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Refugees, Migration and the Tightening Borders in the Middle East. A Perspective From Biographical Research on the Re-Figuration of Spaces and Cross-Cultural Comparison

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Abstract: With its diachronic focus on socio-historical processes and life and family histories, sociological biographical research can analyse the emergence of new spatial figurations. It does so from the perspective of the experiences of individuals in their changing belonging to different groupings at different times. In this article, I investigate changing (meanings of) spaces in the Bilad ash-Sham region (roughly today's Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and parts of Jordan and Syria). I discuss how the process of the formation of nation-state borders and citizenship in the twentieth century transformed translocal relations into transnational networks, combined spatial diffusion with (forced) emplacement in nation-states, and initiated accelerating national closure processes. At the family level, the growing relevance of citizenship and borders in the region came about with knowledge of, and family dialogue about, border crossing, and the increasing spatial diffusion of the family, as well as intrafamilial discussions on the "value" of different nation-states. These processes affected all families in the Bilad ash-Sham region to a varying extent. They constitute a type of figuration of space that influenced the gradual formation of societies within the framework of nation-states defined by colonial rulers. As an example, I will discuss the regional family history of a Syrian refugee in Amman, Jordan.

Table of Contents

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1. Biographical Research and the Re-Figuration of Spaces

Sociological biographical research can contribute to analysing the re-figuration of spaces, understood as "a fundamental shift in our understanding of space" in recent decades (KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2017, p.3), by approaching it in its everyday dimension and from the perspective of actors in their socio-historical positionality. With its diachronic focus, biographical research shows *concretely* how a new spatial figuration evolves historically, and how it is tied to the actions and experiences of actors. By analysing biographies in their socio-historical interdependency, we can reconstruct the distinct processes of spatial change in different regions and their relevance in people's lives. It is obvious that re-figuration of spaces does not happen in the same way everywhere. In its processuality, it depends on ever-changing figurations of different groupings in a specific societal setting, and their unequal power changes, which lead to varying borders on several spatial scales. Biographical research thus offers a starting point for understanding cultural and regional differences in respect of spatial re-figuration in their historical or temporal contexts. Following the process of re-figuration from a biographical perspective reveals how spatial changes have been experienced, and shaped, by individuals and how they were discussed at different points in time within the groups to which they belong: families, neighbours, peers, or others. [1]

In this article I will discuss the potential of biographical research to analyse the re-figuration of spaces in the Middle East. Of course, it is not only true of this region, but probably more obvious here than elsewhere, that it is impossible to understand the current situation without taking into account the history of the region with its dramatic changes in the meaning of space over the past one hundred years. As in other areas of the Global South, these changes began with the drawing of relatively arbitrary borders and forced territorialisation in the context of colonial aspirations. This general superimposed redefinition of space served as the basis for the establishment of nation-states in the context of the European colonial projects; the subsequent formation of distinct societies in the Middle East came along with far-reaching changes in the meaning of collective belongings, borders, and the ascension of citizenship. [2]

I will concentrate on Bilad ash-Sham, which can be translated as "Land to the North". Bilad ash-Sham is a region, roughly encompassing present-day Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and parts of Jordan and Syria, which was perceived by its inhabitants as a continuous geographical space. The relatively late significance of state borders within this region, and of the national, territorial character of societies, conflicted with existing translocal processes, or translocality, a term which has been defined by Ulrike FREITAG and Achim VON OPPEN (2010) as transfer and circulation across different possible borders before and beyond the nation-state. The relevance of territoriality is ongoing and visible in the family stories and biographies we collected during our research in Bilad ash-Sham. On the one hand, we were able to identify characteristics of a recent re-figuration of spaces, such as "heterogeneity, transgression of boundaries and informal flat networks", while, on the other hand, the discussion or "reinforcement of

territorially fixed places" (KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2017, p.16) and the increasing negotiation of borders proved to be more relevant in the empirical analysis. [3]

Thus, for this region, I have separated the process of tightening borders heuristically into four periods, which I will introduce in more detail below:

1. a period of translocal exchange and the relative insignificance of formal citizenship;
2. the dramatically increasing importance of legal and formal citizenship, borders, and transnational migration "in the region";
3. a period during which different citizenships were ascribed differing socio-economic values and compared at various levels;
4. and, most recently, accelerated national closure processes and more obvious ideological enforcement of borders and citizenship. [4]

I will exemplify these processes by presenting the life history of a Syrian Druze woman named Azima Qasim, and her family history spanning three generations. The interview with Azima (not her real name, which, like other details, has been altered) in Amman, Jordan, was spread out over two meetings in May 2017. It was conducted in English and lasted for a total of five hours. I met Azima several times for follow-up talks in subsequent years. [5]

The case of Azima highlights the tightening and framing effects of colonial and nation-building processes in Bilad ash-Sham, and the dramatic changes of meaning of collective and national belongings and national borders in the last three generations. At the same time, it shows how translocal relations turned into a transnational migration pattern within her extended family. These processes are actively discussed within the family, and the present is compared with a past that is remembered as being little influenced by border and citizenship restrictions. While not all personal and family histories in Bilad ash-Sham were shaped and determined by these processes to such a great extent as within Azima's family, no one was left completely unaffected by them, either. These changes always meant changing power changes, ranging from the growing importance of migration capital within parts of the family to socio-economic establishment in certain nation-states and uncertainty for family members who became refugees. I will illustrate below how, in this socio-historical context, the constitution of space or place has impacted biographical and familial structures, how the interviewee has been emplaced by others, and how she emplaces herself. I will also analyse the way past spatial figurations are spoken about in the family dialogue. [6]

I conducted the biographical and family interview with Azima Qasim in the context of the research project "Dynamic Figurations of Refugees, Migrants, and Long-Time Residents in Jordan Since 1946". Our fieldwork was mainly concentrated in the country's capital, Amman. Today, inhabitants who themselves, or whose families, came to Amman as refugees form the majority of the city's roughly 4,000,000 inhabitants. Refugees came from the neighbouring regions and countries, with large numbers of arrivals coinciding with wars in Palestine, Iraq,

Kuwait and Syria. Azima is one of Jordan's 650,000 registered Syrian refugees, a number which the Jordanian government challenges; it estimates the number of Syrian refugees to be about 1,300,000 people. However, Azima came to Jordan before the war started in 2011. This is not the only detail of her story, and that of her family, that differs from the common view of refugees as people who flee from their home in one place and settle in a new place. [7]

