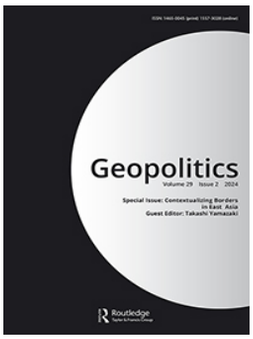

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"Do It Yourself!" Pedagogical Performances, Technical Expertise, and Crimmigration Control in the IOM's Capacity-Building Practices in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) implementation of the Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) in Nigeria. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of performativity and pragmatism, I conceptualise MIDAS as an attempt to resolve perceived social issues relating to the postcolonial ordering of global migration using biometric data collection tools. The deployment of the system is characterised by two ways of neutralising potential criticisms relating to the IOM's post-imperial nature: pedagogical performances that represent the organisation as a 'teacher' of migration management, and claims of technological neutrality based on international technical standards and 'best practices'. However, these technical interventions are not neutral; they have resulted in the expansion of crimmigration control practices in Nigeria, with a focus on security, risk, and crime control. The expansion of MIDAS has been accompanied by an increased focus on shared operating procedures between the Nigerian Immigration Service and federal agencies focused on law enforcement and transnational crime.

Introduction

During fieldwork in the summer of 2021 in Abuja, Nigeria, I attended an inter-agency cooperation workshop arranged by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), with several Nigerian federal agencies in attendance, prominently the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). The workshop focused on the development of new standard operating procedures for cooperation between these federal agencies, which is a prerequisite for enabling the full operability of the Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) at the Nigerian border.

MIDAS is a digital border management system that collects cross-border travellers' 'biographic and biometric data through the use of document readers, webcams and fingerprint readers' (IOM 2018b). The IOM offers this

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system, as a free alternative to private sector technologies, to states looking to 'modernise' their border control practices (IOM 2023). MIDAS is currently operational in at least 20 states, most of which are in Africa. Nigeria hosts the most extensive roll-out of the system, first deployed in the country in 2010. A basic MIDAS installation collects and stores travel document data in a centralised database accessible by national immigration authorities, but the technology can also be configured for more extensive risk assessments, migration policy planning, and checks against national and international policing alert lists. Such expansion is the current focus of the IOM's Immigration and Border Management division in Nigeria.

The system will not be able to connect to international alert lists such as Interpol's I-24/7 system or process more sensitive Advance Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) data until sufficient legal, operational, and technical frameworks for inter-agency cooperation and data sharing are put into place. At the workshop arranged by the IOM in August 2021, the organisation provided an abundance of visual materials prominently displaying its 'IOM: UN Migration' logo, and explained to participating agencies that:

> This intelligence [collected via MIDAS] gives us actionable results to tackle security risks. This project is very important for your country and your agencies. Nothing of this will ever happen unless you are able to put into place an interagency cooperation mechanism at the border. Keeping the data all for you will only give you a limited picture, and a limited picture gives you limited results. (Field diary, 19.8.2021)

To an external observer, the IOM seemed to run the show, providing detailed guidelines on what inter-agency cooperation procedures should look like as well as how and to what end MIDAS should be deployed at the border. Nonetheless, the organisation's officials also periodically reminded participants that, in the words of one official, 'I'm just a teacher. My only goal is convincing you that intelligence collection is absolutely important, to empower you [...] to solve crime and mitigate threats' (Field diary, 19.8.2021). A slide outlining the development of standard operating procedures stated: 'The agencies need to DO the development work – Do it yourself!' (Field diary, 19.8.2021).

In this article I argue that the prominence of the IOM in shaping migration control practices in Nigeria contradicts its self-proclaimed status as 'completely neutral', as one official put it in another meeting on the topic of inter-agency cooperation (Field diary, 28.7.2021). Drawing on the frameworks of performativity and pragmatism, I demonstrate that the IOM's promotion of its MIDAS system in Nigeria is highly political, due to the extent to which the system has contributed to reshaping border control practices in the country according to norms and standards primarily developed in the Global North.

I utilise the framework of performativity to critically analyse the IOM's capacity-building interventions as 'pedagogical performances' (Singler 2021). These performances primarily aim to reinforce the organisation's perceived status as a neutral, disinterested 'teacher' of 'correct' migration management practices. Pragmatism, in turn, is useful for theorising the technical components of MIDAS as inherently political to the extent that this system materialises a particular understanding of migration control as a social problem to which it represents a supposedly neutral 'solution'. The political nature of MIDAS-related capacity-building practices in Nigeria is evident in the expansion of 'crimmigration control', that is, increased legal and operational overlap between the fields of migration control and criminal justice (Brandariz 2022; Ferraris 2022; Hernández 2018; Stumpf 2006). This approach to border control is widespread in Global North states (Šalamon, Barry, and Elizabeth 2020), yet it represents a historically novel development in Nigerian border control practices.

Existing critical research into technology suggests that the practical impact of new devices is not entirely flexible at the point of their deployment (Jacobsen 2015; Matthewman 2011). While any particular technical tool is open to several uses, a hammer, for instance, would make for a painstaking writing instrument while it would be difficult to drive nails into wood using a pencil. For this reason, as Martin-Mazé and Perret (2021, 279) have argued, critical research into border control technologies should interrogate 'which actors contribute to assembling which rationality of border control through which devices'. In short, border control practices 'occur at the intersection between actors' social dispositions, the sociotechnical characteristics of devices and the broader social context in which both are embedded' (Martin-Mazé and Perret 2021, 282).

