Mirrors on the Wall: Myths and Realities about Forced Migration in Contemporary Middle East

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Abstract:

This article charts the response of Middle Eastern states to the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis and attempts to contextualize the Turkish state response accordingly. The purpose of this study is to understand why the outbreak of the region's largest refugee crisis since World War II did not prompt the region's states to accede to international refugee law or border closures but instead they each opted for piecemeal solutions and labor-related arrangements. To this day, most Middle Eastern states continue to reject the legal definitions of refugee or stateless people because of the belief that their interests were best served by alternative and *ad hoc* policies solely determined by the national legislative action. Consequently, Middle Eastern states have long engaged in a conduct of absorption and maneuvering of forced migration. Their strategy placed the onus for responding to the crisis in financial terms on international institutions and Western states while incorporating the newly arrived masses as fresh unqualified labor, service sector labor, capital bearers and potential new voters for regime sustenance and fortification. The whole transaction concerning Syrian refugees in contemporary Middle East thus amounted to the collapse of border protection fantasies so strongly embraced in the Global North and duly served the impulse of emergent forms of developmentalism in the region.

Introduction

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Throughout modern history, the ambiguous, amorphous, elastic and politically expedient term Middle East has connoted political formulations of a given moment. In the following pages, the commonplace American, European, Turkish, Iranian, Israeli and Arab views – and serious implications of these border projects in terms of understanding the state structures in the region– are reexamined in the context of the Syrian refugee crises. Whether as part of the US-delimited region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) or as affiliated to the European Union via the conception of Mediterranean Union based on trade relations, the exclusion or inclusion of the Middle East in a given historical and political discourse is not a simple matter of convenient choice. Rather, one has to pay close attention to emergent regional economies of capital, labor, and, state models and policies pertaining to regimes of accumulation. In this regard, treating the Syrian refugee crisis mainly in humanitarian terms provides hardly any clues concerning the differences and the similarities in the reception regimes clearly identifiable across the region.

Finding Nemo: Where is the Middle East?[1]

The Middle East is commonly denoted as the landmass around the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, extending from contemporary Morocco to the Arabian Peninsula, including Iran. The central part of the area was formerly called the Near East, originally used by Western geographers and historians specializing in colonies in that area, who divided what they called the Orient into three regions. The term Near East applied to the regions nearest to Europe, extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf, Middle East applied to the regions from the Persian Gulf all the way to Southeast Asia, and Far East corresponded to those regions extending from the Middle East to the Pacific Ocean. The change in terminology and usage began prior to 1939, and it was firmly entrenched by the immediate aftermath of the WWII. By the mid-20th century the common definition of the Middle East was settled as encompassing the states and territories including Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, Libya, the various states and territories of Arabia proper including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Subsequent decades bore witness to the inclusion of the three North African countries of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco to this list. In addition, geopolitical factors sometimes require Afghanistan and Pakistan to be included in the larger definition. Present day Turkey and Greece, together with the predominantly Arabic-speaking lands around the eastern end of the Mediterranean, were also formerly known as the Levant. Use of the term Middle East nonetheless still remains unsettled, and some agencies such as the United States State Department and certain bodies of the United Nations still employ the terms Near East and Middle East interchangeably denoting the region under question.[2]

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[1] Nemo is the name for 'no one' in Latin.
[2] See http://www.un.org/en/sections/where-we-work/middle-east/ [27.02.2017]

Despite the long list of state names in either of the regional coinage, however, there were never any real nation-states in this region—i.e. a state populated almost entirely by a single ethno-religious group. For an entire century, the worlds' ignorance of diversity of the ethno-religious realities of the Middle East, accompanied by maps and atlases that depict the states of the region separated from each other by sharp and seemingly eternal borders, created an image of a Westphalian state system (Appadurai 1996). This is despite the fact that the Middle East, as we know it today, is more of a place of constantly challenged borders, divided up minorities and shifting alliances. In that sense, it is more akin to the Balkans (otherwise known as the South East Europe) than one would care to think.[3]

Prior to the invasion of Iraq some 20 years ago, the Middle East was also perceived mostly as a homogeneously Arab region. There was no knowledge of, or even interest in the complex internal differences within and between the states of the region. A case in point is Syria. Prior to the outpouring of the refugees and victims of the war in the country, who was really aware that Syria was controlled by a small Alawite minority, consisting of no more than 10 percent of the country's population? Who knew about the Kurds of Syria, or the Christian minorities of the Middle East residing there for centuries? Was it widely known outside of the immediate neighbors of Lebanon that it was an artificial territorial construct created by the French mandate, based on the outcome of a colonial census, and that the country was populated by not just Maronite Christians, but also by large Sunni, Shi'ite and Druse populations? Prior to the collapse of the Iraqi state, did the world know or care about the three distinct ethnic groups in Iraq, or the fact that the Shi'ites and the Kurds were ruled by a Sunni minority for decades? The one ethno-national group that occupied a clearly defined territory was the Kurds, who never achieved national statehood, as their region was carved up between Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey and they lived an existence being scattered across the region, reshuffled between borders with each civil war. Yet, how many people knew or wrote about the Kurds before 1990s and the massacres that led to their displacement by the Baath regime in Iraq?

The concept of the nation-state reached its peak in the immediate aftermath of World War I, as the great empires of the 18th and 19th centuries declined and collapsed. The same geopolitical principles which led to the re-territorialization of post-World War I Europe were then applied to those parts of the Middle East which had been part of the Ottoman Empire.[4] The result was a sundry list of new states, and a variety of strategically defined borders, all of which encapsulated numerous minorities. However, the emergent political and territorial system bore little relation to the daily realities of the ethno-religiously distinct populations in these newly created states. Nor did it take into consideration the ways in which political power had been practiced by the regions' administrative units until then. As the Middle Eastern states became accepted as part of the global system of

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[3] On the history of South East Europe, see the ground-breaking work of Wolf (2010).
[4] On this issue, the cannon readings of Middle Eastern studies provide ample evidence (Pamuk 1987; Kasaba 1988; Owen 1993; Issawi 2013; Goldschmidt and Boum 2015).

power distribution and sovereign immunity, problems within their borders continued to perculate (Bellin 2004 and 2012; King 2007). Those groups or tribes which had received the reins of control from the European colonizers of the time, often due to their assistance in wresting power away from the Ottoman Empire, ensured that they would retain that power through uniquely authoritarian and centralized state structures (Schectman 1961; Nisan 2002; White 2011). Hence were the origins of the current system of states and monarchies, which bore limited legitimacy in the eyes of the populations whom they came to represent. Syria was one of them.

