A new perspective of refugee studies: refugees as a source of social peace

As defined in UNHCR’s emergency handbook, an emergency is “a situation in which the lives, rights, and well-being of humans are or will be threatened unless immediate and appropriate action is taken”. A refugee emergency in updated numbers means 42,500 persons per day forced to leave their homes and seek protection elsewhere either within the borders of their countries or in other countries. Therefore, social and political scientists are becoming increasingly interested in studying the impact of refugees on social and political processes in host countries. One of the most prevailing public and academic discourses is the role of refugees in diffusing conflict across borders. The existing literature suggests that refugees are likely to exacerbate or initiate social conflict in their host communities especially in case of neighboring countries where refugees identify ally and opponent groups. In this case, local and international actors in the fields of conflict resolution and peace building work on analyzing and addressing these conflicts. Nevertheless, it is interesting to look at the role of the refugees from another perspective: how do refugees play an active role in peace building processes in their host country? This study aims at answering this question using an actor-oriented interface analysis in order to understand the linkages and networks that have developed between the different actors involved in peace building initiatives in a specific social situation. The most important interfaces for this paper are those between the refugees and host communities, refugees and local actors (including civil society and public institutions), refugees and international actors (including INGOs, UN). The actor-oriented interface analysis helps in revealing the interplay between the different agendas and methods used by these different actors involved and how refugees can use these interfaces to contribute to peace-building processes. The study will highly rely on field research which will be conducted in Tripoli’s Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen neighborhoods where the resilient inter-community conflict haves often been described as a microcosm for Syria’s ongoing civil war. The Sunni and Alawite communities living there are among the poorest and underprivileged in Lebanon noting that Lebanon is currently hosting 1.3 million Syrian refugees residing in urban settings, 300.000 located in Tripoli of which hundreds are living in Bab Al-Tabbaneh.

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