I contextualise the organisation's interventions against the background of the political and economic inequalities reflected in what Sharma (2020, 3) has called the 'Postcolonial New World Order of nationally sovereign states', as well as epistemic hierarchies that shape international norms and technological 'best practices' relating to migration management (Jegen 2023). I demonstrate how the IOM seeks to uphold and legitimise the global 'statist' order that privileges nation-states as the primary and legitimate actors of world politics (Cole 2017). This state-centric global order is understood here as postcolonial in that although it is characterised by the formal end of imperial rule, it nonetheless 'not only produces but normalises a racism in which political separations and segregations are seen as the natural *spatial* order of nationally sovereign states' (Sharma 2020, 4, original emphasis). Such racial and national segregations form the basis for differential access to cross-border mobility, no longer enacted on the basis of colonialism but rather states' sovereign authority to exclude non-citizens (Pallister-Wilkins 2022). When deploying the

terminology of Global North and South throughout this article, I also seek to highlight continuities in colonial and postcolonial relations of domination and othering; recent initiatives to Southernise academic research have also used this terminology to empower previously marginalised voices (Carrington et al. 2018; Sud and Sánchez-Ancochea 2022).

Below, I first describe the theoretical frameworks of performativity and pragmatism as they relate to critical research on technology. I then briefly outline the methodology underpinning this research, before providing some context on the IOM's role in shaping migration control practices globally. I then turn to the examination of original empirical data relating to the IOM's MIDAS-related projects in Nigeria. The discussion is organised according to three different levels of analysis. The overarching argument aims to produce a 'transversal' analysis that highlights the interconnections between these different levels and demonstrates how digital border control tools are the result the complex interplay between structural background conditions, human agency, and the effects of technical tools and standards (Basaran et al. 2017; Huysmans and Pontes Nogueira 2016). On a structural level, I highlight the postcolonial nature of the dominant discourses and norms that shape the IOM's practices globally. Moving onto an analysis of the organisation's practices on the ground, I show how the IOM engages in pedagogical performances in Nigeria. Finally, on the level of technology, I demonstrate that the IOM relies on a discourse of technical neutrality to depoliticise the various technical components of MIDAS. Nonetheless, the system has had the political effect of entrenching the global criminalisation of migration by expanding crimmigration control in Nigeria.

Theorising the Politics of Border Control Technologies

Several authors have laid the groundwork for examining the performative effects of technical systems like MIDAS (Amicelle, Aradau, and Jeandesboz 2015; Fabini 2019; Stambøl 2021). In this view, border control technologies not only have immediate material impacts in terms of how cross-border movements can be controlled and surveilled; they also constitute migration and border control as particular kinds of social issues. According to Giulia Fabini (2019, 177), '[b]orders and migrants are mutually constitutive through border performances'. Both humans and non-human technical objects can exert performative effects. Particularly as novel technical tools become increasingly complex and normalised in the context of everyday border control practices, these technologies influence the views and behaviour of policy-makers and other practitioners (Jeandesboz 2016; Müller and Richmond 2023). For instance, according to Alpa Parmar (2019), tools intended to assess the immigration status of criminal suspects more neutrally in the UK had the

unintended impact of increasing levels of suspicion and scrutiny of minority ethnic suspects.

Elsewhere, I have analysed the performative effects of the IOM's MIDAS on a global level (Singler 2021). In its public discourse, the IOM refers to MIDAS as evidence of its supposedly neutral, pedagogical role in 'teaching' Southern states about migration management. I conceptualised these discursive moves as 'pedagogical performances' (Singler 2021, 463), which are crucial to neutralise criticisms of the organisation as 'post-imperial' and promoting the interests of its wealthier Global North funders (Andrijasevic and Walters 2010). Below, I show how this broader pedagogical discourse is enacted on the ground through the IOM's training practices and its technical interventions.

The framework of performativity is most useful for analysing the political effects of technical tools at the point of their deployment and daily operation. Pragmatism, in turn, provides a useful framework for responding to Martin-Mazé and Perret's (2021) call for researchers to inquire into who develops which border control tools and why. Pragmatists conceptualise technology as 'the invention, development, and cognitive deployment of tools and other artefacts, brought to bear on raw materials and intermediate stock parts, with a view to the resolution of perceived problems' (Hickman 2001, 12). This conception can illuminate how and why existing technical tools are deployed and suggests that the development of new tools is shaped by two key factors: a background of dominant practices and norms – including existing technical tools that shape human action – and the identification of perceived social problems which existing technologies have been unable to resolve. As Hickman (2001, 59) explains, 'new forms of technological methods and artifacts tend to incorporate elements of older techniques and artifacts as their content. New technologies do not arise out of nothing, but are built on the basis of more or less reliable institutions, customs, and habits'.

Annabelle Littoz-Monnet (2022, 7) argues in her analysis of expertise in global governance that while particular tools and practices are developed to tackle specific problems, 'they also intersect with more structural factors' such as 'epistemic hierarchies [that] structure the space within which actors operate'. The innovative process of developing new technical tools, however, is not entirely predetermined by this social and technological background, but also motivated by the perceived failure of existing tools to resolve social problems. The development of new tools is 'characterised by organised and deliberate transformations of existing situations in ways that generate new outcomes, or products' (Hickman 2001, 17). In short, the pragmatist conception of technology asks what are the relevant social and technological background conditions that have shaped the IOM's development of MIDAS, and what perceived social problems the organisation has attempted to solve through the deployment of this new system.

Pragmatism also offers a productive framework for avoiding both the reductionism of instrumentalist theories of technology and the risks of depoliticisation inherent to 'assemblage' theories and other posthumanist perspectives (for a more complete discussion, see Singler 2023). Critical border scholars have demonstrated how the political effects of new digital migration control technologies are not always predictable or reducible to the intentions of their developers or deployers (Amicelle, Aradau, and Jeandesboz 2015; Leese 2014). In order to highlight the extent to which digital technologies shape human action, critical authors have relied on conceptualising the sociotechnical networks of human and non-human actors engaged in border control as 'assemblages' (Madianou 2019; Müller 2015; Müller and Richmond 2023). In this view, critical analysis ought to dispense with human/nonhuman distinctions and view both human agents and material technologies as actors shaping border control practices (Jeandesboz 2016).

