

Policy Brief

J U L Y 2 0 2 2

Offshoring Migration Policy

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Western states are increasingly sending asylum-seekers caught at their borders to states in the Global South, in violation of humanitarian principles about the right to asylum. Critics have also noted the racial dimensions of this policy, asking why Ukrainian refugees aren't being sent to Rwanda for processing or resettlement? What has not received attention in this discussion is how, in response to internal and external pressures, African states are developing migration management policies to address intra-African migration.



THINK • STIMULATE • BRIDGE

INTRODUCTION

In recent weeks thousands of protesters have marched in English and Spanish cities to denounce their governments' treatment of migrants. In Spain, activists rallied to protest the deaths of at least 23 migrants at the border of Melilla, the Spanish enclave between Spain and Morocco. Young activists chanted Black Lives Matter (Las vidas negras son importantes) and held signs that read "Borders Kill." In Rabat, activists gathered near the parliament holding placards splashed with red paint, evoking the migrants' violent deaths.¹ Meanwhile, in England, human rights activists have mobilized against the Home Office's plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda, a policy that the courts have not yet deemed legal.² In mid-April, the Rwandan government announced that it had signed an accord with the United Kingdom, "a migration and economic development partnership,". The agreement allowed Britain to send asylum-seekers who arrived via the British channel to the Central African country, where they would be resettled in Rwanda or a third country or sent to their home country.

Western states are increasingly sending asylum-seekers caught at their borders to states in the Global South, violating humanitarian principles about the right to asylum. As The Washington Post recently pointed out, since December 2013, Israel has deported thousands of Sudanese and Eritrean nationals to Uganda and Rwanda. Since 2017 Italy has sent migrants crossing the Mediterranean to Libyan detention centers.³ Foreign Affairs recently observed that "offshoring migration policy" has become standard practice along various migration routes, not just between Africa and Europe.⁴ The United States has negotiated "third country" agreements with El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico, whereby Washington can return asylum seekers to these Central American countries in exchange for aid. Australia has likewise worked out the cords with Papua New Guinea and Indonesia to retain immigrants heading for its northern shores.

Analysts have also noted that while Rwanda hosts a more significant number of refugees than the United Kingdom and has won praise from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for welcoming refugees, the regime in Kigali is still a repressive one, and refugees in Rwanda have yet to secure the right to work or the right to mobility. Critics have also noted the racial dimensions of this policy, asking why Ukrainian refugees aren't being sent to central Africa for processing or resettlement?⁵ What has not received attention in this discussion is how African states are developing migration management policies to address intra-African migration in response to internal and external pressures. This piece reviews recent research by African scholars on intra-African migration.

"A NEW NARRATIVE"

In their recently published edited volume Understanding Global Migration, James F. Hollifield and Neil Foley observe that the concept of a "migration state" is ideal, reflecting a range of ways states grapple with migration. In its original formulation, the concept

1. <https://www.reuters.com/world/morocco-prosecutes-65-migrants-involved-deadly-melilla-incident-2022-06-27/>

2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jul/03/uk-home-office-plans-second-flight-to-deport-asylum-seekers-to-rwanda>

3. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/04/20/uk-refugee-scheme-rwanda/>

4. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2022-01-05/rich-countries-cannot-outsource-their-migration-dilemmas>

5. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/home-office-anger-over-racist-rwanda-policy-vc8gzbw2q>

referred to the liberal democratic state with policies oriented towards markets and rights. Yet as they show, the “migration state” can take different forms, whether it is the “post-imperial” liberal states of Europe and Turkey, the “postcolonial” migration state of Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, or the “developmental” migration state in East and Southeast Asia.⁶ Moreover, as they write in the introduction, migration has created economic and political interdependence between states; economic remittances support livelihoods and aid development in far-flung corners of the world. But the xenophobic surge in the West has also galvanized nationalism outside the West.

In a similar spirit, political scientists Fiona Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas, argue that the field of migration studies has neglected the emergence of “state migration management regimes” outside the Global North and the West. The bias towards liberal democratic states has split this field between “migration” and “refugee” studies, with the latter more focused on the Global South.⁷ Thus “migration studies” research tends to be centered on issues of economic migration, citizenship, and integration in northern democracies, while “refugee studies” scholarship, is focused on humanitarian crises and security challenges in southern “non-democracies.” Moreover, the scholarship on migration flows in the Global South has tended to treat the topic as an issue of global governance rather than domestic policymaking. As Adamson and Tsourapas maintain, “states in the Global South are often missing or lack agency in this literature, relegated to the backdrop on which refugee crises unfold, the passive recipients of international aid, or victims of the policies of more powerful Northern states.”⁸

If the scholarship on migration in the Global South is wanting, the discourse on migration in and out of Africa is particularly distorted and “exceptionalist.” As the African Migration Report: Challenging the Narrative (2020),⁹ published by the African Union and the International Organization for Migration, has observed, the current narrative about African migration tends to conceive of African migrants as being largely irregular, crossing oceans to Europe, and constituting the majority of global migrants; in reality, most African migrants are migrating within Africa, crossing land borders within the continent and largely within their respective regions. The report says that 94% of African migration across oceans is regular, with Africa accounting for 14% of the global migrant population, compared with 41% of Asia and 24% from Europe. Moreover, write the authors, African migration in Europe has been a constant for over a decade and the number of arrivals across the Mediterranean has declined since 2015. The African Union/IOM report calls for “a new narrative on contemporary African migration that focuses largely on intra-African migration.”

