

Transforming Amman: Displaced Iraqis Impact on Architecture and Urban Form

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Abstract: It has become common to observe that the spatial and social displacement of people has been accelerating around the world at a fast pace. Displacement provokes disruptions and shifts of meanings and conventions. Architecture can function as a receptacle, as an instrument, or as staging of displacement. Sometimes, architecture manages to generate possibilities to turn contradiction into ambivalence. In this regard, cultural representations of memory, migration and migrant experiences provide fruitful points of departure for the development of new theoretical concepts of place and belonging that have direct effect on built architecture and urban form. Jordan has received two primary waves of Iraqi refugees; the first arrived after the 1991 Gulf War. Many of these Iraqis were middle class, including doctors, intellectuals, and teachers. Since the start in 2003 of the war in Iraq, increasing numbers of Iraqi nationals have left their homes for different parts of Iraq or have taken residence in neighbouring countries, particularly Jordan and Syria. Iraqi refugees and migrants in Jordan represent a large sector of society; this research looks into the current architecture or urbanisms of displacement which took place in the city of Amman as a result of Iraqi migration into the city. So, this research proposes a theoretical framework to examine the effects of Iraqi migration on urban form and urbanism in the city of Amman. The authors look at four agencies of impact (movement of capital, people, information, and culture) and their effects. These consequences, the authors suggest, are expressed in the configuration of urban space, urban form, and urbanism in Amman. The goal of the research is to offer a critical framework for studying the impact of migration and refugees on third world cities urban form.

Key words: Displacement, Iraqi Refugees, Amman City, Identity, Urban Form.

INTRODUCTION

It has been noted that refugees, through the process of forced migration, lose aspects of their identities that were embedded in their former communities, jobs, skills, language, and culture. Upon arrival in a new society, they seek to reconstruct their identity.

After the current advances in communications, the increasingly complex relationship between the local and the global has emerged as one of the defining characteristics of contemporary societies. With globalization's increased mobility of people and speed of information exchange, and the cultural encounters resulting from it, traditional definitions of terms such as home, belonging, place, identity and memory have long become problematic, and more adequate understandings of these conceptions are much sought after.

The issues of migrant resettlement, adaptation and acculturation have received increasing attention from social scientists. A dominant paradigm is Acculturation Theory, proposed by Berry (1980), explains how individuals from a cultural background react when in contact with another culture (mostly in the context of immigration). The theory posits that, depending on how these individuals react to the 'host' culture and how much of their 'home' culture they retain, individuals will either; integrate, assimilate, reject or become marginalized. Nevertheless, Iraqis in Amman are not recognized as refugees as the international meaning of the word suggests, but they are active residents of Jordan, participating in changing the economic, social and urban status of the city. This research looks into the active role they are playing in transforming Amman. The research's main aim is to identify how the built environment is rendered and shaped by community identities. The object of the research is to pinpoint the effect of immigration on place transformation. It also studies both new and historical urban form, and discovers the different ways that they are occupied and transformed in reference to identity formation. By examining urban conditions, and discovering the different ways that they are occupied and transformed with reference to identity formation by cultural and economic factors, the research aims to highlight displaced Iraqis influence upon architecture and urban form in the city of Amman and how architecture and urban form is part of the collective identities of different city inhabitants and communities.

Methodology:

Research and data gathering is divided into three main parts, where all parts are interrelated. First part concerns the study of refugees in Amman with emphasis on Iraqi refugees, including analysis of tables and

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statistics to derive conclusions. Second part analyses data depending on observations, recordings of social characteristics, and conducting a series of interviews. Interviews constitute a significant part of fieldwork.

Fieldwork is documented with notes and pictures by the authors. Main data resources are assembled by interviewing Iraqi refugees from two main categories; one that arrived in Amman before 2003, and one that arrived after the Iraqi war of 2003. Both categories have shown different social and economic characteristics. Final stage of research includes synthesis of data to implement research strategies and derive conclusions.