Despite their analytical benefits, the risk of posthumanist perspectives is the reification of depoliticising discourses that present the human developers of new border control technologies as not responsible for their potential misuses or harms. The risk here is that focusing too much on the independent agency of technical tools themselves overlooks crucial social understandings and political decisions that influenced the process of developing these tools. Whether, for instance, the developers of digital border control technologies view migration primarily as a human rights issue, or a national security issue, will have bearing on the kinds of technical tools that are developed. As Thomas Lemke (2018, 33) has argued, focusing on technical agency often inadvertently 'translates into a systematic blindness concerning the inequalities, asymmetries and hierarchies' built into new digital tools. As an alternative theoretical framework, pragmatism incorporates posthumanist insights regarding the independent effects of new technologies on bordering practices, while retaining a focus on the political accountability of humans by conceptualising these tools as the result of prior political decisions and problem formulations by human actors (Pihlström 2021). In doing so, it provides a fruitful perspective from which to deconstruct the politics of MIDAS.

Methods and Data Collection

The arguments presented in this article are based on elite interviews with IOM officials from its Immigration and Border Management division as well as fieldwork at the organisation's field office in Abuja, Nigeria.[1] I carried out 28 online semi-structured interviews with IOM officials between January – June 2021. From July – September 2021, I was based in the IOM field offices in Abuja. There, I carried out further informal interviews and observed the daily work of IOM employees, including their meetings and training sessions

with Nigerian federal officials, particularly from the NIS and MoJ. I thematically coded interview transcripts and digitised field notes using NVivo (Hilal and Said Alabri 2013). The combination of document analysis, qualitative interviews, and non-participant observation is particularly useful in uncovering discrepancies between rhetoric and practice by triangulating findings from various data sources (Gadd 2012; Mabry 2008).

It is important to highlight my positionality as a white male academic researcher based in the Global North, given the focus of this article on postcolonial power dynamics. Throughout the research process, I have adopted a stance of critical reflexivity, continually examining how my physical characteristics, social background, and intellectual and political dispositions have shaped the research process (Salter 2013). The arguments presented below are largely a result of critically reflecting on why Nigerian officials often assumed that as a white European researcher, I must be part of the IOM team running training workshops in the country. In order to mitigate potential concerns relating to these power dynamics, I distanced myself from the organisation's officials at workshops, and made it clear to interview participants that my research was meant to provide a critical perspective on the IOM's work in the country. My status as a white European man who was nonetheless critical of the organisation resulted in interesting, nuanced, and frank conversations with both Nigerian federal officials and IOM employees. In this way, this research has built on the arguments of authors such as Sultana (2007, 376) who argues that 'acknowledging one's own positionality or subjectivity should not mean abandoning work'. Instead of abandoning the research, I opted instead to focus my arguments on deconstructing and critiquing postcolonial power dynamics. Elsewhere, I have outlined in more detail how my research aims to contribute to the projects of Southernising and decolonising academic research into border control globally (Singler 2023).

The IOM and the Global Politics of Border Control

Following its evolution from the Provisional Intergovernmental Committee for the Movement of Migrants in Europe in 1951 to a fully-fledged International Organization for Migration in 1989 (Georgi 2010), the IOM has in recent decades become one of the most influential international organisations dealing with migration and border control on a global level. Its annual operational budget – approximately $1.2bn in 2022 – funds migration-related interventions implemented by the organisation's 15,000 staff members across 590 offices globally. Of this total budget, approximately $223 million is directed towards 'regulating migration', including the Immigration and Border Management division, which has developed the technical tools that comprise MIDAS (IOM 2021). Existing research has examined the impact of the interventions that this budget has funded, demonstrating that the

organisation has undoubtedly had a significant effect on migration control practices on a global level (Pécoud 2020).

The structure of the IOM's budget brings into view three relevant considerations regarding the background context of the organisation's development of new border control technologies. First, its funding comes from its own member states, who seek to reaffirm what Georgi (2010, 64) has termed the 'national sovereignty project'. This term refers to the hegemonic view of migration primarily as a matter of sovereign authority rather than, for instance, human rights or supranational governance. As several researchers have highlighted, although the IOM extensively draws on discourses at the intersection of human rights and neoliberal economic governance, it conceptualises migration primarily as a problem of sovereign authority (Ashutosh and Mountz 2011). In practice, its interventions in the Global South focus on 'capacity building' to strengthen states' ability to police their borders, shaping local migration control practices while formally respecting state sovereignty (Geiger and Pécoud 2014, 875).

This statist orientation is unsurprising for an organisation funded by sovereign states, yet the specific source of its funding is the second key factor shaping its conceptualisation of migration control. Most of the IOM's budget comes from wealthy Northern donor states (Patz and Svanhildur 2020). In 2022, the largest contributors were the United States ($942 million) and the European Union ($512 million), with Germany, Canada, and the United Kingdom all contributing over $100 million (IOM 2024). The top 10 donors include nine Global North states along with the United Nations itself.

Consequently, Pécoud (2020, 13) has argued that 'the IOM tends to align itself with the agenda of the Global North and is thus bound to be involved in some of the toughest measures designed to fight undocumented migration'. The organisation's Global North funders often outsource harsh migration control policies to the IOM in order to politically distance themselves from their broader 'deterrence agenda' (Hirsch and Doig 2018, 699). Andrijasevic and Walters (2010) have explicitly described the IOM as a 'post-imperial' organisation. According to Andrijasevic and Walters (2010, 984), although the organisation's activities in the Global South take 'the form of a regulated choice, not an imposition', nonetheless 'some "choices" made by governments in the Global South are going to be more "voluntary" than others'. Even when the organisation's capacity-building interventions are requested by Southern states themselves, these initiatives still require the support of Northern donor states, which again favours projects broadly in line with Northern policy goals.