Before introducing some basic concepts of biographical research, I will outline the story of Azima and her family, including her current situation, which may help to give an idea of the relevance of the theoretical considerations. For several generations, Azima Qasim's extended family has lived a "translocal" life (FREITAG & VON OPPEN, 2010) in different places within the Bilad ash-Sham region. During the twentieth century, this region, which formerly belonged to the Ottoman empire, was split up into newly created nation-states. Azima's family belongs to the ethno-religious minority of the Druze, who mainly live in an area that is today part of Israel, Lebanon, Syria, and, to a lesser extent, Jordan. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the family's migration movements grew both in terms of geographical range and in number. Members of Azima's extended family are today scattered across four continents, especially in the countries of the Bilad ash-Sham region and in the Arab Gulf. Migration has a distinctly positive connotation in the family dialogue and in the family memory; it is a strategy for acquiring agency and for solving problems. This familial meaning of migration poses a stark contrast to the process of nation-state formation, which came along with the increasing relevance of national borders, national consciousness, migration regimes, and especially forced national emplacement in the Middle East. This overall process was not always linear in all geographical areas, with local periods of opening spaces. However, generally speaking, opportunities to emplace oneself translocally in a flexible manner became increasingly restricted in a process that lasted several decades. For example, Azima's grandfather migrated from present-day Lebanon to Syria, Palestine, and Jordan, where he became a citizen. By contrast, Azima, who had migrated to Amman before the war in Syria started, was later forced to register as a refugee in Jordan, and this labelled her as Syrian more unambiguously than ever before. For Azima's family, this restricting emplacement in nation-states has been a challenge to their translocal and transnational practices. On the one hand, it has increased the ambivalence between citizenship, translocal consciousness and solidarity with family and the Druze community. On the other hand, it is connected to a process of increasing mediatisation (LÖW & KNOBLAUCH, 2017). This process could be traced earlier in Azima's family, due to their geographically extending migrations, but wars and border closures have led to a rise in the importance of digital communication even over short distances, for instance between Syria and Jordan. [8]

I hope that this brief overview has demonstrated why it would be important to enquire into the *genesis* of Azima's current situation, especially her present spatial situation, and why it provides a suitable object for analysing changing spatial figurations in the Middle East from the perspective of social constructivist biographical research. The leading question in my discussion of the case is:

Which conditions have led to translocal or transnational diffusion within the family, and to nation-state-induced limitations to self-definition and definition by others? Which patterns of interpretation and action are interrelated with, and negotiated within, the family? I will answer these questions by interconnecting Azima's family and personal history with the local socio-historical conditions. This opens up opportunities for discussing longer-term social processes in the Middle East. In order to make my approach clearer, I will first briefly outline the history of sociological biographical research, with its theoretical assumptions and recent developments (Section 2), before discussing Azima's family and life history in its socio-historical context (Section 3), followed by concluding thoughts about the re-figuration of spaces in the Middle East (Section 4). [9]

2. On the History and Conceptualisation of Biographical Research

At first sight, there is nothing new about connecting biographical research to an analysis of spaces and places. Especially in the early history of sociology, there was a linkage between analysing biographies and spatial and urban transformation processes. Protagonists of the Chicago School of Sociology integrated analyses of biographies into their study of immigrant communities (THOMAS & ZNANIECKI, 1918-1920), and in the Marienthal study biographies were used as one point of access (JAHODA, LAZARSFELD & ZEISEL, 2015 [1933]). Later, the analysis of spatial processes lost its importance in biographical research, as opposed to temporality. Biographical research became known as an arena for studying periods of great social transformation or the (temporal) process of migration (APITZSCH & INOWLOCKI, 2000, p.55; articles in *FQS* with a focus on processes of migration from the perspective of biographical research include: KAZMIERSKA, 2003; RIEMANN, 2003; ROSENTHAL, BAHL & WORM, 2016; SCHÜTZE, 2003). In this article, I will attempt to bring the "spatial component" back into the analysis of biographical courses. I will emphasise the potential of *combining* temporal and spatial aspects in a processual view. Of course, the spatial environment has *somehow* implicitly always played a role in the analysis of biographies. But the explicit, theoretically and methodologically informed thematisation of such a combination situated between the sociology of space and social constructivist biographical research has represented a research gap for a long time in sociology in German-speaking countries. In 2015, Gunter WEIDENHAUS presented such a combination, with a focus on social space-time in processes of biographisation. He analysed how life historicity is connected to biographical constitutions of space when biographers turn to their own life history. In my own research, I have focused more strongly on the level of experiencing places in biographical courses (BECKER, 2019). Taking the example of Jerusalem's Old City (BECKER, 2017), I have highlighted the central biographical importance of certain places as primary, *close* levels of experiencing. This importance, however, interrelates with the places themselves, which are not only constituted by things; their members also contribute to their constitution. I have framed the relevance of such place-bound belonging as emplacement—as biographical processes of emplacing and being emplaced (pp.53ff.). [10]

The dialectics of emplacing and being emplaced mirrors the influence social constructivism has had on biographical research: the assumption that people are actively involved in creating social reality, without challenging their subordination to social stocks of knowledge (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1966). In biographical research, it became important to consider, on the basis of a *dynamic structural concept*, not only subjective perspectives, but also the determination of action. Wolfram FISCHER and Martin KOHLI (1987, p.35) suggested that the concept of biography—as rooted in everyday life—captures the ambiguity between regularity and emergence in lifeworlds. Biographies as constructs are shaped both socially and individually. Therefore, "[r]econstructions that carefully use thick descriptions of life and family histories in their interrelation with social processes of transformation allow [...] for the interdependency of macro- and micro-levels of enquiry (or society and individual) to be taken into account" (ROSENTHAL, 2012, p.207). [11]

As I have argued, this resonates with the concept that places are co-constituted by their members' emplacement and would not be able to exist without them: "[T]here is a reciprocal relationship between the constitution of places and people. Thus, there is a dual focus on how places are given meaning and how people are constituted through place" (McDOWELL, 1997, p.1; see also CASEY, 1996, p.24). [12]

This idea is compatible not only with social constructivism, but also with other concepts that do not treat society and individual as discrete entities. This is also true of figurational sociology, which is based on Norbert ELIAS's work. One of ELIAS's (2010 [1987]) central messages was that societies cannot be imagined without the individuals who constitute them. The link to figurational sociology is currently being discussed not only in connection with the idea of a re-figuration of spaces, but prominently also in biographical research, which I will come back to below. [13]

But first I will look at some well-established basic principles in biographical research. Like other approaches in interpretative social research, biographical research follows a *logic of discovery* (HOFFMANN-RIEM, 1980, pp.345f.) and develops theoretical considerations systematically based on first-hand empirical data (GLASER & STRAUSS, 1967). Thus, extended phases of collecting data, using methods such as narrative interviews, participant observation, group discussions or discourse analysis, oscillate with data analysis (BECKER & ROSENTHAL, forthcoming). The researcher starts by taking the experiences and relevancies of the actors themselves seriously (SCHÜTZ, 1953). This opens up a space for identifying novel themes and for questioning established topics in certain research areas. In the present case, it is the diachronic approach to reconstructing family histories of migration in particular that differs markedly from most literature on processes of flight and refuge in the Middle East. [14]

Although analyses in biographical research often start with single biographies, they do not remain at this level. The process of generalisation is closely connected to the idea of the mutual constitution of society and individuals. The

"personal perspectives" and life histories of biographers are important, but the aim of analysing individual biographies is to identify which patterns of interpretation and stocks of knowledge are present in a society or collective at a certain time, what can and cannot be said and done in a particular context, and how this is interrelated with individual perspectives. In other words, social reality and its history are difficult to grasp if the perspectives of the actors are not included; collective history and life (hi)stories are interdependent by necessity. [15]

Not surprisingly, at the core of biographical research is the question of how far an analytical approximation to past experiences is possible. The main data collection methods are open interview forms, such as the narrative interview (SCHÜTZE, 1983, 2003), and interview stimuli targeting the complete life and family history (ROSENTHAL, 2004, p.51). An interview question aimed at evoking narrations and strictly narrative follow-up questions are suitable means of supporting interviewees in approaching past perspectives. The accompanying academic discussion on the complex relation of present perspectives (e.g. during the interview) and past experiences has long since been a central point of departure in biographical research. I will not detail the various positions here (see, for example, APITZSCH & INOWLOCKI, 2000). They range from the assumption that experiencing and narrating experiences are homologous, to the idea that life-history narratives do not divulge anything about the past, but rather only something about the current situation and point of view of the interviewee. [16]