Over time, military coups became a regular part of politics and regime transformation in the region. As long as the regimes maintained a relatively stable relationship with the rest of the world, internal dynamics of the region continued to be a non-issue. The borders separating Iraq from Syria, Syrian from Lebanon, Lebanon from Jordan are all constructs from a period when there was a need to create them but they always maintained the marked traces of historical memories communities they divided. These borders have never really represented nations as such, as contemporary events in Syria clearly demonstrate. They were porous and unstable in the face of social and political ferment and change, as the events of the Arab Spring also proved. As the Arab uprisings led to war, exodus, and general turmoil for large segments of the region's populations, the territorial foundations of the region's states began to face unique challenges. One such challenge was that of *en masse* exodus.

Traditionally, Middle Eastern states do not respond well to demands for rights, accountability, access to power, greater autonomy and secession. The backbone of the state system in the region is that of a creative amalgamation of corporatism, clientalism, rentier mentality and developmentalism, all of which rely upon a heavy-handed central state apparatus. As a result, many of the countries in the region have witnessed substantial changes in the ethnic composition of their populations during the post-independence period. Still, for as long as these countries succeed in maintaining a system of populist representation and centralized authority, they continue to protect their borders. However, overall, the basic political structure of the Middle Eastern states does not hold a strong promise for the stability of the demographic make-up of the region. As contesting groups introduce alternative political understandings of what a state is and how it should be run and controlled, the political idiom of governance has come under increasing pressure, which in turn led to a constant phenomenon of forced migration flows in the region.[5]

In the Middle East, where the pre-independence state structures were no more than carefully crafted impositions and where select ethno-religious minorities often ended up controlling the state through oppression and force, something had to give in sooner or later. For much of the twentieth century, modernization was considered as the unifying

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[5] On the history of discontent in the Middle East, see Nore and Turner 1980; Eickelman 1989; Seale 1990; Van Dam 2011; Bayat 2013; Lane and White 2013.

principle in the study of the changing character of the state in the Middle East.6 As Middle Eastern states defied global trends toward formulaic democratization, the region has been marginalized in the field of comparative politics but interestingly, became a strong subject of analysis in the field of political economy. Regimes like those in the Middle East can actually serve as a springboard to enhance explanations of the factors that contribute to the perpetuate authoritarian or centralized rule with popular support and often kept in place through the ballot box. Eschewing orientalist cultural explanations, it is possible to advance different propositions that spotlight political-institutional variables, such as widespread governing party recognition among the marginalized classes as well as the elite, involvement of non-governmental organizations in providing public services parallel to the state and thus filling the vacuum, and military professionalization and institutional involvement of the military in capital accumulation (Zoltan 2011). Similarly, strategic choices made by incumbent authoritarian rulers, religious and secular opposition and class-based system-challengers clearly indicate a robust presence of politics in the region. It is just that understanding state sovereignty and border maintenance in the Middle East requires a different nomenclature than the standardized one of pluralist, liberal democracy.

Indeed, the events of the Arab Spring have amply suggested the necessity of rethinking the logic of authoritarian persistence in the region. However, internal variations in regime collapse and survival confirm that the comportment of the coercive state apparatus, especially its will and skill to repress opposition, is pivotal to determining the durability of the centralized regimes and the protection of their post-independence borders. Meanwhile, the trajectory of the Arab Spring also introduced an empirical novelty: the manifestation of huge, cross-class, popular protests in the name of political change for the Middle Eastern state (Bellin 2012). On that note, suffice to state that Middle East experts were as surprised as everyone else by the contemporary Arab revolts against the Middle Eastern state itself. Focused on explaining the stability of local autocracies for the last fifty odd years, they underestimated the hidden forces driving change and the power of discontent. These developments indeed force us to reconsider long-held assumptions about the Middle Eastern state and its sanctified borders.[7]

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[6]By the 19th century, the region began to exhibited clear signs of economic stagnation and institutional collapse. The reason for this transformation is often associated with certain components of the region's legal infrastructure stagnated as their Western counterparts blossomed through colonization and differential accumulation strategies. Among the institutions cited that are accused of generating bottlenecks are the Islamic law of inheritance, which inhibited capital accumulation; the absence in Islamic law of the concept of a corporation; and the waqf system, which locked vast resources for the delivery of basic social services. For proponents of this point of view, see Bill 1972; Beblawi 1977; Shambayati 1994; Kuran 2004; Anderson 2004; Posusney 2004. This particular debate died out with the onset of repercussions of global neoliberal trends in the Middle East.
[7] On the issue of the new doors of analysis opened up by the Arab Spring, see Bellin 2004; Gause III 2011; Heydemann and Leenders 2011; Brownlee et al. 2013.

Still, to date, no Middle Eastern monarchy fell to revolutions of the Arab Spring. The question remains as to what accounts for this monarchical exceptionalism to regime change. Perhaps royal autocracies are inherently more resilient than authoritarian republics due to their cultural foundations and institutional structure based on closed systems (Yom and Gause III 2012). By contrast, we could choose to emphasize deliberate regime strategies made in circumstances of geographic fortuity that keeps monarchical, top-down regimes in the region intact while challenging the republican model to the core. Mobilization of crosscutting coalitions, wealth emanating from hydrocarbon exploits and extractive industries, and engrained foreign patronage with global capital must surely account for the resilience of at least some of the monarchical regimes in the Middle East.[8] Without these factors, kingships are just as vulnerable to overthrow as any other autocracy. And that observation brings us back full circle to the issue of Syria.