Research Problem:

The case with the Iraqi Diaspora in Jordan, and in Amman specifically, is that they have mastered the art of impact without real-time integration with the Ammani society. They are main catalysers of social and urban development. Empowered by strong capital and investment talents, they seem to transform and influence many changes to the urban realm of the city.

Melvin Webber's (1964) celebrated 'Non place Urban Realm' is what best describes the new metropolitan multicultural new city of Amman; where the built environment is subject to constant change due to different waves of immigrants coming into the city. Each group bringing part of their culture to the new city that does not represent a place with a singular identity but a multi layered Ammani urban realm.

The current forms of urban morphology that are occurring in the city of Amman, and the responsive developments initiated by new waves of displaced Iraqis and their counter effects build on what Melvin Webber describes as: 'Dynamic, locational patterns of human communication that occur through space but transcend any given place' (Webber, 1964). The Iraqis in the city are creating points of arrival for their trans-placed identity and culture inside the urban fabric of the city. In these points of arrival Iraqis can meet and socialize with fellow Iraqis and create a sense of home within their new city.

Refugees in Jordan:

Jordan has the highest ratio of refugees to total population of any country in the world, and is host to the largest number of Palestinian refugees under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Jordan acted generously towards these refugees, granting them fully-fledged citizenship while UNRWA provides health and education services.

Although Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, both the authorities and civil society are sensitive to refugee and human rights issues. The government considers the Iraqis in the country to be guests, rather than refugees, which ensures that they are secure and respected, but fails to provide them with a clear legal status.

While most Jordanians show tolerance and hospitality to the people of concern to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in their midst, the country's national systems and infrastructure have come under strain. The pressure has become more acute over the past two years due to the financial and economic crises, and was exacerbated in early 2011 as a consequence of the 'Arab Spring'. As refugees from many Arab countries have taken refuge in the country including those from Libyan and Syrian nationalities. One of the largest groups of Syrian refugees resides in Al-Zaatari camp, which is home to more than half a million Syrian refugees.

Iraqi Refugees in Jordan:

Throughout the 1990s hundreds of thousands of Iraqis fled their country, mainly Iraqi Shia and Kurds. Iran took the bulk of those refugees but by 1995, Iraqis also began to head to Jordan either to settle there or to use Jordan as a transit base to other countries. Although there are no accurate statistics on Iraqi refugees in Jordan before the 2003 war, it was estimated that by 1996 there were 100,000 Iraqis. By 2003, their numbers were put at 250,000 to 350,000 and only 30,000 were legally permanent residents in Jordan (Sassoon 2010).

In the immediate aftermath of the 2003 invasion, the first waves of Iraqis to flee were similar to the initial groups of refugees in the 1990s.

One of the issues facing international humanitarian organizations and research institutions is the fact that the Iraqi refugees, unlike refugees in many other war-torn areas, are not living in camps or tents; the vast majority of them are urbanites heading to urban centres (Ferris, 2007).

The majority of the Iraqi community in Jordan resides in Amman, and had originally come from Baghdad. The population of Iraqis in Jordan is almost exclusively urban and hence most of them benefit from the infrastructure in the capital city of Amman and other large cities, Figure 1. Almost all households are connected to the public electricity network, the water network and the sewage network.



Fig. 1: Iraqi women in downtown Amman area selling smuggled cigarettes (Authors, 2003).

Many Iraqis have been forced by their financial circumstances to move to poorer parts of Amman. Dalen et al. (2007) indicates that 25 per cent of Iraqi households in Jordan own their dwellings. Household wealth plays a factor in home ownership; 60 per cent of the households in the highest wealth group own their houses, whereas only 1 per cent of the poor households do.

In fact, with the passage of time, a real gap in wealth and status has evolved among Iraqis in Jordan. While there are stories of successful entrepreneurs whose business is booming, 100 thousands of other Iraqis are relying on humanitarian aid for food and blankets, Figure 2.



Fig. 2: Neighbourhoods in West Amman marked with (A) Areas where wealthy Iraqis and investors own houses and businesses, and have invested in real-estate market. (B) Represents the old downtown of Amman where less privileged Iraqis prior to 2003 have settled (Authors, 2013).

