



## **SPECIAL SECTION**

### **Transit Migration**

#### **Introduction**

#### **Reconceptualizing Transit States in an Era of Outsourcing, Offshoring, and Obfuscation**

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■ **ABSTRACT:** There has been growing pressure on states to “solve” the phenomenon of irregular migration. Destination countries have transferred this pressure onto transit countries, which are assumed to have the political will, ability, and means to stop irregular migration. This special section looks at the ways in which transit countries respond to challenges, pressures, and compromises in matters of irregular migration policies through a number of empirical case studies. Making transit countries the main focus, this special section aims to scrutinize domestic policy discourses in the transit countries, which are influenced by regional agreements and economic incentives from abroad but are also shaped by local interests and a wide range of actors. Of special interest is to understanding whether the logics of destination countries that favor deterrence and exclusion have been adopted by politicians and the public discourse within transit countries.

■ **KEYWORDS:** borders, immobilization, irregular migration, migration control, migration industry, transit migration, transit state

Public interest in irregular migration is at an all-time high in many parts of the world. Consequently, governments, policy makers, and international organizations are under considerable pressure to reduce the momentum of irregular migration and thereby demonstrate that they are in control of it. Notions of migration “crises” and migration “panic” are on the rise around the globe, not least because some potential destination states have chosen to actively fuel notions of panic through discourse and spectacle. Consequently, policy makers in the global North are increasingly shifting part of the pressure to enforce border protections to neighboring countries, both countries of origin, and, more importantly for this special section, those that are deemed to be “transit states.” In brief, transit states can be understood as countries through which migrants and asylum seekers try to pass on their way to another destination country.



State officials from destination countries in the global North make both implicit and explicit demands for transit states to act as gatekeepers and bulwarks of irregular migration, thereby effectively outsourcing part of their management of migration (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2006; Tsianos and Karakayali 2010; Wallace and Sidorenko 1999). Through a designation of transit states as both the problem and the solution to irregular arrivals, destination countries then design measures, such as policy and legal arrangements embedded with significant financial incentives, through which they exert ongoing pressure on transit states (De Haas 2008).

Destination countries increasingly expect the transit countries receiving such incentives to put in place migration and border controls and preemptive deterrence measures, but also asylum processing systems that will reduce their own long-standing policy questions about how to deal with unwanted irregular migration (Boswell 2003; Gammeltoft-Hansen 2012; McNamara 2013; Weber 2007). In this special section, we aim to push back against the rhetoric of destination countries, which claim to be overwhelmed by the numbers of people arriving on their shores when evidence points to the contrary. More significantly, we direct attention to transit countries in the global South both to examine how they react to such external demands to become gatekeepers and, more importantly, to understand the (self-)perceptions, conceptualizations, and discourses of transit that have developed over time within these Southern positionalities, which, as we argue in this special section, are very different from the common understanding of “the transit country” developed for the European borderlands, such as Turkey or Ukraine (Düvell and Vollmer 2009; İçduygu and Yüксеk 2012). The common understanding of “the transit country” has tended to focus on specific conditions, including, for instance, porous borders and corrupt authorities, an inability to process asylum applications and general lack of protection frameworks, and a high degree of instability coupled with a high likelihood of deportation. While the institutional contexts and domestic political-electoral pressures in potential destination countries have been examined in great detail in the literature (see, e.g., Heckmann 2016; Marr and Wilkinson 2003), less attention has been paid to such contexts and pressures in transit countries. This lack of grounded empirical knowledge of what is happening in spaces assumed to function as transit countries presents a challenge to politicians and policy makers trying to implement effective programs to immobilize irregular migrants, including asylum seekers and refugees in situ, and poses a number of challenging theoretical and epistemological questions to academics working in migration and refugee studies and related disciplines.