An influential intermediary position has most prominently been developed by Wolfram FISCHER (1978) and Gabriele ROSENTHAL (2004), who argued that turning to past experiences is mediated by the interview situation, with its presentation of, and the intentional approaching of, memories. The biographer's present view plays a role in what is remembered, how and in which sequence, and in which thematic combinations experiences are remembered and presented. However, one cannot turn to the past without the past experiences that are talked about, as well as subsequent experiences, playing a role. In ROSENTHAL's analytical approach, which is based on these assumptions, the steps for analysing the interview text distinguish heuristically between the experienced life history and the narrated life story. This separation does not mean that the past perspective is "more real" and the other merely an interpretation from the present perspective. Rather, the analysis aims at reconstructing present perspectives and past experiences, long courses of action and the meanings attached to them. They need to be viewed and interpreted as interrelated. [17]

Proponents of biographical research have extended the temporal range of the analysis by including institutions that were formative for the individual. While the first step is to widen the interview question to include asking about the person's family history, another reflection of this historically extended view of societal processes is conducting interviews with several generations of the same family (see, for example, BERTEAUX & BERTEAUX-WIAME, 1997 [1988]; HILDENBRAND, 1998; ROSENTHAL & STEPHAN, 2009), or—when analysing spatial configurations—in the same urban neighbourhood (BECKER, 2013, 2016; WITTE, 2016), or refugee camp (WORM, HINRICHSEN & ALBABA, 2016). Multi-

generational studies prolong the reconstruction range from three to five generations. According to memory theory, communicative memory usually encompasses three, and no more than four, generations (ASSMANN & CZAPLICKA, 1995, pp.126f.). If three generations in a family are interviewed, the historical time span includes two more generations, which makes it possible to trace the genesis of social phenomena and memory processes in a *longue durée* perspective. In the present article, the material consists of biographical interviews with only one person. However, Azima relied strongly on her very pronounced family memory; she thematised three generations of her extended family:

> "Whenever any two or three members of this family would meet we will start talking about family stories, we enjoy doing this like we really love it."[1] [18]

Although the family memory is negotiated in, and strongly influenced by, the present, with "its influential discourses and collective memories", the events discussed are always connected to the past experiences "of those who remember and those who communicate it, as also with the collective stocks of knowledge established and internalized over generations" (ROSENTHAL, 2016, pp.32f.). [19]

As will be seen in the analysis of Azima's life story, the discussion of spatial changes in the last three generations is a central aspect of the family memory. Thus, it provides an excellent starting point for the analysis of changing spatial figurations. In the Qasim family, whenever the family members get together, they talk about how it was easier to cross borders in former times, or about belonging to different nation-states, or they tell stories about flexible ways of dealing with spatial belonging and emplacement. [20]

Against the backdrop of this short recap of the history of biographical research in recent decades, current attempts to combine social-constructivist biographical research with figurational sociology appear reasonable, or even self-evident. Figurational sociology proposes to analyse societal developments in an extended time frame. This makes it possible to identify processes of change that are subtle, slow, and unspoken. ELIAS (2012 [1939]) traced what he called the process of civilisation over more than one thousand years. Although the framework of biographical research allows only for a historical range of three to five generations, its immanently diachronic view is nevertheless a feature it obviously has in common with figurational sociology when regarded in the context of a general sociological environment, which was criticised by ELIAS (2009 [1987]) as being forgetful of history. Biographical research also places a special emphasis on ongoing social transformation processes, which it aims to reconstruct from the perspective of the actors and in their genesis. The proposed re-figuration of spaces, which was located heuristically in the second half of the twentieth century, is therefore a research theme to which biographical studies can likely contribute. [21]

1 All interview quotations are a verbatim transcript. They keep the particularities of oral speech and have not been grammatically corrected.

Following these considerations, the reconstruction of psychogenetic and interrelated sociogenetic processes is impossible if the micro-, macro- and meso-levels are strictly separated. Such a separation would mean denying the inherent connectedness of societies and individuals, for the processes at both "ends" cannot be analysed without each other. Thinking instead of the individual (or the neighbourhood, or the state, for instance) as being part of various figurations, always interdependent with others, overcomes such an artificial separation. It also puts an essential emphasis on changing power balances between different groupings to which the individual belongs. For biographical studies, investigating these power balances forms a perspective that decentres the individual. The otherwise egological perspective (in a phenomenological sense) of the lifeworld (HITZLER & HONER, 1984, pp.58ff.) can thus be transcended by interpreting individuals in their interdependencies with others, their societal positioning, their belonging to we-groups, and their ascribed images as members of they-groups (BOGNER & ROSENTHAL, 2017). Group discussions and participant observations, methods which we have additionally used in our research project in Amman, help us to reconstruct the current figurational positioning of the biographers, and the discourses around certain groupings of refugees and long-term residents. By doing this, we generalise from single cases with regard to processes of belonging and the relation between groupings in Jordan. Thus, the following reconstruction of a single case—Azima's family and life history—allows us to analyse changing spatial figurations. Even seemingly "rare" cases reveal the possibilities and restrictions of action in a specific societal setting. That is what I hope to show in the following analysis. [22]

3. Changing Spatial Figurations in the Middle East: Azima's Family and Life History in its Socio-Historical Context

Azima's family and life history is representative of a family that has become spatially diffused in the context of regional spatial reorganisation and in the context of belonging to an ethno-religious minority. Migration has for a long time had a positive connotation in the Qasim family and is related to experiences of agency. At the same time—and this creates ambivalence—the Qasim family has had to deal with increasingly restrictive migration regimes, and the growing importance of national emplacement, which are not compatible with the translocal history of this Druze family. The case highlights how a translocally oriented family deals with the prescribed regional conditions of nation-state formation and with their effects. It also shows the relation between emplacement, migratory dynamisation and subsequent mediatisation. [23]

In relation to the Global South, FREITAG and VON OPPEN (2010) defined the term "translocality" as describing circulation and transfer across *different* possible borders. It is an umbrella term for transnationalism, because in Bilad ash-Sham spatial mobility was important for certain groupings and milieus before the far-reaching process of nation-state formation. Cyrus SCHAYEGH (2017) discussed these aspects in his detailed study of Bilad ash-Sham's spatial history from the nineteenth century until roughly the middle of the twentieth century. [24]

Taking Azima's family as an example, it is possible to reconstruct what it means for the (spatial) history of a family if nation-state borders are imposed on families living translocally, and when they become increasingly important. Two processes are represented in the family memory and can be traced in Azima's life history. On the one hand, *increasing legal confinement and forced emplacement, due to the effectiveness of state borders*, and, on the other hand, the *growing spatial diffusion of the family in different nation-states*. These aspects are called up in the family memory and addressed by Azima in the interview. [25]

In Azima's family, this started a process that can be separated into four distinct *periods* which I will introduce in the following sections. These are framed by a number of political, social and intrafamilial developments.