Daring scholars have highlighted important similarities between the Arab Spring of 2011 and the "revolutions" of 1848 (Goldstone 2011; Weyland 2012). Specifically, it was argued that both waves of contention swept with dramatic speed across whole regions, but ended up yielding rather limited advances toward political liberalism and actual regime change. What they failed to see was the pattern of reshuffling populations and rendering of state boundaries into a mere formality as a result of these challenges to the Middle Eastern state. Drawing on the analyses of 1848, it is indeed possible to argue that contention spread extremely quickly because of a heightened expectation concerning the significance of popular uprisings. This precipitation prompted protests in many settings many of which were not at all propitious for change and there we witnessed the emergence of millions of dispossessed and stateless people. The decision to engage in emulative contention fell to ordinary citizens, who then became highly susceptible to the direct and brutally coercive inferences by the regimes they opposed. Indeed, since late 2010, as unprecedented wave of protests demanding greater political freedoms and regime change mounted, the number of internally displaced people, asylum seekers and war refugees in the Middle East reached millions.[9] Although in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, long-standing autocrats have been toppled, in other countries of the region well-established authoritarian regimes grew increasingly violent.

Dispossession in the Fine Hour of Discontent: Refugees of the Middle East

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[8] Arab oil states are often discussed under the banner of the rentier state in the relevant literature, which separates them from states like the Turkish Republic at least for the duration of their foundational period. Theories of rentierism argue that, because oil states do not depend upon the populace for taxation or production, the state is relieved of political accountability and can effectively buy off potential opposition (Ayubi 1996). Although oil wealth has been a catalyst for opposition rather than only being a means to placate dissent, the Gulf states in particular solved this problem through excessive reliance on migrant labor. However, this is an entirely different chapter concerning the functions of migration and forced displacement in the Middle East.

[9] See https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2010/oct/05/middle-east-refugees-by-country [27.02.2017]

The refugee and displacement problem is one of the most complex humanitarian and political issues facing the contemporary Middle East. Currently, the region hosts the highest number of refugees and asylum seekers in the world. Underlining the failure to find lasting solutions is the confusion between stateless people, exiled populations, refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the region.

It is therefore imperative to come to terms with the characteristics of the citizenship, migration and refugee regimes in operation across the region. There are at least 7 states that regularly accept and absorb refugees from the region: Iraq, Syria (hence the irony), Turkey, Egypt, Yemen, Lebanon and Jordan. Starting with the country with the largest population, Egypt is a state party to both the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (known as the African Union) Convention Governing Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. It is both a refugee host country and a transit point for asylum seekers. Currently, it hosts refugees from 38 countries.[10] In Egypt, UNHCR conducts all refugee status determination (RSD) procedures, registration and documentation. Issues affecting refugees, asylum seekers and dispossessed populations, including poverty, gaps in protection and dependence on the informal economy, are resolved by the NGOs and the state offers minimal assistance. However, they are allowed into the country and kept within Egypt's borders.[11]

In contradistinction, Iraq is not a state party to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Meanwhile, currently Iraqis are the second largest refugee group in the world. Back in 2010, there were 207,639 UNHCR-documented Iraqi refugees living beyond their country's borders. The estimated number of IDPs exceeds 1.55 million. Most Iraqi refugees were living in Syria and there were other large communities are in Jordan and Lebanon. Some moved to Turkey. A growing number of dispossessed Iraqis are returning home for lack of employment and education opportunities in neighboring host countries, despite the prevailing conditions of civil war. Religious and other minorities face a particularly grave risk of persecution in Iraq. As a result, the majority of the Christian populations of Iraq, a population of 1-1.4 million before 2003, left the country. Similarly, according to UNHCR estimates, of the 34,000 Palestinians in Iraq in May 2006, very few remain. In this sense, Iraq is the quintessential example of porous borders in the Middle East. The reshuffling of the Iraqi population is only second to that of Syria in terms of its

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[10] Prior to the events of the Arab Spring, as of August 2010, the registered population of concern to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) was 38,962, of whom 57% were Sudanese nationals, 17% Iraqi and 17% Somali. According to the Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance NGO, unofficial estimates put the number of refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt at 500,000. See IRIN data at http://www.irinnews.org/news/2010/10/04/refugees-and-idps-country [27.02.2017]

[11] The sources for these data are Africa and Middle East Refugee Assistance and Human Rights Watch. See http://www.refugee-rights.org/African%20NGO%20directory/North%20Africa/Egypt-AMERA.html [27.02.2017]

overwhelming velocity and volume.

UNHCR's guidelines for Iraq ask governments not to forcibly return people originating from the governorates of Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninewa and Salah Al-din, in view of the serious human rights violations and continuing security incidents in these areas. UNHCR's position is that Iraqi asylum applicants originating from these five governorates should benefit from international protection as per the 1951 Refugee Convention or an alternative form of protection.[12] There have been a recorded 426,090 Iraqi refugee and IDP returnees in 2008 and 2009. The estimated 1.5 million IDPs in Iraq include 500,000 in settlements or camp-like situations in extremely poor conditions.[13]

Similar to Iraq, Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. Before the arrival of Syrians en masse, there were around 1.9 million Palestinians settled in Jordan and registered with UNRWA. Unlike any other host country, Jordan granted all Palestinian refugees full citizenship rights, except for the 120,000 Palestinians who originally came from the Gaza Strip. Back in 2010, there were 32,599 registered persons of concern, 90% (30,700) of whom were Iraqis registered with UNHCR, along with 1,899 refugees and asylum seekers from other countries, mainly Sudan and Somalia. Jordan's economy is built upon the labor power provided by the refugees and immigrants settled in the country. The Jordanian state is highly adaptable to new arrivals and more than 90% of the refugees in the country have access to primary education. In 1998, the Jordanian government and UNHCR signed a memorandum of understanding, according to which asylum seekers may remain in Jordan pending refugee status determination by UNHCR.