Some scholars working primarily on the migration trends within the context of the European Union (EU) have provided detailed overviews on the genealogy of the label “transit country” and how it has spread in policy circles to then be applied to ever wider geographic contexts beyond the EU (Düvell 2006; Düvell and Vollmer 2009; Düvell et al. 2014). In contrast, however, very little work exists on the intrinsic perceptions of those countries that have been labeled as transit countries by external policy makers, or that have adopted the transit country label for themselves but with slightly diverging meanings. The focus of this special section is thus on empirically interrogating the diverse ways in which “transit state” is deployed by conceptualizing the linkage between origin, transit, and destination countries, so that these diverse lived realities and heterogeneous local contexts from around the globe can be used to shed new light on perceptions and implications of transit and transit states. In order to position our analysis on transit states in a wider context, we need to treat the relational, reversible, and complex relations between countries of origin, transit, and potential destinations with caution. We also tread carefully in presenting this work in an era of “migration panic,” where the word “migration” is most often conflated with “crisis.” Here we intend to work against this notion by demonstrating how migration is an evolving phenomenon that is best served by reflexive and evidence-based analysis rather than rhetoric and knee-jerk reactions. This is essential, not least because the con-

text and drivers of irregular migration in each transit state differ to such an extent that simplistic migration management templates cannot easily be applied.

In order to analyze current developments, represented by a number of strategic case studies in this special section, we must first, however, define some of the key terms (e.g., destination country, receiving country, and country of origin) that we rely on here and retrace some of the scholarship that has evolved around transit migration over the last decades. While the process of transiting through several countries before reaching what is hoped to be a final destination is not new, the term “transit migration” entered academic debates in the course of the expansion of the European Union into Eastern Europe. Prime targets for installing new border and asylum policies were the new EU member countries known for their hitherto lax approach toward irregular migrants and their toleration of people passing through their territories widely unhindered. From this point of view, in the European context, “transit country” was no longer just a descriptive denomination for a geographic entity; rather, it was reconceptualized into a tool of governance by potential destination countries (Oelgemoller 2011: 416). Despite the proliferation of both the terminology and the associated concept of transit migration among policy makers and academics across Europe, no widely accepted academic definition evolved of what in fact characterized transit migration per se, or a transit migrant or a transit state/country (Düvell 2012; Papadopoulou 2004; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008). So far, the best working definition is that offered by Ann Kimball (2007), which is still widely used, criticisms notwithstanding, including by the authors of this special section. According to Kimball (2007: 12), four defining criteria determine whether or not a country qualifies as a transit state: first, transit states must border a “fully developed country”<sup>1</sup>; second, transit states must show a higher rate of emigration than immigration; third, transit states must function as primary staging grounds for migrants who intend to travel on to a nearby desired destination country; and fourth, over time transit states adopt and enforce more restrictive migration and border policies.

Instead of coining a new authoritative definition, many scholars who were compelled to study the coping mechanisms put forward by destination states to keep migrants on the move at bay limited themselves to criticizing inherent conceptual ambiguities of transit. In particular, the inability to sufficiently encompass all inherent complexities of migratory processes into a definition was widely bemoaned by the critics: after all, there were no fixed or easily quantifiable parameters, such as the actual duration of journeys, legal statuses, intentions or hierarchies of intentions and actual outcomes of those journeys, which lend themselves to capturing the very nature of transit (Castagnone 2011; Düvell 2006; Kimball 2007; Transit Migration Forschungsgruppe 2007).

Due to the intense politicization of the term “transit migration” within the European migratory regime that resulted from an obsession with wanting to secure the peripheries of the European Union, most critical scholars eventually tended to obviate the term altogether. This was because the term “transit migration” did not simply describe “an existing reality, but to some extent [was] also a part of the process of constructing that reality in such a way that discursive practices enable policy statements to conceptualise and talk about this phenomenon” (İçduygu and Yüsekser 2010: 441). Within public discourse, policy makers who had associated the term with the need for manifold restrictive control mechanisms had gained the upper hand. Now—almost a decade later—there is a noticeable revival of academic interest in studying transit migration outside of the European context (Busse and Vásquez Luque 2016; McDowell 2018; Tsourapas 2017; Willers 2018). Many of these scholars are trying to employ the term in a way that frees it from its Eurocentric ballast and the inherent connotations that often seemed to favor the increasing securitization and militarization of borders. When attempting to extend our knowledge on transit migration and people on the move, we assert that the way forward is

not to insist on honing epistemological finesse and overstressing the temporal scales and temporality of spaces of migration. Rather, when recapturing the political debate and individual theoretical positions therein, we want to contrast a number of fixed assumptions about the political underpinnings of “transit state” with realities from across the global South that open up new understandings of what transit countries can be and how they react toward external pressures.

