

Mobility or sedentariness? Towards an understanding of local norms of migration

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Research question

- How is the norm of sedentariness, as accrued within the European Union, translated into a local context in Burkina Faso?

Structure

- 1) Sedentariness as a norm
- 2) The role of critical norms research in IR
 - a. Non-hierarchical, non-static norms
 - b. Translation of norms
- 3) Towards an understanding of local norms of migration
 - a. The case of Burkina Faso
 - b. Method: conducting interviews with an “ethnographic sensibility”
 - c. Limits of approach
 - d. Results of interviews
- 4) Conclusion: differentiated norm(s) of mobility and sedentariness

1) Sedentariness as a norm from the Global North

- What constitutes a norm in IR?
 - “[...] a standard of appropriate behavior for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998, 891)
- Migration as “unwanted mobility”
 - “[...] assumption that mobility is normal for the wealthy, international elite, but a symptom of failure among the poor.” (Bakewell, 2008, 1356)
 - (Also: controlling mobility as colonial practice)
- Migration and development
 - “[...] causal direction of the relationships traced between migration and development. At a meta-level of analysis, almost all theorisations of this link assume migration to be something that can be contained, regulated or influenced, development as normatively good.” (Raghuram 2009, 104)
 - Recent trend in European discourse: containment of migration is normatively good in itself!
 - = effect: normatively charged policies which reflect the sedentarist bias in IR as well as development policies
- → norm of sedentariness

2) The role of critical norms research in IR

- Assumption a) Norms are non-hierarchical
 - No hierarchical descending of norms, but rather back and forth movement between different actors (see Berger 2017, 30)
 - Translations of a global norm onto a local level should not be regarded as mere derivatives (see Berger 2017, 30)
- Assumption b) Norms are dynamic?
 - “Constructivists have thereby developed dynamic models of the ways in which norms travel; but these models have persistently relied on static assumptions about the content of norms” (Berger 2017, 24)
- → Need to look at translation process of norms
 - Problem of ignorance towards local practices: “Multiple actors, sites, and practices that constitute the everyday are relegated to the margins, as they are not recognized as political.” (Singh 2020, 511)
 - This characterization of actions as “apolitical” excludes them from the discourse on norms (and norms-setting)

3) Understanding local norms of migration – the case of Burkina Faso

- A) Translation of norms
 - How is the notion of “unwanted mobility” translated?
 - Through concrete development projects in Burkina Faso
 - Examples
 - Réseau pour le développement socio-économique et culturel du Burkina
 - Direct engagement with village populations, information about employment opportunities and dangers of irregular migration
 - GIZ in Burkina Faso
 - EUTF-financed border management program + “improving living conditions”
 - EU-IOM joint initiative
 - Increasing the competitiveness of local businesses, focus on cotton sector
 - Goal: Offering stable job opportunities
 - “They want to give the young people a reason to stay”

3) Understanding local norms of migration

- C) Method: conducting interviews with an ethnographic sensibility
 - i. engage the persons being studied as authors or collaborators, not subjects (see Shdaimah, Stahl, and Schram 2009, 257).
 - ii. Goal: understanding...
 - i. of the ideas around mobility which (possibly) connect to the norm of sedentariness
 - ii. how ideas and practices are affected by the norm and
 - iii. whether local practices question the norm
- D) Limits of approach
 - i. Snowball approach of contacting interviewees
 - i. Approach limited to “development community”
 - ii. Pandemic-related difficulties

E) Results of interviews

- Multi-dimensional norms of mobility **and** sedentariness
 - *Stay*:
 - Responsibility towards family
 - “Rootedness”
 - Tenacity
 - *Move*:
 - Being able to support one’s family financially
 - Leaving as relief for the family

E) Results of interviews

- Ambiguous role of development projects
 - Norm of sedentariness often overridden by individual's responsibilities
- Role of education and sensibilization (by societal initiatives)
- Problem: the norm does not travel back
 - Understanding of these norms from the perspective of European development actors remains insufficient

4) Conclusion and outlook

- Worsening security situation in Burkina Faso is likely to change status quo of migration
 - Assumption of my research: migration is not forced by conflict/ violence
- Perpetuation of one-dimensional norm of sedentariness from European perspective likely

Selected bibliography

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