

State-Building, Sovereignty and Migration Management in the Global South

Written by Fiona B. Adamson and Gerasimos Tsourapas

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A key function of the modern sovereign state is population management. As Torpey (1998) has noted, modern nation-states not only have a monopoly over the legitimate means of violence, but also the legitimate means of movement. Their territorial logic means that they have an interest in maintaining and controlling their national borders as an aspect of their domestic, Westphalian and interdependence sovereignty (Krasner 1999). With regard to domestic sovereignty – or the internal capacity of states — the ability to control borders is viewed as a marker of state capacity – the end of communism in Europe, for example, was symbolized by the loss of control over state borders, and one of the characteristics of weak or failing states is an inability to effectively control their territorial borders. In terms of Westphalian sovereignty – or the ability of states to act without external interference – states prioritize border control and migration policies as policy areas in which they seek to maintain autonomy. Finally, interdependence sovereignty suggests the importance that states place on the orderly management of cross-border flows, including those of people (Adamson 2006, 175-80).

Yet how states have managed “their” populations has changed over time, according to factors such as their stage of state-formation and consolidation, their position in the international system, the nature of state interests and institutions, and the influence of external actors, including powerful states and international organizations. Indeed, the emphasis on territorial control and borders is a unique feature of the modern nation-state — nomadic societies historically decoupled political communities from territory; large land-based empires such as the Ottoman Empire had nebulous frontier zones rather than fixed territorial boundaries (Goettlich 2019). European and other empires often had elaborate forms of internal “migration management” policies (Klotz 2013) – an element that has largely disappeared in contemporary nation-states, although still exists in some states such as China (Chan 2013).

The contemporary nation-state was established and evolved as a political structure designed to “embrace” particular populations, distinguishing between “insiders” and “outsiders” for the purposes of performing bureaucratic functions such as taxation, public service and welfare provision, security and conscription. “Embracing” has both a protective and coercive logic and is meant to capture the German term *erfassen* which means “to ‘grasp’ or ‘lay hold of’ in the sense of ‘register’” (Torpey 1998: 244). States attempt to maintain a “monopoly over the legitimate means of movement” via the entire apparatus of passports, travel documentation, visas, and national identification cards (Torpey 2000).

International Relations (IR) as a discipline has under-theorized the role that population movement and control (including policies of forced migration) have played in larger processes of state formation and nation-building, especially in post-colonial and post-imperial contexts. The emergence of new nation-states outside Europe and North America involved the establishment of national identities and the assertion of sovereignty in the wake of the collapse of multi-ethnic empires, a process that typically involved the management of cross-border population mobility. Beyond this, migration has also been a key feature of states’ attempts to pursue developmental functions via their national economies. More recently, states’ attempts to capitalize on voluntary and forced migration as a form of commodity in their diplomatic strategies constitutes a third way through which population management features in the modern sovereign state, particularly in the Global South.

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Sovereignty and Migration Management

In this section, we provide examples of how migration management regimes evolved across the Global South as states sought to establish, consolidate, and leverage their sovereignty. We discuss the emergence of nationalizing, developmental and neoliberal forms of migration management and link these to the exercise of state sovereignty within a context of an unevenly institutionalized international system.

Establishing Sovereignty: State-Building and Nationalizing Migration Regimes

The violent history of forced displacement, population transfers and expulsions obfuscates liberal narratives of state migration policies geared to voluntary economic immigrants (Hollifield 2004). But state- and nation-building processes were responsible for significant human population flows during the 20th century and need to be (re-)integrated into our understandings of how states have viewed and attempted to utilize and manage migration. The ideology of nationalism, and the political impetus “to make a state correspond to a nation” informed post-colonial and post-imperial forms of state building around the world, including “both colonized peoples’ quest for liberation and dominant groups’ efforts to purify a space via ethnic cleansing” (Cooper 2018: 95). As Zolberg has noted, the formation of new states has historically also been a “refugee-generating” process, in which state authorities attempt to forge a new identity by excluding populations who are viewed as threatening to the new national identity (Zolberg 1983). Indeed, the contemporary international state system has been constituted in no small part through the use of state policies of forced migration (Rae 2002; Vigneswaran 2013). Migration regimes used for the purpose of ethno-national state building include both *immigration* regimes in which the categories used to admit potential migrants are based on ethno-national or identity criteria (such as the prioritization of ethnically German *Aussiedler* by Germany), as well as *forced migration* regimes that used ethnic cleansing to expel and exclude “unwanted” populations from the territories of newly-formed nation-states.