1. The *point of departure* is a period in which formal citizenship was more or less irrelevant within the Qasim family. This period includes the migration of Azima's two grandfathers, who were brothers, from Beirut to Syria, and the younger brother's onward journey via Transjordan to Jaffa in Palestine, and finally, his forced migration to Amman in 1948. Connected to this is a translocal form of moving and residing in Bilad ash-Sham, which was probably already practised in earlier generations.
2. In a second period, the *relevancy of legal, formal citizenship* becomes evident within Azima's family, and is connected to the growing importance of passports and formal border crossings in the context of the family members' increasing transnational migration "within the region".
3. In Azima's youth, the family members *negotiated their different citizenships on the level of their socio-economic value*, which led to differentiations within the family. At the same time, the migration radius widened and transcended the region of the Middle East.
4. In more recent years, and especially visible after the latest unrest and conflicts in a number of Middle Eastern countries, *the tendency towards national closure processes* has become stronger. Although visible since the establishment of the Middle Eastern nation-states, borders and citizenship are being increasingly enforced and normatively loaded. [26]

Apart from the reconstruction of these four periods of spatial change as represented in the case of Azima and her family, the present analysis also highlights the challenges posed to social scientists when faced with a transcultural perspective. What, from the current perspective of the Global North, looks like an extreme accumulation of migration and diffusion in the single case of Azima's family, appears differently in the Jordanian research context. Authors dealing with the history of migration in the region (CHATTY, 2010; GESEMANN, 1999; SHAMI, 1996) have pointed to the multicultural and translocal character of Middle Eastern societies. During our field work in Jordan, we came to recognise that rapid familial diffusion is known even in the lower middle classes in Amman. The need for transcultural research that transgresses our own national border*s*—still the exception rather than the rule in German sociology—is evident here; this

is a case where assumptions in respect of normality are challenged by the empirical data (BECKER & ROSENTHAL, forthcoming). [27]

3.1 Irrelevance of formal citizenship and normality of translocal conditions

In order to understand migration in Azima Qasim's family, it is essential to include the regional history in the analysis, as well as important characteristics of the Druze community. Although their religion is considered a monotheistic religion influenced by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the Druze have always had an ambivalent relation with other groupings in the Middle East. While it is often acknowledged that they identify with the nation-state in which they live (in other words, with the more powerful groupings in that country), at the same time the Druze community has often been described from the outside as secluded (SWAYD, 2015, pp.1f.). Its strict religious rules, which say that a Druze is only someone who has a Druze father and mother, lead to the non-recognition by other Druze of intermarriage, and this is usually not accepted socially. Druze who marry someone from another religion often leave their communities (pp.129ff.). This will become important when analysing Azima's biography. [28]

The main area in which Druze live today covers Lebanon, the Jabal Druze area south of Damascus, the north of Israel and—to a lesser extent—Jordan. This area was historically part of Bilad ash-Sham, a region which was perceived as being united by cultural and linguistic similarities, comprising present-day Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and parts of today's Syria and Jordan. Since the late nineteenth century, Druze have emigrated to the Americas, and there is a continuous exchange. In Bilad ash-Sham, the splitting up of the Druze community between different newly founded states after the First World War was a consequence of colonial rule and the process of nation-state formation. Estimates of the current number of Druze worldwide differ notoriously, ranging from 800,000 to 2,000,000. In Syria, estimates point to 600,000 or 700,000, in Jordan between 20,000 and 40,000. [29]

During the late Ottoman period, administrative borders in the Bilad ash-Sham region had practically no impact on everyday mobility. After the Ottoman empire was dissolved, France and Great Britain partitioned the region. The Druze area of settlement was now separated by the borders agreed upon in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. These borders are still largely intact between Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. Britain controlled Mandatory Palestine, which was later divided into Transjordan and Palestine. The French governed today's Syria and Lebanon and separated the area into several "states", which encompassed, amongst others, a Druze state. It was located in Jabal Druze, south of Damascus. However, the majority of Druze rejected autonomy and supported the establishment of a Syrian nation-state. The Great Syrian Revolt, or Great Druze Revolt, started in the Druze state in 1925, and spread across Syria. The revolt was brutally crushed by the French, and in 1936, a central Syrian government was established in Damascus. [30]

Thus, Bilad ash-Sham lost its boundlessness. This process stands in an ambivalent relation to the ease of mobility; travelling was becoming much faster and safer through the introduction of new technologies and infrastructure (the introduction of the railway, and later buses and cars), as well as the enforcement of the state monopoly on legitimate violence (growing protection from robberies and attacks, such as Bedouin raids). Although the administrative recording and limitation of mobility in the region was not a completely linear process, it can be clearly reconstructed. During the rest of the twentieth century, borders played an increasingly significant role in everyday life and influenced the mobility of the inhabitants—as in the case of the Qasim family. This is of central importance in the family memory. At the beginning of the 1940s, Azima's grandfathers Farid and Amin, who were brothers, migrated from a village near Beirut to the area of Jabal al-Druze in Syria:

> "My two grandfathers, mother's side and father's side, decided once to leave Lebanon, ok, they walked until they came to Suweida." [31]

Suweida is the central city in the region and Druze form the large majority there. The way Azima talked about the migration of Amin and Farid resembles a myth or a fairy-tale. This is suggested by the phrase "once" and the *topos* of directionless walking. In this way, Azima evoked a sentimental memory of a time in which borders were barely important, crossing them easy and effortless. Our analysis shows that this "tale" is a sort of founding myth for what happened in the family history afterwards. It concentrates on Azima's two grandfathers and dethematises other family members who did not migrate. Its inherent positive connotation in the family memory is also characteristic of other migrations. [32]

Amin, the older of Azima's grandfathers, remained in Suweida while Farid, the younger, continued his migration, seemingly for a good reason: Farid ran away after an argument that ended with a physical confrontation:

> "[My grandfather] threw a big stone on his head and he thought that he killed him [...] so what we know is that he kept running until he reached Jordan, of course there was no papers no borders no nothing, then he was looking for a job to do he was like thirteen fourteen years old, then he saw people working at the port in Jaffa so he went there and he started working on the boat like taking stuff putting stuff and then in 1948 he saw all the people leaving Palestine so he left Palestine, he came to Amman where he knows that there is a Druze community." [33]

The fairy-tale structure of Azima's report continues: her grandfather Farid travelled easily from one place to another. Migration is again characterised as independent and as an obvious solution to problems, including the forced migration from Palestine, which she glossed over. It is, however, possible that the first migration from Suweida to Jaffa was far more "trivial" and less individualistic than is portrayed in the family memory. In the politically turbulent mid-1940s, Transjordanian ruler Emir Abdullah attempted to add the Jabal Druze area to Transjordan. He later shelved this idea, which then led to an economic crisis in the region. In this context, Druze families began migrating to Palestine. Three

hundred Druze families settled in Jaffa and mainly worked at the port (FIRRO, 1999, pp.33ff.). Farid certainly belonged to this Druze group in Jaffa. It is striking that Azima then talked in a very distanced way about her grandfather's flight from Palestine in the context of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. This might be a form of defence, or a kind of normalisation of what was certainly a difficult course of expulsion, connected with distressing experiences which are dethematised or muted in the family dialogue. Azima framed Farid's migration from Palestine as being self-chosen. It echoes the report of his earlier departure from Suweida, which was also presented as something accomplished by him alone. But not only did nearly all 120,000 Palestinian inhabitants leave Jaffa and its vicinity, but most Druze migrants did as well (p.35). [34]