In turn, “destination country” has become a commonly used term to describe countries that are receiving migrants and refugees, although “receiving country” is also frequently used.<sup>2</sup> While these terms are often used interchangeably, the lack of consistency reflects a wider problem in scholarship on irregular migration. In this special section we use “destination country” to describe a country that may be intended as an end point in an individual’s migration journey, whereas “receiving country” refers to all the spaces where irregular migrants can potentially end up. According to public and political imaginaries in the global North, most destination countries are located in the global North. They are deemed to be desirable for migrants due to their strong standing in the global political economy. However, this public and political understanding needs to be challenged by actual figures, which clearly indicate that receiving countries are often outside the global North. More often than not, those countries that are understood to be “transit countries” are in fact receiving countries. Due to ever restrictive border and asylum policies, transit countries close to conflict countries have, often against their own intentions, become final destinations.

Finally, a country of origin usually designates the country where a person was born. As is the case for certain groups such as stateless persons or displaced people, this does not necessarily confer citizenship or equip him/her with equal rights to citizens. Also, the extent to which, if at all, a person considers the country of birth to be a “home” country (in an emotional sense) will depend, *inter alia*, on how long they have lived in that country, and under what conditions. Bearing in mind the staggered journeys that displaced people often undergo, which can include a range of countries of first or secondary asylum, if not more, sending countries cannot necessarily be equated with countries of origin. We have given preference to relying on the term “countries of origin,” simply because these are the places where asylum seekers whose claims for protection have been rejected and deported migrants will most likely be sent to. We note, however, that the term is being used as justification by some countries to return or deport people to places they have no knowledge of; such is the case for many Afghan asylum seekers who have been denied refugee status and who, having grown up in neighboring countries such as Pakistan and Iran, find themselves subject to return to a country they have never lived in (Schuster and Majidi 2013).

## **Empirical Realities and Global Developments Shaping Transit State Narratives**

The crucial links between irregular migration and transit states are rarely interrogated in migration scholarship, especially using a global comparative approach. To address this gap, this special section brings together a collection of empirically based articles that question the expectations, role, and sociopolitical dynamics of a number of transit states around the world. Given that some countries in the global South have started to adopt the term “transit state” for their own purposes (see Missbach and Hoffstaedter, this volume), our main focus is on transit states and their respective governments as significant political entities and actors within the migration domain. This is important for many reasons, not least because there has been a privileging of the individual and collective decision-making practices of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees

and the different degrees of uncertainty they experience (e.g., Baldwin-Edwards 2006; Basok et al. 2015; Collyer 2007; Gerard and Pickering 2014; Hugo et al. 2014; Missbach 2015; Sampson et al. 2016; Tazreiter et al. 2017) to the detriment of the wider context, which this special section seeks to address. While our collection pays attention to the micro level, encompassing mobile populations of women, men, children, and families, the main focus is directed at the state, its central and local authorities, as well as other competing actors on the local level. While the state (e.g., Indonesia) forms the meso level in our analyses, we also try to consider the macro level of migration management (e.g., Asia-Pacific).

As the contributors to this special section demonstrate, a wider picture of the intricacies of interaction, collaboration, collusion, terms of debate, and divergent views between potential destination countries and transit countries emerges from a focus on the roles of actors such as local, state/provincial, and federal governments and other stakeholders and decision makers based in transit countries. These actors, who are often difficult to study because of the political nature of their maneuvering and their more concealed presence in the field, are examined in detail to represent a large variety of standpoints and multilayered interests. By expanding the analysis of irregular migration and turning attention to these actors as well as other sources such as policy documents and media reports, the contributors shed light on the bargaining power that transit states yield and the decisions they make in response to the expectations of ever-demanding potential destination countries.