One of the most significant examples of the use of mass migrations in the formation of post-colonial states occurred with the 1947 partition of British India into the newly formed states of India and Pakistan. An estimated 10–12 million refugees were created, with around 7,226,000 Muslims moving to Pakistan and approximately 7,249,000 Hindus and Sikhs crossing from Pakistan to India (Talbot and Singh 2009). A further partition of Pakistan in the context of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War led to an additional outflow of 10 million Bengali refugees to neighboring India (Totten and Bartrop 2008).

Another important example is the transition from the Ottoman Empire to modern Turkey, which can be characterized as a period of nation-building via the state management of forced migration, including population exchanges, expulsions, and ethnic cleansing (Yildirim 2007). The founding of the new Turkish Republic saw rounds of deportations in the form of the 1923 Greek–Turkish population exchange, in which 1.2 million Christian “Greeks” in Anatolia were denationalized and exchanged for 350,000 Muslim “Turks” from Greece (Triadafilopoulos 1998; Hirschon 2003). At the same time, immigration policies in the early Republican period promoted the development of an ethno-religiously defined Turkish identity, encouraging the arrival of over 700,000 Muslims from various Balkan states, including Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria (Akgündüz 1998; Kirişçi 2000). The transition from empire to nation-state, thus, involved the establishment of a migration management regime based on the homogenization of a population within clearly defined territorial borders.

Other cases of postcolonial state formation involved the exodus of European settler colonial populations or minority groups. At the end of the Portuguese empire in the 1970s, approximately 500,000 European retornados “returned” to Portugal, despite never having lived there (Lewis and Williams 1985). Around 90,000 Europeans left the Congo for Belgium in 1960 (Stanard 2018). Nationalizing processes in Uganda under Idi Amin led to the mass expulsion of approximately 80,000 citizens and residents of South Asian descent in 1972 (Adams and Bristow 1979). Population expulsions and returns also formed key components of post-imperial nation-building in Japan, where the ethnically Korean population was forcibly repatriated to Korea after WWII (Ryang 2013; Morris-Suzuki 2007).

Approximately 800,000 French citizens were expelled from Algeria in 1961–2 followed the Algerian War of Liberation (McDougall 2017, 221). In addition, there were multiple cases of the expulsion or mass exodus of approximately

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inspecting foreign companies that recruit Indians abroad. For developmental migration states reliant on remittances, the management of labor *emigration* — including the management of resulting diaspora populations — constitutes a key element of exercising and consolidating state sovereignty (Gamlen 2008; Adamson 2016; 2019). Such diaspora policies call into question the relation between “state” and “national identity,” leading to complex and overlapping jurisdictions of populations who may reside and work in one state, but retain citizenship in another (Adamson and Demetriou 2007).

Leveraging Sovereignty: Neoliberalism, Commodification and ‘Refugee Rents’

Under larger structural conditions of neoliberalism, states have an incentive to leverage sovereignty in ways that capitalize on cross-border mobility, by treating both voluntary and forced migration as a commodity that can be utilized to enhance state revenue and power. The trend towards states monetizing and commodifying cross-border migration flows leads to the emergence of what could be called a “neoliberal migration state” (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2020). Two examples illustrate the workings of neoliberal migration states: the emergence of citizenship-by-investment schemes and the emergence of “refugee rentier states” (Tsourapas 2019). In these two examples of neoliberal forms of migration management, states strategically use population mobility as a means of generating revenue.

In the first case of “citizenship-by-investment” schemes, states literally sell membership in their polity (Abrahamian 2015; Surak 2016). The proliferation of “citizenship-by-investment” schemes can be partly explained by the revenue they generate for economies in the Global South. A number of Caribbean nations charge \$250,000 to provide visa-free access to Europe: the citizenship-by-investment scheme “has brought about an economic miracle” in St. Kitts island, with the sale of passports now constituting 25% of the country’s GDP (Surak 2016, 39). Since 2017, the Republic of Vanuatu has offered citizenship for \$150,000, promising “visa-free entry to 26 Schengen Area countries as well as UK, Russia, Hong Kong & Singapore.” Cyprus’ “golden passport” scheme has been running since 2013 and awards Cypriot (and European) citizenship for an individual investment of €2 million (Antoniou 2018). In 2018, Turkey revised its national scheme (established in 2016), allowing foreigners to become citizens if they own property worth \$250,000 (Cağlayan 2018).

