# **Mixed fragmented migrations of Iraqis and challenges to Iraqi refugee integration: the Jordanian experience**

[Kwaku Opoku Dankwah Department of Geography, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, NorwayCorrespondencedankwahopoku@gmail.com  
ORCID Iconhttp://orcid.org/0000-0003-2480-3708](http://www.tandfonline.com/author/Dankwah%2C+Kwaku+Opoku) & [Marko Valenta Department of Social Work, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway](http://www.tandfonline.com/author/Valenta%2C+Marko)

# Abstract

This article focuses on Iraqis in Jordan who intend to migrate further. It is maintained that the distinction between forced and voluntary migrations and the formal labels used to categorize migrants do not express the complexity of movements within and from the region. It is argued that movements out of Iraq and into Jordan, and further migrations to the West, are underpinned by more than one reason though triggered by force or violence. Indeed, the reasons urging movements of Iraqis in our study took different turns as people got to particular places and faced the context of reception there. We have identified challenges to Iraqi refugee integration and related them to the variety of intended and unintended fragmented movements that go together with multiple changes in formal migrant statuses. The article thus contributes to discussions on mixed migrations and fragmented migrations in the region and portrays the agency of Iraqis in migrating amidst the structural factor of force. The article also provides valuable contributions to discussions on fragmented journeys of would-be asylum seekers in the West.

*Keywords*: Fragmented Journeys, Iraqis, Jordan, Mixed Migrations, Refugees

This article explores the nuances of mixed and/or fragmented migration using the life stories of Iraqi refugees and highlights the challenges to their integration in Jordan. Of important linkage to this paper is the perilous journey migrants embark on across the Mediterranean Sea in an attempt to reach Europe. About a million migrants arrived in Europe by sea in 2015 as per the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) figures.[[1]](#endnote-1) Most likely due to the European Union (EU)-Turkey deal in March, 2016,[[2]](#endnote-2) and the closing of the Balkan route,[[3]](#endnote-3) this figure decreased rapidly in 2016.

This article draws on a series of qualitative interviews with Iraqi refugees in Jordan in 2015 and 2016, at the time when refugee migrations from the Middle East to Europe were at their peak. Refugee interviewees were fully anonymized.  No real names are used, and all individual characteristics or accounts that may be used to identify the interviewees have been removed and/or modified to hide the identity of our informants. It is also maintained that there are thousands of Iraqi refugees in Amman who have similar characteristics as our informants, and it would be impossible to identify our cases amidst the thousands of other similar ones. The analysis hinges on the existing literature on mixed migration to delve deeper into the concept of fragmented migrations to explore the varied motivations underpinning migratory movements.

Highlighting the notion of mixed and fragmented migration using the life experiences of Iraqi refugees, we shall answer the following interrelated questions: is the decision to migrate underpinned by a single factor and therefore the straitjacket labelling of migrants useful? Which factors and reasons trigger secondary movements? Can we identify certain stages in fragmented migrations? What are some of the strategies employed by Iraqi refugees in moving to intended destinations? Why do Iraqi refugees in Jordan strive to reach other countries despite the relative peace and stability in Jordan?

The article is divided into three main sections. The first section presents relevant previous research on mixed and fragmented migration. The second section explores the multiple reasons underpinning mixed movements. The final sections look at the challenges to Iraqi refugee integration in Jordan and the diverse ways of fragmented movements amongst Iraqis.

# **Background and previous Research**

Migration across, to and from Jordan has been fundamental to the state’s economy, society and politics. Since its inception, Jordan has played host to Palestinian refugees first arriving in connection with the 1948 war and establishment of the State of Israel, and in several new waves of Palestinian displacement. Palestinian refugees have now become an essential part of its population. Jordan has also played host to refugees from other Middle Eastern neighbors, including the Lebanese from the 1975 to 1991 civil war, and Iraqis in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War as well as continuous inflows of Iraqis that were partly triggered by the increase in sectarian violence that followed the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime. In addition to being a refugee destination, Jordan has been a significant ground for transit migration to other states. This includes Palestinians moving to the Gulf countries since the 1990s, Lebanese to the United States since the 1970s and Iraqis seeking asylum in Europe and elsewhere since the 1991 Gulf War.[[4]](#endnote-4) Despite the unavailability of data on the International Organization for Migration (IOM)’s website as well as the lack of official Jordanian census data on the Palestinian population in Jordan, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had over 2 million registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan as at 2015 making Jordan host to the largest Palestinian refugee population.[[5]](#endnote-5) According to the global migration statistics of the IOM, 40.98 per cent of the Jordanian resident population (7.6 million) were immigrants in 2015. IOM 2015 figures state the Syrian, Egyptian, Iraqi and Lebanese population in Jordan as 700,266, 138,939, 35,875 and 1,940 respectively.[[6]](#endnote-6) However, the number of Iraqi refugees (subjects of this study) in Jordan is subject to debates with the Norwegian Research Institute FAFO-(Institutt for arbeidslivs- og velferdsforskning) estimating the figure to be between 450,000 and 500,000 in its final report as at 2007, while the Jordanian government used a much higher figure of 750,000 earlier in the same year.[[7]](#endnote-7) E.A. Yanni and colleagues put the Iraqi refugee population in Jordan as at 2012, to be more than 500,000.[[8]](#endnote-8)

