Chapter 1
Pushing the Limits of Mediterranean Configurations:
Refugees as Actors

Clara Rachel Eybalin Casseus
Independent Researcher, France

ABSTRACT

The outbreak of conflicts in parts of the Middle East and North Africa since 2011 has turned cities into contentious spaces and primary sites hosting large numbers of refugees and undocumented migrants. Yet, the lack of economic perspectives and human rights' violations are push factors for emigration in a number of countries beyond the Mediterranean facing a gap in comprehensively addressing migratory challenges from a broad-based perspective. How can urbanization be addressed concerning the discourse about conflict-induced displacement without first identifying the noncitizen? Considering forced displacement induced by war/environmental disaster, this chapter situates its discussion of global displacement, war, and non-citizenship by exploring the interplay between place, power, and politics. It argues for deconstructing non-citizenship and reinstating displacement in the city by analysing the decision-making processes and experiences of non-citizens in the cities of Jeddah, Doha, and Beirut, while expanding the issue of statelessness to post-earthquake Haïti.

INTRODUCTION

The recent migratory movements that are partly due to the war in Syria have been represented as a crisis in the media and by politicians, activists and scholarly debate. The deployment of a discourse of crisis by states as well as at times by solidarity and humanitarian actors has produced representations of migrants' mobility as exceptional and has called for emergency interventions. From the European Union and its borders to the Mediterranean contexts but also, and importantly, cities that are part of the Global South, collective actions by and in support of refugees have multiplied. While European citizens may perceive the current migratory pressure as dramatic, the European Union is by no means the most affected region in tLhe world. The conflict and the absence of state structures have turned Libya into a major crossing point for Sub-Saharan Africans into Europe, and primarily Italy. In doing so, people's mobility shows the need for better discourse and more effective policies, whereby the dynamics signals the possibilities for a different politics of membership that is simultaneously localized and transnational.

Today's refugee crisis across the world reminds mobilities researchers that countries are not only trying to reassert control of their borders, but also to use people flows and differences in population size for geostrategic gain. Is this a sign that geopolitics of extreme environments may contribute to the understanding of the positioning of an emerging Global South power with increasing regional and global ambitions? The relationship between mobility and geopolitics can be better understood through the use of the framework of social capital and transnational community networks. Multiple works on the boundaries of political shifts (Levitt 2014) reveals the need to continue to search for more ways to conceptualize, study, and evaluate political processes that cross, intersect, and challenge national borders. Similarly, Bertrand Badie supports the idea that the 'web' of networks develops strategies to circumvent states, which contributes to lifting it above the 'world' of territories. Kishore Mahbubani (2013) rightly argues that the understanding of contemporary geopolitics should encompass far more than relations among great powers, but also much less powerful actors, regardless of their geographical connections. Are the Lebanese/Syrian communities in Haiti part of the scheme post-reconstruction towards this nation and in the MENA and Gulf States? In this age of mobility, this chapter is part of a comparative research project concerning urban organisation at times of political instability

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