

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN DEVELOPMENT, MOBILITIES AND
MIGRATION

South–South Educational Migration, Humanitarianism and Development

Views from the Caribbean, North Africa
and the Middle East

Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh



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This ground-breaking book is one of the first to analyse the important phenomenon of South–South educational migration for refugees. It focuses particularly on South–South scholarship programmes in Cuba and Libya, which have granted free education to children, adolescents and young adults from two of the world's most protracted refugee situations: Sahrawis and Palestinians.

Through in-depth multi-sited fieldwork conducted with and about Sahrawi and Palestinian refugee-students in Cuba and Libya, and following their return to the desert-based Sahrawi refugee camps in Algeria and the urban Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, this highly pertinent study brings refugees' views and voices to the forefront and sheds a unique light on their understandings of self-sufficiency, humanitarianism and hospitality. It critically assesses the impact of diverse policies designed to maximise self-sufficiency and to reduce both brain drain and ongoing dependency upon Northern aid providers, exploring the extent to which South–South scholarship systems have challenged the power imbalances that typically characterise North to South development models.

Finally, this very timely study discusses the impact of the Arab Spring on Libya's support mechanisms for Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees, and considers the changing nature of Cuba's educational model in light of major ongoing political, ideological and economic shifts in the island state, asking whether there is a future for such alternative programmes and initiatives

This book will be a valuable resource for students, researchers and practitioners in the areas of migration studies, refugee studies, comparative education, development and humanitarian studies, international relations and regional studies (Latin America, Middle East and North Africa).

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To Bissan-María and Yousif

'In a field where decentralised and historically-grounded studies remain rare, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh questions common assumptions about the nature, foundations, and lived experiences of humanitarian action. By documenting refugees' perceptions and pathways, she demonstrates that "alternative" models of support originating in the global South are neither utopias of solidarity nor mere political instruments. A challenging yet accessible insight into the complex identities, conflicting opportunities and paradoxical outcomes of humanitarian action.'

Eleanor Davey, University of Manchester, UK

'Fiddian-Qasmiyeh's excellent research opens our eyes to an important and neglected phenomenon: the transnational movement of refugees from one Southern state to another for educational purposes. Based on in-depth fieldwork, the author explains the politics underlying such movements and their social consequences, and unpacks the implications for how we think about humanitarianism and development. The book is accessible, well-written, and highly original.'

Alexander Betts, University of Oxford, UK

'This book draws attention to some of the most significant experiences of international migration today, those of Palestinian and Sahrawi refugee-migrant students, as they exercise agency over their own lives, pursuing ambitious education and employment goals in their camps in the MENA region and beyond. Their trials, tribulations and achievements are traced in minute detail from the perspective of individuals, families and (stateless) nations. This indispensable book also investigates the transnational education systems that have welcomed thousands of these and other refugees in Cuba and Libya. These modes of South-South co-operation and solidarity are largely unknown in the global North, and they are analysed here on the basis of extensive fieldwork in three continents. This book is a remarkable achievement, and it will remain an essential reference in the field.'

Alfredo Saad-Filho, University of London, UK

'Challenging canonical studies of Western-centric humanitarianism, this book unearths the neglected history of Southern-led interventions developed as a response to and in solidarity with Palestinian and Sahrawi refugees. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh carefully analyses the intersecting case studies of Palestinians and Sahrawis educated in Libya and Cuba, and traces their personal, professional and political experiences of returning as refugee-graduates to their home-camps in Lebanon and Algeria. Her thorough and critical assessment of Derrida and Agamben provides the critical foundations to centralise the agency of these refugees, and to further problematise the complex relationship between hospitality and hostility in these encounters.'