Exploring the empirical realities and recent political developments in selected transit countries highlights long-standing hegemonic power relationships and procured compliance in what are often unequal partnerships. However, the articles presented here reveal emerging forms of resistance against expectations that transit countries are willing gatekeepers for destination countries in the global North. We show that there is good reason to question not only the nature and implications of forced-upon collaborations but also their alleged “success” in holding back unwanted migrants. Those unwilling or reluctant gatekeeper transit states must be taken seriously, as business-as-usual migration directives and programs financed by potential destination countries may no longer be a valid option. This is because more and more transit countries are aware of their bargaining power and are beginning to prioritize their political and economic interests linked to migration over the interests of other countries. One explanation is that migrants and refugees who are considered “undesirable” by potential destination countries are also rarely wanted by transit countries. In this way the label “transit migrant,” which brings with it the trope of illegality, has been successfully implanted in transit states with new consequences for how people are treated (Bredeloup 2012). By detailing trends within this global reordering of contemporary migration regimes, this special section seeks to challenge perceptions of power differentials between transit countries and other states. Among the transit states chosen as case studies—Ecuador, Indonesia, Libya, Malaysia, Mexico, and Niger—only Libya “borders” the European Union (EU). These case studies have been chosen to develop a comparative and global approach, and to explore what insights can be derived vis-à-vis “transit migration” precisely by viewing “it” from the South. By doing so we not only draw important lessons from a range of geographic contexts, but also avoid the theoretical Eurocentrism that is otherwise so dominant in discussions of transit migration (Düvell 2006; Suter 2017).

While numerous studies have theorized transit *migration* (Collyer and De Haas 2012; Dimitriadi 2018; Düvell 2012), the focus of this special section is on transit *states*, using an actor-based approach to hone in on the role of local, state/provincial, and federal governments. It seeks to challenge widespread perceptions of “weak” transit states that are easily influenced in the negotiation of migration matters, even to their own detriment. For instance, all too often it is assumed that potential destination countries can simply force their externalized border

controls on transit states through what Amy Nethery and Carly Gordyn (2014: 178) call “incentivised policy transfers” (see also Cosgrave et al. 2016; Lavenex 2006). Migration management incentives include targeted development aid, specialized training of key government agencies, and capacity building. Potential destination countries seeking to deter irregular migrants from arriving at their borders invest significant resources in offshore and extraterritorialized policies in order to enclose, contain, and confine people far from destinations where they aspire to enter and seek asylum. For example, the provision of aid funds, such as the 2015 European Union–African Union Migration and Mobility Dialogue, and mobility partnerships, including expedited accession to the European Union and fast-tracked visa processing for Turkey (Rygiel et al. 2016), are used to co-opt governments in transit countries into taking responsibility for migrants and refugees. Such interventions have far-reaching implications; they can harm migrants and violate their basic human rights and empower illicit and potentially dangerous political forces and actors. For example, Italy was alleged to have directly negotiated with militias involved in people smuggling in the south of Libya to reduce irregular migration (see M. Phillips, this volume). In turn, Ruben Andersson’s (2014, 2016, 2017) work on illegality along the West African corridor has demonstrated how border regimes create sites of transit onto which a logic of illegality is imposed and then “solved” through policies and vast sums of money that serve to boost an industry of government departments and private sector organizations, including those running immigration detention centers, to enact a “border spectacle.” As two of our contributors discuss, large sums of money have been spent in countries such as Niger and Libya on technological, financial, political, and security measures that have in the past included detention centers and now focus on training and building the capacity of government departments, with questionable impact (see Moretti’s and M. Phillips’s articles, this volume).

While some transit countries, such as Libya, Morocco, and Turkey, have been subjected to intense empirical research (Brachet 2018; Bredeloup 2012; Collyer 2007; İçduygu 2000; Isleyen 2017), other areas, such as heavily used migration pathways in the Americas and throughout the Asia-Pacific region, await similar academic engagement to provide a fuller picture of regional and global interdependencies when it comes to irregular migration. For example, while the EU can use its development strategies to press for more compliance with regard to migration issues in states that are beneficiaries of EU funding (Brown 2017), in the Asia-Pacific region, Australia’s political reach does not give it a similar level of control over those whose compliance it desires. Whereas transit states such as Turkey and Libya may expect that their collaboration and compliance would result in the recognition of their regimes or more respect for their governments, better aid delivery, and favorable trade deals, Indonesia has not had the same interest in increasing its political leverage with Australia, and has instead initiated a downgrading of the bilateral relationship. Malaysia has been a willing Australian partner at times, but has also made demands that run counter to Australian interests. In addition, the failed Malaysia refugee swap deal would have made Australia beholden to Malaysia in undesirable ways (see Missbach and Hoffstaedter, this volume).