In this article, we focus on migration experiences of Iraqis in Jordan. We draw on previous research that explored two closely related migration phenomena depicted by the terms ‘mixed migrations’ and ‘fragmented journeys’. These terms have portrayed the growing intricacy of resources, timing, legal status, location and inspirations involved in migratory movements.[[9]](#endnote-9) Several studies spanning different regions of the world have demonstrated that prolonged unstable political and economic environments as well as large-scale conflicts generate mixed flows that are not adequately captured by the legal labels used by the migratory policy regimes of states.[[10]](#endnote-10) M. Collyer’s article on the protection needs of three categories of refugee groups in Morocco reveals how the motivations driving movements take on different turns as migrants embark on ‘fragmented journeys’ in an attempt to reach intended destinations.[[11]](#endnote-11) N. Van Hear, R. Brubaker, and T. Bessa[[12]](#endnote-12) as well as J. Van der Klaauw[[13]](#endnote-13) have also written extensively on mixed migration focusing on the rights of refugees and the relevance of mobility for human development respectively. Several scholars also identify mixed reasons for emigrations, return and remigration of Iraqis.[[14]](#endnote-14)

The notion of mixed migration can be traced to the 1990s with regards to attempts at distinguishing voluntary labor migrants from refugees and asylum seekers.[[15]](#endnote-15) In the policy world, a basic and clear-cut distinction is often made between voluntary and forced migration with its commensurate policies. In reality however, the distinction between the two is more often than not blurred. They are not stringently and mutually exclusive as perceived and dealt with by most governmental migratory policy regimes.[[16]](#endnote-16) As the interest in the concept of mixed migration soared, the term took on broader meanings underpinned by the threat of a confusion between humanitarian, political, economic and security concerns.[[17]](#endnote-17)

Indeed, mobility within and across states can rarely be attributed to a single cause or motive.[[18]](#endnote-18) The motives prompting migration mostly encompass a complicated mixture of social, economic, political and individual psychological variables.[[19]](#endnote-19) Mixed migration also occurs when elements of force and choice are both present and concurrently inform the decision regarding movement. In addition, mixed migration transpires when the reason/s for moving take a different turn while one is in the process of moving and/or when people reach their destination or during their voyage. People also more often than not alternate between different categories of migrants in their journeys and this is also captured under the notion of mixed migration.[[20]](#endnote-20)

It is also maintained that the phenomenon of ‘mixed migrations’ and of ‘fragmented journeys’ are often closely interrelated. While the notion of mixed migration underscores the multiplicity and fluidity of motivations for migration, the concept of fragmented journeys stresses the fact that mixed migrations can happen in several stages and may include several international migrations as well as changes in migrant statuses and motivation for migration.[[21]](#endnote-21)

The growth of fragmented movements could be a response to the strengthening and more ‘effective’ immigration controls of attractive destinations such as Europe and North America. Yet, as C. Mainwaring and N. Brigden noted, despite the structural obstacles to migration such as state borders, migrants are employing a multiplicity of strategies to migrate further and improve their life circumstances.[[22]](#endnote-22) The strengthened border controls however cannot wholly explain the heightened importance of fragmented forms of movement. Though they give the motive for these ‘illegal’ movements, other factors such as communication and technology play an important role as well as the inadequate standards of reception in many receiving countries and other push-factors that force people to continue their fragmented journeys.[[23]](#endnote-23)

Building on the aforementioned studies, we focus on fragmented journeys and mixed migrations of Iraqis in Jordan. It is argued that for many Iraqis, Jordan represents just a phase in their fragmented migrations to the West. It is also maintained that an important factor that generates secondary migrations of Iraqis from Jordan is lack of regular status and possibilities for integration in the country. While they left their homes in Iraq because of armed conflict, sectarian violence and persecution, they are leaving Jordan due to inadequate possibilities of restarting their life in the country. Thus, their migration trajectories may be seen as mixed fragmented migrations.

# **Methodology**

This article is part of a larger project that included fieldwork in Jordan, between October 2015 and March 2016. Three local research assistants were commissioned to gather data among the refugees under the guidance of a professor (co-author). Most interviews were conducted in Arabic by these experienced local project assistants under the close supervision of project coordinator, Professor Valenta.  Most interviews were semi-structured qualitative individual and focus group discussions done under the instructions of the project leader and in line with interview guides made by the project leader.  Interviews with refugees were most often conducted in refugees’ apartments while interviews with various professionals, NGOs and service providers in Amman took place in their offices. In-depth interviews lasting one to two-and-a-half hours were conducted in Arabic with around 32 Iraqi and 30 Syrian refugees, as well as with 15 international and non-governmental organizations and experts. This article is, however, based exclusively on interviews with the Iraqi refugees as well as NGOs in Amman. In the first phases of the fieldwork, informants were encouraged to describe their migration trajectories and reasons for migrating, as well as their perceptions of Jordan and the other countries they were in, or intended to migrate to as part of their fragmented journeys.

During the interviews, informants were asked to describe their own migration experiences, survival strategies, migratory plans and experiences in Jordan and other countries. As several relevant codes emerged, such as ‘regularised/not regularised’, ‘fragmented migrations’ and ‘mixed migrations’, the later phases of the analysis focused on exploring the interconnection between the elements and facets of fragmented journeys and the dynamics of strategy adjustments as well as changes in motivations for further migrations. Furthermore, we encouraged the informants to describe, comment on and discuss the migration trajectories and survival strategies of their Iraqi friends and relatives. In this way, we got valuable insights on migratory patterns and practices of large networks of refugees which include hundreds of people.