The use of economic capital as a determining factor of membership in a political community constitutes a commodification of citizenship by states that have succumbed to the market’s logic (Shachar and Hirschl 2014; Tanasoca 2016). Citizenship-by-investment schemes represent the opposite end of the spectrum from the nationalizing migration state, as they “speak to the very arbitrariness of the concept of belonging to a nation to begin with” (Abrahamian 2015, 154). Under this arrangement, modern citizenship is shaped by “universalizing [and contending] criteria of neoliberalism and human rights” (Ong 2006, 499), within the context of a broader neoliberal shift toward the “contractualization of citizenship” by states that hold the “market value [to be] the chief criterion for membership” (Somers 2008, 5). Citizenship-by-investment schemes reshape the underlying links between citizenship, membership and rights that have often underpinned liberal models of migration management (Hollifield 2004). They are manifestations of the commodification of rights and the transformation of states into entrepreneurial actors in which belonging is redefined in neoliberal terms (Brown 2015; Surak 2019).

Beyond the commodification of citizenship, states have also monetized other forms of cross-border migration flows, such as forced migration. The increasing reluctance of states in the Global North to accept refugees has led to the emergence of strategies aimed at keeping forcibly displaced populations in the Global South, including providing material support to host states of first asylum (Loescher 1993; FitzGerald 2019). Formalized via migration “deals” and refugee “compacts,” the commodification of forced displacement creates incentives for refugee rent-seeking across Global South states, which seek to attract external economic support in order to support the hosting of refugee populations within their borders (Tsourapas 2019b). The trend toward refugee rent-seeking behavior is particularly evident in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis: Turkey, which has come to host approximately 3 million displaced Syrians, successfully negotiated with the EU in 2015 and 2016 to receive approximately €6 billion in exchange for controlling emigration and keeping refugees in situ (Özden 2013; İçduygu 2015; Greenhill 2016; Sert and Yıldız 2016). Jordan and Lebanon negotiated similar agreements, aimed at “turning the Syrian refugee crisis into a development opportunity” (Tsourapas 2019b, 7). Between 2013 and 2014, the EU concluded a number of “Mobility

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Partnerships” with Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan that offered certain perks to these states in return for securitizing irregular migration and refugee flows in the European periphery (Collyer 2012).

The tiny island nations of Nauru, Manus and Christmas Island were able to leverage \$1 billion in revenue from Australia between 2001-7 to host and process approximately 1,700 asylum-seekers, amounting to more than \$500,000 per asylum seeker (Greenhill 2010, 329). In 2017-18 Nauru earned two-thirds of its entire \$170 million revenue from detaining and processing migrants for Australia. The trend of capitalizing on irregular migration and forced displacement for material gain in the Global South is, of course, directly related to Global North states’ policies of externalizing and outsourcing migration management (FitzGerald 2019; Grewcock 2014).

Conclusions

In this article we examine the evolution of migration management regimes over time and discuss how state interest in building, maintaining, and utilising sovereignty has shaped migration regimes in the Global South. Across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, states have transitioned through nationalizing, developmental and neoliberal phases of migration management. A focus on use of cross-border mobility in nation-building, developmental and neoliberal contexts allows for new directions in comparative research on the state’s role in shaping migration policy across the Global South. It also points to when and why particular states move between the categories of nationalizing, developmental and neoliberal, as well as the ways these categories relate to one another over time.

Of course, the relationship between migration, population control and state sovereignty is not just limited to states in the Global South. State migration policy has a long history of being used as a means of creating or preserving a particular (often racialized) form of national identity (Zolberg 2006; Triadafilopoulos 2004; Cook-Martin and FitzGerald 2014; Jupp 2002; Klotz 2013). Furthermore, state-building processes in the Global South have been heavily shaped by systemic pressures emanating from Europe to adopt the national state model. Similarly, the developmental migration state, with its focus on emigration, is the mirror image of labor-receiving immigration states – all immigrants are also emigrants. By studying the evolution of state migration management regimes, we gain an insight into the operational logic of state sovereignty – how it has changed over time, but also how it continues to evolve and shape global mobility regimes. State attempts to establish, consolidate and leverage sovereignty have all been closely tied up with attempts to regulate and control population movements. It is time to bring this critical feature of the modern state into our understanding of state sovereignty in IR.

Notes

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