When it comes to political bargaining power, the two contributions of this special section that draw on case studies in the Americas portray rather different reactions toward transit migration there. As Wendy Vogt (this volume) explains, Mexico and the United States have formed a complex and often contradictory relationship around the question of unauthorized migration. While Mexico has been openly critical of US immigration enforcement policies, it has also served as a strategic partner in US efforts to externalize its immigration enforcement strategy. Compared to Mexico’s long history as a transit country and quite refined regulations (Kimball 2007), Ecuador has more recently started the decision-making process on how to deal with incoming transit migrants, spurred by the arrival of people from countries such as Syria, Iraq,

Nigeria, Sudan, and Ghana. Ecuador's decision making is heavily influenced by the externalized US border regime, yet a number of domestic inconsistencies, such as a progressive constitution that holds promises for "universal citizenship and free mobility" on the one hand and rather repressive migration laws on the other, have resulted in a highly selective system that controls transit mobility (Álvarez Velasco, this volume).

As detailed in this special section, the variety of political outcomes in countries in the global South with regard to an increase in migrants in their territory and pressures from the global North challenges one-dimensional depictions of transit states as willing implementers of external policy preferences. Moreover, an important finding of the contributors to this special section is to show how contested the policy-making process is, on a number of different levels (local, regional, and national), and how policy makers, depending on the level they are operating on, may have conflicting and incompatible interests.

### Expanding the Definition of a Transit State

Despite the rich scholarly debate on transit migration, few authors have tried to refine or further develop the definition of what a transit state actually is. Instead, the definition (referred to above) that Ann Kimball offered in 2007 is still widely used, assuming that onward migration does in fact happen eventually and that then transit becomes finite. More recently, transit has been conceptualized through the use of opposing metaphors of transit either as a cul-de-sac or dead-end road (Mountz 2017). In all such cases, transit is used in relation to both place and time and is almost exclusively reserved for irregularized migration paths with varying degrees of uncertainty and mobility risks (De Genova 2005).

We argue that there is a need for an agreed-upon definition of "transit state" as well as the contours of "the transit stage" to ensure more critical grounds for future debates. A renewed definition should not be so specific or rigid as to hinder comparative analysis, nor should it be an oversimplified definition that is excessively concerned with being relevant in policy contexts. Rather, we aspire to a definition of transit that considers the ways that transit is historically produced and embedded in complex political, economic, and social dynamics between neighboring countries. In particular, we therefore propose amending the first criterion of Kimball's definition of a transit state to acknowledge that they may not always border a "fully developed country" (a problematic construct in and of itself), but instead suggest a revised criterion that transit states are either *proximate* to a "developed" country or are a *perceived gateway* to a "developed" country. The fourth criterion, that over time transit states adopt and enforce more restrictive migration and border policies, should also be amended to reflect that states themselves may not adopt or enforce more restrictive policies, but instead are very often the target of proposed restrictive migration and border management policies that transit states may engage with, selectively implement, or resist. Finally, we also call for an expansion of Kimball's definition to recognize the fluidity of transit states. Transit and transit states cannot be looked at in isolation from origin and destination. The multidirectional nature of migration movements has shifted the way in which origin-transit-destination has been conceptualized, a point taken up next.

### Reconceptualizing Origin-Transit-Destination

While it is important to recognize the global inequalities that underpin arrangements to render people immobile, the urgency of the transit debate and mounting political pressure brought

about by record numbers of people moving irregularly in many parts of the world have tended to reinforce rigid conceptualizations of origin-transit-destination that Bredeloup describes as being both mechanistic and reassuring (Bredeloup 2012: 460; Phillips and Missbach 2017b). In this schema, which is more often employed by destination countries, countries of origin are assumed to be poor, transit countries influenceable emerging economies, and destination countries wealthy and highly sought-after. Such a framework reinforces what have been seen as inaccurate portrayals of the contemporary political world through center-periphery models, as promoted by adherents of long-outdated world-systems theory, and is also based on contested definitions of destination and host country (Schapendonk 2017). Nevertheless, this framework is intentionally applied by actual and self-imagined destination countries to suit their political agendas and results in policy solutions that are focused on origin and transit countries to the convenience of destination countries. As will be discussed later in detail, we apply the term “destination” critically throughout this special section to emphasize its mythical nature; as the contributions here show, in reality the larger proportion of people moving irregularly do not reach, or are turned back from, so-called destination countries.