The sample includes informants with different geographical origins and socio-economic backgrounds. It included adult males and females some of whom were parents as well as youthful Iraqis. They also differed across religious beliefs including mostly Muslims and Christians. Additional efforts were made to reach those who had arrived in the wake of sectarian violence following the United States (US)-led invasion of Iraq, as well as those who arrived more recently in Jordan. However, it should be stressed that in an early stage of the project, we found that Iraqis in Amman could be roughly divided into two categories. In the first category were those who arrived with considerable financial means and other assets, who are integrated and who have regularized residence status and permits to work in Jordan. In the second category were those who have not managed to regularize their status in Jordan. Our study was primarily concentrated on grasping the experiences and migratory aspirations of Iraqis who have not managed to regularize their status. This was a conscious choice since this category of Iraqis was most relevant for our discussions on fragmented journeys further to the West.

# **Reasons for leaving homes in Iraq: Force in multiple and complex facets**

The multiplicity and/or variability of reasons underpinning migration as have been noted by several authors,[[24]](#endnote-24) and institutions cannot be understated as have been made manifest by Iraqi refugees in Jordan. The most evident aspect of the study undertaken in Jordan however, reveals that while multiple factors accounted for the journeys of Iraqis in Jordan, virtually all of the initial movements of the people in our sample were triggered by violence and/or the threat of violence. In the words of a young man:

I was on the street, the car was about 10 to 15 meters away, a car bomb, I took a step back on the main street, the policeman came to open it, as I crossed from the sidewalk to the street, the car exploded. I got a fragment, injured my hand, …thank God I was the only one who wasn’t injured much, but my friends, – one with his arm injured, then another his hand was cut, the third his leg was cut; after that I couldn’t handle the situation anymore.

This account is representative of most of the stories of our informants that describe the hardships they experienced in Iraq which eventually made people to flee from Iraq. The generalized as well as targeted violence in Iraq and the attendant fear is probably the dominant factor underpinning movements amongst our interviewees. Most were fleeing armed conflict and sectarian violence which triggered their journeys. Attack or destruction of one’s home altered already planned journeys and changed the ways and timing of movements, complicating the mixed nature of flows. Others left in anticipation of conflicts based on news of escalated sectarian violence in areas nearby. The generalized and/or targeted violence triggering flows out of Iraq is well exemplified in the words of an Iraqi mother:

Our house was bombed in July …it was bombed by an air missile in 2014 …In Iraq, the planes used to fly over our heads, we used to flip the couches so that if the shrapnel flew around, it wouldn’t fall on them directly. You know how much we suffered?

While violence was widespread, some of the refugees interviewed in Jordan were also specifically targeted. They were fleeing the reach of ISIS (Daesh) and direct threats by persons and groups belonging to different militias. One mother had this to say:

They know what your job is, what your husband works in; for example, my neighbor’s son worked with the police and they came and killed him. They came to all houses in our town and they made an inventory to get all the information of families living in the area.

Some people fled in order to prevent persecution from armed groups or they had been told to leave or risk losing their lives like relatives and/or friends. Others left Iraq after narrowly escaping assassination (bomb and gun attacks) attempts by militias. Among interviewees were also people who left Iraq immediately upon release from detainment and torture by militias. One such detainee exclaimed:

They took everything from me, the militias, I had nothing left. I was detained for a year and two months... I left in a hurry, fled for my life leaving my family behind.

The armed conflict in Iraq has in recent years exposed rivalry between Sunnis and Shiites, sectarian violence, as well as political and/or religious persecution which have all triggered movements out of Iraq. This led to Sunnis or Shiites relocating to Sunni or Shiite majority areas. Accounts of our informants indicate that some left Iraq leaving relatives behind because they belonged to different branches of Islam. Some of those who stayed did so because they felt relatively safe because they were in areas where the majority of people belonged to the same religious faction:

…the threats occurred recently, but my mother is a Sunni, my family were able to stay there, but myself (Shiite) as a young man I couldn’t, they have killed three of my friends in the region, Shiites.

There was also victimization of people depending on whether the individual was Christian. All Christian Iraqis interviewed left because they were being harassed and attacked as Christians in addition to other factors. An Iraqi Christian said, ‘After ISIS entered Mosul, we realized we must get out, there is no hope in Iraq. We know there is no place for us, Christian people.’Amidst the aforementioned factors, some left for political reasons. Families that were against the Saddam regime had become targets of violence. One interviewee said:

I come from an oppressed family… that stood against al-Ba’ath party, because my father's cousin… stood… against Saddam…. Saddam had executed many of my relatives…. So they were chasing him, the one who is older was killed, the resistance forces have killed him, … and we had gone to Syria and we returned… even the cars of the intelligence services were observing us …they had threatened my father, what can we do in this case? We left for a while… to Syria…. I was threatened, my family and I, we were threatened…

As at April 2007, Iraqi refugees around the world constituted over four million including two million in the Middle East region.[[25]](#endnote-25) The aforementioned accounts illustrate the variety of reasons triggering movements out of Iraq. According to our informants, they were largely underpinned by force which is in line with previous research, inter alia, N. Parker’s study, which describes extensively these push factors.[[26]](#endnote-26) Yet our findings suggest that different groups of people were exposed to violence and persecution in different phases of the conflict. Before the fall of the Saddam regime, some of our informants’ relatives were executed by the regime and those still in Iraq remained targets. So also were Iraqis who worked with the Americans t during the invasion. Informants who left Iraq for Jordan after the collapse of Saddam’s regime were victims of sectarian violence. In addition, it was not unusual, as the last informant indicated, that Iraqis who had been in other countries before they ‘ended up’ in Jordan were victims as well.