According to Dalen et al. (2007), some of the better-off groups have investments in and outside Jordan and some even kept their investments in Iraq. Again, the survey shows a strong correlation between the household's economic status and the size of their investments, and also employment of household heads. Within the households in the highest wealth group, 40 per cent have investments in Jordan.

Apart from purchasing their own houses to live in, some Iraqis invested in the property market, Figure 3, which is considered one of the backbones of Jordan's economy.



Fig. 3: Photo rendering of JD 80 million mega mall project in Sweifieh District in West Amman by Amwaj Properties owned by Iraqi investors (Nadel Architects, 2013).

From 2002–05, the value of Iraqi transactions in the Jordanian housing market has doubled each year, rising from about five million (JD) Jordanian Dinars to JD100 million (one Jordanian dinar is equal to \$1.4). The value of Iraqi transactions as a percentage of all foreign transactions also increased dramatically from 21 per cent in 2002 to 68 per cent in 2005. Obviously, these purchases boosted property prices in Jordan and added to the inflationary pressures in the housing market (Sassoon, 2010).

During 2004–06, the Jordanian economy witnessed strong Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates of 8.4 per cent, 7.2 per cent and 6.3 per cent respectively. The reasons for this growth have more to do with external and regional factors than government reforms, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Iraqi refugees' economic and social status in Amman (Dalen et al., 2007).

		Places of residence			Total	Sample size
		Not in Amman	In Amman	Total		
Total		20.7	79.3	100	1,691	
Household wealth in quintiles	Lowest wealth	40.8	59.2	100	306	
	Low wealth	41.7	58.3	100	287	
	Middle wealth	17.9	82.1	100	243	
	High wealth	5.9	94.1	100	231	
	Highest wealth	2.0	98.0	100	624	
Arrival of household head in Jordan	Before 2003	40.1	59.9	100	425	
	2003	11.6	88.4	100	131	
	2004	21.6	78.4	100	193	
	2005	8.9	91.1	100	296	
	2006	6.2	93.8	100	465	
Employment status of household head	2007	8.2	91.8	100	64	
	Employed	27.4	72.6	100	808	
	Unemployed	21.9	78.1	100	126	
Registration of household head with	Out of workforce	12.4	87.6	100	756	
	Registered with UNHCR	26.3	73.7	100	691	
Status of household head's permit	Not registered with UNHCR	14.8	85.2	100	873	
	Valid permit	16.7	83.3	100	832	
	Not valid permit	26.3	73.7	100	562	

Among those reasons were the ramifications of the Iraq war, increased wealth and savings in the oil producing Gulf countries which led to a rise in foreign flows into Jordan. One of the engines behind the

impressive growth of GDP is the construction sector, which has grown by an average of 10.7 per cent each year from 2003–07 to meet the demand for housing by the new wave of refugees. The Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM) estimated that the arrival of Iraqi families in 2004 and early 2005 pumped \$2 billion into the Jordanian economy, and that ‘clearly contributed to accelerating the cycle of the economy’ (Saif and Debartolo, 2010).

Displaced Iraqis Identity:

Identity is the foundation to a sense of belonging. It is the means by which people locate themselves as members of communities and groups and how they define their place in society. Identities are not singular, nor are they stable. New patterns in population movement, developments in transport and advances in electronic communication have loosened traditional ties between residence and identity. There has been a move from the community sociality of physically localised connections, to an increasing ‘network sociality’ of informational, ephemeral and often temporary associations (Wittel, 2011).

The globalizing era of rapid economic and cultural transformation has unsettled cultural locations and their settled ways. Those practices, beliefs, and ideas that were once considered folk culture and defined as organic expressions of locally lived experiences are, with ever increasing speed, being unsettled. The mobility and mobilization of both populations and territories raises questions about the nature of the ties social groups have to their places, about the durability of these ties and the kind of settlement practices enacted for those on the move (Iltan, 2002).