Sari Hanafi, American University of Beirut, Lebanon

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This book is part of a broader comparative research project which examines the histories, modes of operation and implications of Southern-led responses to conflict-induced displacement. The book focuses specifically on initiatives revolving around South–South educational migration, drawing on the extensive research which I have conducted since 2001 with and about Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) refugees in countries both within and outside of the MENA region (including Algeria, Cuba, Lebanon, Libya, and Syria) – countries in the Global South which have provided different forms of humanitarian and development assistance to MENA refugee populations.

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Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
EFA	Education For All
GDP	gross domestic product
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
LDC	least developed country
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MINUSTAH	United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NUSW	National Union of Sahrawi Women
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
Polisario Front	Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguiat el-Hamra and Rio de Oro
SADR	Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic
SSC	Special Unit for South-South Cooperation of the United Nations Development Programme
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

1 South–South educational migration and development

Introduction

Refugees often engage in multiple, and overlapping, forms of mobility and migration: far from being stagnant and dependent objects of humanitarian action who wait to be ‘saved’ by powerful Others,¹ Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees – amongst many others – have historically been highly mobile within and outside the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) for educational and employment purposes alike.

MENA refugees’ access to Cuban and Libyan schools and universities are key examples of the ways in which transnational education systems have been created by, and in, the margins for other marginal(ised) populations: through such programmes, education has been provided by the Other for the Other, with providers and recipients alike being from, and of, the periphery.² In the context under analysis, the educational providers (two sovereign states) can be conceptualised as being positioned in the independent margin, providing support to members of the dependent margin: refugees who belong to territories and groups pending decolonisation and self-determination.

This book, therefore, examines the experiences of Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees during and after studying in Cuba and Libya both as a form of international educational migration, and as an example of South–South cooperation. In addition to, or precisely by, providing a different entry point to the analysis of the education-migration nexus from the perspective of non-aligned states, the Cuban and Libyan initiatives, as models of South–South cooperation, concurrently provide an ‘alternative’ to hegemonic responses to, and analyses of, forced migration.

These programmes have often offered an explicit challenge to mainstream theory, policy and practice vis-à-vis development and humanitarianism. Indeed, the policies and programmes advocated by Northern states and international organisations ‘normatively privilege ... some forms of migration and/or development... [while] others [are] occluded through their invisibilisation’ (Raghuram 2009: 108). To this I would add that these actors also ‘normatively privilege’ certain models of education, and certain student(s’) bodies, to the detriment of Others. Through these (and other) mutually reinforcing processes,

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diverse forms of migration (such as refugee children's, adolescents' and young adults' migration to access education), planes and directionalities of migration ('horizontal' and South–South migration), or alternative conceptualisations of development and humanitarianism (such as local, national or international self-sufficiency) have been marginalised from view. This book consequently places these marginalised subjects at the core of its analysis.

I start from the premise that not all international students, refugees and education systems are equally positioned, or have similar aims and expectations for the future. Indeed, if international student migration as a whole has remained under-examined (King and Raghuram 2013: 127), the experiences of hybrid figures such as 'refugee-student-migrants' have received even less academic attention, especially in the context of educational migration within the Global South, and in contexts which oppose, rather than reproduce, financially driven models of education.³

In particular, the book critically traces and examines the history and legacies of initiatives developed by two such states with a long history of supporting anti-colonial and liberation movements – Cuba and Libya – for two groups of long-standing Middle Eastern refugees. The first are Sahrawi refugees whose families are amongst the approximately 165,000 refugees currently in desert-based refugee camps in South-West Algeria; the Sahrawi are the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' second-most long-standing caseload, having been displaced in 1975 when the non-self-governing territory now known as the Western Sahara (formerly called the Spanish Sahara) was occupied by force by Morocco and Mauritania.⁴ The second group are Palestinian refugees – the oldest protracted refugee situation in the world as a result of their expulsion, displacement and dispossession before, during and after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. An estimated 5 million Palestinians remain dispersed across the Middle East and in the broader diaspora outside of the MENA region, with this book focusing on those Palestinians who have migrated to Cuba or Libya from their urban refugee camp homes in Lebanon, a country which hosts approximately 455,000 Palestinians (UNRWA, 2014).