# **Phases in fragmented mixed migrations prior to arrival in Jordan**

Lengthy and sometimes treacherous fragmented journeys have increasingly characterized contemporary global migration systems.[[27]](#endnote-27) These fragmented journeys highlight the assertiveness and agency of migrants amidst broader structural migration control schemes.[[28]](#endnote-28) What probably and mostly resonates with the concept of mixed fragmented migrations in our material is the fact that most interviewees did not move from their war-torn areas in Iraq directly to Jordan and did not intend to stay in Jordan. Jordan was just a stage in their fragmented migrations that included shorter and longer stays in various countries and changes in status and motivations for further journeys.

Some informants first fled from their homes to relatively peaceful parts of Iraq, mostly to Kurdish-controlled areas in Northern Iraq where they had relatives and stayed for a while before proceeding to Jordan. Later on, they, however, decided to leave for Jordan because the Kurdistan region was expensive and the Kurdish authorities gave minimal or no humanitarian support to internally displaced people:

There is no assistance there, not from the central government nor the Kurdish government. No one helps. The ones who stayed there, no one helps them. It was only the organizations, they would come, and give us things [blankets or food], and that was it. Other than that, no help from the central government or the Kurdish government.

In addition to lack of support and economic problems, our informants clearly indicated mixed motivations for further migration. Some Iraqis we met had intended to settle permanently or stay for a short time in Kurdish-controlled areas, waiting on return to their homes, before their plans altered and they moved to other places. One Iraqi father did mention how one of his daughters who wanted to stay permanently in Erbil with her husband changed her mind within ten days and joined the family in Jordan. Another Iraqi father narrated extensively his reasons for not staying in the Kurdish region:

I as a doctor and my fellow doctors in Kurdistan, we were not allowed to work. If they worked, they would go to places far from Erbil, this is the first point. The second thing, the colleges don’t accept the minorities.The Christian Iraqis are not studying. Till now my niece is not studying. Kurdistan is a region in Iraq, but you can say it is a country of its own… independent… Even the high school exams differ from the rest, so because we came from the central government of Iraq, they did not accept us in college. The most important thing, that when you become a part of Kurdistan, you should know that they have a lot of extremism... we don’t want to go back to the same film, we don’t want someone to come and kick us out of our homes.

As the informants’ accounts demonstrate, adjustments in plans and migration trajectories that come from unforeseen or changing circumstances that migrants are exposed to in their new environments are an important aspect of ‘fragmented migrations’. Another dimension in our material that fits with the notion of fragmented journeys is that, for some Iraqis we met in Jordan, the country was not their first ‘transit’ destination outside Iraq in their quest to get resettled. Some had moved to the Emirates, Turkey, Lebanon and/or Syria (prior to the war) in an attempt to settle down or make money as temporary labor migrants in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) or get resettled as refugees in Turkey, Syria or Lebanon. They moved to Jordan subsequent to their impatience and/or failure to settle or get resettlement from these countries or were pushed to Jordan as the situation in Syria deteriorated. An Iraqi mother who was in the UAE before she migrated to Jordan, said:

I thought I could work there. I took all my certificates and so on, but they said I would need a guarantor, and I would need to pay for residency, and I couldn’t find someone to sponsor me… I couldn’t find a job and returned. I stayed there for around two months, I went around Ramadan…

Oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE are large receivers of temporary labor migrants from neighboring Arab countries.[[29]](#endnote-29) It is estimated that a significant number of temporary labor migrants may be seen as mixed migrants as they originate from countries that are burdened by armed conflicts. Yet, migrants from countries in conflict are often denied temporary residence as labor migrants,[[30]](#endnote-30) as this informant’s account shows. This informant moved to the Emirates in order to escape the hardships of life in Iraq, but upon failure to secure a temporary work permit, she turned to Jordan, becoming a refugee there. Her story, and the stories of several other Iraqi migrants we met, indicate that their intended and unintended secondary migrations have taken on different migrant ‘labels’ in several ‘transit’ states in a quest to reach final destinations. An Iraqi father asserted:

…I got them as far as Syria – Syria was open and it was safe [then] – and the idea was that I’d apply for them at the embassy, I mean, the British consul in Syria. But then there started to be problems in Syria… and afterwards my children came from Syria to here [Jordan].

This informant and his family had not intended to go to Jordan. His story illustrates how unforeseen factors and the situation in Syria, which had deteriorated, influenced their migration trajectory. Because of the war in Syria, they went to Jordan in order to wait for resettlement there. However, their fragmented journey does not stop there. As we will indicate, before Iraqis who left Jordan managed to reach desired destinations in the West, they had to engage in several intended and unintended secondary movements.

# **Perceptions of Jordan and intended destinations in the West**

The fragmented nature of contemporary movements inherent in mixed migration is manifested by some w Iraqis who arrived in Jordan primarily as economic migrants with the intention of settling down but had to change plans subsequent to the outbreak of violence in Iraq. Thus, they saw Jordan as a final destination, but changed their intentions and planned to move on due to unfolding circumstances in Iraq. One such scenario is evidenced in the words of an Iraqi father:

In 1999, frankly... I wasn’t intending to migrate … To stay here (Jordan), and to receive a residence permit, and I tried to obtain it but it didn’t happen. And my children would study here, I hoped to be in an Islamic country, Arabs just like me, you know their language and they know yours. But then, when Iraq was occupied, then we went immediately to the commission [UNHCR office] in 2004 and we applied … they have accepted us as refugees.