The result of this theoretical recidivism has been what Franck Düvell and colleagues (2014: 21) describe as a “hierarchy of spaces,” and in the case of irregular migration, we see the depiction of transit states as marginalized, manipulatable, and void of any local or regional political allies or alliances. As public policy discourse rages around porous borders and “uncontrolled migration,” there is a tendency for transit to be constructed as a space that can be managed, controlled, and acted upon *from outside*, for example, by measures such as readmission agreements (Coleman 2009), covert turnbacks (J. Phillips 2017), or the “Remain in Mexico” policy (Vogt, this volume). Offshore processing arrangements and externalization measures are other examples that destination states will bear the often significant financial responsibility for, if such actions can take place in another geographical location (Mountz 2011). This implies, however, that transit countries have the political will, ability, and means to acquiesce to that pressure and intervention from outside and stop irregular migration. While concealing their selfish convenience with gatekeeper arrangements, policy makers and governments in “destination countries” claim that such early and externalized interventions will in turn create mutually beneficial solutions for transit countries and potential destination countries, and even for the irregular(ized) migrants and asylum seekers who are prevented from taking risky onward journeys. At a local level this is a highly problematic assumption. For instance, in the case of Niger, when one considers the sizeable economy of smuggling, any attempts to stop irregular migration mean, as the president of the Regional Council of Agadez put it, that “Niger has a knife at its throat. The city’s only functioning economy was the movement of people and goods . . . Each smuggler supports a hundred families” (quoted in Moretti, this volume). The sudden erasure of smuggling will therefore result in economic consequences for those people who were used to stable incomes from smuggling, and addressing this job loss would need to be part of the postsmuggling economic plans for Niger.

Unilaterally directed migration management, created in policy centers and transplanted to transit states, thus assumes the agency of generous providers and grateful recipients, and yet the implementation of migration management packages requires political will and engagement at all levels of government in transit states. In their contributions on Niger and Libya, as noted above, Sébastien Moretti and Melissa Phillips alert us to the many obstacles on the ground that make the implementation processes challenging, if not impossible. For example, in the case of Libya, despite EU and bilateral efforts to come to workable arrangements with government actors and key institutions such as the Ministry of Interior, Libyan authorities are reluctant for the country to become a holding destination for migrants, citing that countries of origin

also refuse to take people back (Middle East Online 2018). Additionally, the lack of coherence between various external agendas can lead to policy confusion on the ground.

“Destination country” has also become an all-too-convenient self-descriptor used by countries that wish to avoid their protection obligations toward people seeking asylum. Instead, these countries impose measures on those potential migrants they perceive to be seeking to irregularly depart from transit states. For example, the Australian minister for home affairs, Peter Dutton, has commented that people smugglers will market countries such as New Zealand as a destination if pathways to settlement are provided for asylum seekers who are found to be refugees, which he described as a drawcard “putting sugar on the table” (Elton-Pym 2018). It then becomes assumed that border management policies are the only answer for destination countries and that these policies must begin in transit states. The generally oversimplified analysis of the relationship between transit and destination countries perpetuated in both academic and policy discourse ignores the conceptual limits of the term “transit state” and the many instances in which transit states have pushed back and, in some cases, refused to be the willing executor of external policies or have rejected the implementation of externally conceptualized “problem-solving” mechanisms in their territory and territorial waters. This has become most apparent in the recent refusal by the governments of Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Albania to build “reception centers” in their territories for migrants and refugees who are attempting to reach the EU (*Al Jazeera* 2018).

Beyond such outright refusals, there is increasing evidence that states are being pulled by both internal and external political pressures around questions of transit. In some cases, the long-term outcome and mutual benefit of policy transfers remains highly questionable, as does, of course, their legality under international law. For example, as Antje Missbach and Gerhard Hoffstaedter illustrate in this volume, the Australian government has provided lucrative funding, material incentives, and other support to combat people smuggling in Indonesia and Malaysia but has at times faced open refusal and more subtle forms of noncompliance by these countries. A current rise in nationalist sentiment in Indonesia is expected to make future turn-backs of asylum seeker boats and maritime intrusions an even more sensitive matter for the Indonesian government. Similarly, the Mexican government faces increasing resistance over its role in facilitating outsourced United States immigration enforcement on Mexico’s southern border, especially since the election of Donald Trump (Vogt, this volume).