Next on the list of non-signatories to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention comes Lebanon. As of date, around 425,000 Palestinian refugees are registered with UNRWA, while around 3,000 are not registered and have no identity documents while living in Lebanon. About 53% of registered refugees live in 12 official refugee camps across the country, while the rest live in cities, towns and informal refugee camps. Living conditions for most refugees - Palestinian or otherwise - are precarious. Non-Lebanese are barred from public sector jobs, though in August 2010, after decades of campaigning, a law was passed in Lebanon's parliament allowing them to request work permits for private sector employment. Because Lebanon is not a state party to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or to its 1967 Protocol, it also does not have legislation or administrative practices in place to address the specific needs of refugees and asylum seekers. As a result, refugees who enter the country without prior authorization or who overstay their visa are considered to be illegal and are at risk of being fined, detained for considerable lengths of time, and deported. Without permission to stay until a durable

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[12] See UNHCR guidelines on Iraq at http://www.refworld.org/docid/49f569cf2.html [27.02.2017]
[13] See Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Brookings Institution figures at https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Mapping-the-Resource-to-Internal-Displacement-The-Evolution-of-Normative-Developments-October-10-2014-FINAL.pdf [27.02.2017]

solution is found, they live in hardship and are mostly employed in the informal sector.

The irony of the citizenship regimes in the Middle East is perhaps most starkly observed in the case of Syria. Syria is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, though before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, around 427,000 Palestinian refugees living in Syria were registered with UNRWA. They enjoyed the same rights as Syrian citizens, barring citizenship rights. Back in 2010, there were 151,907 Iraqi refugees registered with UNHCR in Syria, as well as 4,317 non-Iraqi refugees and 1,156 non-Iraqi asylum-seekers. Going further back, according to UNHCR's 1997 report *The State of The World's Refugees*, up to 200,000 Kurds in Syria became stateless as a result of a 1962 census that withdrew Syrian citizenship from people who had entered the country illegally from Turkey. Though most refugees in Syria were Iraqis, there were many illegal residents from Afghanistan, Iran, Somalia and Sudan. Of these, many had to move to Turkey with the escalation of war-time conditions in Syria. Already back in 2007, the Syrian government estimated that there were over 430,000 IDPs in the country, including the descendants of those originally forced to flee from the Golan Heights during the 1967 six-day war.[14]

Yemen is a rare signatory country in the whole region to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. However, it also had its fair share of producing displacements. The challenges Yemen faces are somewhat unique, given its location on a historical migration route between the Horn of Africa and the oil-rich Arabian Gulf. Mixed migration brings in both refugees fleeing persecution and economic migrants fleeing structural poverty, often via dangerous people-smuggling networks. Back in 2010, 95% of the 236,443 registered refugees in Yemen were Somalis who were granted *prima facie* recognition by the Yemeni government. Iraqis, Ethiopians and Eritreans have also regularly sought refuge in Yemen. There are 304,469 registered IDPs in Yemen. This is despite the fact that Yemen is one of the region's poorest countries, and faces constant threats of insurgency and conflict.

The last country under observation in this select list is Turkey. It is a signatory to the Refugee Convention but with a serious exception clause and its unique status determination regime. By the end of 2011, the Turkish government had thrown its weight completely behind the Syrian opposition and recognized the then-Syrian National Council as the representative of the Syrian people. Turkey's expectation, which was in line with a good part of the international community, was that the Assad regime would not last long. It was against such a background that Turkey declared in October 2011 an open door policy towards refugees fleeing Syria and extended to them a legal framework came to be known as 'temporary protection.' However, things did not go entirely according to plan and by May 2014, there were 220,000 Syrian refugees housed in 22 camps along the Syrian border with another 515,000 registered as urban refugees. Needless to say, the persistence of the conflict well into 2017 and the ever-growing

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[14] See the figures provided by the Norwegian Refugee Council's Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre on Syrian IDPs at http://www.internal-displacement.org/globalreport2016/ [27.02.2017]

number of urban refugees created serious challenges for Turkey. Not just in Turkey but across the region, it is becoming increasingly clear that Syrian war victims and refugees are not about to return home anytime soon. This brought up a range of policy issues for the Turkish government. They ranged from whether the government should offer Syrian refugees residency and citizenship rights to addressing urgent education, employment, health, shelter and integration needs. The presence of growing numbers of Syrians in Turkey is having a direct impact on host communities economically, socially as well as politically. Where they work, how they work, where they live, for whom they would vote are all important questions as they now constitute a sizable 5 % minority in Turkey.

As much as Turkey's open door policy has been a commendable one, it has had a weak legal basis and thus a prominently *ad hoc* quality. Against the backdrop of conflicts and accompanying displacement crises of the past in the Middle East, from the Afghans to the Palestinians and now the Syrians, expecting the return of refugees to their homeland in the near future would be unrealistic and this further exacerbates the problem of temporary solutions. Therefore, Turkey had to develop a well thought out and structurally viable acceptance policy with a legal grounding sooner than later. The semi-secret regulation adopted in March 2012 for allowing the Syrians to stay in perpetuity could not constitute the basis of a policy extending protection for more than three million people.

