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The Foreign Policy of Irregular Migration Governance: State Security and Migrants' Insecurity in Italy and Australia / Gabriele Abbondanza.
- New York ; Abingdon : Routledge, 2025. - 134 p. : ill. (4 B/W). - ISBN 978-1-0327-1126-3 (pbk); 978-1-0327-1125-6 (hbk)

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BOOK REVIEW

Migrants, States and Security: Governing Irregular Migration in Italy and Australia

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Irregular migration remains one of the most polarising issues in contemporary Western politics. It shapes elections, referendums, diplomatic relations and public debates. Yet, scholarship often examines the perspectives of migrants, local communities and states in parallel rather than in relation to one another. So argues Gabriele Abbondanza, Assistant Professor in International Relations at Comillas Pontifical University. His central claim is that these viewpoints must be analysed together to understand the governance of irregular migration, and particularly its foreign policy dimension.

In *The Foreign Policy of Irregular Migration Governance: State Security and Migrants' Insecurity in Italy and Australia*, Abbondanza examines two central themes: how irregular migration governance can be analysed through a framework that incorporates migrants, locals and states; and how such an approach illuminates the external – or foreign policy – dimension of migration control. The author addresses these issues by examining Italy and Australia – two countries that rely heavily on restrictive migration policies and externalisation yet are rarely analysed together.

Abbondanza's book is a timely and important contribution to migration studies, offering an interdisciplinary and policy-relevant analysis that will interest scholars, practitioners and policymakers alike. It examines what he calls the “foreign policy of irregular migration governance” (1) through an analytical grid that bridges migration studies, international relations (IR) and security studies. The comparative case study design, which draws on foreign policy analysis and a holistic, multi-actor approach, provides valuable insights into migration governance across continents.

The book consists of two main parts. The first offers an overview of migration trends and the book's structure (Introduction), a discussion of its theoretical foundations (Chapter 2) and a comparative account of Italian and Australian migration policies (Chapter 3). The second half (Chapters 4-6) explores the implications of the analysis from security, policy and theoretical perspectives.

Chapter 2 sets out the theoretical framework. Abbondanza reviews migration theories from three vantage points: those centred on migrants, those explaining local communities' reactions and those focusing on states. The first group is divided into five strands – functionalist (focusing on push and pull factors), structuralist and trans-nationalist (both addressing structural factors, such as globalisation), perceptionist (stressing migrants' psychological attributes and aspirations) and hybridist (combining elements from different approaches). The second brings together four explanations for opposition to migration among citizens in destination countries – resource-based (emphasising limits in actual resources), groupist (stressing competition between different groups), psychological and perception-driven

(highlighting fears and misperceptions). The third covers IR theories, including realism, liberalism, constructivism and critical approaches. Drawing on these traditions, Abbondanza argues for “theoretical eclecticism” (91) to capture the complexity of migration dynamics across all three levels of analysis.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of Italy’s and Australia’s “foreign policy on irregular migration” (30). Outlining major policy developments between 2000 and 2024, the chapter identifies a convergence between the two countries’ approaches. Both have used pushbacks, externalisation agreements, funding for transit countries and military missions, among other tools. While the chapter is empirically rich, a more precise definition of the ‘foreign policy on irregular migration’ would have strengthened the analytical focus, particularly given the blurred boundaries between internal and external policies. A discussion of why this term was chosen rather than the more established ‘external dimension of migration policy’ would also have helped clarify its conceptual choices. Nonetheless, the chapter provides a detailed and insightful analysis of migration policies in Italy and Australia.

Chapter 4 dissects the multiple dimensions of migrants’ human security – including vulnerabilities in countries of origin, along migration routes and in destination countries – and contrasts them with states’ national security concerns such as border control, perceived links between migration, terrorism and crime, and deterrence strategies. The core argument is that migrants’ and states’ security are closely interconnected: as states strengthen restrictive measures, migrants’ insecurity tends to increase.

Chapter 5 turns to policy implications, assessing policy gaps, alternatives and dilemmas. Abbondanza argues that both Italy and Australia experience significant implementation gaps, though Australia’s policies have been markedly more effective due to a less volatile regional environment, the absence of a Bill of Rights and lower arrival numbers. The chapter evaluates six types of policy alternatives, including open or closed borders, regional solutions involving destination or transit countries, and the creation of legal pathways. It offers an extensive assessment of the controversial extra-territorial asylum processing (exemplified by the 2024 Italy-Albania agreement), outlining the conditions under which it might benefit both migrants and destination states. This constitutes the book’s most significant, and possibly most controversial, policy contribution and will interest scholars and practitioners alike, given the ongoing relevance and debate surrounding extra-territorial asylum processing. The chapter concludes by highlighting what it portrays as the “conflicted choice” between the “moral imperative” to protect lives and the “national interest” to safeguard borders (79).

Chapter 6 returns to theory. It argues for an “eclectic approach” (91) incorporating three levels of analysis: migrants (whose growing numbers reflect intersecting humanitarian, economic, environmental and political crises), destination countries (which design and implement policies) and local citizens (who confront an increasingly politicised and securitised migration debate). According to Abbondanza, this multi-level framework is essential for analysing the governance of irregular migration and its foreign policy dimensions, insofar as each level of analysis supplies what the others lack. Combined together into a single theoretical framework, these approaches provide a more complete account of migration drivers, receiving societies’ (mis)perceptions, and states’ policy responses than any single perspective could offer. This entails both intradisciplinary eclecticism (multiple theories within a discipline) and multidisciplinary eclecticism (theories drawn from different disciplines). The breadth this demands is admittedly challenging, but it is also the approach’s chief virtue, encouraging scholars to move beyond disciplinary and theoretical divides.

The conclusion outlines possible future scenarios. It distinguishes unlikely developments (such as declining birth rates in origin countries reducing migration pressures, or more liberal policies in destination states), probable ones (continued restrictions and externalisation) and

desirable scenarios (such as enhanced multilateral cooperation, including the establishment of extra-territorial asylum processing systems).

Overall, Abbondanza offers a comprehensive analysis of the connections between irregular migration and foreign policy through a framework that integrates the perspectives of migrants, states and local communities. The book's call for intra- and multi-disciplinary approach, while not easy to operationalise, represents a powerful call to move beyond established theoretical and disciplinary divides. Its clear writing style, policy-oriented analysis and helpful summary tables will make it valuable to scholars of migration studies, IR and security studies, as well as to policymakers and journalists.

The book represents an important contribution to the study of international migration. Its comparative focus on Italy and Australia, its detailed examination of externalised migration control, and its holistic, multi-level theoretical framework offer fresh insights into the "foreign policy of irregular migration governance" and the interactions between state and non-state actors in this contested policy domain.

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