At the beginning of the 1940s, the borders between the states in Bilad ash-Sham were becoming increasingly subject to regular control. From 1939, Jordanian security personnel carried out patrols along the Syrian border. While nomads did not have to carry passports with them, they needed a written document. At times, people were unable to immigrate legally from neighbouring countries (ALON, 2007, p.123). The French and the British formulated an agreement to formalise border traffic between Syria/Lebanon and Palestine, but residents living near the border were able to continue crossing without passports. The extent to which the borders were controlled fluctuated, depending on the political situation. During the Arab Revolt in Palestine (1936-39), the British built the so-called Tegart Wall along the Lebanese border (ABOU-HODEIB, 2015). Even though these measures resulted in territorialisation, the borders had little impact on everyday life: "Although the line was a known and recognized international boundary, it did not pose a barrier to any of the economic or social activities on either side. [...] life in its vicinity remained generally unchanged" (BIGER, 2004, p.156). [35]

Nevertheless, the existence of borders as such entered into the consciousness of the inhabitants. The authors of another study analysing the establishment of borders in the Middle East remarked:

> "The establishment of post-Ottoman states had very contrasted effects, neither confining populations within state borders nor producing more than the illusion of territorialization. On the one hand, territorial disputes arose, highlighting issues of ethnic/national settlement, with several further forced migrations. On the other hand, the new borders were not always actively enforced. There was a degree of abstraction in the new borders management, when compared to effective space control" (BOURMAND & NEVEU, 2017, n.p.). [36]

Azima's grandfather probably crossed the borders from Syria to Transjordan and Palestine illegally, since Azima emphasised that he did not possess valid documents. Lebanese and Syrians who resided in Palestine had been considered "foreigners" since 1925 (QAFISHEH, 2008, p.50), but most probably Farid was not even registered there. This became important after his arrival in Amman. [37]

3.2 Legal and formal importance of citizenship and increasing transnational migration experiences "in the region"

The formal independence of the states in the Bilad ash-Sham region after the Second World War, the gamble of the affiliation of Middle Eastern countries in the evolving "Cold War", and the increasing perception of the significance of borders meant that citizenship, papers and border crossing formalities became increasingly meaningful experiences, as well as the experience of moving within Bilad ash-Sham as moving between "states" separated by spatial borders. [38]

Farid settled in Amman in 1948 and later married into a local Druze family. In the history of the Qasim family, the subsequent rapidly increasing significance of borders and citizenship became obvious. During the 1950s, it soon became apparent that the grandfather had no documents. This is connected to the fact that he was not registered as a Palestine refugee with the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East). Thus, he was not entitled to receive Jordanian citizenship like the officially registered refugees. Even though he had fled together with about 350,000-500,000 others from what became Israel to Jordan and the West Bank (which was ruled by Jordan between 1948 and 1967), according to the citizenship law of 1954, only those refugees who possessed Palestinian citizenship were eligible for Jordanian citizenship (MASSAD, 2001, pp.39f.). At the same time, it had become impossible to cross borders without legal documents, and for various reasons, Lebanon and Syria did not issue papers for Farid. He was most probably considered a stateless person. Being additionally a member of a tiny minority in Jordan increased the pressure to acquire citizenship and a certain degree of legal security. [39]

Anyone who lived in Jordan for a certain time could request naturalisation. But naturalisation could also take place without delay:

> "It is up to his majesty the king, based on the Council of Ministers' delegation, to grant Jordanian nationality to any foreigner who chooses in a written petition Jordanian nationality provided he give up any other nationality that he may hold at the time of the petition" (Jordanian citizenship law, Art. 5, cit. in MASSAD, 2001, pp.41f.).[2] [40]

Thus, naturalisation could happen fast, and in the Qasim family memory, Farid's swift naturalisation is connected to another mythical story. It highlights the way borders and citizenship could be negotiated. Farid's wife had heard that the king was to pass near their home:

> "[She] wrote a long letter and she went to the street and she waited she was so close to the king and she hold the letter and she was shouting to the king uh to take the letter [...] she used to say he took it and he put it in the pocket in front of the heart and he just had like his hand on it, saying that like I will keep it, second day the ministry

2 The terms citizenship (*jinsiya*) and nationality (*muwatana*) are used irregularly in the literature. I follow Uri DAVIS' (1995) usage of the terms, although the cited translation of the law refers to it as nationality.

> called my grandfather and they told him come now to get a nationality, so in less than six hours he got a Jordanian passport, like so fast, and he has a nationality now and papers and everything." [41]

It is not important whether the event happened like this or if this version is a later romanticisation of a bureaucratic process. What is important, however, is that national belonging had gained relevance within a relatively short period of time, and that this event is a frequently discussed part of the family memory to this day. It was especially significant for the offspring, because a child's citizenship was determined by that of their father. This is probably the reason why naturalisation was so important for the grandfather. For Farid in Amman, being stateless was not an option in the landscape of states as they had evolved in the Middle East. Being a stateless person, and thus not being part of a "container space", had become a stigma that had to be removed. Belonging to a national space had become considerably more important. Possessing citizenship also meant having better chances to establish himself in Jordan. At first, Farid took on a simple job in the Jordanian army. Later, he continued his education and became a civil servant. Even though the grandmother's family had lived in Amman for some time before the grandfather's arrival, Farid contributed to the process of becoming established in Jordan both for the Qasim family and the Druze grouping (for historical aspects of the Druze community in Jordan, see QUNTAR (2016) and SHANNAK (2015). [42]

In addition, borders, and the question of how to cross them, were now an important part of people's consciousness. Only after acquiring Jordanian citizenship was Farid able to visit family members in Lebanon and Syria. However, despite his emplacement in Jordan and in a central institution of the Jordanian state, nationality continued to be a functional element of spatial belonging and was not interpreted essentialistically. This does not mean that with time certain citizenships were not considered "better" or "worse". But citizenships were abandoned or adopted without any "ideological" problems. Azima's grandfather later took on Syrian citizenship, and Azima's grandmother apparently possessed three passports (the legality of the third one is a topic of debate within the family). [43]

At the beginning of the 1970s, Farid's oldest daughter Nadia, Azima's mother (b. 1953), married the only son of Azima's older grandfather, Amin, who had stayed in Syria. In contrast to her grandfather in Amman, Azima did not talk a lot in the interview about Amin and the family he founded. This is certainly connected to the fact that he had much less migration capital. Amin remained in Suweida where Druze formed the numerical majority and were in an established position (ELIAS & SCOTSON, 2008 [1965]). He married a Druze woman from a local family, had only one son, Azima's father, Abu Tareq, who was born in 1948. Azima introduced her father by talking about his political activism and the numerous jail terms he served. Most likely he was first imprisoned in the context of a failed Druze coup in September 1966 and subsequent sectarian protests and purges (MOUBAYED, 2006, pp.52ff.; VAN DAM, 2011, pp.58f.). [44]

In prison, Abu Tareq came into contact with Palestinian activists, and since then he has supported the struggle for "Palestinian liberation". It is likely that political activism and periods of imprisonment stalled his educational career and led to lesser power changes in the local society. And, although the Druze community was not known as the most ardent backer of the Assad regime, with Druze belonging continuing to be central (GERLACH, 2015, p.313), his oppositional views certainly limited Abu Tareq's options in other areas of society. However, his activism is not part of the main family narrative. [45]

