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Intervention

Interventions on the concept of externalisation in migration and border studies[☆]

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emerged in Europe from the 19th century onwards (...) above other modes of knowing" (Sabaratnam, 2013: 262). Eurocentrism in debates on agency and externalisation is rooted in ethnocentrism, which defines much IR theorising of agency and international security. As Bilgin (2016: 17) puts it, "Ethnocentrism occurs when scholars seek to make sense of other groups and societies through their own concepts and categories," with the conviction "that 'we already understand' 'their' behaviour" (2016: 19). This in turn constitutes the epistemic (conceptual and methodological) boundary of analysis and judgement as regards the motivations, belief systems and behaviour of others.

Two lines of critique in postcolonial IR are relevant for our discussion on the ethnocentric limits of the concept of agency in externalisation research. First, there is a tendency to relegate the countries of the 'non-West' to the role of 'trouble-makers' if they do not fit into the role available to them as 'junior-partners' of core states (Korany, 1986). Academic debates on Turkey-EU migration and border cooperation are an example of this. Besides a few studies inquiring into discourses, policymaking and everyday practices of border security and migration in Turkey (e.g. İşleyen, 2018), most scholars analyse the Turkish position and behaviour as either a partner in the periphery fulfilling the role of Europe's 'gatekeeper', or as a troublemaker engaged in 'rent-seeking' and even 'black-mailing' the EU (Tsourapas, 2019).

Second, ethnocentrism entails a bias towards rationalist explanations to understand others' foreign policy behaviour (Bilgin, 2016) with limited attention paid to alternative explanations, such as affective politics underpinning how the world outside Europe identifies itself and its relations with Europe (Sabaratnam, 2013). To continue with the example of Turkey, intentions and motivations are attributed to an anthropomorphised country and presumed to rest purely on rationalist/materialist considerations, such as increased EU funds for refugee and border governance. Similarly, analyses of Morocco's positions in negotiations with European countries on migration often focus on direct 'financial incentives', although Moroccan officials highlight other objectives than funding (El Qadim, 2018). Little effort is made in "taking seriously questions of subjects' presence, positionality and the materiality of experience" (Sabaratnam, 2013: 274) within the broader context of global mobility and the EU's border regime. As a result, Europe is depicted as the only factor or concern for third countries' security imaginings and political considerations, regardless of whether they are collaborating with or troubling EU policy.

How can we overcome the rationalist/materialist bias which informs dominant theorisation of non-European subjects in externalisation? When it comes to migration policy, how can we conceptualise non-EU actors in ways other than their conventionally assigned roles (junior-partner or troublemaker) and with explanations beyond the rationalist/materialist framework?

In this short contribution, we put forward two strategies drawing upon postcolonial insights. Our first invitation is to reconsider state autonomy within IR. Arlene Tickner observes that autonomy differs from the Westphalian idea of sovereignty and is better suited to inquire into 'non-Western' perceptions of the international. For Tickner (2003: 319), autonomy in the 'non-West' "constitutes a basic symbol of statehood, and is viewed as the primary means of securing distinct forms of non-dependent or autochthonous development". Thus, autonomy is essentially a political concept and involves a form of resistance to outside intervention by emphasising local capacities to address domestic conditions and needs. Tickner notes that autonomy differs from power politics as traditionally theorised in the field of IR. Power is about the capacity to make others do what they are otherwise not willing to do; it is about enforcing one's will over others, making a difference in someone else's actions. Autonomy, in contrast, is a matter of safeguarding national sovereignty through the acquisition and development of local capacities, the establishment of alliances to prevent outside interference and the management of transnational practices and processes in and outside state boundaries.

What new insights can be gained from the idea of state autonomy,

3. Beyond Euro-centrism in the study of EU externalisation

3.1. Nora El Qadim and Beste İşleyen

The concept of externalisation has been used extensively in the context of critical examinations of the migration policies of European and other Western countries. In the last ten years however, the concept has been increasingly criticised. This contribution focuses on EU externalisation, building on the authors' research (El Qadim, 2017, 2018; İşleyen, 2018, 2022, 2023), to show that one of the limits of the concept has been its Eurocentrism.