A central goal of this special section is to formulate a multipronged critique of the common assumption that transit states are easy to manipulate and that externalized migration management approaches are the “silver bullet” that will stop irregular migration within the “gateways” to Europe, Australia, the United States, and Canada. Although these countries have the thickest physical walls and the least penetrable virtual, biometric, and e-walls, “undesired” migrants and asylum seekers continue to arrive (Vogt, this volume). According to the logic of deterrence, the failure and challenges of migration control at national borders mean that more walls and obstacles need to be erected to interrupt the pathways early and prevent onward migration. The notion of transit states as gatekeepers raises questions about the politics of belonging and about which side of the imagined and factual border the gatekeepers stand, that is, whether they are positioned within the EU or not, or whether they—as an entire country—simply depict a new form of imagined border. Transit countries thus come to embody the border itself, serving as final bulwarks in the seemingly endless attempt to stop movements early and far away from the physical borders of assumed destination countries. This not only creates additional distance and stretches waiting times for migrants and asylum seekers, but also means that many asylum seekers are unable to ever make their claims for international protection.

## Refuting Hierarchies of Categorization

In this special section we aim to challenge and leave behind the oversimplified intentions of many policy makers who peddle the “win-win-win” argument by focusing on and taking seriously the political interests and agendas generated within transit countries. We do this by drawing on a range of empirical cases that include analysis of recent negotiations with neighboring receiving countries, shifting policies, and alternative proposals for global or regional collaboration with regard to questions of stemming transit. We aim, first, to put in focus the political significance of transit states and, second, to challenge the unquestioned hegemony of the potential destination countries as well as migration-related realities in those countries. In particular, we assert that the description of a country as a destination or receiving country often arises more from self-perception than reality, with increasing numbers of migrants remaining in transit states indefinitely or returning “home,” more or less voluntarily, because of a lack of viable mid- to long-term prospects or rising xenophobia and anti-immigration sentiment (see Cherti and Grant 2013; Sampson et al. 2016; Vogt 2018; Zaazaa 2017). Thus, we endeavor to push back against the rhetoric of destination countries who claim to be overwhelmed by the numbers of people arriving on their shores when evidence points to the contrary (see, e.g., Edwards 2013).

Conceptions of origin-transit-destination do not bear scrutiny in a complex multipolar world. These labels that once may have appeared to be neutral or even benign are now used as part of “ruthless political campaigns,” as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has described campaigns against migrants and refugees (United Nations General Assembly 2018). Migration itself is a dynamic and multidirectional phenomenon, which often does not “end” in resettlement or permanent migration to a highly sought-after country (see Álvarez Velasco, as well as Missbach and Hoffstaedter, this volume). A more nuanced approach to investigating the dynamic relationships between countries along certain migration corridors, as advanced in this special section, lends itself to an exploration of the layering of borders (Brown 2017) and demands that attention be focused on the fluidity and versatility of traditional sending-transit-destination categorizations. By putting transit states at the center of our analysis, we open a discussion of their role in agenda setting and of their interests and strategic calculations within a highly interdependent global environment. To do this, the contributors consider the distinct migratory histories and legal traditions behind recent policy and legal changes (Álvarez Velasco), the complex political economies and cultural climates shaping transit (Vogt), and the need to take into consideration the local level in migration policy design (Moretti). Specific attention is paid to the evolution of law and policy in transit states in order to overcome the ahistorical approach in the transit debate and to demonstrate how local conditions determine the viability of a policy transfer (M. Phillips, as well as Missbach and Hoffstaedter).

## Conclusion

This special section demonstrates that there is an urgent need to engage critically with concepts created and mobilized by European states, including the term “transit state.” One way of reviewing underlying assumptions and biases is to place the global South at the center of analysis, as this shift in perspective helps make visible how unrealistic certain political demands and expectations are. The analysis of transit states presented in this special section provides three dimensions that migration scholars interested in transit migration may seek to engage with in their future studies: economic side effects of incentivized policy transfers; possible legal repercussions encountered by destination countries that deny asylum seekers the basic human right

to seek asylum; and mechanisms that would increase transit countries' responsibilities toward protecting incoming migrants.