EXTERNALIZING BORDERS

Recent scholarship by African researchers has indeed sought to show how African states are not simply exporters of refugees and migrants, or passive executors of European Union policies.¹⁰ Younger scholars are exploring how African states are developing

6. James F. Hollifield and Neil Foley, *Understanding Global Migration* (Stanford University Press 2022) <https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=32777>

7. Fiona B. Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas, “The Migration State in the Global South: Nationalizing, Developmental, and Neoliberal Models of Migration Management,” *International Migration Review* (October 2019) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0197918319879057>

8. Fiona B. Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas, “The Migration State in the Global South: Nationalizing, Developmental, and Neoliberal Models of Migration Management,” *International Migration Review* (October 2019) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0197918319879057>

9. <https://publications.iom.int/books/africa-migration-report-challenging-narrative>

10. <https://www.pasiri.org/pasr-publications>

their own approaches to migration management, and how migration has made African states interdependent (wherein unrest in South Africa can have economic repercussions in the Horn of Africa.) As in other regions, intra-African migration can spur xenophobic violence and anti-globalization sentiment, but migration within the continent is generating humanitarianism, cosmopolitan identities, and conviviality. Recent research is showing that African migration is not exceptional, or fundamentally different from other regions: most Africans emigrate to work, study, or join family. According to UNHCR, in 2011, refugees and 'people in refugee-like situations' represented 2.4 million or 14 per cent of international migrants in Africa meaning that about 86 per cent of international migration within Africa was not directly related to conflict.¹¹

Scholar Balkissa Diallo's recent work on the localization of European migration norms in Niger is exemplary. Her research contributes to the ongoing conversation on how European states are externalizing their borders (as with the agreement between Rwanda and the United Kingdom).¹² Diallo shows how following the Valetta Migration conference held in Malta in 2015 and the establishment of the European Union Trust Fund for Africa (EUTFA), the government of Niger passed Law 2015-36 aiming to criminalize the trafficking of migrants. The law would have unexpected repercussions domestically, including incentivizing ex-smugglers to form associations (such as L'Association des Anciens Passeurs). The diffusion of what Diallo terms the European Union's "migration management norms," would also lead Niamey to introduce the 2020-2035 National Migration Law and a five-year Action Plan.

Salahuddin Ali has made a similar argument tracing how the European Union's Horn of Africa Migration Route Initiative (also known as the Khartoum Process) has adversely affected the lives of "forced migrants" in Sudan. The Khartoum process is an inter-regional forum, which includes five European member states and five African member states (Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan). Ali shows how the Khartoum Process led to the Asylum Regulation Act of 2014 and the new Passports and Immigration Act of 2015, both which were used to justify a crackdown on Eritrean migrants in Sudan. Itah Patience, a researcher at Makerere University, has in turn demonstrated how while the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union are trying to promote intra-African migration (through a possible AU passport, for instance), pressure from external actors like the European Union and the United Nations is shoring up authoritarianism and hardening borders. Thus, Uganda, which Patience suggests has surpassed the Maghreb as a "feeder-state," and currently hosts a large refugee population is under pressure from international organizations to be more accountable and to provide more social services, all of which raises domestic political tensions. Scholars in the field of cultural studies have also attempted to understand the lethal consequences of European state policies. In a haunting essay, Nabil Ferdaoussi has considered how the deaths that occurred on the Moroccan and Senegalese coasts as a result of European "border regimes," have been depicted in the work of Senegalese filmmaker Mati Diop.

In the last decade, the migration policy of African states has evolved in myriad ways. Stürner-Siovitz and Nzamba examine how local city actors, at the forefront of migration crises, but long shut out of international decision-making processes have created city networks such as

11. <https://comparativemigrationstudies.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40878-015-0015-6#ref-CR53>

12. Ferruccio Pastore and Emanuela Roman, "Migration policies and threat-based extraversion. Analyzing the impact of European externalization policies on African polities," *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, (January 2020) <https://journals.openedition.org/remi/14591>

the UCLG Africa,¹³ the Global Mayoral Forum and the Mayors' Mechanism. Reflecting the "local turn" in migration studies, where researchers have come to treat municipalities, not simply as spaces of migration, but also as actors involved in local and federal governance,¹⁴ the authors interview a range of local actors from a range of cities including Freetown, Kampala, Oujda, Sfax, and Sousse.

