

## Book Review

**Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, 2023. *Migration and International Relations*.  
Springer Nature, 105pp.**

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Catherine Wihtol de Wenden's *Migration and International Relations* offers a sweeping, structural analysis of how human mobility has transitioned from a localized socio-economic phenomenon to a central pillar of global diplomacy and international relations. For decades, migration was largely absent from international university courses and diplomatic agreements. Today, it disrupts the traditional paradigm of nation-states, challenging their sovereignty and borders.

While Wihtol de Wenden heavily emphasizes the Euro-Mediterranean space and the policies of the Global North, her framework inadvertently shines a vital light on a much more silent, yet equally massive, demographic reality of Global South-South migration. Public opinion and media narratives predominantly fixate on South-to-North flows, but this book provides the necessary data and theoretical grounding to correct that misconception. By examining through the specific lens of South-South mobility, the book uncovers a complex web of forced displacement, informal economies, emerging diplomatic agency, and transnational survival strategies.

One of the most striking factual corrections Wihtol de Wenden offers to popular Western narratives is the sheer scale of migration within the Global South. The total scale of migration flows to the Global South, currently standing at 140 million people, has now reached the exact same scale as migration flows to the Global North. The character of this Southern mobility is deeply complex and distinctly different from Northern migration regimes. In the Global North, legal migrants can often secure rights similar to citizens over time, but in South-South migration, formal rights are rarely recognized. Entry and residence are largely built on fragile tolerance, particularly for asylum seekers, or are strictly tied to temporary labor contracts, such as in the Gulf States.

Furthermore, the narrative that Europe or North America bears the brunt of the global refugee crisis is factually dismantled by the reality that seventy-five percent of refugees originating from countries in the Global South travel to other Southern countries. The book highlights that Afghans primarily flee to Iran and Pakistan, Sudanese refugees move to Egypt and Uganda, and Syrians find shelter in Turkey and Lebanon. Wihtol de Wenden astutely points out that the boundaries between forced and voluntary migration are increasingly dissolving, resulting in mixed flows. In the Global South, people fleeing localized violence, extreme poverty, or climate degradation often fall into these mixed flows where distinguishing an economic migrant from a refugee is practically impossible.

To understand why people move within the Global South, Wihtol de Wenden leverages several sociological frameworks, most notably Thomas Faist's concept of the transnational social question. Faist argues that the primary lens for understanding global inequality is no longer the Marxist internal class struggle, but rather the massive social disparities between and within regions of the globe. Today, location, where one is born, is the ultimate determinant of human inequality.

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For populations in the Global South, passports dictate their future, dictating their right to mobility and access to social protection. Afghanistan, for example, holds a passport granting visa-free access to a mere 26 countries, virtually locking its citizens out of the legal global mobility enjoyed by the Global North. Consequently, citizens of failed or violently contested states must resort to informal South-South border crossings to seek basic human security, water, and education.

A crucial sub-section of South-South migration involves environmentally displaced persons. The book notes that approximately 50 million people are currently displaced by environmental factors. Up to 200 million could be displaced by the end of the century. The vast majority of this displacement occurs as South-South migration, either internally or to neighboring countries. Despite the massive scale of this displacement, such as the existential threat facing Bangladesh, these individuals possess no internationally recognized legal status. Because the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) does not view environmental degradation as persecution, these vulnerable populations remain unprotected by the 1951 Geneva Convention, leaving Southern nations to absorb these internal and cross-border shocks entirely on their own.

Historically, the global migration regime was shaped almost exclusively by powerful immigration states like the United States, Canada, and European nations. However, *Migration and International Relations* highlights a fascinating shift with the rise of migration diplomacy led by countries in the Global South. Southern nations have recognized that migration is a potent diplomatic lever, and countries that serve as transit hubs, such as Turkey, Morocco, Libya, and Mexico, have successfully weaponised their geographical positions to gain geopolitical bargaining power. For example, in 2016, Turkey agreed to host millions of Middle Eastern refugees in exchange for €6 billion and renewed negotiations regarding EU membership. Turkey later used the threat of opening its borders to Greece as leverage when it felt the European Union was failing to meet its demands. Similarly, Morocco has routinely used its border with the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla to exert pressure on Spain, while during the Gaddafi era, Libya extracted infrastructure projects and international legitimacy from European nations in exchange for acting as a containment zone for Sub-Saharan African migrants. While this diplomacy grants Southern states unprecedented leverage, it often comes at a horrific human cost, as the externalization of Northern borders into the Global South has resulted in severe human rights abuses, most notably in the so-called “Libyan Hell”.

In addition to transit leverage, development and migration are intimately tied in the Global South. The book effectively demolishes the Northern assumption that economic development will naturally halt migration, demonstrating instead that in the short term, development actually increases migration, as modernization and urbanization provide more people with the resources and information needed to move. Furthermore, migration is a massive economic engine for the Global South, with remittances sent by migrants back to their countries of origin amounting to approximately \$550 billion annually. This sum is vastly superior to all global public development aid combined. In nations like Senegal and Cape Verde, remittances account for twenty percent of the GNP, acting as a crucial survival mechanism and a form of decentralized insurance against the failures of local states.

Wihlto de Wenden details the faltering attempts to create a unified system of global migration governance, such as the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and the 2018 Marrakech Global Compact for Migration. The fundamental failure of these initiatives lies in the stark polarization between the North and the South. For example, the 1990 UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families

has been ratified by 56 states, all of which are in the Global South. Nations in the Global North strictly refuse to sign it because it grants baseline rights to irregular migrants. This creates what Aristide Zolberg famously termed strange bedfellows in the political arena. Emigration countries in the South, human rights NGOs, and multinational corporations all advocate for open borders, but they share no common ideological ground, making unified transnational mobilization nearly impossible. The Global South advocates for a win-win-win approach, where migration benefits the migrant, the origin country via remittances, and the destination country via labour, but the Global North remains entrenched in a security-first, border-militarisation mindset.

While the book provides invaluable data on the structural mechanisms of migration, a critical reader must acknowledge its geographical bias. Despite the title promising a global view of international relations, Wihtol de Wenden's analysis is heavily skewed toward Europe and the Euro-Mediterranean space. The discussions on South-South migration, while present and highly informative, often feel peripheral to the overarching narrative of European policy failures, the Schengen area, and Frontex. For instance, while the book acknowledges the massive internal displacement and inter-state movement within Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, it rarely dedicates the same granular, policy-level analysis to spaces like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the Mercosur residence agreements as it does to the EU's Dublin regulations. Consequently, the Global South is sometimes analysed primarily as a staging ground for eventual migration to the North, rather than an ecosystem of complex, localised mobility regimes.

Catherine Wihtol de Wenden's *Migration and International Relations* is a vital, factually dense synthesis of how human mobility is rewriting the rules of global diplomacy. By unpacking the statistics and theories within the text, it becomes undeniably clear that the future of global migration will not be dictated solely by Washington or Brussels. The Global South is no longer just a passive zone of departure as it is an active, highly strategic player in international relations. As populations in the South navigate failing states, demographic explosions, and the devastating impacts of climate change, South-South migration will only accelerate. If the international community wishes to avoid perpetual humanitarian crises, it must abandon the fantasy that border militarization can stop structural mobility, and instead engage honestly with the social realities and diplomatic agency of the Global South.