The comparative analysis developed in this book across these two refugee groups is highly relevant because '[t]he considerable literature on "refugee education" that has developed *overlooks the case of Palestinian refugees in host countries*' (Demirdjian 2012: 14, emphasis added). 'Overlooking' Palestinian refugees is habitual within Refugee and Forced Migration Studies due to academics', politicians' and policymakers' claims of Palestinian 'exceptionalism' (Kagan 2009; Akram 2014). In part, these claims to Palestinian exceptionalism are justified on the basis that although the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is mandated to assist and protect 'refugees' around the world (including Sahrawi refugees), Palestinians are the only group of refugees excluded from the UNHCR's mandate since a separate United Nations (UN) agency – the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) – is ostensibly responsible for them (and their education) in five operational areas of the contemporary Middle East: Lebanon (the focus of this book), Syria, Jordan, Gaza

and the West Bank. A related distinction is that although the 'international' definition of a 'refugee' is encompassed in the 1951 Geneva Convention on the Status of Refugees,⁵ no such Convention definition exists for *Palestinian* refugees.⁶

If the provision of primary, secondary and tertiary level education for refugees is to be heralded – as international humanitarian agencies and Northern donors increasingly hold⁷ – this leads us to interrogate why the programmes centralised in this book have been, at best, relegated to the margins of academic and policy analysis. Education may indeed now be recognised as a human right, and yet 'the ideology underpinning education and the organization, delivery and content of education is not neutral, and indeed can never be neutral because it always has political intention either for the domination of people or for their liberation' (Alzaroo and Lewando-Hundt 2003: 166). In this regard, both the Cuban and Libyan *national* education systems have been scrutinised on the basis of their ideological foundations and aims, often leading to their rejection of these as systems geared towards indoctrinating children and youth.⁸ In contrast, the internationalist nature and implications of the Cuban education programme, and the Pan-Arabist reach of Libya's education system, have remained under-examined to date, especially vis-à-vis their relationship with, and influence upon, refugee groups from the Middle East and North Africa.

In effect, the Cuban and Libyan case studies clearly correspond to the broader networks 'of education systems under historical socialism' which are receiving increasing attention, 'particularly [due to] the provision of education for *citizens* of other, non-socialist, developing *countries* under the banner of international solidarity and as demonstrations of the superiority of socialist ideology' (Griffiths and Millei 2013: 165, emphasis added). As argued in this book, such systems reached not only *citizens* from developing *countries*, but also *refugee* children, adolescents and young adults associated with liberation movements struggling for the right to self-determination in the MENA region.⁹

This book demonstrates not only the importance of historically and geopolitically situating the experiences of refugees as international *students* but also of understanding the contours, experiences and impacts of educational *migration* as lived processes of (im)mobility, departure, arrival, emplacement and displacement. Furthermore, examining Cuba's and Libya's support for Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees through a *migratory* lens also enables us to develop an alternative analysis of dependency theories, which are traditionally understood to conceptualise migration as part of the exploitative capitalist system which leads to 'brain drain' (i.e. see de Haas 2008; King 2012: 17–18). This widespread interpretation of dependency theory effectively assumes that 'migration' is equal to 'labour migration', that movement will take place in a particular direction (from South to North) and that migration itself causes 'the development of underdevelopment' (Baran 1973). In contrast, a more nuanced relationship between migration and (under)development can be recognised if this equation between 'migration' and 'labour migration' from peripheral countries to the Northern core is disrupted.

Cuba's and Libya's state policies and worldviews have historically been heavily influenced by dependency theories, and yet certain configurations of

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educational migration have been seen by these states as a possible *solution* to underdevelopment and geopolitical marginalisation (also see Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010, 2011). A key question explored in the following chapters is, therefore, to what extent refugees' access to basic and further education in Southern states such as Cuba or Libya challenges, or reproduces, ties of dependency between refugees and their communities of origin on the one hand, and hegemonic states and institutions on the other.