We may distinguish between (changing) conditions in Jordan and changing conditions in a state outside the country where an immigrant finds himself or herself. One or both factors could alter travels plans. Indeed, being an economic migrant in a neighboring country who could visit Iraq often with plans to return were altered for many when the violence in Iraq escalated and made them start to think about leaving the region. Yet, for most, Jordan was certainly not intended to be the final destination, but just a stage in their fragmented journeys. It must be emphasized that more than one of the aforementioned factors drove Iraqi movements to Jordan. There are multiple factors that motivate them to migrate and that influence their preferences regarding the final country to settle in. Very characteristic of mixed migration, the multiplicity and complexity of these factors urged their movement. No single factor including the predominant fear of violence can adequately explain the choice for Jordan over other neighboring countries. Movement to Jordan should not be seen only in the light of existing constraints and the lack of opportunities to move to other places, but also in the light of the agency of migrants subsequent to available resources and information people had at the time, and their accompanying strategies. With regards to movement partly influenced by information available to or known by Iraqi migrants, one such Iraqi mother asserted: ‘I didn’t hear of people applying to the UN (United Nations) in Lebanon, I know that people who want to apply to the UN go to Jordan.’ Another example highlighting the agency and strategies of Iraqis in choosing which state to migrate to in the interim for onward migration to their final destination is amplified by some Iraqis we met who said that they moved to Jordan because they thought the UNHCR in Jordan processed resettlements faster than in Turkey or Lebanon based on information they got. One such informant exclaimed:

We hear that UNHCR in Jordan is quicker in allowing one to travel but Turkey is not … In Jordan, you can stay for one year and then maybe travel but in Turkey and Lebanon you have to wait more than one year.

Among informants are also Iraqis who said they preferred Jordan based on the belief that there were no jobs in Jordan and hence the UNHCR would feel the urgency to relocate them, unlike Turkey and Lebanon which they thought have relatively low unemployment levels. In the words of an Iraqi young man:

… second because there is no work, no job. In Turkey and Lebanon there is a job and the UN considers that people can live normally, they have the job, they have income, but in Jordan they know that there is no job and they have to resettle us.

We also met those who moved to Jordan because they had been there before and knew it better than other Arab states. Some of the informants even had relatives and/or friends in Jordan who arrived earlier either voluntarily and/or out of compulsion. Knowledge of the country and its language as well as access to networks that could help while they were staying there reduced the risk and the relative socioeconomic costs of migration for these people. For others, Jordan appeared as the only alternative, as at the time it was the only relatively peaceful neighboring Arab state that opened its doors to refugees. In the words of an Iraqi mother:

I have a brother and sister in the US, they went to Turkey before. But I thought going to an Arab country would be better, my children are young. I thought that I had been to Jordan before and knew it and knew that it is safe… I thought it’s important to go to a country that at least speaks the language we speak. My eldest son speaks English for example, but in Turkey they don’t speak English.… I thought that Jordan, thank God, it’s safe, and we won’t suffer from instability.

The above-mentioned reasons given by our informants emphasize the assertiveness and strategies of migrants in deciding which countries to move to and how to migrate even amidst the broader structural factor of violence. Our findings concur with that of Mainwaring and Brigden who demonstrated how migrants find spaces within and between state practices of securitization and engage with the multiple geographies they travel across. Mainwaring and Brigden argued that, from marginalized positions such as that of the Iraqi refugees captured in this article, migrants continue to manipulate/maneuver and/or negotiate, portraying a degree of agency reflected in successful journeys despite barriers.[[31]](#endnote-31)

With regards to the preferred final destination, several factors explain the preferences of Iraqi refugees for particular states. Some mentioned the intent of not settling in a European country that is overpopulated with lots of refugees like Germany. This is highlighted in the words of one interviewee:

People didn’t want to stay in Germany. They wanted to continue… There’s those who went to Sweden, Finland, Denmark, or Norway. The ones who went to Norway, they were sent to the north. The situation of my friends there is excellent. They are getting food, drink and shelter. What more do they want? Their children are going to school also, it is great. Most Iraqis didn’t want to stay in Germany. In terms of Denmark, there are more Iraqis, many wanted Sweden, and Norway, also Finland…

Informants gave different explanations for their preferences for specific Western countries. Some thought that overpopulated refugee populations would reduce the quality of service for refugees in large receivers of refugees such as Germany and Italy. By contrast, others preferred specific countries because many Iraqis were in that country already. Yet, despite the above-mentioned differences, all the informants perceived migration to specific countries in the West as a livelihood strategy where the primary aim for migrating to the anticipated destination was to secure a better life for themselves and their families. One interviewee said this regarding the preferred destination in the West:

…the Iraqis, how do they decide to immigrate to Europe? According to the facilities of the country.… When do they give you the citizenship? … What are the salaries like? And how do they treat the refugees? These are the main things the refugee considers.

Another Iraqi asserted:

I would go to countries that give you good treatment and find comfort.… Because eventually I know… I will find comfort and give it to my family. My son’s future will be good, I will be able to give my aunt an operation and good healthcare. I want a good, prosperous future.

