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A Tale of Two Tactics
Civil Society and Competing Visions of Global Migration Governance from Below

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The disciplining of migration includes the way this issue is framed on the global level: The securitization of migration, the technical concept of “migration management” and the promotion of the “migration and development mantra” were all put on the agenda by nation-states and international organizations (IOs). But in recent years, migrant organizations have increasingly worked on establishing a counter-discourse that questions or negates these “truths”. Their aim is to shift the focus towards issues like human development, gender awareness, a rights-based approach to migration and the de-militarization of borders. While these goals may be widely agreed upon among many of those globally active organizations, there are significant differences regarding the strategies on how to reach them and contribute to global migration governance “from below”.

In this chapter, the “agency-achieving measures” of two “clusters” of migrant organizations towards the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) are analysed: 1 The People’s Global Action on Migration, Development and Human Rights (PGA) and the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees (IAMR).

Disciplining of migration and migrants can happen in a number of ways, some of which are more subtle than others. The more obvious forms are regulations ranging from immigration laws to guest worker programs, technologies which are increasingly employed in border controls or various forms of “managing” migration. But the term “managing” is also part of the more subtle forms of disciplining: by framing migration as a challenge that can be managed, the discursive ground is laid for solutions “from above” while little is said about
the rights of those migrants involved. Migrant representatives or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that lobby on their behalf are thus reduced from subjects with whom one argues on an almost equal level to objects of these managing efforts. Many migrant organizations do not simply accept this role, though, but have rather developed their own counter-strategies to these disciplining efforts in order to achieve or increase their agency. The GFMD, although an institution introduced only in 2007, has become a place to highlight these competing strategies of nation-states and their international institutions on the one side and civil society on the other – but also within the migrant community.

This chapter discusses the attempts to discipline migrants within the emerging global governance of migration framework and then introduces their counter-strategies. By drawing from approaches in International Relations (IR) Theory and social movement studies, four agency-achieving measures are defined that civil society actors use to advance their rights-based understanding of migration: first, agenda setting, which includes framing as well as acting as norm entrepreneurs; second, the use – and creation – of political opportunity structures; third, alliance building (“islands of persuasion”) and, fourth, “inside-outside” strategies. These four measures are analysed from the perspective of the networks behind the two major parallel events of the GFMD process – the PGA (People’s Global Action on Migration, Development and Human Rights) and IAMR (the International Assembly of Migrants and Refugees). It is of high significance that in both cases the main impetus for collective action originates in the global South.

The disciplining nature of the migration-development nexus

After decades of inertia, at the turn of the millennium migration forcefully came to the international agenda, as was observed by Kathleen Newland from the Washington-based Migration Policy Institute: ‘Suddenly, migration was everywhere one looked in the UN system and beyond’ (Newland, 2010, p. 332). Several new initiatives and processes were begun, existing organizations like the International Labour Organization (ILO) took up the issue and new venues for addressing migration were formed. Among those were the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) and the aforementioned GFMD, a direct result of the High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development (HLD) held by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2006.