MIGRATING IDENTITIES

Recent work sponsored by the Program on African Social Research (PASR)¹⁵ also address the links between migration, identity formation and "long-distance nationalism."¹⁶ Sarah Koshin's work on "diaspora practices" within the Somali community in Zambia, looks at how technology (WhatsApp, to be precise) has driven "kinship mobilization," and humanitarian support for the region of Puntland, and how socio-demographic changes produced by migration are shifting gender roles within Somali migrant communities. She observes that Somalis in Zambia may insist that they are not a diaspora ("We are not diaspora, we are Africans in Africa, we belong here"), yet academics and journalists still refer to these transnational communities as diasporas, and the Somali government has set up a Department of Diaspora Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to reach the two million-strong Somali population living abroad. On the role of technology Richard Houessou of Afro barometer has examined the links between social networks and migration, suggesting that social media and communication technology can not only trigger and facilitate migration, but increase diaspora civic engagement.

The xenophobic surge against migrants in different African cities has also spawned interesting research. Abdullahi Ali Hassan at the University of Cape town has tried to understand the precarious status of small Somali business owners in Cape Town, South Africa using Edna Bonacich's classic theory of the "middleman minority," arguing that this approach may be more compelling than Mahmood Mamdani's influential framework for understanding the Indian community in Uganda, as the colonial state's political intermediary and "buffer community."¹⁷ Hassan observes that, despite not having a political role within the South African state or governing coalition, Somali migrants are still targeted by South African politicians for political purposes. (In 2016, the secretary-general of the African National Congress Gwede Mantashe said the solution to the migration question was refugee camps.¹⁸)

Namhla Thando Matshanda at the University of Western Cape has attempted to draw attention to migrant flows into South Africa from beyond the Southern African Development Community (SADC, as it's called), which includes South Africa, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Angola, Zambia and South Africa. She spotlights the "Ethiopia-South Africa migration corridor" detailing how Ethiopian identity is being reconstructed transnationally, through migration, and considering the splintering of Ethiopia's system of ethnic federalism. In the study of intra-African migration, there are several "flashpoint borders" and "corridors." Carina Kanbi at the University of the Witwatersrand looks at the cultural corridor connecting

13. <https://www.uclga.org/>

14. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0020852316688426>

15. <https://www.pasiri.org/>

16. https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-0-387-29904-4_59

17. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03056247508703264>

18. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/south-africa>

Lagos and Accra, what she calls Anglophone Africa's "cities of cool," and demonstrating how creatives in these cultural hubs are forging a new cosmopolitanism and cultures of conviviality, that are shaping cultural flows at the global level.

In closing, the African Union has expressed shock at the deaths of migrants at the Spanish Moroccan border and demanded an immediate investigation. It would be salutary if the pan-African organization could support human rights and legal organizations across the continent, pressing African states to be held accountable for any infringement of migrants' rights. It would also be helpful if the African Union issued a statement or commissioned a study showing how the European Union in recent decades has established a vast institutional architecture and policy system to keep migrants off its shores and partnered with African and Middle Eastern states to implement Europe's migration preferences. The consequences of these partnerships have been severe.

About the Author, Hisham Aidi

Hisham Aidi focuses on cultural globalization and the political economy of race and social movements. He received his Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University and has taught at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), and at the Driskell Center for the Study of the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park. He is the author of *Redeploying the State* (Palgrave, 2008) a comparative study of neo-liberalism and labor movements in Latin America; and co-editor, with Manning Marable, of *Black Routes to Islam* (Palgrave, 2009). In 2002–2003, Aidi was a consultant for UNDP's Human Development Report. From 2000 to 2003, he was part of Harvard University's Encarta Africana project, and worked as a cultural reporter, covering youth culture and immigration in Harlem and the Bronx, for *Africana*, *The New African* and *ColorLines*. More recently, his work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The New Yorker* and *Salon*. Since 2007, he has been a contributing editor of *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Culture, Politics and Society*. Aidi is the author most recently of *Rebel Music: Race, Empire and the New Muslim Youth Culture* (Pantheon, 2014), a study of American cultural diplomacy. Aidi teaches the SIPA MIA survey course *Conceptual Foundations of International Politics* and seminars in SIPA's summer program.

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The PCNS advocates the concept of an open, responsible and proactive « new South »; a South that defines its own narratives, as well as the mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, within the framework of an open relationship with the rest of the world. Through its work, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give experts from the South a voice in the geopolitical developments that concern them. This positioning, based on dialogue and partnerships, consists in cultivating African expertise and excellence, capable of contributing to the diagnosis and solutions to African challenges.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author.

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