The third background condition shaping the development of tools like MIDAS is that the vast majority of the organisation's budget is project based and decentralised. Instead of merely responding to requests by donors or recipient states, field offices are responsible for securing funds by identifying new potential projects that donor states are willing to fund (Pécoud 2018). The

organisation's officials actively prepare project proposals based on their perceptions of a mix of local needs and donor interests. This dynamic, Georgi (2010, 63) has argued, 'creates an instrumental-rational logic that establishes the monetary value of a project as an independent and important factor in addition to its practical use-value or its normative justification'. Caught between the organisation's desire to respect local sovereignty and financial constraints related to donor interests, the IOM entrepreneurially develops potential project proposals that member states might be interested in (Dini 2018; Geiger and Pécoud 2014).

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the IOM's development of MIDAS has been underpinned by the organisation's commitment to statist norms in the field of migration control, potential political tensions arising from its role in shaping border control practices in the Global South, and the organisation's entrepreneurialism in proposing new projects to ensure its continued existence and affirm its authority in the field of migration governance. According to a pragmatist conception of technology, these dimensions constitute the relevant background of social norms and practices that have shaped the development of MIDAS, and are therefore relevant for understanding the political effects of the system. The remainder of this article focuses on analysing primary empirical material from interviews and field observations, in order to deconstruct the politics of MIDAS in terms of the structural discourses and norms, pedagogical practices, and technical infrastructures and standards that underpin the deployment of the system in Nigeria.

The Discursive and Normative Structures of Global Border Control: Migration Management and Biometric Statehood

In public discourse, the IOM presents migration as a 'win-win-win situation' benefitting migrants, countries of origin, and receiving states (Castles and Derya 2014). In the words of IOM official Tom, 'the IOM also helps, let's say, governments to understand that migration is not . . . doesn't only bring bad effects, but there is a win-win-win. There is an added value to having migrants, if the migration is orderly. And it benefits everyone' (Interview, 3.3.2021). The notion of 'orderly' migration is central to the organisation's normative vision, expressed in writing in an IOM-branded folder I received in Abuja: 'Migration is inevitable, necessary and desirable – if well governed' (Field diary, 27.7.2021).

The discourse of ordering and governance reflects how the organisation attempts to simultaneously enact a state-centric view of migration control and affirm its own importance within the global governance of migration (Fine 2018; Geiger 2020). A crucial component of this endeavour is the concept of 'migration management'. This notion enacts migration control as a global issue and as a 'field of knowledge of knowledge in its own right' (Andrijasevic and Walters 2010, 978), enabling the organisation to make claims about expertise within this

broader field. Insofar as the notion of 'management' stands in contrast to 'more binding and truly rights-based governance', it strengthens the authority of the IOM by making its interventions more politically palatable to member states (Geiger 2020, 297). According to IOM official Diego:

> One of our main focus points is integrated border management [. . .] You know, it's difficult to push the cultural side out, the concerns of our member states. But we do a pretty good job by using integrated border management and looking at a larger picture, rather than the smaller picture. (Interview, 16.2.2021)

Diego's account of the power of managerial language to smooth over local political concerns is in line with the findings of Shoshana Fine (2018, 1749), who argues that in Turkey, the widespread adoption of such discourse 'as a natural and self-evident way of framing border governance is indicative of the successful lobbying practices of EU agencies and the IOM in normalising and diffusing "migration management" terminology and "good governance" practices'.

If the notion of 'migration management' has allowed the organisation to affirm its authority in the global governance of migration, what perceived problem necessitated the construction of a new technological system that earlier technical and policy tools had been unable to adequately address? According to IOM official José, the development of MIDAS was rooted in the digitalisation of border controls alongside the increasing securitisation of migration in the Global North in recent decades. Securitisation in this context refers to the increasing dominance of politically framing migration primarily as an issue of national security (Epstein 2008; Huysmans 2006). These trends motivated the organisation to develop new tools that would allow the alignment of bordering practices in the Global South with those in the North:

> When 9/11 happened, the United States put some pressure on the international community, through ICAO [the International Civil Aviation Organization], to bring biometrics into the passport and border control [. . .] 'Let the good guys in and keep the bad guys out', something like that. So, this is what the use of biometrics is all about. (Interview, 17.3.2021)

This new push in the Global North for internationally standardised biometric passports created significant pressures for Southern states with more limited technological and economic means to implement new biometric tools at the border. In essence, the adoption of biometric border controls created a hierarchy of trustworthiness between Northern and Southern states.

The advent of biometric border control tools has effectively instituted a norm of 'biometric statehood' (Muller 2010), which Nigerian federal agencies have sought to perform through their deployment of MIDAS (for a more complete discussion, see Singler 2021). According to this norm, in order to be viewed as trustworthy and to engage with the international community, states must demonstrate effective internal sovereignty by controlling their borders

through the collection and analysis of travellers' digital biometric data. Biometric statehood 'promises greater legibility of mobility as well as symbolic modernity' among the international society of states (Frowd 2017, 344). This norm has become institutionalised in, for instance, the technical standards set by ICAO relating to 'mandatory globally interoperable biometric data' in current electronic Machine Readable Travel Documents (ICAO 2021, 1), as well as the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2396 (2017) requiring states to collect biometric data at border control checkpoints (United Nations 2017).

