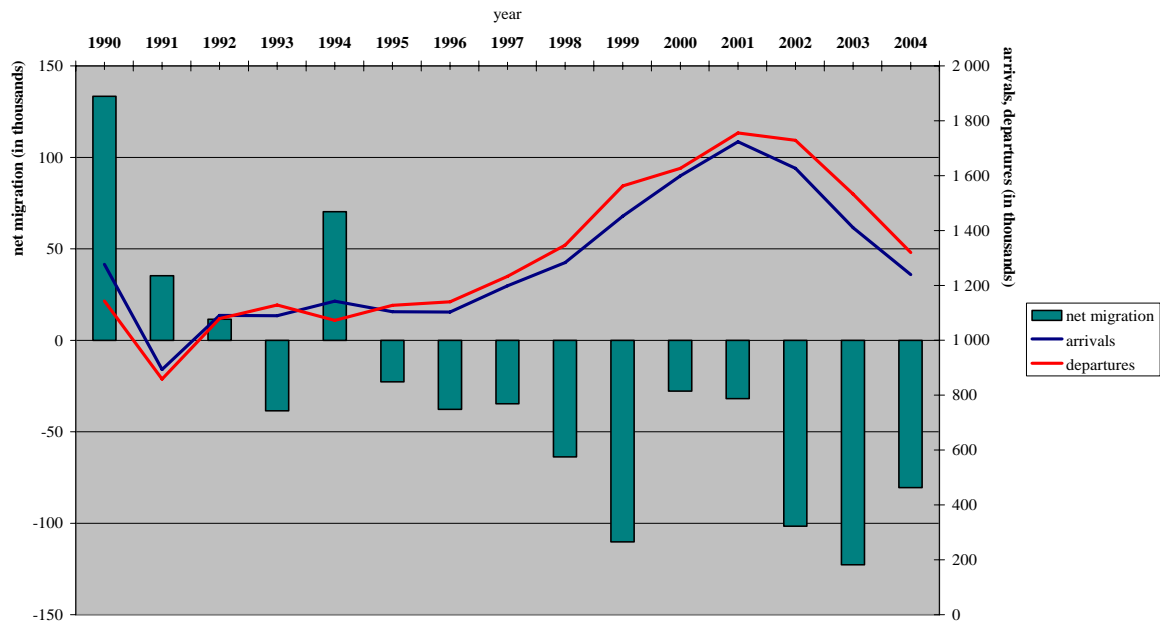
22 For a general picture of QIZs in Jordan, see Kardoosh/ Al-Khoury, 2004; for an analysis of the role of migrants in QIZs, see De Bel-Air/ Dergarabedian, 2006.

23 Public Security Directorate's data , i.e. net migration calculated from entries and exits by nationality.

24 Interview, Department of Statistics, Amman.

25 The 2004' census does not allow for the drawing of a clear picture of Jordanian migrants abroad, as data are collected from their household members remaining in Jordan, and only take into account the migrants away for less than one year, if for work purposes or accompaniment. On the contrary, migrant students, people treated in hospitals abroad, members of the Jordanian contingent to the UN forces, for instance, are counted irrespective of their duration of stay abroad (HKJ / DoS, main results, Population and Housing Census 2004, vol. 4., 2006, p.18).

Arrivals, departures and net migration of Jordanians (1990-2004)



source: Public Security Department

First, Jordanian migrants turned their back to the Gulf countries which was their main destination during the 1970's, and were massively choosing north America (Canada and the US), as well as Australia as a destination²⁶. Later on, after September 9/11 which made emigration to Western countries increasingly difficult, Gulf countries were again chosen as a favourite destination by Jordanians, this time not Kuwait, but mainly Saudi Arabia and the UAE (De Bel-Air, 2003) and this, all the more since the increase in oil prices which led to a considerable amount of investments in all sorts of projects in the Gulf region, which increases the need for workers in numerous sectors of activity, in the Army, in construction, in education, in services, etc.