A proliferation of studies has taken the perspective of non-EU actors as their focal point of analysis. Looking at non-EU countries' domestic and foreign policy interests, bargaining power and diplomatic practices, this work goes beyond conceptualising the EU's counterparts as passive recipients of decisions, policies and practices (e.g. Cassarino, 2018; Zaiotti, 2016). This literature points out how the EU's partners such as Morocco, Libya and Turkey resist externalisation or interpret it for their own purposes to achieve other political and economic objectives (El Qadim, 2018; Paoletti, 2010). This critique coincides with the call for 'decentring' Europe in international politics (Fisher-Onar & Nicolaïdis, 2013) through an acknowledgement of and a concerted engagement with the agency of state interlocutors elsewhere and especially in the 'Global South' (for non-state actors, see Cuttitta, Fine, Giusa and Heller herein).

We believe that these efforts to decentre and depart from the 'methodological Europeanism' of migration studies (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2013: 247) would benefit from a deeper engagement with criticisms of Eurocentrism and its 'avatars' (Sabaratnam, 2013) in the field of IR, particularly its 'epistemic avatar'. This epistemic (and methodological) Eurocentrism privileges "social scientific modes of knowledge that

which existing conceptions of agency in externalisation research cannot deliver? Examining Turkey's border and refugee governance policy, particularly in response to the arrival of Syrian refugees, we reach the limits of the concept of agency. Indeed, it does not provide an adequate explanation of the seemingly paradoxical reluctance of Turkey towards local and international non-state presence and activities in the country, despite the immense strain that border and refugee governance places on the country's material and human resources. Here, a core component of autonomy – 'national viability' – which stands for, among other things, "the existence of adequate human and material resources" (Jaguaribe in Tickner, 2003, pp. 319–320), can help understand this paradox. The Turkish position is telling with respect to an actor's perception of what agency is and how to deploy it. Over the years, the state has often downplayed the EU's contribution to refugee governance in Turkey with President Erdoğan stating that the country has invested more than €40 billion in refugees and is ready to do more. The Turkish state has regularly invited EU officials to visit its refugee camps to demonstrate that the country is performing better than EU countries in refugee reception. Moreover, in the reasoning of Turkish border officials, Turkey's strong statehood is proven by its ability to effectively control its borders by its human and material capacities to manufacture its own coast guard ships and border surveillance technologies at sea (İşleyen, 2018).

This also relates to 'international permissibility', a second core component of autonomy, defined as the capacity to avert threats from the outside through possession of material resources and the ability to form international alliances (Jaguaribe in Tickner, 2003, pp. 319–320). Morocco's 'African strategy', in the field of migration as in others, is closely connected to 'international permissibility.' The Moroccan state's diplomatic turn towards sub-Saharan Africa is rooted in historic and economic reasons, with the rise of Moroccan investments and economic exchanges with other African countries, as well as strategic ones, such as its territorial struggle in the Sahara and the fight against violent extremism – both as a domestic and an international issue. The reintegration of Morocco into the African Union in 2017 coincides with the prominence of migration issues on the Moroccan agenda in this organisation. The African Union has thus served as a platform for Moroccan officials to advocate for an autonomous African migration policy as well as to form a regional alliance sustaining Moroccan autonomy.

Our second invitation is to consider the importance of symbolic politics in these affirmations of autonomy towards externalisation strategies. Visa policies and negotiations are an example of this. European countries often use visa facilitation or liberalisation as an incentive for negotiating the collaboration of 'third countries' in border control and restrictive measures against migration. EU representatives often act as if visa facilitation is actually going to improve the situation of third country nationals in a drastic manner when it would in fact mostly concern those who can already travel relatively easily. The insistence of countries such as Turkey or Morocco on this dimension is not only a battle for the effective rights of their citizens to circulate: it is also a refusal to recognise a symbolic international hierarchy, which the unequal freedom of circulation of their citizens exposes (El Qadim, 2018). In this case, the "postcolonial politics of dignity" in the Arab world, which emerged in close connection to nationalism in independence movements (El Bernoussi, 2015) play a central role in displaying autonomy. This is not to say that symbolism is a part of non-Western cultures only. European and North American countries fully embrace symbolic politics, as border control is turned into a deadly 'border spectacle' (De Genova, 2002). Rather, our call is to fully integrate this dimension into the analysis of the interactions of 'third countries' with externalisation.

In questioning externalisation, we highlight the importance of questioning the methodological Europeanism of research on EU externalisation and the epistemic Eurocentrism of the concept itself. Migration studies have recently mapped different responses to externalisation through decentring (Stock et al., 2019) and 'recentering the South'

(Fiddian-Qasmieh, 2020). Here we propose two additional, practical strategies to address the Eurocentrism of the field: reconsidering state autonomy from how it is currently theorised in postcolonial IR and taking symbolic politics into account.

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