By contrast, Azima's mother, Nadia, had studied in Lebanon. Her nine siblings lived a naturally transnational and often socio-economically successful life. With one exception, all of them left Jordan and went abroad to study. Nadia's siblings married partners in Lebanon, in the U.S., and in the United Arab Emirates. Azima described the Qasims' transnationality by joking about crossing borders with three of her siblings, each of whom possessed a different passport. In the family, there was plenty of everyday, practical knowledge about migration and border crossing. Out of the numerous colourful stories of transnational mobility which Azima told from her family memory, I will give only one typical example. It highlights how the narration of border experiences within the family transmits self-confidence in dealing with border problems. The mother's youngest sister got engaged to a distant cousin from the US shortly after she had started studying. She quit her studies and moved there. Migration capital was probably more important than social or cultural capital. They divorced several years later. Mother and child returned to Jordan. The former husband abducted the child and took it to Syria. Azima's grandmother in Amman apparently tried to bring back the child by bribing border officials and entering Syria illegally. She was stopped on the Syrian side of the border and returned. According to the family memory, she told the Jordanian officers:

> "I left Jordan with a fake passport and you didn't even know [...] it's very easy you can just send me to jail or you can just pretend that nothing happened and let me go." [46]

It is characteristic that the story highlights the grandmother's attempt to deal with the problem through her own actions, and to transfer negative experiences with borders into positive, independent action. [47]

Whereas SCHAYEGH (2017, p. 317) argued that in the 1950s and 1960s "transnationalized interurban ties and hinterlands have become less influential as the postcolonial nation-states have grown deeper roots", in the case of Azima's family, the ties remained strong and were connected to intense cross-border activities, even though the border crossing from Syria to Jordan was frequently complicated by political developments, for example between 1970 and 1973 when the border and the air space between Jordan and Syria were closed (BRAND, 1995, pp.153ff.). Thus, the arranged marriage of Azima's parents, Abu Tareq and Nadia, in about 1973 can be seen as serving family reunification across national borders. [48]

Shortly afterwards, the newlyweds moved to Saudi Arabia. This migration was not only a way of solving problems—Abu Tareq was politically rebellious *and* regularly short of money—but was also embedded in the skyrocketing transnational migration of workers in this historical period in the Middle East. Generally, wages in Saudi Arabia were four to eight times higher than in Syria (BUREŠ, 2008, pp.111ff.). In Saudi Arabia, Nadia gave birth to two sons, and went back to Syria with them, which was her fourth migration within a few years. Azima's mother applied for Syrian citizenship and gave up her Jordanian one. [49]

At first, Abu Tareq remained in Saudi Arabia. Around 1980, he was accused of political activities and deported to Syria. The family settled in a majority-Druze quarter of Damascus. Multiple migration as a basic structure was now also entrenched in Azima's nuclear family. [50]

3.3 Growing socio-economic importance of formal citizenship and extension of the family's migration radius

Although there had been border conflicts between different Middle Eastern countries in the previous decades, within the family the question of belonging to different nation-states was related to the emplacement of family members in different states rather than to the discussion of larger political conflicts. This became apparent when Azima talked about her own childhood and youth. Within her extended family, especially with family members of the same age, discussions about which countries are "better" or "worse" emerged as an important marker of distinction between them. At the same time, transnational migration expanded quantitatively and geographically, and the family members became scattered around the world. [51]

Azima was born in Damascus in 1983, and a brother followed a few years thereafter. When she was a child, her father, Abu Tareq, sent her oldest brother to study in the German Democratic Republic because his grades were not good enough for admission to a Syrian university. The other option would have been for the brother to repeat the exams a year later. Her father thus resorted to a pattern of action that had originally been established in his wife's family—migration as a strategy for solving problems. Probably motivated by political considerations, the distances became greater, and Bilad ash-Sham was no longer the limit. Azima emphasised that this migration entailed heavy costs for her family:

> "He wanted to send him to East Germany and he sent him to East Germany, then we got fucked up all of us." [52]

In the 1990s, Azima's family depended on financial assistance from other parts of the family. The transnational status of her family also became an issue for Azima in relation to her enlarged family. In her youth in the 1990s, Azima mainly perceived the problem of growing economic differences between family members in different countries. This was due to the generally lower economic level in Syria and the family's financial crisis. Azima's nuclear family was in an outsider position

in the figuration with other parts of the family. For Azima, this manifested itself in her relation with her Jordanian and Lebanese cousins. She frames this as a "nationality problem". She did not care that her relatives had a different passport, but she did care about what she described as their different "mentality"; she felt she was inferior to her Jordanian and Lebanese cousins, and that they looked down on her:

> "Having fun feeling that they rich and that we are not rich." [53]

She said that her relatives wore good clothes, while her family could not afford new clothing. The cousins gossiped about Syria:

> "We used to be Syrians Jordanians Lebanese sitting in the same room and [...] they used to say how bad Syria is and how uh great life in Lebanon is or how great life in Jordan is." [54]

This classification of states in terms of their "value" is another sign of the way the contingent spatial borders unfolded their relevancy. It is a stark contrast to the "travel stories" of the two grandfather brothers, and constituted an intrafamilial basis for comparison and devaluation. Azima felt a stronger allegiance or sense of belonging to her nuclear family in Syria. Despite the numerous migrations and transnationality, Azima emplaced herself in Damascus in this period:

> "Yeah uh we lived in Damascus all of our lives all of us." [55]

Azima's father, Abu Tareq, kept quiet politically, but nevertheless the security services continued to monitor his activities. A drastic experience, which heavily influenced Azima's biography and which is tied to her later migration, was a series of interrogations by the Syrian security services when she was 13 years old. She was questioned together with her father for ten days, on the final day in an infamous interrogation centre, known for torture, rape, and murder. While looking through intercepted letters, the security services found that she had cursed President Assad. They made Azima watch while other prisoners—likely including her father—were tortured:

> "They were questioning people in front of me, so like slapping them smashing them." [56]

Although it was not clear to Azima at the time, the interrogations were probably not primarily about the intercepted letters, but about her father's political activism. During the interrogations, the agents combined her file with her father's. This merging of the files increased the pressure on Azima to take responsibility for her family's well-being. Retrospectively, however, it made her feel (though probably not in a completely manifest way) that her fate was connected to her father's, and that it would not be easy to disentangle herself. This thought was connected in one way or another to her later migration. In the following years, her family was under continuous surveillance. Azima was isolated in her class by teachers and parents. Two years after the interrogation, in 1999, when Azima was 16 years

old, her father and an older brother emigrated to Venezuela. Political issues certainly played a role in their decision. [57]

After leaving high school, Azima started studying in Damascus in 2001. Although she did not mention it explicitly, she was influenced by the Damascus Spring, which followed the coming into power of Bashar al-Assad after his father's death in June 2000. For a short time, there was hope for increasing freedom of speech. Azima started to become involved in a Palestinian political organisation that belonged to the (tolerated) margin of Syria's political landscape (QANDIL, 2012). This move resembled the activism of her father. But while she was still in her first year at university, her father and her eldest brothers met with her to give her a warning: first, that her family would punish her if she was imprisoned again, which would probably mean being raped, and second, that she should start dating Druze men. As Azima remembered, this warning was explicitly connected to the expectation that Azima would live a transnational or at least a mobile life. She reported what her father and brother said:

> "So instead of saying look at this family that their daughter is travelling all the time and she is visiting countries and talking about Syria everywhere it is going to be look at this family their *sharmuta* [Arab. slut] girl that they have is the one who is travelling all the time [...] this would affect any of my brothers sisters in getting married." [58]

In the interview, Azima tried to play down the importance of this message, stating that everyone knew she did not care about it. Nevertheless, in the concrete situation the warning was certainly serious, and cumbersome for her. Resisting it would mean exposing herself both to family pressure *and* to the Syrian security services. In this period, Azima started to change her dialect, which was clearly identifiable as Druze. Instead, she assumed a mix of Jordanian and Palestinian dialects, influenced by her maternal family. The change of dialects was connected to her pro-Palestinian activism, which she continued, despite the warnings from her family. Of course, this was difficult for her family to sanction, as it corresponded to her father's activism, and was thus connected to the family history. However, activism was also, or mainly, part of her detachment from her family, as well as from everything Druze. As the question of dialects shows, she took this seriously. [59]

During all this time, there were many migration processes in the nuclear and extended family, which continued to influence Azima. They are so numerous that I can only mention a few here. After receiving his master's degree, her eldest brother migrated from Germany to Kuwait in order to avoid conscription in Syria. In 2004, her father returned from Venezuela. Her second eldest brother moved to study in France and later migrated to Kuwait, where his brother lived. Family members from Jordan commuted between Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, and others migrated abroad permanently. For most men in the family, migrating in search of work or for educational purposes was normal, while women migrated in order to pursue their studies or due to marriage. Within the family, migration experiences were shared, usually emphasising their positive character and that they were organised autonomously by those who migrated. Azima increasingly

saw migration as a possibility to emancipate herself from being controlled by family and state, which is connected to what happened next. [60]

When she was 22 or 23 years old, Azima plunged into a deep crisis. Probably in connection with the pressure she was facing, she fell seriously ill. She repeatedly failed an important exam and it was unclear whether she would receive her degree. Azima assumed—and still assumes—that the examiner failed her at the urging of the security services. At roughly the same time, she left the Palestinian organisation following several disputes. Afterwards she fell ill:

> "I got really depressed, and I got really sick ((whispering)) like I was going to die no one knew why what happened." [61]

Within the following six months, she travelled to Jordan ten times to consult various doctors. She was completely dependent on her family, and her desire to migrate grew stronger. Azima said that she felt

> "I wanna go out of everything, start from the beginning". [62]

It is typical for the family structure that in this situation her family would allow her to migrate to Jordan. Although this step is unusual for an unmarried woman if the migration is not connected to a certain purpose such as studying, as already discussed migration is a familial strategy to solve problems. Her parents expected her to return to Syria after what they considered a temporary migration. In 2006, Azima, 23 years old, moved to Amman. The migration itself was easy:

> "So I just like gathered uh talked to my friend was like I'm coming tomorrow gathered uh all of the important stuff and psh came to Jordan, I just moved to Jordan like this." [63]

Generally, up to the recent war, the ideology of Pan-Arabism was the reason why every Syrian could take up residence in Jordan; until 1984 not even a permit was necessary (CHATELARD, 2010a). Azima moved into a friend's flat and started working. In Jordan she recovered and built a stable social network with a peer group her own age, independent of her Druze family and the Syrian state. In politically interested circles, she met her Sunni-Palestinian boyfriend, whom she hid from her Druze family. "Migration" as a strategy for solving problems proved to be successful. Following the family patterns of action and interpretation, she portrayed her migration as an independent action that she planned and implemented autonomously. [64]

In 2008, after two years in Amman, Azima had to return to Syria to fulfil familial and university-related duties. In her memory, her return presents itself to Azima as a series of defeats and humiliation by her parents and the Syrian state. Despite opposition from her parents, she was determined to return to Jordan as soon as possible. Accordingly, in answer to my question about the best experience in her life, she mentioned her final return to Amman in 2010:

> "My victory when I came back to Jordan to study, I was so fucking happy like *khallas* [enough], to leave everything and to come to Jordan start ya." [65]

It meant she could distance herself from her family and the Syrian state with its security apparatuses. Azima started a master's degree, she found a well-paid job and moved into a flat in Jabal Amman, a liberal part of the city, which was an important aspect of her emplacement in Amman. She still lives on her own in Jabal Amman, which would be more difficult elsewhere. She has sought only minimal contact to other family members in Amman. At least partly, this is still due to the feeling of having been disadvantaged as a Syrian by them during her youth. [66]

3.4 Increasing normativity of citizenship, border closures, mediatisation

In the Bilad ash-Sham region, there have been increasing closure processes in recent decades, and this process has been accelerated due to recent violent conflicts in different states. It is especially visible in border regimes and discourses regarding "foreigners" from other countries in the Middle East. In some of our interviews in Amman, we recognised denigrating discourses concerning Syrian and Iraqi refugees who could be identified by their dialects. Other interviewees, on the contrary, reiterated the idea of a common Arab nation, and spoke about memories within families of easy travel to, and residence in, countries other than the one for which one had formal citizenship. Family relations provide a good approach to studying these developments. [67]

The war in Syria had a great impact on Azima's family, her group of friends, and her status in Jordan. It especially affected border crossings and migrations. The character of migrations changed within Azima's family: now they were not only due to what family members perceived as their own ideas, but they grew out of immediate necessity. At the same time, migrations were becoming increasingly difficult. Some family members (including Azima herself) were barred from entering Syria, while others found it difficult to leave. Azima's younger brother took part in protests and was imprisoned several times. He was forced to flee from Syria. His route took him to Jordan, Kuwait, Egypt, and finally Greece. Several of Azima's Jordanian cousins who had lived in Syria for a long time applied for Syrian citizenship after being repeatedly questioned by the Jordanian security services. The war brought about rifts within the family, and increased the importance of citizenship, emplacement and ideological beliefs. [68]

For Azima—as for all Syrians who were living in Jordan when the war started—it became more difficult to find a job. Azima was rejected several times after revealing her citizenship to potential employers. Her citizenship affected her negatively. Theoretically, Syrians in Jordan continued to be able to get formal work permits for a restricted number of professions, but obtaining one was very difficult because of political, practical and financial obstacles. Syrians were employed, even in quite visible positions, without having a formal work permit (LENNER, 2016, p.17, also see BECKER, HINRICHSEN & WORM, forthcoming). After several unsuccessful applications, she reluctantly took advantage of her

social network in order to find a new job. She was invited for an interview with a European company. Her new insecurity regarding national belonging was clearly visible when Azima recalled the job interview:

> "I was like ya are you sure you want to hire a Syrian, and they were like yeah but we didn't decide if we are hiring you or not I was like yaya but you have no problem with my nationality[?]" [69]

Azima was aware that from now on, her Syrian citizenship had a central and limiting role. When she applied for a visa to the European country where the company's headquarters were located, she was told that she would need the UNHCR document and the white refugee card issued by the Jordanian government. This meant that she had to register as a refugee, which Azima perceived as a degradation of her life in Jordan:

> "This is where the shock started and I told them I'm not a refugee, I'm not an asylum seeker, I'm just living in here, they were like yeah but these are the documents that you need you like it or you don't, so I went back to the office and I uh start screaming and crying and aah I was like I'm not a refugee I'm not seeking asylum." [70]

In a sense, by becoming a *Syrian* refugee, Azima was more strongly emplaced in Syria than before. Although she is safe from being deported for now, it is not clear what will happen when the fighting ends. [71]