From the perspective of the IOM, the norm of biometric statehood created several novel social problems that necessitated the development of MIDAS; existing policy tools related to 'migration management' had become insufficient and politically contestable. As Northern donor states became focused on the promotion of biometric border controls, Southern state agencies felt pressure to digitalise their borders to demonstrate their biometric credentials. According to IOM official Diego:

> When you look at the Western world, what we do in Africa for border management is, for the most part, we replicate what is happening in the rest of the world. [. . .] Southern states realised that a computerised border has much more to do than just security, it's also about economics and politics. So, we are riding that wave right now in a number of our project activities. (Interview, 16.2.2021)

Against this background, MIDAS was developed to solve the new problem of how to promote the global biometric legibility of populations – which had become the central notion tying together Northern state interests and Southern state agencies' aspirations. MIDAS allowed the IOM to position itself as a service provider that strengthens Southern states' capacity to make populations legible both at the border and within the national territory, by aligning local practices with global biometric norms. In Abuja, an IOM official explained that 'MIDAS creates the foundations not just for border management, it creates the foundations for national identity in a context where state control is often very, very limited' (Field diary, 6.9.2021). The establishment of biometric identity management was presented as an internationally standardised 'best practice' and a key marker of statehood.

Below, I examine how the promotion of the biometric legibility of populations is not a neutral technical solution to the problem of border control, but rather has paved the way for the expansion of crimmigration control measures at Nigeria's external borders. At this point, it is important to highlight that the deployment of biometric identity management tools in the Global South is not always straightforward for the IOM. In the words of IOM official Mohammed: 'It's very sensitive, trying to get a state to realign its migration policy, especially when they may see it differently from us. It takes quite a fair amount of work to get them to change their minds around it' (Interview, 16.2.2021). Although

presenting MIDAS as a way to uphold global 'best practices' has made the IOM's technical interventions more palatable to Southern states, these practices are nonetheless at risk of becoming politicised according to a general North–South divide. For this reason, additional performative work is required by the organisation to neutralise potential criticisms of its capacity-building activities and its biometric border control tools. Below, I argue that in pursuit of such neutralisation, the organisation's officials engage in two key practices: pedagogical performances that stress the organisation's role as 'teacher' of migration control practices, and the presentation of MIDAS as a politically neutral technical 'solution' to the problem of border control.

Neutralising 'Post-imperialism' Through Pedagogical Performances

IOM officials in Abuja repeatedly demonstrated an awareness of the risk of appearing 'post-imperial' due to the extent that their capacity building interventions encroached upon the prerogatives of Nigerian federal agencies. In a meeting regarding the future expansion of MIDAS, one official explicitly acknowledged that in a postcolonial state such as Nigeria, 'the country's borders are unnatural, colonial lines that cut communities in half [. . .] we still need to keep this in mind when we talk about strengthening borders. It can be potentially sensitive, you know?' (Field diary, 28.7.2021). Further compounding the risk of politicisation is the extensive influence of Global North donor states on the organisation's capacity-building practices: 'Donors always come with their agenda [. . .] it is the classic problem of all support to development and emergencies as well, that the receiving country is not exactly . . . not always in the position to actually negotiate for the need that they have' (Maria, interview, 10.3.2021). In Nigeria, documents and meetings include reference to, among other goals, 'bordering to curb irregular migration flows to Europe' (Field diary, 22.7.2021).

Despite these indications of Northern influences underpinning the IOM's practices, in Abuja, explicit mentions of donors' political interests were rare. Projects were mainly discussed in terms of the benefits they bring to Nigerian federal authorities. The organisation avoided highlighting the relationship between its interventions and broader North–South economic and political inequalities, and publicly denounced paternalistic attitudes to migration capacity building in the Global South. In a workshop with Nigerian federal agencies, an IOM official explained that 'law enforcement ethnocentrism is what happens when a person from Europe comes to Africa and teaches you that things must be done in a certain way because that worked in Europe. That is completely wrong!' (Field diary, 19.8.2021). Publicly available reports have also stressed that the organisation's activities in Nigeria are based on a 'consultative and collaborative approach' (IOM 2016, xv). These statements demonstrate that while Northern policy interests underpin the organisation's

activities in the Global South, officials are also aware of the political tensions that would arise from the explicit acknowledgement of the IOM's status as an intermediary between Northern and Southern states.

The organisation's pedagogical orientation is central to the broader attempt to neutralise potential criticisms of its post-imperial nature. Elsewhere, I have highlighted the symbolic nature of the IOM's pedagogical practices by referring to them as 'pedagogical performances' that are meant to depoliticise the organisation's role in global migration management (Singler 2021; see also Frowd 2020). The IOM's capacity-building interventions in Nigeria performatively enact this broader pedagogical discourse on the ground.

In Abuja, the IOM was heavily focused on training, 'curriculum development', and the provision of material infrastructure for what the organisation called the 'Training of Trainers'. Through these activities, the organisation 'taught' the NIS how to provide IOM-developed border management training courses to its officials, aiming to ensure continuity in these practices after fixed-term capacity-building projects came to an end. This pedagogical focus allowed the IOM to explicitly position itself in opposition to potential neo-imperial influences from wealthy donor states like the United States – which offers its own biometric border management system PISCES[2] to Southern states – and potentially exploitative private sector vendors. As one IOM official explained: 'We provide Nigerian authorities as much as possible with sovereign control of their own borders, which is not what PISCES provides' (Field diary, 5.8.2021). NIS officials acknowledged that the IOM has profoundly reshaped local border control training curricula, but also viewed cooperation with a 'UN actor' as politically expedient: 'Yes, IOM shape our curricula a lot. But what they bring for us is global standards from the UN, you know, on things like gender and human rights' (Field diary, 3.8.2021). This symbolic authority, tied to the IOM's UN-affiliated status, brought local agencies significant political benefits by strengthening their domestic legitimacy and demonstrating their adherence to 'best practices' to an international audience.