First, a more comprehensive definition of transit that goes beyond policy jargon is essential to capture other migration-related phenomena in transit sites, for example, transit-related forms of commercial activity. As has been noted elsewhere, transit environments fuel lucrative industries (Andersson 2014) that generate income from servicing the needs of smugglers, service providers, and state-financed countersmuggling agencies. Other actors involved in transit states, such as international organizations and supranational border security agencies (such as Frontex), also benefit significantly by offering humanitarian interventions funded by sizeable migration management programs. Although the operations of organizations running programs in transit states may be framed as life-saving and humanitarian work, they restore and maintain the border logic imposed by wealthier states and exclusive regional bodies. Conversely, as the case of Niger demonstrates, countries of transit may also benefit considerably from the migration business, which means that any attempt to curb migration can negatively affect their economy (Moretti, this volume). A focus on comparing the political economies of transit countries (e.g., Phillips and Missbach 2017a) would appear to be a way to improve theorization of the phenomenon.

Second, when studying transit states and outsourced and extraterritorial activities implemented or financed by potential destination countries, more attention needs to be given to legal implications, human rights responsibilities, and criminal liabilities. For example, Azadeh Dastyari and Asher Hirsch (forthcoming) have examined in detail the implementation of extraterritorial policies, in the case of Italian and Australian policies toward Libya and Indonesia, respectively, which among others include the financing of immigration detention centers where numerous rights violations occur with the full knowledge and intention of the sponsors. In some instances this financing has been under the guise of foreign aid or funding diverted from aid budgets toward immigration controls. Both Australia and Italy have engaged in various ways with the transit countries of Indonesia and Libya to deter the onward movement of migrants and refugees, and the resulting human rights violations are well-documented (Phillips and Missbach 2017a). Therefore, the label transit state has a twofold implication. It is used by other countries to justify their interference in states interpellated as transit states, and, in turn, as noted below, can be embraced by transit states themselves to reinforce the dominant notion that a transit state is a place where migrants do *not* wish to stay in order to justify why they are not implementing policies or are ignoring their presence. The legal liability for externalized actions of destination countries remains a key area for comparative research, especially across multiple jurisdictions.

Finally, any reconceptualization of transit should also recognize that, in the past, the term was primarily used by destination states to refer to other countries considered useful in the implementation of migration controls (Düvell 2006, 2012). As noted above, however, there has been a shift in discursive ownership of the term, as it has been increasingly appropriated by so-called transit countries for different political purposes. For example, some contributors to this special section have encountered incidents in the field of local politicians arguing that they are not responsible for the well-being of migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees because they are only passing through. For instance, Agung Sampurno, spokesman for the Indonesian Directorate General of Immigration, has been quoted as saying "Indonesia is only a transit country, to accommodate migrants to their destination country. If the U.N. asks us to make it permanent, Indonesia can't do that" (Cochrane 2018). By making statements like this, states wash their hands of any responsibility for protecting the rights of people in transit and people moving through transit states and ignore the lack of both regular and irregular options for onward

migration. Such statements also highlight a lack of political will to take responsibility for immobilized people in those states, thus deflecting tasks arising from their immobility to other stakeholders, such as international organizations and NGOs.

As we have stressed throughout this introduction, terminology matters deeply in discussions about transit migration, transit migrants, and transit states. Contributors to this special section variously refer to transit states and transit countries, depending on local contexts and on whether they are referring primarily to geographic spaces or to forms of governance. Similarly, while it is well-known that asylum seekers, migrants, deportees, and refugees are specific legal categories of persons, many authors have preferred to use the label “migrants” for all groups of persons on the move in a transit context. What comes to the fore in all the contributions is that the growing prevalence of irregular migration is a direct result of the imposition of restrictions on legal migration through barriers, walls, security, and surveillance measures and deterrents. Thus, migration itself has become widely irregularized. The impact of these restrictions has not resulted in any tangible improvement either to the conditions that migrants and refugees on the move experience or to adherence to human rights conventions intended to govern their treatment. It is hoped that this special section will promote further critical reflection on expanded definitions of transit and new ways of thinking about transit states from the vantage point of diverse state and nonstate actors in the global South.

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## ■ NOTES

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1. Kimball does not elaborate on the definition of a “fully developed country”; however, it is assumed to mean a country in the global North that is considered to be a more attractive destination than the transit country due to perceived economic opportunities and legal protections.
2. Notwithstanding, the terms “destination countries” and “receiving countries” have their historical antecedents in economic conceptualizations of the status of countries as producers of goods for capitalist markets. For more see Piché (2013).

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