From the 1920s into the mid-1990s, the Turkish republic received more than one and a half million Muslim refugees ranging from Albanians to Tatars and their integration was done on an ad hoc basis. During the 1990s, an influx of more than 300,000 Pomaks and ethnic Turks fleeing the persecution of the then Communist regime in Bulgaria were also quickly absorbed within the existing immigration and citizenship policy framework (Kırışçı 2000). The government, in line with a law from 1934 considered the latter group to be of "Turkish descent and culture" and granted them the possibility of acquiring Turkish citizenship. In 1991, however, Turkey became the receiving country of the mass influx of refugees who could not be included in that particular law: close to half a million people fled Saddam Hussein's violence against Kurds and other minorities in northern harsh mountainous terrain and winter conditions, and at a time when the Turkish state still denied cultural and language rights of Kurds within its borders. Initially seen as a national security crisis, Turkey tried to deny entry to the displaced. Eventually, the government resorted to mounting a diplomatic effort, which led to the United Nations Security Council to create a safe zone in northern Iraq that would ensure the return of the refugees to their homes. Together with the crisis of 1988 that emerged with the arrival of more than 60,000 Kurds fleeing the Halabja massacres, temporarily housed in southeastern Turkey, the 'Kurdish refugee problem' thus constituted the defining moment in modern Turkey's handling of mass influx of the displaced in the region (Kirisci 1993, 1996). In November 1994, Turkey proceeded to adopt its first national legislation on asylum. The resultant regulation defined the urgency to respond to mass influxes of refugees before the displaced populations could cross the border into Turkey unless the

government was to make a decision to the contrary, as was the case with the Syrians some 20 years later.[15]

The 1994 Regulation also defined procedures for receiving and processing individual asylum applications. In line with Turkey's acceptance of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees with a "geographical limitation," the Regulation limited the right to receive refugee status to only asylum seekers fleeing "events in Europe." Refugees from outside Europe would be granted only temporary stay in Turkey pending their resettlement to third countries. In this context, the influx and gradual official admission of Syrians into Turkey is unprecedented. Turkey's facilitation of an 'open-door' policy for such a large number of refugees from outside Europe marks a notable break from its past practices. In response to this latest regional refugee crisis, Turkey set up a General Directorate of Migration Management (GDMM) to be responsible for implementing new immigration laws that addresses both individual and en masse asylum.[16]

The anomaly is that Turkey was among the original drafters and signatories of the 1951 Geneva Convention. With the arrival of Syrians, Turkey has become the sixth largest recipient of refugees in the world. However, its immigration system is under severe strain and the status determination process conducted by the UNHCR would take years. UNHCR began to employ the services of a Turkish non-governmental organization (NGO), Association of Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) since July 2013 to speed up the process.[17] Complicating the situation even further, the Turkish GDMM implemented the Foreigners and International Protection Law that came into force in April 2014. The new law redefines the rights that asylum seekers and recognized refugees would enjoy with respect to access to public services and employment. Now that the new law and the new agency are in place, the management of the Syrian refugees entered a new phase. It is important to remember, however, that Turkey is not the only country affected by the sheer mass of the Syrian exodus and responding to the regional circumstances in an official capacity. The next section thus offers a brief account of the evolution of the Syrian refugee situation in the region at large.

Syrians, Syrians Everywhere…The Exodus

The flow of the displaced Syrians to neighboring countries in the Middle East started

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[15] See http://www.refworld.org/docid/49746cc62.html [27.02.2017] For a detailed analysis of the Regulation see Kırışçı 1996.

[16] The rights and obligations of individual asylum seekers and refugees are governed by the 1951 Geneva Convention while en masse asylum cases are defined by UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Executive Committee decisions and general international humanitarian law.

[17] On ASAM, see http://www.unhcr.org/partners/ngodirectory/48fdeb8925/association-solidarity-asylum-seekers-migrants.html [27.02.2017].

back in April 2011. Syrians flee fighting in the town of Talkalakh to Lebanon, using an unofficial border crossing previously designated for smuggled goods trade.[18] In June 2011, the military siege of the northwestern part of Syria sparked the first major outpouring of war victims to Turkey. Escaping shelling and fighting, thousands crossed the border, which was kept open for their entry. By July 2011, Jordan also began to receive Syrian war victims arriving through the Syrian border town of Deraa. By the end of 2011, Turkey set up 6 refugee camps to host Syrian asylum seekers and military defectors and introduced these populations as 'guests' rather than 'refugees' to the Turkish public. By March 2012, the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon became a major reception site for Syrian war victims and asylum seekers, many of whom were fleeing fierce fighting in Homs, Quseir, Zabadani and Hama. Syrians began to settle in northern Lebanese cities of Wadi Khaled and Tripoli. Since Bekaa is a poor, agricultural region, they either joined relatives in towns or began to establish squatter communities up on the hills. In April 2012, Syrian refugees of Kurdish origin began to settle in Northern Iraq, in particular the Iraqi Kurdistan. As mines began to be planted across the Syrian-Turkish border, larger numbers began to flee to Turkey, and by July 2013, nearly 200,000 thousand Syrians originating from Haleppo crossed the Turkish border *en masse*. This was followed by the exodus to Lebanon by Damascus Syrians. Close to 40,000 Syrians crossed the Masnaa border post in a matter of days. In the meantime, UNHCR was forced to open Za'atari refugee camp in Jordan to host the continuous influx of Syrians to Jordan. By September 2012, the heavy daily influx of Syrians to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan reached a new zenith with 11,000 in one single day. By the end of 2012, there were already seizable Syrian communities in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt and Iraq, their total number estimated to be more than half a million people.

In January 2013, the Lebanese government took a landmark step and agreed to officially register Syrian refugees. This decision was partly led by the fear of the emergence of new refugee camps such as those allocated to Palestinians, except this time for Syrians. By the end of 2013, the number of Syrians who fled to the region reached 2 million people and half of them were children. This was another factor leading to the decision of the Lebanese parliament to absorb and assimilate the Syrians. Throughout 2013, the Za'atari camp in Jordan continued to grow, though some Syrians managed to settle in Jordanian towns and cities. At the end of 2013, the camp had 12,000 tents, amounting to 20,000 households. The UNHCR estimates were suggesting that 6,000 people per day were feeling Syria throughout 2013. In August 2013, another 20,000 Syrians cross the Syria-Iraq border in a just a few days. Meanwhile, Turkey built a wall in the district of Nusaybin, a site of frequent clashes between Syrian rebels, Kurds and local Arab tribes. It is significant to note that of the 2 million Syrians who fled the country, the 'international community' of Western states pledged to take in and resettle 30,000 by the end of 2014. By the end of 2013, Syrian war victims who arrived in Turkey began to cross the Aegean Sea and established a dangerous sea route to get to Europe via Greece. In response, Bulgaria built a 30 km fence across its border with Turkey to stop the influx of Syrians. Polio and Tuberculosis began to spread among the Syrians on the move.