Those quotes are representative of several refugees in our sample and they summarize the multiple factors Iraqis considered in deciding which country in the West they would prefer to settle in. Our data at this point is in line with several studies that conclude that the preferred destination of would-be asylum seekers and refugees should be related to their perceptions of asylum and immigration policies in different countries, networks, work, education, social security, safety, human rights, democracy, protection, and fair treatment. And more than anything else, they are primarily concerned with getting protection, finding safety, and obtaining socioeconomic stability for themselves and their children.[[32]](#endnote-32)

# **Challenges to integration in Jordan as the push factor**

Several factors as well as the disposition of the Iraqis themselves hinder their integration in Jordan. Together, these challenges intensify the need for Iraqis to proceed from Jordan, amplifying the phenomenon of mixed and fragmented migration. First, the central push factors and challenge to the integration of Iraqis in Amman identified by interviewees is the lack of status in Jordan, the lack of support from the UNHCR and an exclusionary stance of the Jordanian government toward Iraqis. Jordan has not ratified the 1951 refugee convention and Iraqis in the country are defined as ‘temporary guests’ who are only entitled to temporary residence permits. With the exception of smaller numbers of Iraqi businessmen and specialists, Iraqis face difficulties as regards attaining permanent residency and work permits. Many overstay their visas and end up as irregular migrants. In addition, some of the Iraqis had asylum seeker status from the UNHCR that had expired while others had not been accorded such status at all from the UNHCR. Furthermore, the UNHCR’s support to Iraqis has been very minimal and in several scenarios non-existent. Only a few of our Iraqi informants received cash support from the UNHCR. Even for those who received support, their situation was exacerbated by the high cost of living in Jordan. Additionally, support from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (global ones like the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE), Churches Around Richmond Involved to Assure Shelter (CARITAS) as well as local ones like the Jordan Health Aid Society (JHAS)), religious bodies and other associations in Jordan has been very limited and sporadic if not absent for most Iraqis.[[33]](#endnote-33) The lack of support in the face of depleted savings upon arrival in Jordan amidst the high cost of living in Amman have undermined their integration and made living conditions more or less unbearable. The lack of support is bemoaned and summarized by one of our informants in the following words:

I went on… I was interviewed in Deer Ghbar (UNHCR office), I had my interview there and nothing happened… They didn’t give me anything, they didn’t even call me, nothing … I am a member of a group on Facebook for the Iraqi refugees in Amman. We are all the same, and we are all saying that we are not receiving any help and they keep cursing the UN…

Another obstacle to integration and an important push factor was related to the fact that most Iraqis we interviewed were denied the right to work in Jordan. This forced people into passivity, poverty, begging and irregular underpaid jobs. One informant laments the right to work in the following:

I tried to work, but they refused; they said I am an Iraqi and I don’t have a residence permit, they told me that it is impossible… When I go to meet the work owner, he tells me that he is not capable of hiring me, the work owner himself asks about the residence… I don’t have the residence permit. The main (reason) is the residence permit… I am always at home… I buy movies, or I watch them on the net, a (foreign) series… just sitting in the house.

Furthermore, the Jordanian government offered very limited health support and the few NGOs who do are willing to fund only portions of medical expenditures. Some of our informants intended to leave Amman for Europe in an attempt to receive appropriate medical care (have their surgical operations), as they heard from Iraqis already in Europe about how they get free medical services. An informant expresses his hope of getting to Britain in order to get appropriate healthcare for his kids and consequently a better future for them, despite the perilous journey and in light of inadequate health support in Amman:

I am the elder among my siblings, and I have kids that are growing up … This is my sick son that I have [told you about] … Care and Caritas, I have gone to them; they have expelled me … I am not getting any help from the mosques. But … Britain. My kids … will get health care ... and … they will have a bright future ...

healthcare...

Lack of affordable schooling was also seen as an important reason for secondary migration.Only a few Iraqi respondents in this study had their children enrolled in school when this research was conducted. Iraqis have formal access to primary/secondary school education. However, the problem of costs, transport and other socio-economic factors have resulted in low attendance rates. These children were mostly receiving support from the church in the form of tuition and book scholarship. Indeed, several Iraqi families pointed to the future of their children and the lack of affordable university education as the primary motivations for wanting to leave Jordan and migrate to the West. However, there were other factors that hampered access to education, which may be seen as part of refugees positioning vis-à-vis the UNHCR regarding their resettlement cases. Thus, some of our informants had suspicions that the UNHCR will not prioritize those who go to school and are integrated in local communities. One young Iraqi adult had this to say: ‘Even if I was studying and the United Nations (UN) knew that I was studying they would delay our file processing.’ The disposition of this young informant undermines his ability to integrate in Jordan but can simultaneously be seen as a conscious strategy to boost his chances of legally making it out of Jordan.

Finally, Iraqis claimed that the arrival of Syrians in Jordan subsequent to the Syrian civil war was what worsened living conditions in Jordan for Iraqis. The arrival of the Syrians meant that the cost of rent especially shot up and reduced the support Iraqis in Jordan used to receive. They believe all support services have been redirected to the Syrians. An informant said:

The Syrians get food coupons, we are not getting those. Syrians are getting a salary, we are not. Syrians are getting work permits, we are not. The Syrians are better than us, they are applying [for resettlement] through embassies.

In the face of the above-mentioned poor and worsening reception conditions for Iraqi refugees in Jordan, the stories of far better reception conditions for refugees in Western countries amplified informants’ motivations to proceed further from Jordan. News and information about the good living conditions from Iraqis who have already arrived at their final destinations in the West encouraged others to embark on fragmented journeys to preferred destinations.