One key component of the IOM's pedagogical authority, related to its UN affiliation, pertained to the organization's self-professed expertise regarding human rights in a migration control context. In Nigeria, IOM officials repeatedly stated that ordering and regularising migration promote mobility and safeguard migrants' rights. As IOM official Diego explained: 'We have the regular spiel of facilitating and assisting, but we are the interlocutor between commodifying the migrant and the migration process, [and] ensuring the humanitarian rights of that migrant' (Interview, 16.2.2021).

Although several IOM officials demonstrate a 'genuine humanitarianism' (Frowd 2018, 1658) when discussing topics such as migrant rights, nonetheless the organisation's capacity-building interventions prioritise a logic of ordering migration by making it amenable to state control over rights-based considerations. Importantly, this statist orientation means that the organisation plays

a key role in legitimising the contemporary postcolonial order in which states strictly control cross-border migration of people, who, as migrants, are viewed as 'having no lawful claim to territory, livelihoods, or political membership' (Sharma 2020, 11). The IOM occasionally engages in what Polly Pallister-Wilkins has termed 'humanitarian borderwork', a form of humanitarianism that seeks to ameliorate suffering caused by border control while not fundamentally challenging the legitimacy of those bordering practices themselves (Pallister-Wilkins 2022). Yet, even when the organisation focuses on expanding human rights protections alongside its other developmental practices, the statist orientation of combatting excessive and potentially dangerous migration remains its key priority. As IOM official Catherine explained to me: 'Of course we are concerned about rights, and about exploitation [. . .] but I am always focused on security. We must put law and order first, then we can begin to promote other things' (Field diary 5.8.2021).

In contrast to the view of the NIS official that the 'IOM shape our curricula a lot' (field diary, 3.8.2021), IOM officials often downplayed their impact by reverting to the pedagogical discourse demonstrated at the beginning of this article: 'I'm just a teacher' (Field diary, 19.8.2021). Whenever the potential issues of postcolonial hierarchy, the colonial history of borders, or the 'post-imperial' status of the organisation came up in discussions, meetings, or workshops, IOM officials' pedagogical performances allowed them to argue that any political responsibility for border control practices – however much shaped by the organisation's interventions – lies with local agencies. Alongside providing detailed guidelines on what kinds of legal and technical frameworks will be required for the full operationalisation of MIDAS, training materials stated that 'we are not the experts teaching you, it's the exact opposite' (Field diary, 19.8.2021). One IOM official stated in a meeting that 'we need to make sure that NIS feels like they are leading the process' (Field diary, 5.8.2021). Simultaneously, however, the organisation sought to protect its interventions from the vagaries of local politics: 'We need to try to put as much as possible into the legislation. This will lock things in a bit and protect from changes of government' (Field diary, 6.9.2021). These statements demonstrate how in-country officials depended on pedagogical performances to straddle the boundary between two positions: on one hand, the IOM significantly shaped local border control practices, while on the other hand any political accountability for these practices was located solely with local federal agencies.

Periodically, this contradiction risked being exposed by the fact that the IOM's capacity-building programmes are often expensive and difficult to sustain after project funding runs out. In Abuja, one official commented that a key theme in recent project proposals to donors has been securing more funds for long-term engagement by the organisation, as the continuation of MIDAS-related practices after initial funding runs out has proven unreliable: 'We have realised that we've created a monster, and the monster is very

expensive' (Field diary, 6.9.2021). Rolling out technical infrastructure at Nigerian borders is often practically very difficult, and IOM-built 'Personnel Training Resource Centres' require periodic investments into IT and electrical equipment by the NIS to ensure their continued operability.

The successful roll-out of MIDAS-related infrastructural and training projects can result in new dependencies on external funding, and therefore also risks undermining the neutrality that the IOM achieves through its pedagogical orientation. It appears that discursive pedagogical performances are necessary, but not sufficient, to neutralise the organisation's role in shaping Nigerian border control practices. As Frowd (2020, 72) has argued, 'at its root, the politics of border control pedagogy is paternalistic', dependent upon an unequal distribution of resources even as the IOM's pedagogical performances obscure such inequalities. Additional work is required for the IOM to ensure that its interventions are viewed as politically neutral, rather than as creating new dependencies. This perceived neutrality is provided in part by the technical tools themselves, insofar as they are successfully presented as politically 'neutral' technical 'solutions' to the problem of migration management.

Technological Expertise, Depoliticisation, and the Expansion of Crimmigration Control in Nigeria

As the developer of MIDAS, the IOM presented itself as a technical expert organisation, supplementing its pedagogical orientation by obscuring remaining criticisms beneath the supposed neutrality of the technical tools that constitute this border control system. Whereas the IOM's pedagogical performances presented the organisation as an apolitical 'teacher' of border control, as described above, its focus on technical expertise depoliticised MIDAS and the international technical standards upon which it is based (Metcalfe and Dencik 2019). As one IOM official in Abuja explained to me: 'My career is really about interoperability and global standards. [. . .] Our edge over competing organizations and private actors is absolutely our technical expertise' (Field diary, 6.9.2021).