In the absence of data on emigration from Jordan, on the profile of expatriates, reasons to leave, etc., it may be hazardous to assimilate this emigration to a liberalisation-led "migration hump"²⁷. However, it can be acknowledged that, few years after it took off in the mid-1990's, the emigration trend is indeed sustained by the three conditions, which were seen on other contexts necessary to its inception and successful reproduction: 1- continuous job opportunities abroad (here, North America and, since the shrinking of opportunities for Arabs on those markets after 9/11, the Gulf countries), 2- "supply-push emigration pressures as the sending country adjusts to freer trade" and, 3- "social networks that provide information, funds and social capital [in order to] bridge the border" (Martin, 2001: 38). This set of factors also fits the case of Jordan and, also, some data confirm the match between Jordan's emigrants and a "population that is socially and economically uprooted and prone to migration", described by various authors such as Massey *et. al.* (1998: 93), or S. Sassen (1988): their young age, the high turnover in positions, and most of all, the fact that the Jordanian population as a

26 Estimates give 50% of Jordanian migrants in North America at the end of the 1990's. Between 1995 and 2002, the request for emigration visas to Canada had been trebling, and the emigration to the US also notably increased, while becoming increasingly illegal.

27 According to Sassen (1988), the movement of industrial capital to peripheral locations in search of cheap labour produces new dislocations in the receiving societies. They stimulate emigration by exposing their manpower to cultural practices of the West; also, as jobs in those economic sectors are usually of short duration, this young manpower is, thus, quickly left unemployed, with a combination of aspirations and qualifications which it acquired during its employment period. This category of young professionals is thus, gathering all characteristics of potential emigrants. Portes (1995) emphasises the fact that potential migrants are not the poorest and the unemployed, but the persons detaining some social resources, i.e. the members of the working or middle-classes, most exposed to the cultural symbols of advanced countries.

whole, males and females, is characterised by an almost universal access to education within the concerned age-brackets and, thus, to a kind of social capital negotiable abroad, while salaries levels in Jordan do not stand up to their expectations in the above-mentioned context of economic transition²⁸.

In the absence of data, field experience suggests that all sorts of information sources and mechanisms are mobilised by migrants in order to leave Jordan, overwhelmingly to the Gulf markets: word of mouth, recruiting agencies collecting CVs or hiring away specific professionals, spontaneous applications to companies abroad, secondments from Jordanian private sector companies operating abroad, or even, at the occasion of a bilateral agreement, from the Jordanian public sector to their counterparts in the country of destination. In contrary to many countries, no intermediate specialised bodies, public and private, seem to be involved in the organisation of expatriations. All sectors are concerned: media, engineering, financial and banking sector, teaching and research, the Army, intelligence services, etc²⁹. Experience also suggests that current expatriation patterns to the Gulf could match the definition of circular migration, as return to Jordan after a definite period is expected, due to the very high costs of living there, which force expatriates to remain single or leave their family back in Jordan. Increase of the household' financial income, meeting needs for important purchase purposes, as well as, to a lesser extent, strategies for professional status' enhancement or training are, thus, the main motivation for emigration which remains a purely private operation, for personal/household benefit, rather than, for example, investment back to Jordan or technology transfer to the country.

This continuous emigration can be seen as an opportunity for Jordan, as it provides an "exit" for citizens who feel evicted from the redistribution process, due to the looming economic crisis and the post-rentier economic transition (De Bel-Air, 2003). Moreover, it constitutes a very important source of income for the country, in the shape of remittances: since 2000, expatriate workers' earnings amounted to between 20 and 25% of the country's GDP (Central Bank of Jordan's data). Those combined profits explain that emigration is not subject of official policies³⁰, or, like before in Jordanian history, is governed by an "open door policy".

However, a number of concerns towards this continuous exodus of skilled manpower, are expressed by the government's ministries and technocrats directly involved in the economic reform agenda, under the pressure of the King himself who leads and embodies the process. Even if, for political reasons explained above, leaving the door opened to emigration is an essential asset for political stabilisation in the country and compensation for lagging average incomes, the economic reform process, aiming at attracting FDI's, also targets the promotion of Jordan as a regional hub for technology. The development of the IT sector, especially, is one of the priorities in the reform' agenda. Therefore, the issue of the brain drain is sometimes mentioned in public discourses as a handicap for the achievement of this aim, especially when it comes to Jordanian students involved in high-level scientific institutions abroad, who hesitate coming back for lack of opportunities offered to them in Jordan³¹. However, if the issue of brain drain is (quite discretely) mentioned by technocrats, is it not tackled by explicit policies, for the reasons mentioned, political by essence. Moreover, no general,

28 Often mentioned by young professionals is the fact that massive cheap immigration also pushes for the emigration of locals, in the sense that labour becomes devaluated and, thus does not provide the expected financial, social and political capital.