**The variety of experiences with fragmented migrations further to the West**

The fragmented migrations out of Jordan and further to the West have varied as well. Here, we may roughly distinguish between legal and irregular migrations, and between people who reached preferred countries as well as stranded migrants. Our informants in Iraq talked about their friends and relatives who were resettled in their preferred destination legally (USA, Canada, Australia, Europe) and directly from Jordan. The ‘legal’ means of resettlement from Jordan has also varied with virtually all the Iraqis pursuing more than one option either as a refugee or reunification with family. The very basic point of call is resettlement through the UNHCR. In addition, they have resorted to the respective embassies of intended final destinations or through non-state agencies such as the church. An Iraqi informant asserted the following:

I know about several Iraqi families who migrated. Some went through the UN to Canada… In Canada, there are churches that sponsor you… you need to pay them.… Within three to six months you get your papers. I know several families that left this way.… I heard of some going through embassies, you apply and you either are accepted or rejected.… But you have to pay.

Direct legal migration to the West was the most preferred way of secondary migration from Jordan. However, as the informants indicated, several obstacles hampered such migrations including the lack of sponsorship and money to facilitate their legal resettlements to Canada via the church for instance. In addition, people had to wait for years for legal resettlement and due to harsh conditions in Jordan, a growing number started to consider leaving the country via alternative channels. We met several refugees barely sustaining themselves who felt the urgency to move on, and since they could not wait for resettlement via legal channels, some have planned to move to third countries by resorting to smugglers. One Iraqi said:

I will go to Turkey and go to the sea. I don’t know how much it will cost. I have no relatives I can borrow money from, but I can beg, knock on doors. The UN made us reach this point, a point of despair… Yes, many of my friends that we met in Jordan, they left for Turkey… to the sea.… The UN is not helping us, it forced them to do this…

We got the impression that Iraqis in Jordan have usually been more reluctant to migrate to Europe via illegal channels compared to some other categories of refugees we met in Jordan, such as Syrians. Yet, the situation in 2015, during large-scale migrations when the Western Balkan route to Europe was open, was perceived by many Iraqis as an opportunity to enter Europe. People were concerned about announcements regarding border closures and the fences that different countries in Southeastern Europe started to erect and this spurred them on to leave. Smuggling from Jordan to Turkey was common among the Iraqis at that time. Some relatives and friends of the Iraqis that we interviewed moved to Turkey, and from Turkey they went to Greece, Macedonia and other countries in Southeastern Europe before applying for asylum in Germany, Sweden and Norway. Some of the interviewees were planning to use similar routes to get to their preferred destination. One interviewee summarizes the smuggling route his friends took:

… they were able to get to Denmark, from Turkey to Greece to Ukraine… They were also in Croatia and Austria. From Austria, they went to Germany, and from Germany to Denmark. I mean, it’s the easiest place to get to, with other people – Syrians and Iraqis and Africans. All the people are doing OK with this situation.

The story of this informant, as several others we met, indicate that the opening of the Western Balkans was seen as an opportunity, as the countries on that route allowed hundreds of thousands of irregular migrants to enter the EU and apply for asylum. Some countries also stopped registering asylum seekers, but just allowed them to continue further to the West, so the risk of being ‘stranded in transit’ because of the Dublin regulations was also reduced.[[34]](#endnote-34) Furthermore, the local authorities in several Western Balkan countries allowed migrants to use public transportation, and hence migrants did not need smugglers to pass through some of the countries, which in sum significantly reduced the costs of migration. However, this does not mean that migrations to the EU at that time were without problems. The journey to Europe was still dangerous, and as the informant above indicated, people had to travel to one or multiple countries before reaching their final destination using different means and legal and/or illegal channels.

Therefore, their journeys should be rather seen as fragmented where the length of stay in Jordan or other ‘transit’ countries in the Middle East such as Turkey and Lebanon varied greatly between a few weeks, months and as long as ten years before proceeding to final destinations in the West. Finally, yet importantly, it should be stressed that many Iraqis were stranded in Jordan: they wanted to leave the country but did not have the resources and opportunities to do so. Others were stranded elsewhere as they did not manage to cross borders illegally due to increased border controls and recently erected fences in several Western Balkan countries. Our informants spoke of husbands, sons, friends and relatives who were stranded for shorter or longer periods in Southern Europe in countries that they never perceived as destination countries. Some managed to continue further to Germany and Scandinavian countries while others were stranded in transit countries due to Dublin procedures which denied them the possibility to apply for asylum in preferred receiving countries. Moreover, there were those who managed to reach planned destination countries, but were stranded as their asylum applications were rejected. As with many other rejected asylum seekers in Europe, they live in limbo as unreturnable rejected asylum seekers or risk being returned to Jordan, Iraq or other countries in the Middle East.

In sum, the stories of refugees in this and other studies on contemporary migrations suggest that various categories of stranded migrants are a central part of fragmented mixed migrations. These people live in a state of uncertainty with the ambition to seize any ‘opportunity’ to move. In the same vein, where stages of a journey may emerge subsequent to the failure of a previous one, planned journeys may come to an abrupt end based on the current circumstances in a fragmented journey making further migration barely possible.[[35]](#endnote-35)

# **Conclusion**

In this article, we discussed mixed fragmented migrations of Iraqis in Jordan. The concept of mixed movements reveals the weaknesses of seeing migration as a clear-cut distinction between voluntary and involuntary migration, while the concept of fragmented journeys questions the idea that refugee migrations have strict defined points of destination. It is maintained that clear-cut categorizations we often find in migration research, inter alia those that distinguish between transit countries and destination countries should be nuanced. Journeys of a fragmented nature are such that primary reasons prompting one to move may no longer be relevant as events unfold in these journeys and therefore blur the distinction between the strict categorization of migrants.[[36]](#endnote-36) We have argued that the reasons urging movements of Iraqis we met in Jordan also took different turns as people reached particular places and faced the context of reception there. As has been demonstrated in this article, movements out of Iraq and into Jordan, and further migrations to the West, were underpinned by more than one reason though triggered by force or violence. However, certain patterns have emerged: first, people migrated in order to avoid persecution, violence, and fallouts of the war, while later stages of migrations were undertaken in response to inadequate socioeconomic standards of reception which did not allow them to normalize their situation and reestablish their families in the new context.