Yet, as Stephan Scheel and Funda Ustek-Spilda (Scheel and Ustek-Spilda 2019, 667) have argued in their analysis of the IOM's production of global migration statistics: 'expertise is not a fixed attribute of an organization. Instead, organizations like the IOM need to constantly perform themselves as knowledgeable, competent actors through publication of reports and studies, maintenance of research units, digital devices [. . .] and other knowledge practices'. MIDAS constituted a key component within this broader performance of technical expertise. In workshops and meetings with Nigerian federal agencies, the organisation's officials repeatedly demonstrated a techno-solutionist belief in the power of biometric technologies and data analytics to resolve complex problems related to border

control. The politically and epistemologically contestable assumption (see Amoore 2014) that risk assessment technologies can and should pre-emptively identify and neutralise risky travellers was related by one IOM official to Nigerian federal officials:

> The most important thing we are always looking for in life is information. We now know that 9/11 could have been prevented if we had the kind of information we can now get at the border [. . .] But unfortunately politics, and competition between agencies, sometimes gets in the way of implementing effective tools at the border. (Field diary, 19.8.2021)

MIDAS, then, was presented as the kind of 'effective tool' that should not be hindered by political contestation. Complex political issues surrounding the distinctions between regular and irregular migration, or the potentially discriminatory nature of security-oriented biometric border control technologies, were buried beneath the veneer of technicality.

In its 2014 policy recommendations for Nigeria, the IOM (2016, 10) expressed the belief that the main challenge to nearly all migration-related problems in the country is the lack of 'the systematic gathering, analysis, dissemination, and exchange of migration data'. In meetings in Abuja, potentially controversial amendments to legal frameworks relating to the processing of API and PNR data – required for the full operationalisation of MIDAS – were described as 'necessary for this law to be of an internationally acceptable standard. [. . .] Of course, our starting point was Nigeria-focused, but yes, this wording is inspired by other countries' (Field diary, 5.8.2021). The potentially political nature of MIDAS was dismissed by IOM official Fabian with reference to the supposedly neutral nature of migration data: 'No, we do not really get involved in the politics [. . .] Our interest at the end is just that the data is collected' (Interview, 12.2.2021). As Pécoud (2018, 1629) has argued, the IOM respects state sovereignty but also 'modifies (and expands) the nature of this sovereignty' by 'depoliticising it and making political measures sound technical and therefore more acceptable'. International technical standards were repeatedly described by IOM official Maria as neutral and natural steps towards modernising border control practices:

> I don't see anything really negative about MIDAS even because it's never an imposition. It's actually facilitation again, for countries that start from zero that are still at the level of pen, paper and register [. . .] the big advantage of IOM is that we can give support as a technical expert for countries to improve on that. (Interview, 10.3.2021)

The development and deployment of novel technical tools for border control, such as MIDAS, play a particularly important role in allowing the organisation to shape current and future practices of migration management. According to Molnar (2021, 70), organisations such as the IOM are 'major players and driving forces in the development and deployment of migration management

technologies', which 'set the agenda in terms of prioritisation when it comes to humanitarian innovation and technological development'.

In contrast to the organisation's presentation of MIDAS as a neutral technical tool, in fact the roll-out of the system has enacted a view of migration control as a matter of sovereignty, security, and crime control by contributing to the merging of migration control and criminal justice. A pragmatist conception of technology is helpful in highlighting that technical expertise and digital tools can never be neutral. If technical devices are developed in order to resolve specific social problems, their design necessarily enacts particular definitions of these problems (Hickman 2001). As Dijstelbloem (2021, 57) has put it, 'borders and the technologies that comprise them [...] contain within themselves implicit or explicit political goals, generate unforeseen consequences, and encourage political intervention. Borders thus function as vehicles for politics'. Against the backdrop of the postcolonial hierarchies that underpin contemporary migratory practices, it is important not only to highlight what kinds of independent effects the introduction of MIDAS has had on Nigerian border control practices, but also to trace these technological effects back to the political biases and decisions of its initial developer – the IOM. In this view, border control technologies can have political effects that are irreducible to the immediate goals or intentions of their developers. Nonetheless, these effects do not emerge naturally or apolitically from the tools themselves. Rather, the development of these tools has at some point been characterised by political decisions – by humans – regarding how we should conceptualise migration as a social problem, and what kinds of 'solutions' we should aim to develop.

The above accounts of the IOM's workshops and training sessions already demonstrated how the organisation's projects aimed to strengthen state power by increasing the biometric legibility of domestic and migrant populations. In short, the organisation provided Nigerian federal officials with the tools to exercise territorial authority more effectively. According to one IOM official in Abuja, 'NIS is the MIDAS people, and whoever has MIDAS has the power' (Field diary, 5.8.2021). IOM officials in Nigeria conceptualised the data collected by the system specifically in terms of sovereign authority: 'We are providing a solution that guarantees their sovereign right over the data processing that MIDAS provides them with' (Field diary, 5.8.2021). Yet, biometric identification is itself not a neutral technological practice, but often used for security-oriented surveillance purposes.

The IOM's publicly available documentation on MIDAS and biometric border controls argue that the use of biometric data 'facilitates regular and safe cross-border mobility and migration' and 'helps to protect vulnerable migrants' (IOM 2018a, 1). In practice, however, officials described the system as enabling local authorities to 'solve crime and to mitigate threats' (Field diary, 19.8.2021). A central theme

in the organisation's promotion of inter-agency cooperation was the notion that migration data are key to crime control. A document circulated in a workshop explained that 'the application of domestic inter-agency cooperation postures, represents the *principal and critical key* in the fight against transnational organised crime' (Field diary, 19.8.2021, original emphasis). Although MIDAS in Nigeria has not yet reached its full technical capacity, the system has been developed to communicate with Interpol's I-24/7 alert lists and to process API and PNR data, which were created to tackle 'terrorism' and 'conventional border crimes, such as illegal migration and smuggling in illegal drugs' (Han, McGauran, and Nelen 2017, 1048).