Structure of the book

Following this introductory chapter, the history and broad aims of South–South cooperation are explored in [Chapter 2](#), reflecting on its origin as an anti-colonial paradigm associated with the non-aligned movement, to the present day institutional mainstreaming of South–South initiatives by Northern states, and inter-governmental agencies including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNHCR. The chapter argues that recognising the historical and ongoing significance of South–South cooperation enables us to (re)inscribe, rather than erase, Others from the multifaceted history of development and humanitarian action writ large.¹⁰ Furthermore, it notes that in spite of increasing attention to South–South development initiatives – such as China's development projects across Sub-Saharan Africa and collaboration on South–South technology transfer – studies of South–South humanitarian responses to refugee situations are almost entirely absent from the literature. This long-standing gap in theoretical and conceptual engagement with Other models of responding to displacement and dispossession – including in the context of refugee education – is, therefore, filled in the subsequent chapters by focusing on how, why and to what effect Cuba and Libya have provided a free education to refugees from the Middle East and North Africa.

Turning to the first main case-study – Cuba's model of South–South cooperation with MENA refugees – [Chapter 3](#) outlines the Cuban internationalist scholarship programme as a whole, before highlighting the ideological and political connections which have existed between Cuba and Arab socialist states and liberation movements since the 1950s, and the broad conditions which make Sahrawi and Palestinian students' educational migration to Cuba desirable or necessary. It then explores the experiences and expectations of a group of MENA students¹¹ who were studying in Cuba at the time of my research there in 2006.¹² The chapter thus traces students' accounts of material conditions in Cuba and at 'home', and of the nature of social relations with Cuban citizens and other MENA students, including with regards to religious identity and practice. It then concludes by turning to students' expectations for their own future upon graduation and the future of the programme itself, reflecting not only upon the transnational and trans-generational nature of the Cuban programme, but also on the extent to which Cuba's provision of scholarships for doubly and triply marginalised MENA refugees has created a space for what Qasmiyeh and I call the 'central margin' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2010).

By presenting students' accounts of the educational migration programme through interviews conducted in Cuba, [Chapter 3](#), therefore, offers one particular perspective of the scholarship system which is subsequently compared and contrasted with Sahrawi and Palestinian graduates' accounts of having studied in Cuba and having returned to their refugee camp homes – to the desert-based Sahrawi refugee camps in South-West Algeria ([Chapter 4](#)) and the urban Palestinian refugee camps across Lebanon ([Chapter 5](#)) respectively.

[Chapter 4](#) examines the accounts of Sahrawi graduates in their home-camps in Algeria, arguing that although 'Cuba' is pivotal in Sahrawi refugees' imaginary landscapes and ideoscapes in the camps, a range of paradoxical outcomes have arisen from Sahrawi participation in this education programme. Hence, although a 'central margin' may have been created in Cuba, many graduates have experienced different forms of marginalisation and ostracism upon their return to the camps – female graduates in particular – while other graduates have placed themselves at the margins of the camps by undertaking onward labour migration to work as medical doctors in Spain, where their Cuban medical degrees are readily recognised. The chapter concludes by exploring the emerging ways in which different individuals and groups in the Sahrawi context evaluate these and other courses of action in relation to notions of 'self-sufficiency' and renewed dependence upon the North. In essence, the chapter contends that the Cuban scholarship system has reshaped and reinforced, rather than reduced, the Sahrawi refugee camps' dependence upon Northern aid providers, and yet Sahrawi refugees disagree as to whether these outcomes are considered to be a 'success' or a 'failure' in securing a 'better future' for Sahrawi individuals and families in the refugee camps and for the Sahrawi quest for self-determination more broadly.