The article has also portrayed how what was intended to be a swift, transit movement through one country may turn out to be a long-term stay for many. Our findings from Jordan are thus clearly in line with Collyer’s arguments that refugees’ journeys often have a fragmented nature, and that they are not always prearranged in advance but mostly one journey or plan erupts subsequent to the unsuccessfulness of a prior one which limits future alternatives and uses up lean resources.[[37]](#endnote-37) This article also demonstrates that mixed migrations are intrinsic dimensions of refugees’ fragmented journeys, and that during fragmented journeys, individuals on the move use a blend of legal (regular) and illegal (irregular) means in their mobility patterns. They take on different ‘labels’ such as internally displaced person, refugee, labor migrant, irregular migrant and asylum seeker.

We also argued that formal labels imposed on individuals highlight existing structural constraints and undermine the agency and assertiveness of migrants. As we demonstrated and in line with Mainwaring and Brigden's argument, even in the face of broader structural constraints such as widespread violence and tighter border restrictions, migrants still find space and negotiate within and between contextual impediments, employing a multiplicity of strategies. It is maintained that formal labels imposed on individuals are not constant and should be seen as dynamic highlighting the agency and assertiveness of migrants. Instead of seeing migrants and especially those emanating from conflict-struck countries as ‘puppets’ of structural external factors in their environment, decisions to move should be regarded as not borne exclusively out of structural influences. Most often than not, migration is underpinned by the agency, initiative and survival strategies of individuals and households concerned amidst conditions in the broader context they find themselves in. In sum, the challenges to Iraqi refugee integration in Jordan and the available secondary migration opportunities, or lack of them, constitutes a blend of wider context conditions, which should be related to the disposition of Iraqi refugees themselves, portraying the significance of the structure-agency model. Here, each stage of mixed fragmented movements of the migrants, both prior to arrival in Jordan and after, represents migrants’ responses to the local reception contexts, a new survival strategy aimed at improving situation for themselves and their children.

**Notes**

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2. See http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35854413 [last accessed 20 June 2017]. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35763101 [last accessed 20 June 2017]. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
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11. Collyer, ‘Stranded migrants and the fragmented journey’. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
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14. G. Chatelard and T. Morris, ‘[Editorial Essay: Iraqi Refugees, Beyond the Urban Refugee Paradigm](http://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/36083)’, *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on refugees,* Vol.28, No.1,(2011), pp.3-14; V. Iaria, ‘[Attempting Return: Iraqis’ Remigration from Iraq](http://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/view/36093)’, *Refuge:* *Canada’s Journal on refugees* Vol.28, No.1, (2011), pp.109-121. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
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16. Van Hear, Brubaker and Bessa, *Managing mobility for human development: The growing salience of mixed migration.* [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Linde, ‘Mixed Migration – A Humanitarian Counterpoint’. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
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24. See Collyer, ‘Stranded migrants and the fragmented journey’; Linde, ‘Mixed Migration – A Humanitarian Counterpoint’; Van der Klaauw, ‘Refugee rights in times of mixed migration: evolving status and protection issues’; Van Hear, Brubaker and Bessa, *Managing mobility for human development: The growing salience of mixed migration.* [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
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27. Collyer, ‘Stranded migrants and the fragmented journey’. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. See Brekke and Brochmann, ‘Stuck in Transit: Secondary Migration of Asylum Seekers in Europe, National Differences, and the Dublin Regulation’; Mainwaring and Brigden, *Beyond the Border: Clandestine Migration Journeys*; Valenta, Zuparic-lljc and Vidovic, ‘The Reluctant Asylum-Seekers: Migrants at the Southeastern Frontiers of the European Migration System’. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
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30. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Our case is in harmony with that of Mainwaring and Brigden (2016) and is highlighted in the stories of successful journeys embarked on by other Iraqis to the West, shared with us by our informants, no matter how perilous the journeys may have been. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
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34. Valenta, Zuparic-lljc and Vidovic, ‘The Reluctant Asylum-Seekers: Migrants at the Southeastern Frontiers of the European Migration System’. The Dublin Regulations determines which member state is responsible for asylum claims. Conventionally, the member country where the asylum seeker first arrives bears the responsibility for this asylum seeker. Therefore, asylum seekers that lodged asylum application in one of the Member States are denied to apply for asylum in other member states. If they try to do that they will be returned to the member state where they lodged their first applications. See Council Regulation (EC) No. 343/2003. ‘Establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national’,*Official Journal of the European Union*. **L** (50/1). 25 February 2003, available at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32003R0343&from=EN [last accessed 29 September 2017]; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/oct/07/dublin-regulation-european-asylum-seekers> [last accessed 29 September 2017]. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
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36. Collyer, ‘Stranded migrants and the fragmented journey’. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid; M. Collyer, ‘In-Between Places; Trans-Saharan Transit Migrants in Morocco and the Fragmented Journey to Europe’, *Antipode* Vol.39, No.4. (2007) pp.668-690. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)