These alert lists and forms of risk assessment are based on a view of migration control as a key component within the general project of ensuring law and order by tackling security risks and controlling crime. For this reason, the IOM has focused on the promotion of inter-agency cooperation between the NIS and various law enforcement agencies in Nigeria. Such activities have effectively resulted in the expansion of crimmigration control practices, as the NIS is increasingly responsible for collecting data perceived as crucial for crime control, and criminal justice agencies play an increasingly important role in dealing with migrants flagged by MIDAS at the border. This cooperation has blurred the boundaries between migration control and criminal justice practices. As in other contexts extensively researched by border criminologists, this merging of criminal justice and migration control practices risks 'destabilising the normal frame of criminal justice system based on fairness, due process and equal treatment' (Barker 2017, 453; Weber and McCulloch 2019; Zedner 2019). IOM officials themselves expressed some concerns about the potential misuse of state power once federal agencies begin to cooperate in their deployment of MIDAS: 'The privacy law doesn't exempt law enforcement completely, but it does exempt some provisions. [. . .] We need to be careful not to create a situation where officials can do whatever they want with the MIDAS data' (Field diary, 5.8.2021).

In Nigeria, inter-agency cooperation between the NIS and criminal justice agencies such as the Nigerian Police Force and the Ministry of Justice is a highly novel phenomenon. Historically, these federal agencies have closely guarded their institutional remit from encroachment by other institutions. Organisational conflict has periodically even escalated to violence between the various security- and crime-control agencies operational in the country (Abioye and Alao 2020). The history of such inter-agency conflict is complex, but contemporary researchers have pointed out the lack of operational frameworks or legislation 'compelling the security agencies to work as a team' (Eferebo 2022, 15). Remarkably, the IOM's training workshops brought these security agencies together into a shared process of developing standard operating procedures for inter-agency cooperation in order to enable the future collection of API and PNR data at the border for security and crime-control purposes.

The IOM promoted cooperation not only between the NIS and federal criminal justice actors, but also between these agencies and the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), which are jointly responsible for the development of a national biometric identity card in Nigeria as well as a 'foreigner registration' system that also collects biometric data. In technical documentation, the organisation explained that the Nigerian configuration of MIDAS has been modified to ensure compatibility between these different databases, providing federal agencies with a more 'comprehensive biometric identity management system' (Field diary, 10.9.2021). In other words, the expansion of MIDAS was already viewed as supporting a broader technical infrastructure of biometric surveillance not only at Nigeria's external borders, but across the country.

Building on these initial steps towards institutionalising inter-agency cooperation between law enforcement and immigration control authorities, the future expansion of crimmigration control through MIDAS seems increasingly likely. The IOM is still actively involved in efforts to enable MIDAS to analyse API and PNR data in the near future (IOM 2022). While doing so, the organisation has partnered with more overtly crime- and security-focused agencies like the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism to promote even more extensive inter-agency cooperation between the NIS and law enforcement agencies in Nigeria (UNOCT 2022). Back in 2021, the organisation sought to ensure that future privacy legislation would include national security and crime control-related exceptions to individual privacy rights, so that the use of API and PNR data for criminal investigations would not be hampered by legal challenges. Such exceptions were included in the Nigeria Data Protection Act of 2023.

Conclusion

The expansion of crimmigration control practices and the biometric legibility of populations in Nigeria reflects a general tendency of supposedly neutral security and surveillance technologies to proliferate. As Scheel and Ustek-Spilda (2019, 665) have argued, the IOM's knowledge production and technical projects fuels 'a quest for more and better knowledge on migration', paving the way for the expansion of the remit of existing systems, as well as the development of new technical systems to supplement existing ones. This dynamic is reflected in the expansion of MIDAS in Nigeria from an initial focus on border control to crimmigration control more broadly conceived. Officials in Abuja are aware that these tools cannot proliferate or expand too quickly: 'The use of special tools needs to be built like a house. if you put the roof before the foundation, it will just collapse' (Field diary, 28.7.2021). Such moderation notwithstanding, each added component to MIDAS paved the way for the

next expansion of the system: 'The new API legislation will create the foundations for PNR in the future. [...] Intelligence agencies will eventually be the ones who get PNR data, but only when everyone is comfortable that they actually have the capacity to use PNR data and not misuse it' (Field diary, 5.8.2021).

Given the accelerating expansion of novel digital border control systems in Nigeria and the Global South more broadly, it is imperative to critically analyse the political motivations underpinning the development of these tools and the political effects resulting from their deployment. Above, I have argued that on one hand, the IOM engages in pedagogical performances to obscure the postcolonial political and epistemic hierarchies underpinning its capacity-building interventions. On the other hand, pragmatism provides a useful framework for deconstructing the organisation's claims about its technical expertise, and challenging the supposed political neutrality of MIDAS. By contributing to the merging of migration control and criminal justice, the system materially enacts an understanding of migration primarily as an issue of security, risk, and law enforcement.

Utilising the frameworks of performativity and pragmatism helps link together structural, institutional, and technical levels of analysis when critically examining border control technologies. This 'transversal' orientation can challenge depoliticised framings of new digital tools, and illuminate how the politics of border technologies cannot be fully grasped without reference to the postcolonial hierarchies that underpin the practices of large international organisations and the global statist world order. Such hierarchies shape the process of developing new digital tools by influencing global norms of biometric statehood, the interests and practices of large state-funded international organisations, and dominant perceptions of the social problems that new border technologies are created to solve. In the near future, digital border control tools will continue to become increasingly sophisticated and complex – and therefore more apparently impervious to human inputs and to critical social analysis – as well as more geographically widespread across the Global South. In this context, grasping the pragmatic and performative dimensions of novel border control tools will only increase in importance.

Notes

1. All participants have been pseudonymised in this article. The field research was approved by the University of Oxford Central University Ethics Committee, approval ref. R72127/RE001.
2. The Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES) was developed by the United States Department of State as part of its Terrorist Interdiction Program.

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