When she applied for another visa to Europe, she was asked if her parents had ever changed their citizenship:

> "My mother she didn't really remember exactly [...] it was not a problem like fifteen years ago it was not a problem even, then my mum was like at least I know that when you were born I was Syrian." [72]

Regardless of whether in connection with applying for jobs, refugee status, treatment in the UNHCR offices, or visa applications—within a short time, Azima became aware that her citizenship and status were of increasing importance, in contrast to the translocal/transnational history and memories of her family. The times of easy border crossings appear to be over. In June 2016, the Syrian-Jordanian land border was fully closed. Quietly, as informal reports suggest, immigration policies at the airport also became restrictive and arriving Syrians were required to apply for *de facto* visas (AL-NASR, 2015; ĠARBATNA, n.d.). Iraqis have also been subject to a formal visa policy since 2008 (CHATELARD, 2010b). Although the land border between Jordan and Syria was opened again in October 2018, restrictions for Syrians passing into Jordan have continued to be imposed. While complex travel arrangements are needed for family members to meet, growing mediatisation, for instance in the form of social media, has meant that people can talk to each other across borders, not only between Syria and Jordan, but also between countries in the Middle East that have an inimical relationship. For instance, families living in Lebanon or Syria have found it much easier to keep in contact with family members in Palestine or Israel. [73]

In 2017, Azima married her Sunni boyfriend, even though with this move she is considered as having left the Druze community. Her husband is also a registered refugee—his family lived in the Bethlehem area before family members fled to Amman, and he lived in Saudi Arabia for a considerable time. However, in contrast to Azima, he has Jordanian citizenship. Her marriage opened up the possibility for Azima to gain Jordanian citizenship and thus to overcome the growing legal and practical challenges that she had faced in the past few years. On the one hand, this would mean increased alienation from her family and from the Syrian state. On the other hand, changing her citizenship would simply be a continuation of practices that have been present in the family for the past three generations. [74]

4. Conclusion

In this article, I have analysed changing spatial figurations in a specific regional environment, the Bilad ash-Sham region (roughly Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, and parts of Jordan and Syria). The setting up of spatial borders after the First World War in a region that hitherto had known no significant borders is a theme that is still part of family memories. It falls within the range of communicative memory and is discussed as spatial change. The new borders became increasingly important at an everyday level and were connected to the process of constructing nation-states and the growing significance of citizenship. Translocal relations turned into transnational family networks, which were connected to knowledge and a family dialogue about border crossing. Later on, new transnational entanglements were created by large-scale work migration. A number of issues are reconstructed in this article: the growing importance of citizenship and borders in the region; translocal relations that become transnational; intrafamilial discussions on the "value" of different nation-states; and increasing territorial closure processes. These processes have affected all families living in Bilad ash-Sham, but to a varying extent. [75]

This means more generally that the re-figuration of spaces in the Bilad ash-Sham region has developed on the basis of *rapid* and *ongoing* spatial changes since the early twentieth century within the framework of "territorialisation" processes: the gradual formation of nation-state societies whose borders were determined by outsiders. This also means that in the framework of "young" nation-states, the "transcending of spatial scales", which has been described as one of the characteristics of recent re-figuration processes (KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2017, p. 10) might be seen in Bilad ash-Sham as a continuation of earlier practices. As the definition of translocality used in this article (FREITAG & VON OPPEN, 2010) implies, translocal, continuous exchange between different regions and cities was important in Bilad ash-Sham before the formation of nation-states. SCHAYEGH (2017), in particular, portrayed Bilad ash-Sham in the early twentieth century as a region linked by networked cities. This networking did not suddenly cease with the formal creation of nation-states; it continued, transcending nation-state borders. More precisely, while it was curtailed by the establishment of nation-states and spatial borders, it was also accepted for a long time, for instance by lax residence laws for inhabitants of the region. Only in recent times have

residence laws been more severely restricted (in Israel and the Palestinian territories much earlier), and it remains an open question in what way these translocal/transnational networks will continue to exist. They might even be empowered, for instance, by processes of mediatisation, which facilitate communication between people living in hostile territories. Although the opposition between territorial fixation and new spatial orders (KNOBLAUCH & LÖW, 2017, p.16) is visible in the Middle East, state- and territory-related interpretations still seem of prime importance. This might have to do with the young age of the nation-states, severe ongoing territorial disputes and a general negotiation of the character of belonging to national containers. These aspects highlight the complexity of analysing the relations between territorialisation and re-figuration in Bilad ash-Sham. The identification and analysis of the re-figuration of spaces thus need a thorough grounding in fine-grained socio-historical studies that consider regional characteristics in terms of periodisation and previous processes of spatial change. [76]

For transcultural research, the results of the above analysis also highlight the importance of a *longue durée* perspective in the attempt to understand locally specific characteristics in the present, for instance in terms of belonging to a nation-state, or translocalised or mediatised practices. An understanding that solely focuses on the present fails to capture the genesis of regional or cultural differences and runs the risk of essentialising them. [77]

The historical reconstruction in this article, based on a family's history, is aimed at highlighting how sociological biographical research can contribute to the study of the re-figuration of spaces—and more generally to figurational sociology. With its diachronic focus on socio-historical processes and individual and family histories, the emergence of new spatial patterns or orders can be analysed from the perspective of the experiences of individuals in their (changing) belonging to different groupings at different times. Thus, such empirically grounded studies may contribute to refining the theoretical model of re-figuration. Moreover, combining biographical research with figurational sociology is a good way to approach the challenge of reconstructing the interrelation between society and the individual, and helps to avoid concentrating on the psycho-social life of individuals without embedding this life in the framework of socio-historical processes (BOGNER & ROSENTHAL, 2017). [78]

In this article I have reconstructed the striking case of Azima and the history of her family. This had enabled me to characterise processes of spatial change in Bilad ash-Sham, and to trace how the meaning of space has changed within her family over the past three generations. On the basis of this case reconstruction, it can be argued that even during the colonial period when the borders were already in place, lifeworlds that on the one hand had clear limitations in respect of their practices and patterns of interpretation, were nevertheless borderless in the sense that there was not yet any serious physical limitation to free movement. The subsequent increasing implementation of physical borders by the authorities can be interpreted as a general change in the meaning and interpretation of space. In the case of Azima, the growing diffusion of her family accompanies

(forced) emplacement in nation-states, creating an ambivalent relation of diffusion and emplacement. Translocality increasingly turned into transnationalism, because national belonging gained importance besides local affiliation. In Azima's family, concretely, this process ranged from a translocal way of life in the region to emplacement in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. It was connected to the formation of differing national images leading to intrafamilial comparisons. Azima's own migration and emplacement in Jordan had an ambivalent character, especially when taking into account the enduring or increasing significance of her Syrian belonging due to the imposition of refugee status in recent years. The meaning of migration within Azima's family has witnessed a change in that it is no longer *only* positively connotated, because recent experiences have shown that migration can also be associated with loss of agency. Amman, and Jabal Amman, the liberal neighbourhood within the city where she lives, are significant for Azima as places on different scales (GLICK SCHILLER & CAGLAR, 2011). The neighbourhood where she lives in particular offers security and understanding and a feeling of belonging to a certain spatially fixed milieu; it is for her an open place in which ethnic, religious and national belongings are either less important or can be thematised in their constructedness. [79]

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