29 The Bahraini Army, as well as the public sector and intelligence services, hired Jordanian soldiers, sometimes retired. The Qatar-based TV channel Al-Jazeera, as well as the emergent UAE various private and public TV and press groups, heavily relied on Jordanian professionals. The recent development of some Emirates like Sharjah or Al-Ain, for instance, owes also a lot to a regular flow of Jordanian university teachers and professionals. Saudi Arabia, for its part, seems rather to offer technical and support positions to Jordanian expatriates.

30 Except for the case of secondments from the public sector, which do not seem very massive. Data on the frequency of such contracts could not be gathered, either from Education or from Health ministries known to perform such monitored emigration movements in the 1980's, or from the Army.

31 See for example King Abdullah's speeches at the occasion of Dead Sea World Economic Forums, as well as during ICT Forums held regularly in the country since 2001.

public debate is opened on the subject, as households need the supplementary income generated by expatriation, as well as they enjoy political stability, in a politically uncertain regional environment.

Conclusion: High politics and migration policies

Promoting circular migration to and from Jordan can be seen as an objective of public policy, although the aggregate, long term benefits of the phenomenon are ignored and mechanisms necessary to its successful implementations are not set up. The reasons are political: in order to smoothen the political outcomes of the transition from the rentier State's system to a deregulated, export-oriented economy, the immigrants are kept to perform the productive tasks; for the same reasons, emigration is left unregulated, as expectations of young professional in terms of capital can not yet be met, under the painstaking economic adjustment process. The private benefits of such a system can thus be seen as an element of redistribution of the regime to the citizen, though at the expense of public, aggregate development and that of immigrants' human rights in the country.

Therefore, it could be said that one of the preconditions for circular migration to contribute to development in both origin and host countries, and to tackle the issue of brain drain, would be sound governance at the domestic and at other aggregate levels. Economy being intrinsically linked to politics, every step of the circular migration project's implementation, which requests careful monitoring by specialised bodies, may come otherwise in conflict with some private interest or shifting political coalitions between the actors involved: government ministries, entrepreneurs, local and foreign investors, local communities in competition with the foreign workers for access to jobs. The guest workers' employment patterns in QIZs illustrate this subordination of economics to politics.

Also, even though what is at stake is the globalisation of economies, totally deregulated systems are not yet existing and public intervention is called upon in the implementation of the process. Therefore, another main precondition for the success of these two processes would be the existence of the idea of nation, or at least, a consensus on the national integration patterns, in both the departure and receiving countries. Indeed, "redefinition of borders, and hence national sovereignty, is inextricably tied to the demarcation of internal and external labour markets, and to the leverage the state maintains in reconciling the two" (Morales, 1992). The success of the process requiring a clear picture of the contours of national work markets, of the roles of various actors, what is at stake in the implementation of circular migration policies is the building of a consensus over the definition of the national population, borders, social contract's patterns and ways to protect sovereignty, i.e. the nation-building process as a whole.

In the specific case of Jordan, after its disengagement from the West Bank in 1988, the signing of the Peace Treaty with Israel and the onset of the second Intifadah, within the uncertainties surrounding the fate of the Palestinian-Israeli Peace Process, the creation of a Palestinian national entity or the implementation of the refugees' right of return, and, mainly, since the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime which brought to its borders war, as well as, possibly, opportunities of achieving some leadership on the regional level, Jordan has seen an unprecedented blurring of its borders, of the definition of its citizens and hence, of its patterns of national sovereignty. In such a context, defining development and its patterns, delineating its work market and addressing its characteristics under a bi- or multilateral agreement seems an almost impossible task.

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