The idea of belonging to a ‘community’, for example, is never simply the recognition of cultural similarity or social contiguity. It is instead a categorical identity that is characterized by various forms of exclusion and constructions of otherness (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). Berry's (1980) acculturation theory when applied to Iraqi diaspora represents varieties of adaptation that differ according to the group economic situation. But Berry's model recognizes the importance of multicultural societies, minority individuals and groups, and the fact that individuals have a choice in the matter of how far they are willing to go in the acculturation process (Berry, 1980). Immigrants involved in cultural transitions because of migration must cope with their new cultural-societal pressures and standards. They must make sense of their new social environment and decide how and/or whether they are going to integrate themselves into the host culture. This is how they develop situated behaviour patterns that are adaptive within the larger context (Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

One important point of arrival for Iraqis' identity resides within the restaurant or café culture. There are several Iraqi restaurants that have opened in West Amman. In these cafes and restaurants 75% of guests are Iraqis, where a large number of Iraqi families gather to socialize on a daily basis. Many Iraqi restaurants in West Amman are social Iraqi hubs where Iraqis can meet, and wedding ceremonies can take place. The interiors of these restaurants are vivid with memorabilia and nostalgic elements that echo Baghdad or Mosul or any other city in Iraq, Figure 4. Restaurant names are also nostalgic in a sense that they may refer to street names in Baghdad, or to a Mesopotamian goddess or to traditional dishes...etc., Figure 5.



Fig. 4: Interior of (Zad El Khair) restaurant in Umm Uthaina district - framed pictures on the walls are vintage photos from Bagdad and Mosul (Authors, 2013).



Fig. 5: Esagila is an Iraqi restaurant in West Amman owned by an Iraqi investor named after Esagila the famous ancient temple in Babylon (Authors, 2013).

The Iraqi restaurants and cafes of West Amman are not only places where Iraqis can eat, but they also represent political arenas. Found in the neighbourhoods of Sweifieh, Abdoun, Umm Uthaina and Rabiah districts; they mark territorial Iraqi zones, where they almost act as medieval Christian churches or Islamic mosques, acting as social centres one for each neighbourhood. But most importantly they act as points of arrival for Iraqis' displaced culture and identity in Amman.

Displaced Iraqis and the Changing Face of Amman:

Jordan experienced a high rate of urbanization during the last five decades leading to concentration of population in the main cities. This has created high demand for the opening up of huge areas to meet housing, commercial, industrial and other service planning requirements.

The Urbanization in Jordan is the result of a rapid population growth caused by high natural growth and a flow of refugees, Figure 6.

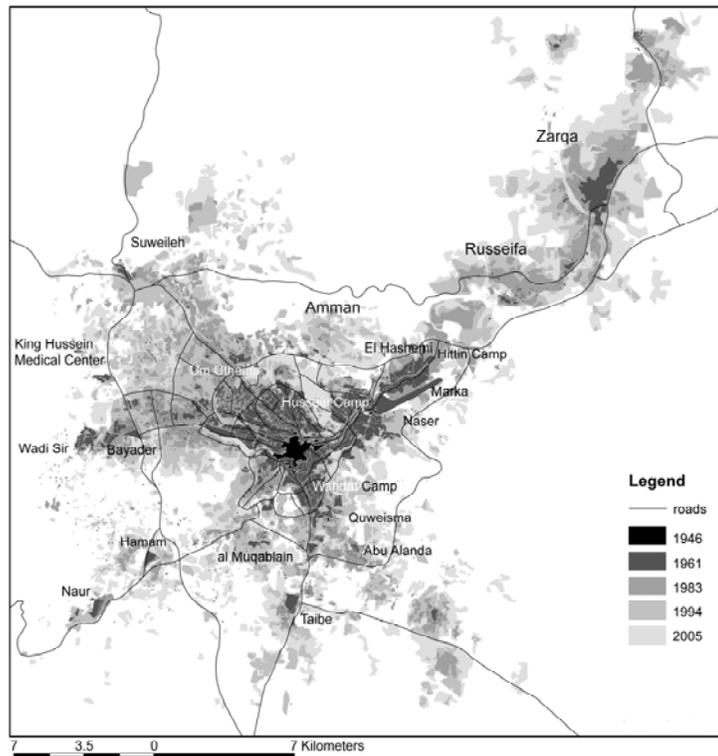


Fig. 6: Fifty years of urban expansion of Amman, with more expansion to the West after 2005. (Ababsa, 2010).