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[18] The timeline is appropriated from http://syrianrefugees.eu/timeline/ [27.02.2017].

By February 2014, Syrian refugees were outnumbering the local residents in the Lebanese border town of Arsal. They were living in makeshift shelters in the outskirts of the town and away from the resident community. By April 2014, 1 in 5 people in Lebanon were declared to be Syrian, amounting to 20 percent of the country's total population. Lebanon received its 1 millionth Syrian refugee on April 3, 2014. Meanwhile, Palestinians living in refugee camps within Syria began to leave and flee the war. In June 2014, ISIS [The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant] took over the Iraqi town of Mosul and 500,000 Mosul residents became displaced. As ISIS declares Iraq and Syria as a caliphate, 1.2 million more Iraqis and Syrians in Iraq became displaced. As ISIS took control of Syrian oil fields, American troops began their airstrikes in August 2014, which led to the displacement of several more hundreds of thousands Syrians caught under fire. By September 2014, another wave of more than 130,000 Syrian Kurds fled to Turkey. In October 2014, the Turkish town of Suruç grew twice in size with the influx of 400,000 Syrian Kurds fleeing across the border, mainly running away from the massacres in the Syrian town of Kobani. By November 2014, the number of Syrians in Turkey reached 1.6 million.

As the numbers continue to escalate, in January 2015, Lebanon introduced a visa requirement for Syrians crossing its borders. Meanwhile, two thirds of the Syrians settled in Jordan were estimated to be living below the country's poverty line. The sight of Syrian children working on the streets of Beirut or Istanbul began to be regarded as all too common. Egypt capped its Syrian refugee intake at about 30,000 and as such remained afloat in terms of providing aid and basic services. However, for Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, the situation was becoming more complex by the day as the exodus continued.

Almost 40% of the Syrians in Lebanon are registered to be under the age of 11 and by 2015, Lebanese schools began to show signs of stress and strained under the added volume of students. By March 2015, Middle Eastern states neighboring Syria were hosting an estimated 4 million Syrian refugees.[19] With the collapse of Palmyra and the DAESH control of half of Syria, the exodus continued with renewed emergency. Meanwhile, Hungary became the second European state to build a wall against Syrians. Germany, however, started an asylum program for Syrians and suspended the 1990 protocol obliging asylum seekers to seek refuge in their first safe country of arrival. By November 2015, the European Union began its Syrian resettlement scheme across the continent, targeting the acceptance of 160,000 Syrians in two years amongst its 14 participating states. In 2015 alone, 1 million people crossed the Mediterranean Sea to the reach the shores of Europe and half of them are estimated to be Syrians.

By January 2016, Turkey established a new policy allowing the 2.5 million Syrian refugees resettled in the country to apply for work permits. In February 2016, Turkey accepted another 70,000 Syrians fleeing the fighting in Aleppo. In March 2016, Turkey signed a deal with the EU, curtailing the forward movement of Syrians through the

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[19] See Global Trends Report at https://www.dni.gov/index.php/global-trends-home [27.02.2017]

'Balkan route' in exchange for monetary aid to Turkey. In June 2016, Amnesty International declared Turkey as unsafe for Syrian refugees due to the regular breach of the non-refoulement principle (i.e. the practice of not forcing refugees or asylum seekers to return to a country in which they are liable to be subjected to persecution) by the country's authorities. In response, Turkey insisted that the open-door policy for Syrians remains in effect and those who were deported were security threats to the national population. The final step in the Turkish reception of Syrians is the completion of more than half of a planned 511-kilometer wall along its border with Syria.[20] With the USA/Russia agreed cease-fire plan of September 2016, the expectation has been the gradual ceasing of the Syrian exodus. By the end of 2016, UNHCR estimates revealed that half of the world's 59.5 million refugees live in the following 10 countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Chad, Uganda, Kenya, Etiopia, Iran, Pakistan, and China.[21]

A Refugee, A Migrant, A Guest, An Illegal Resident, or A New Citizen? The Naming Rituals of the Developmentalist State in the Middle East

Examples of the new Middle Eastern state failing to provide its citizens with basic public services in the context of neoliberal economic restructuring are as common as the counter examples of the general populace being endowed with massive road construction and urban renewal projects, dams and mines, nuclear power stations and state of art locally produced weaponry. Approval for and appreciation of the power of the Middle Eastern state by the masses is as widely chanted as the narratives of discontent concerned about privatized infrastructural development projects, marginalized populations, dispossession and chronic poverty. In this sense, surely a categorical reliance on neoliberalism to understand contemporary Middle Eastern states obscures more than it reveals. Instead, more attention needs to be paid to the unique correlations between specific techniques of governance and relations of power that shape both the discourse and the practice of citizenship/rights and membership in contemporary Middle Eastern polities.

Lineages of the developmentalist state in the Middle East reach back to the independence from colonial and/or imperial rule during the 1950s. Confronting neoliberal models and their emphasis on state–market alliances, a divergent form of developmentalism has also emerged as a powerful alternative with a particularly strong purchase amongst the Arab socialist cadres. Both on the conservative and the progressive sides of this spectrum, the old formula of a 'strong, self-sufficient state' and centralization of political practices remained as the key characteristic of developmentalism. In short, the developmentalist

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[20] As to be expected, The EU has remained largely silent about the wall's impact on refugees. According to the journalists' accounts, "The wall is made from portable concrete blocks each weighing seven tons. The blocks are 2-meters thick (6.5-foot) at the base and 3-meters (10-foot) high, topped by a meter of razor wire. Along the entire wall roads are being built for military patrols and watch towers are being erected." See http://www.dw.com/en/turkey-builds-more-than-half-of-syrian-border-wall/a-37723820 [27.02.2017]

[21] See the figures provided by the UNHCR on global refugee distribution at http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html [27.02.2017]

state in the Middle East, though it also brought hopes for inclusive policies and had announced new forms of alliances between state and society, delivered a heavy and centralized state apparatus.[22] There is very little doubt about the strength of the contemporary Middle Eastern state in its capacity to coerce.