An alternative perspective on the Cuban educational migration programme, and of 'self-sufficiency', is offered in [Chapter 5](#) through a critical analysis of Palestinian graduates' narratives of gaining access to, studying in and returning from Cuba. Taking an explicitly comparative approach with the perspectives offered in Cuba and in the Sahrawi refugee camps, the chapter argues that Palestinian graduates in Lebanon have developed diverse discursive and practical strategies to distance themselves from Cuba's influence and legacy, including by centralising the roles played by Palestinian actors throughout all stages of their migration to and from Cuba. The chapter subsequently considers the ways in which Palestinian graduates retrospectively conceptualise the nature and impacts of the Cuban educational migration programme, through reference to identity, ideology, politics and humanitarianism. By placing Palestinian refugee graduates' reflections of the relationship between humanitarianism, politics and ideology at the forefront of the analysis, this chapter, therefore, fills a major gap in debates which consistently prioritise the perspectives of academics, policymakers and practitioners on programmes which are designed and implemented on refugees' behalf. If the discursive erasure of Cuba's legacy can be linked to graduates' fears that they might be perceived by external actors (and especially by UNRWA) to have been indoctrinated whilst studying in Cuba, the ongoing influence of Cuba's education programme is in many ways also the result of structural conditions,

in this case local, national and international conditions which have (thus far) prevented Palestinian graduates from leaving the camps to work in Europe (as their Sahrawi counterparts have) or to work in Lebanese hospitals (due to the prohibition of Palestinians' employment as doctors in Lebanon). Consequently, Palestinian refugees continue to benefit from graduates' professional training in Cuba not only because they are committed to supporting their communities, but also because these graduates have limited alternatives. If the education programme has facilitated a high degree of Palestinian self-sufficiency in terms of medical professionals treating Palestinian patients in the camps, I conclude that this outcome can in many ways be considered to represent a form of what I refer to as 'circumstantial humanitarianism'.

Building upon the trans-regional, intergenerational and multi-directional links examined in [Chapters 3, 4 and 5](#), [Chapter 6](#) explores the changing nature and impact of Libya's support for Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees through initiatives, based upon Gaddafi's Pan-Arabist commitments, which are intimately linked to and yet significantly different from the Cuban internationalist education programme. In particular, this chapter examines the nature and implications of Libya's bifurcated approach to supporting Sahrawis on the one hand and Palestinians on the other. It starts by briefly tracing the history of Libya's structured support for Sahrawis, including through reference to Sahrawi graduates' experiences of having been allocated scholarships as young children through a bilateral agreement between the Polisario Front and the Libyan state. It then explores how, why and with what effect Gaddafi supported Palestinians' access to Libya's educational establishments through a range of intersecting mechanisms, including the provision of a small number of scholarships – primarily for individual Palestinians affiliated with particular factions to attend military colleges in Libya – but more broadly through the implementation of policies which facilitated the South–South migration of tens of thousands of Palestinians to Libya both as refugee-students but also as refugee-migrant workers.

In contrast with the formal scholarships institutionalised by Libya on behalf of Sahrawi refugees, [Chapter 6](#) argues that Palestinians' migration to form part of Libya's transnational eduscape, as students and teachers alike, can best be conceptualised as a process of 'self-service', a term I use to capture the extent to which Palestinians were encouraged to 'help themselves' by migrating to Libya, but also to centralise the practical and political benefits which Libya itself accrued by virtue of Palestinians' presence in North Africa. A key question guiding the chapter is, therefore, the extent to which Libya's support for refugees' education can be conceptualised as a mode of South–South cooperation designed to promote the self-sufficiency of refugees, and/or is more readily identifiable as part of Gaddafi's Pan-Arabist ideology and regional aims. Ultimately, I argue that far from creating a 'central margin' via education, Libya's approach to Sahrawi refugees, but especially to Palestinians, can thus be conceptualised as a policy of *hospitality* (following Derrida 2000) towards these refugees. This line of argumentation is developed through an analysis of discriminatory policies implemented sporadically by Gaddafi, and three major occasions when Sahrawi