Historically, urban immigration in Amman has increased at rates that have exceeded those of infrastructure development in the destination cities, resulting in concentration of population and increasing of population density. Continuous migration flows have largely contributed to an increase of the population density and built-up areas, one of the main effects of such a situation is the transformation of settlement structures and urban services, Figure 7.



Fig. 7: Increased populations means more demand on housing and a construction boom, but large strain on public services (Authors, 2013).

The population growth of Amman since the second half of the 20th century has been phenomenal, in terms of its population, density, and socio-economic characteristics. This has transformed Amman from a small town in the early 1920s of little more than 3000 people to a major city with a population of 2.4 million people (Ong, 2000).

Currently, the spatial characteristics of the urban areas of Amman had become increasingly complex. The peak in the population number indicated an increase in the fragmentation of the urban areas, and decreases the existence of open spaces inside the urbanized areas.

Due to the marked difference in socio-economic conditions, the form of urbanization in West Amman is considerably different from that observed in East Amman. The urban growth under the Amman Land Use Master Plan has been influenced by economic development of the country and the city. In the east it is over populated while the west is more fragmented, thus the wealthy Iraqis found holes to fill in the vacant pricy lands of west Amman.

The urbanization of Amman has also produced several patterns. The new urban areas were quickly assimilated into the old urban centre by the rapid and unexpected economic growth that followed the privatization reforms, while the areas of east Amman remained relatively less developed (Christopher, 2009).

Amman, a city of refugees and migrants, Amman's inhabitants arrived in waves that resonate with the convulsions of the landscape upon which they settled. The steep hills of the city's eastern parts and natural setting reinforced distinctions between groups. It provided shelter for the reconstitution of poor communities of Iraqi refugees, those were the ones that claimed the status quo of politically displaced and under privileged (Christopher, 2009). Jordan's population is just over six million people and its informal economy is small and there is no doubt that the influx of so many Iraqis in a period of several years has put tremendous pressure on the quality of the infrastructure and the level of government services, particularly in Amman.

Conclusions:

Iraqi diaspora in Jordan are not like any other ordinary refugees and displaced people as a result of war. They are residents of a city that they are participating in transforming socially and economically; in a way that is changing its urban typology and development.

The majority of Iraqis in Amman come from good economic backgrounds and a very good percentage are active investors in the real estate and construction sectors.

Effects of Iraqi migration on urban form and urbanism in the city of Amman are tangible. Four agencies of impact including movement of capital, people's identity, information, and culture have affected the lifestyle and urban morphology of the city.

The configuration of urban space is affected by Iraqis in a way that is felt in the city's urban form. The effects of migration on third world cities urban form and social life are tremendous, because cities like Amman have not formed their own strong identity yet. Amman is less than a century old city, which means that a large

number of people moving into a small populated city and country can have their impact on social life and also on the urban form, as well as architecture and architectural behaviour of the residents from all backgrounds.

Recommendations:

Third world cities come under huge strain during political turmoil. Their developing infra-structures and most of the time shaky economies cannot cope with major political events, especially those concerning refugees and displaced people. Amman as a developing city is no exception to the rule; on the contrary, it is a city that can be mostly affected. Policy makers should take this into consideration when developing long time span plans for the city.

Identity and culture are among many issues of concern for displaced people or refugees. Governments should respond to such issues with great concern; as refugees may at a time represent a temporary situation, but consequently they're integrated into societies and from there they can either be promoters of positive or negative change.

Decision makers and urban planners should always develop predication scenarios for the future. These scenarios should foresee current and future situations concerning education, health and social aspects of all city inhabitants. Social and cultural aspects can have a major impact on planning initiatives and may contribute to a more comprehensive and holistic approach to the planning of cities.

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