Different from the usual repertoires of political action and persuasion that demanded a negotiation process, the model embraced by the Middle Eastern developmentalist state in its latest stage encourages creation of new classes and categories of belonging to ensure a reliable, loyal, non-conflictive public. In particular, instrumentalization of citizenship and membership rights as a means for political leveraging, along with widespread clientelism among the economic elite, led to a unique relationship between different political and economic actors. Changes in the conception of the public itself are best witnessed in the area of the regularization of policy-making strategies whereby major investments, public policy initiatives, access rights and large public works projects are almost always left out of the reach of participatory decision-making. In this larger context, immigration [voluntary and forced] and its management became an area that the state began to operate almost always as the sole actor in making critical decisions, based on the needs determined by a state-centric arhitecture of governance.

Similarities and continuities with respect to citizenship regimes of several Middle Eastern developmentalist states reveal that there is indeed a persistent inner logic to the reception of dispossessed groups from neighboring states. This distinct approach is one of complementarity, with reinforced regulatory capacities of the state in terms of deciding not only who to let in, but also how and where to situate them once they arrive in accordance with the matrix of existent labor market needs and contingencies of the political landscape. What is most noteworthy in the example of the reception of the Syrian war victims and refugees is the explicit refusal of any immediate interventionist or protectionist moves by the neighboring states to the flow of masses through their borders. Only well passed the zenith of the Syrian crisis did Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey began to exercise traditional border controls. In this sense, the latest version of the developmentalist state in the Middle East is proven to be pragmatic and highly adaptive. It desires both a strong market and a strong state and doesn't see any contradiction between the two at all. On the contrary, to absorb the dichotomies created by this anathema of progress and justice delivered by the state and yet through the market, the Middle Eastern states' redistributive goals now include opening up of citizenship and the

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[22] These centralizing political practices endemic to developmentalism led to a new architecture of governance, comprised of an exclusive focus on public policy management, devolution of participatory mechanisms at municipal, provincial and national levels, and a resultant crisis of representation as the channels for public involvement were opened or closed at the whimsy of the state. In addition, large scale privatization and liquidation of public goods, and, formalization and permanence of private sector involvement of the state through limited parliamentary deliberation meant that the frequently scarce resources available for policy implementation became funded by the sale and handing over of the commons.

'right to work' to the dispossessed of the region. Indeed, opening borders or managing their porousness appears to be regarded as an affirmation of a protagonist 'strong state' rather than a weak one. The 'old' developmentalist model, also known as national developmentalism, was first established in the Middle East back in the 1960s and had a distinct militaristic flavor. Defenders of national developmentalism considered the state as the main agent of social transformation. The new developmentalism continues along these lines, except what is currently considered to be the desired social transformation adheres to a different set of rules and criteria with a distinct emphasis on the absorption of the dispossessed.

After intermittent periods of limited democratic rule, the strong states of the Middle East often became openly authoritarian regimes. The installation of industrial capitalism and the organization of society along corporative lines, coupled with the delivery of social rights and yet the denial of working classes as legitimate political interlocutors, coincided with the beginnings of populism in the region (Kırışçı 2004). Almost 80 years since the emergence of the state system in the Middle East, the current discourse of developmentalism seems to working on the same set of fundamental conceptions of state-society relations, repeating the same vocabulary and yet under a new cloak: the strong state is presented as the nation itself, as the par excellence instrument of the collective desires and dreams for Middle Eastern societies to take their place among the powerful nations at the world stage. Absorption of the regionally dispossessed thus also serves the function of displaying grandeur and might as well as harboring the possibility of renegotiated borders or new infrastructural investment opportunities in the not so far future.

Across the region, the reduction of membership and citizenship rights to representative democracy through voting is linked with the permanent conception of the state as an almighty, self-sufficient entity, dictating the political imagination of a future decided by the state. Given their distributive commitments and capitalizing on their social policies and basic public service provisions, the gradual closure of decision-making in these aggrandized states to the public had limited critical reception. Instead, old paternalistic alliances proved their resilience. Strong charismatic leaders have transferred their legitimacy to an increasingly self-contained state. Oddly enough, attempts to formulate national identities from above, where the state – and not society – defines the 'nation' and the public included the citation of the migrant, the precarious worker, the urban refugee and the 'guests' amongst the grand tally of signs and wonders of national and regional eminence. The new Middle Eastern states' tendency to replace their original emancipatory or redistributive political projects with 'power projects' has become all the more visible in the present management of forced migrations and strategic absorption of dispossessed populations. Holding state power and remaining in their seats at any cost also meant that newly built alliances and concessions regarding extending rights to new groups may well become the order of the day for serving governments and leading parties.

There is no question that such a protagonist role provided an encouraging premise towards the replacement of the dominant West-centric neoliberal model of statehood.

This unique amalgamation of neoliberal pillars of accumulation and statist conception of politics ushered in unprecedented changes regarding the management of migration and citizenship in the Middle East. Expelling those who are deemed unwanted while accepting the unwanted of others is slowly and silently becoming a tool for sustaining the neo-developmentalist states of the region.

And the Show Must Go On: Redefining Sovereignty in the Middle East

The closing question of this article is the following: how is sovereignty managed in the Middle East vis-à-vis forced migration and mass population movements across borders? Investigating the relationship between the Syrian exodus and Middle Eastern models of governance, application of dominant Westphalian conceptions of sovereignty and statehood reveal a perplexing phenomenon and an apparent contradiction in contemporary state governance. The states in the Middle East willingly kept their borders open to the arriving populations from Syria, until such point that they could no longer integrate them due to either significant changes in the make-up of their native demographics as witnessed in Lebanon, or due to a crunch in terms of socio-economic means to accommodate the newly arrived masses of displaced people, as has been the case for Turkey. In Jordan, the point of satiation seems to have been arrived almost naturally, as the state showed its trump card of keeping the new arrivals in an oversized camp rather than letting them directly in. In none of these three cases, however, state sovereignty has been promoted as a reason for denial of entry for literally millions of Syrians.

