

Global Migration Challenges Speaker Series

The Global Migration Challenges series offers accessible, policy-focused conversations with leading experts, civil society, and practitioners. The series is presented with support from Immigration, Refugees, & Citizenship Canada, and the Canada Research Chair in Global Migration.

This report was prepared by students from the Lab's Graduate Student Research Initiative. For more information please email: migration.munkschool@utoronto.ca.

Report 1

Mediterranean Mobility Beyond Europe: The Role of Transit States and International Organizations

6 February 2019

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Participants:

Kelsey P. Norman: "Strategic Indifference: Understanding Responses to Migrant and Refugee Settlement in Mediterranean Host Countries"

Hiba Sha'ath: "At Cross Purposes: A Field-Based Perspective on IOM's Framing(s) of Migration in Libya"

Discussant:

Craig Damian Smith, Associate Director, Global Migration Lab

Issue

The Central Mediterranean has been the site of mass migration for the past decade. Overloaded boats dominate popular imagery. The conditions for migrants in transit states undermine European claims that "breaking" smuggling rings and criminalizing humanitarian NGOs can co-exist with development aid and international protection. Indeed, migration controls have dire consequences for migrants, support autocratic

governments, and undermine international norms. However, the focus on Europe's ability to "externalize" controls ignore the interests, choices, and domestic politics in transit and destination states. Likewise, characterizing International Organizations as passive vehicles of state policies obscures their agency. This discussion unpacked the interests of transit states, explored how IOs mediate between their own and state interests, and asked how these dynamics affect irregular migration.

Discussion Summary

Dr. Norman, SSHRC postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Political Science and the Institute for European Studies at the University of British Columbia, discussed her field research analyzing policies in "new" immigration states: Morocco, Turkey and Egypt. She introduced her concept of "strategic indifference"; that is, indirect engagement in migration governance. Ms. Sha'ath, PhD Candidate in Human Geography at York University, explored the framing of migrants by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). She described her experience working with IOM Libya, and how data gathering elevated IOM's role in global migration governance. Dr. Norman explained how states with low capacity for engaging with migrants and refugees employ policies of "indifference" to strategically manage migrant populations and engage with the international community. She explained variation between a shift towards more liberal policies in Morocco and Turkey, and more protectionist policies in Egypt. Using the case of Turkey, she explained how Turkey allowed non-governmental services for migrants and refugees and expended no effort in removing irregular migrants. Political changes in Egypt, on the other hand, resulted in anti-immigrant policies and less permissive stances towards non-governmental services.

Ms. Sha'ath explained that while IOM has become a main source of information for migration data, the organization also creates conflicting narratives. In the Libyan case, IOM data alternately frames migrants as "victims" of states or "threats" to sovereignty. This shapes public perception and emboldens control-based policies. She reviewed IOM's data collection and suggested that reporting should take local and global audiences into account. She introduced the concern that IOM's operations in states which violate international norms through involvement with Libya's detention centers, when officially IOM prioritizes Alternatives to Detention.

Lessons Learned

Understanding "indifference" as a policy choice suggests the need to investigate how host states rely on IOs and NGOs for service provision. States *choose* strategic indifference to migrants and refugees residing in and passing through their territory as a mode of international leverage. States and IOs must balance engagement with accountability for violations of international law and norms.

Dr. Norman's findings suggest a relationship between engagement and more liberal policies in host countries. She hypothesized that Morocco's and Turkey's liberalization are partly the result of engagement with European states seeking increased cooperation to manage migration. Morocco passed more liberal legislation in response to European engagement. Morocco's strategic goals for deeper engagement with the African Union and its neighbouring states in North Africa are also factors in liberalization. Turkey liberalized policies after the refugee crisis for greater cooperation. However, it is an open question whether liberal policies improve the lives of migrants and refugees or are a means of control. International pressure to hold states to account could be leveraged to fairly and effectively manage migration. That said, Dr. Norman's findings reveal that this pressure depends highly on the political situation in the "new" immigration states; when Egypt began adopting increasingly illiberal policies, they became less amenable to international pressure.

Through these cases, it is evident that IOs are neither passive vehicles for state policy choices, nor entirely independent actors. The contradictory narratives as explained by Ms. Sha'ath complicate engagement with Member States seeking to control migration, and with migrants trapped in states with abusive policies. Ms. Sha'ath highlighted that IOM has long been criticized for involvement in detention centers, for instance Australia's "Pacific Solution" of detaining asylum seekers in offshore facilities. However, she tempered the framing of IOs as vehicles for Member State policy by highlighting how IOM maintains access by mixing strategic cooperation and condemnation, often split between field offices and Headquarters. Access can justify a certain amount of norm-bending on the ground. Without access, IOs would have little means to influence policy or collect data. While IOM is involved in detention centers and disembarkation points, they also use their access to advocate for migrants' rights. Ms. Sha'ath compared this strategic choice by groups like *Médecins Sans Frontières* between strict moral lines and losing leverage. Both choices can be justified and, importantly, can be coordinated to balance cooperation and accountability.

In Conversation

Dr. Norman and Ms. Sha'ath sat down with students from the Global Migration Lab Student Research Initiative after the event to discuss their research and the complexities of Mediterranean migration. Their conversation centred on themes of the commitments to liberal, rights-based policies in migration governance, the political role of international organizations, and differences between field operations and headquarters.

Curious about the role of European influence on Morocco's more integrative and rights-based migration legislation of 2013, the students pressed Dr. Norman to share her understanding of the legislative decision-making. She surveyed the diverse factors motivating Morocco's liberalization of migration policy, including improving relations with neighbouring countries and the EU in order to bolster their claims to Western

Sahara (an occupied region) and opening doors to economic partnerships. Ultimately, Dr. Norman explained that although this more nuanced story could suggest that Morocco was on the path to liberalization, the timing of the specific legislation relates most closely with pressure through reports presented to the EU condemning Morocco's rights violations and security-focused migration policy, and the EU's subsequent pressure on Morocco to liberalize its legal framework.

The conversation broadened to explore the relationships between IOs and illiberal host countries and, relatedly, between field offices and headquarters. Ms. Sha'ath provided insight from her research on IOM Libya. She explained how field offices must consider political viability and blurring organization nred-lines. With regards to rights-violating detention policies in Libya, Ms. Sha'ath pointed to IOM Libya's focus on projects that would tangibly improve the lives of migrants without damaging relations with the Government. Taking a hard line on migrant rights would mean the threat expulsion from the country, meaning that the IOM would lose all influence. Ms. Sha'ath and Dr. Norman agreed that the relationship between the field offices and headquarters are strained by a lack of communication and misalignment between programming and political motivations. However, this seeming disjuncture means IO headquarters can take a more vocal rights-based stance, while their field offices focus on what attainable on the ground.

The Global Migration Lab Student Research Initiative thank Dr. Norman and Ms. Sha'ath for discussing the complexities of migration politics around the Mediterranean.