Does this mean Middle Eastern states transfer their sovereign competencies to the demands of the market, and make long-term calculations about the low cost of labor that would be guaranteed by the employment of the displaced people of other Middle Eastern states? How sovereignty is interpreted and exercised in the region should indeed alert us to the fact that an exclusive focus on the constitutive and regulative dimensions of state sovereignty would fail to provide answers for the regional reception of Syrians *en masse*. The reason cannot be failure to close the borders in a timely and adequate fashion. Neither could it simply be a matter of humanitarian impulses gaining the day in the face of human suffering. The region has seen many a war and massacre and this degree of adaptation to the onslaught of war victims fleeing in millions is a relatively unique development. Perhaps the only other instance whereby the same kind of phenomenon has been witnessed was the Palestinian exodus and the emergence of a stateless Palestinian working class across the Middle East.

As envisioned by T.H. Marshall back in 1950s, social citizenship was meant to be a corrective to the injustices caused by the capitalist market (Marshall 1950). Entitlements and protections guaranteed by the welfare state were hoped to prevent social and economic exclusions that civil and political rights, on their own, could not address. In turn, such protections were to ensure social cohesion and legitimacy for the political regime. Using centuries old capital accumulation topped up with the American Marshall Plan, European welfare states successfully followed this formula for the most part of the

post-World War II period. The Middle Eastern developmentalist states certainly attempted to follow it though with much less certainty or success.[23] This is partly due to the fact that the very meaning of 'work' and 'worker' on which the welfare state is based has never held such sway in the Global South whereby imposed flexibility, risk, marginality and precariousness have been the defining elements of work. Furthermore, the Marshallian notion of 'active citizenship', which envisions participatory decision making, is readily unavailable for immigrant, internally displaced and refugee populations who traditionally made up a significant proportion of the non-traditional working classes in the region. Finally, the post-independence social transformation projects embraced by Middle Eastern states transpired a citizenship model that privileges individual political agency as an expression of the national ethos and not as a means for negotiation and bargaining with the state. In this context, the Middle Eastern state's mandate, not only with respect to its regulatory role but also in its redistributive and transformative roles, needs to be carefully re-examined. It may well be the case that the Middle Eastern state had an eye on irregular labor provided by immigration and refugee flows as a basis for first accumulating then redistributing wealth and resources amongst the native bourgeoisie and middle classes. Through the informal acknowledgement of the porousness of its borders, unlike its European counterparts, the states in the region accept and integrate migrant labor and human capital in all forms, including forced migration flows.

It is not much of a surprise for anyone who looks at the behavior patterns of post-imperial, post-colonial and neo-developmentalist states that forced migration -including refugee flows, asylum seekers, internal displacement, environmental and development-induced displacement - has increased considerably in volume since the end of the Cold War. Not only that it has become an integral part of North-South relationships, it is a major determinant of labor and capital market formations and sustenance of economies within the Global South (Castles 2003; Van Haer 2006; Sales 2007; Canefe 2016). As such, forced migration in the Middle East, including but not limited to the Syrian exodus, must be analyzed as a socio-economic process with significant political repercussions, and not *visa versa*. The fact that forced migration flows often give rise to fears of loss of state control in Europe, for instance, should not blind us to the fact that especially in the context of recent population movements in the Middle East, this particular framing is misleading. To conclude, it is essential to question earlier approaches to refuge, which have been based on the semi-bogus principle of autonomous and self-sufficient national societies. Forced migration must be studied with reference to the needs of capital, labor and state legitimacy and within the context of regional hubs. This is not only relevant for

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[23] The few cases of rapid economic growth in the Global South in the last 30 years have occurred various kinds of polities, and not all of them fit the model of liberal democratic governance. Rather, this phenomenon is best explained by the special character of the states in mention, commonly described as the developmentalist state. Common characteristics of these states and their administrative structures or principles of governance are discussed widely in the political economy liteture pertaining to the subject. See for instance, Leftwitch 1995, Bayar 1996, Öniş and Şenses 2007, Chibber 2009.

our understanding of the present and the future of the Middle Eastern state. It should be the main take-away from the Syrian crisis in the Middle East for the field of forced migration studies at large.

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Images to be Used if applicable:

The Turkish Wall along the Syrian Border

Source:
https://www.google.ca/search?q=images+turkey+wall+at+syrian+border&espv=2&biw=1287&bih=718&tbm=isch&imgil=4vUUqV4utIYd9M%253A%253BG4O75Nz43vejaM%253Bhttps%25253A%25252F%25252Fwww.youtube.com%25252Fwatch%25253Fv%2525253D6f5DCgL970U&source=iu&pf=m&fir=4vUUqV4utIYd9M%253A%252CG4O75Nz43vejaM%252C_&usg=__Gvx7s58ZppN7_b0Pdgeo4tYFCkk%3D&ved=0ahUKEwinsNHJqLHSAhUl0oMKHa6gCfAQyjcIJQ&ei=_6a0WOe0L6WkjwSuwaaADw#imgrc=4vUUqV4utIYd9M:

Lebanese wall along the Syrian Border

Source:
https://www.google.ca/search?q=lebanese+wall+at+syrian+border&espv=2&biw=1287&bih=718&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi-xITxqLHSAhWF34MKHflAAxYQsAQIGQ

Jordanian wall along Syrian Border

Source:
https://www.google.ca/search?q=jordanian+wall+at+syrian+border&espv=2&biw=1287&bih=718&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiO6cyYqbHSAhVnw4MKHWCbAWEQsAQIJg

Hungarian Fence against Syrians

Source:
https://www.google.ca/search?q=jordanian+wall+at+syrian+border&espv=2&biw=1287&bih=718&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiO6cyYqbHSAhVnw4MKHWCbAWEQsAQIJg#tbm=isch&q=hungarian+wall+&*&imgrc=Eq_QSliOciPpSM: