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URBAN SANCTUARY AND SOLIDARITY IN A
GLOBAL CONTEXT: HOW DOES AFRICA
CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEBATE?

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Urban Sanctuary and Solidarity in a Global Context: How Does Africa Contribute to the Debate?

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Abstract

As national governments and supranational institutions fail to cope with international migration and refugee movements, many cities in the Global North are asserting stronger roles in protecting and including vulnerable international migrants and refugees. Various labels, such as sanctuary city, solidarity city, and city of refuge describe corresponding municipal policies and practices. However, literature that connects such labels to urban policies and practices in the Global South is sparse. I review the English language literature to assess whether the concepts of urban sanctuary and solidarity are applicable in Africa, or whether they represent inherently Eurocentric or Western concepts of little relevance to cities in Africa. The review indicates that there may be some similarities between cities in Africa and the Global North, but that the differences are fundamental and challenge the universality of the concepts of urban sanctuary and solidarity.

Keywords: Sanctuary cities; Solidarity cities; International migrants; Refugees; Africa

Résumé

Alors que les gouvernements nationaux et les institutions supranationales ne parviennent pas à faire face aux migrations internationales et aux mouvements de réfugiés, de nombreuses villes du Nord affirment des rôles plus importants dans la protection et l'inclusion des migrants et réfugiés internationaux vulnérables. Divers qualificatifs, tels que ville sanctuaire, ville solidaire et ville-refuge, décrivent les politiques et pratiques municipales correspondantes. Cependant, la littérature qui établit un lien entre ces qualificatifs et les politiques et pratiques urbaines dans les pays du Sud est rare. Je passe donc en revue la littérature anglo-saxonne pour déterminer si les concepts de sanctuaire urbain et de solidarité sont applicables en Afrique, ou s'ils sont des concepts intrinsèquement eurocentriques ou « occidentaux » peu pertinents pour les villes africaines. L'étude indique qu'il peut exister des similitudes entre les villes d'Afrique et celles du Nord, mais que les différences sont fondamentales et remettent en question l'universalité des concepts de sanctuaire urbain et de solidarité.

Mots-clés: Villes sanctuaires; Villes solidaires; Migrants internationaux; Réfugiés; Afrique



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Introduction

Throughout the Global North, urban municipalities and communities are enacting policies and pursuing practices that mitigate the negative consequences of exclusionary national policies towards international migrants and refugees. There is a considerable corresponding literature on sanctuary and solidarity cities in North America and Europe (Bagelmann 2016; Bauder 2017a, 2017b; Bauder and Gonzales 2018; Darling 2010; Ridgley 2008). However, we know little about the manner in which sanctuary and solidarity city policies and solidarity practices in the Global North compare to the urban policies and practices towards international migrants and refugees in the Global South.

In this paper, I examine whether, and to what degree, similar urban policies and practices exist in the Global South, with a particular focus on African cities. My research questions include: (1) is there a common structural problem of migrant and refugee exclusion and illegalisation at the national scale and what are the responses by local governments, civic-society, and other local actors? (2) what are the differences and commonalities in urban belonging, membership, and community, and how does the urban scale relate to the national and other scales in this regard? (3) to what extent can the concepts of urban sanctuary and solidarity be applied in the Global South, especially Africa?

There is a tendency in the literature on urban migration research on Africa to “universalize the American and European processes of integration” (Landau and Bakewell 2018: 5). A preliminary thesis therefore is that urban sanctuary and solidarity are distinctly Eurocentric and Western concepts. These concepts engage with the Eurocentric meanings of “sovereignty” and “rights to the city” – i.e. the territorial nation state claiming absolute authority over political membership, and urban communities calling for the radical reconfiguration of urban politics and governance to address the disenfranchisement of some inhabitants. It would be problematic to apply these meanings uncritically in an African context (Landau 2010: 171; Landau 2019). Derese Kassa (2029: 68) asks: “What does the ‘right to the city’ then mean if African states do not represent liberal democratic contracts between ‘citizens’ and the political establishment?” “Urban citizenship,” referring to claims of rights and belonging at the urban rather than national scale (Holston 1999, 2008; Smith and McQuarrie 2011), is a similar idea related to urban sanctuary and solidarity that may not apply universally. Nevertheless, the concepts of urban sanctuary and solidarity and the associated policies and practices may not be completely irrelevant in the Global South and Africa. In fact, examining these contexts may offer opportunities to develop and rethink the concepts of



urban sanctuary and solidarity beyond the context of the Global North and explore whether and how these concepts can and should travel. Thus, rather than uncritically apply Eurocentric and Western concepts to the Global South and Africa, I am also interested in how African cities contribute to the development of urban theory.

The adoption of sanctuary and solidarity policies and practices in a particular city or country are often inspired by corresponding policies and practices in other countries, even other continents (Christoph and Kron 2019). Creating knowledge about the similarities and differences between urban policies and practices in different global contexts is vital to facilitate international exchange of local policy options and ideas, and encourage international communication and networking activities between local stakeholders at the global scale. In addition, knowledge on this topic is important to municipal and urban decision makers, advocates, and activists to help them develop informed and path-breaking policies and practices related to international migration and refugees at the local rather than the national scale.

The method I use involves an exploratory scoping review of the academic English language literature. One problem was that the terms *urban sanctuary* and *solidarity* or *sanctuary city* or *solidarity city* are rarely used in the context of international migration and refugees outside of North America and Europe. In the end, the material that I could identify addressing my research questions remained sparse. Below, I first discuss urban sanctuary and solidarity in the Global North, then I examine these concepts in the Global South, with a particular focus on Africa. I end with brief conclusions and a discussion of future research opportunities.

Urban Sanctuary and Solidarity in the Global North

“Sanctuary city” and “cities of sanctuary” are commonly-used concepts, especially in AngloAmerican contexts (Bauder 2017b). The term “sanctuary” is contested because its religious origins and connotations imply an ideological perspective that may misrepresent secular municipal policies (Lippert 2005; Caminero-Santangelo 2013; Bagelman 2016). In addition, the sanctuary city idea escapes a single definition (Bauder 2017b); it has been framed as a “process” of interlocking activities at urban, regional, national, and other scales (Houston 2019). In Canada and Europe, the term “solidarity city” is used, alongside other terms such as “city of refuge” (Bauder and Gonzales 2018; Foerster 2018). While sanctuary city policies and practices typically seek to protect “illegalised” persons (Bauder 2014), solidarity practices are not necessarily restricted to international migrants and refugees but also encompass other disenfranchised and marginalised groups (Kron and Lebuhn 2019; Neumann 2019a). Solidarity implies the “equality between citizens and non-status persons” (Nyers 2019: 149).

A variety of policies and practices are associated with urban sanctuary and solidarity towards international migrants and refugees. In the United States, sanctuary cities date back to the 1980s, when the City of San Francisco refused to cooperate with federal authorities



to protect refugees from Central America (Mancina, 2013). In subsequent decades, sanctuary cities have focussed predominantly on illegalized migrants settling permanently in a municipality rather than on refugees in temporary need of protection (Ridgley 2008; Paik 2017). Sanctuary city policies and practices are highly context-particular (Strunk and Leitner, 2013). A common policy, however, is Don't-Ask-Don't-Tell (DADT). According to this policy, local police forces, school boards, and municipal service deliverers, refrain from collecting information on the national status of the city's inhabitants (i.e. Don't-Ask) and, if status is revealed, will not exchange this information with national authorities (Don't-Tell). To establish whether a person is a resident, some municipalities accept alternative identification, such as utility bills, municipal ID cards, or foreign-government-issued documents (Varsanyi 2010). Sanctuary cities, however, cannot offer absolute protection from federal immigration authorities. Although sanctuary city policies send a discursive message of inclusion of all inhabitants (Foerster 2018), illegalized migrants are still subject to detection, and possible detention and deportation by national authorities (Tramonte 2011; American Immigration Council 2015).

In Canada, Toronto first adopted DADT policies in the early 2000s, followed by a "sanctuary city" vote by Toronto's City Council in 2013. Since then several other Canadian cities have followed Toronto's lead and have also initiated sanctuary policies. Compared to the US, however, cities in Canada have less legal autonomy, and front-line municipal workers and the local police do not always implement these policies properly (Hudson et al. 2017; Mofette and Ridgley 2018). Although these policies are well-meant declarations, they are ineffectively implemented (Mofette and Ridgley 2018). Nevertheless, they have sent an important symbolic message regarding the inclusion of all inhabitants in the urban community (McDonald 2012). In the UK, "cities of sanctuary" do not focus so much on policing or non-cooperation with national authorities as on the symbolic inclusion of refugees seeking protection. The main achievement of urban sanctuary in the UK is to change the imagination of the city into a place of welcome and, in this way, shape how migrants, refugees, and residents interact with each other (Darling 2010, Squire and Bagelman 2012, Darling and Squire 2013).

Cities in continental Europe have recently also implemented urban policies and practices to accommodate migrants and refugees in precarious situations – especially with the large number of arrivals from Africa and the Middle East since the 2015 "summer of migration" (Hess et al. 2016). European cities are motivated to protect migrants with "irregular status" for a variety of reasons, including a legal duty of care towards all inhabitants of the city, humanitarian considerations and human rights law, and the need to maintain public order and achieve policy goals related to public health and safety (Delvino 2017). Corresponding urban initiatives include municipal partnerships with NGOs, roundtables involving stakeholders, strategic litigations (e.g. denying a right to an irregular migrant, knowing that this migrant will sue and establish precedence for inclusion), attaching entitlements to place of residence rather than immigration status, and unofficial policies and guidelines to



offer housing, shelter, health care, education, legal counselling, and access to other municipal services (Christoph and Kron 2019; Schweitzer 2018).

Researchers have identified multiple dimensions of policies and practices that define urban sanctuary and solidarity in the Global North. Examining cities in Europe and Canada, Wenke Christoph and Stefanie Kron (2019) describe two dimensions focussing on discursive and symbolic interventions, and the political negotiation of concrete local practices. In the German context, Jungfer (in Jungfer and Schmittgen 2019) mentions three “central goals” of solidarity city initiatives: no deportations, DADT, and access to urban services. A comprehensive review of sanctuary policies and practices in Canada, the UK, and the USA identified four common dimensions (Bauder 2017b): *legality*, i.e. an official commitment by the municipal legislative body to support sanctuary and solidarity policies and practices; *discourse*, i.e. challenging exclusionary narratives that link international migrants and refugees to crime and portray them as undeserving and predatory; *identity*, i.e. facilitating the formation of collective identities that articulate common membership in an urban community; and *scale*, i.e. rejecting national migration and refugee laws and policies, and articulating mitigating policies and practices at the municipal level. These dimensions combine in different ways depending on national, political, and geopolitical contexts and circumstances (Bauder and Gonzales 2018). In addition, the intentions and outcomes of local policies and initiatives may diverge, rendering urban sanctuary and solidarity policies and initiatives ineffective (Hudson et al. 2017).

Urban Sanctuary and Solidarity in the Global South

Academic debate on international migration in cities of the Global South often revolves around “urban refugees” in countries such as Kenya, Malaysia, Uganda, or South Africa (e.g. Buscher 2011; Buscher and Heller 2010; Pavanello et al., 2010). This group encompasses persons who have migrated for a variety of reasons, including fleeing violence and political persecution as well as seeking economic opportunities. The term urban refugee may be “a convenient lexicon or shorthand for an outsider” (Kassa 2019: 27).

Several factors frame the situation of urban refugees in the Global South. First, in many parts of the Global South, the root problem producing urban refugees (and internally displaced persons) is that many nation states are unstable and may not have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention; urban refugees are often a symptom of state failures (Haysom 2013). In this way, the context of urban migrants and refugees differs fundamentally from the Global North where strong Westphalian nation states legally exclude some international migrants and refugees from national membership. Secondly, while in Europe and North America the city was a place of refuge and immigrant arrival, in the Global South the practice of housing refugees fleeing from conflicts in places like Angola, Congo, and Mozambique in rural camps “to isolate them from sources of political contamination represented by Communists and other radical currents” (Marfleet 2007: 38; also Fábos and Kibreab 2007; Hoffstaedter 2015) was established during the Cold War. Thirdly, the cities of the Global



South are in different economic and societal situations than their counterparts in the Global North when it comes to accommodating migrants and refugees: poverty is often wide-spread among urban non-migrant populations in the Global South, instigating competition for scarce resources between migrants and refugees, established residents and citizens. In addition, formal local governance structures are often weak and unable to cope with problems related to poverty, population growth, corruption, etc. In this context, informal institutions, including NGOs, faith-based communities, migrant self-help organisations, and private service providers often offer support and access to essential services. However, these institutions can also be predatory and abusive, especially towards vulnerable migrants and refugees. Furthermore, ineffective access to the legal justice system sometimes encourages justice and dispute resolution based on customary and religious systems, which frequently discriminate against women and minorities (Haysom 2013). Despite these differences between the Global North and Global South, the literature does describe urban situations that resemble urban sanctuary and solidarity policies and practices in the Global South. Before focussing on the particular situation in Africa, I discuss examples of such urban policies and practices in Latin America and Asia.

Latin America

Latin America has seen significant population movements and has undertaken corresponding local policy initiatives. The Mexico Plan of Action, for example, promotes migrant and refugee integration throughout the region at the municipal level (Thayer Correa et al. 2014). Since Latin America has experienced a significant amount of political conflict and corresponding displacement since WWII, “many leading officials in countries such as Chile, Argentina and Uruguay have personally experienced asylum and the benefits of international solidarity” (Varoli 2016: 2). Such experiences may have helped facilitate the establishment of the *Ciudades Solidarias* (Cities of Solidarity) network, involving 25 Latin-American cities. Each city cooperates with UNHCR to offer housing, food, educational services, etc. to refugees and asylum seekers (Varoli 2016). Although these solidarity cities do not necessarily focus on accommodating illegalised migrants, they resemble a coordinated effort at the urban level to include migrants and refugees in precarious situations.

Research I conducted with Dayana Gonzales shows that all the four dimensions that characterise sanctuary and solidarity cities, based on the definition derived from the Global North (Bauder 2017b), i.e. legal, discourse, identity and scale, are evident in the case of the city of Quilicura in Chile (Bauder and Gonzales 2018). Fabio Varoli (2016) corroborates that municipalities represented in the *Ciudades Solidarias* network generally involve these four aspects of urban sanctuary. The legal aspect is achieved when municipal councils ratify the cooperation with UNHCR in the context of the *Ciudades Solidarias* programme; the discursive aspect when these cities “create a more positive and open attitude to refugees” (Varoli 2016: 1); the identity aspect when “the city is presented as an open space and a place for opportunities to be explored and exploited” by all residents (Varoli 2016: 2); and the scale



aspect when “public policies are both defined and implemented effectively, entirely on a local scale” (Valoli 2016: 2).

Research on Buenos Aires, Argentina, shows that the neighbourhood scale, rather than the urban scale, permits migrants to claim local membership and urban citizenship. While migrants are framed as foreigners at the urban scale, they are able to make claims to rights and political participation in the informal settlements of their neighbourhood (Bastia and Bressán 2018). This situation is interesting because sanctuary and solidarity practices occur in neighbourhoods over which municipal control is weak. It suggests solidarity practices exist in contexts that are common in the Global South, such as the presence of informal settlements.

Asia

The Asian continent presents an even more diverse setting than Latin America in which to examine urban sanctuary and solidarity policies and practices. With greater diversity, the chances of encountering such policies and practices arguably increase. A recent study by Antje Missbach, Yunizar Adiputera, and Atin Parbandari (2018) asks explicitly if the Indonesian city of Makassar resembles a “sanctuary city.” Indonesia’s national context frames the situation in Makassar: Indonesia has not signed the Refugee Convention, has received relatively few refugees and asylum seekers, and considers itself mostly a refugee-transit, rather than settlement, country. In addition, the Indonesian national government downloaded responsibilities of refugee protection and management in the areas of housing, security, supervision, and other activities to the local scale (Missbach et al. 2018). Makassar’s mayor, Mohammad Ramdhan “Danny” Pomanto, has been the driving force behind local initiatives towards the protection and inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers. While the IOM largely funds these initiatives, local NGOs are only marginally involved, and diverting municipal funds towards refugee inclusion is politically unpopular. Furthermore, local actors in Makassar focus on management goals, but they do not seek to rescript negative rumours and anti-refugee smear campaigns. Local civic society also lacks interest in refugee inclusion and protection and does not pursue the normative goals of hospitality and social inclusion (Missbach et al. 2018).

Like Indonesia, Malaysia has also not signed the UN Convention on Refugees. According to Malaysian immigration law, refugees are in the country unlawfully and are subject to fines, detention, and deportation. In addition, the Malaysian national government is surveilling NGOs and constraining civil society activities (Hoffstaedter 2015b). In this national context, NGOs in Kuala Lumpur are struggling to provide services to illegalised migrants. Nevertheless, local civic-society actors and community-based organisations are finding ways to provide access to shelter, health care, and education to illegalised migrants – many of whom are refugees – e.g. by collaborating with the UNHCR (Hoffstaedter 2015b). A local support infrastructure seeks to mitigate the adverse effects of national policies and practices towards international migrants and refugees.



A major Asian refugee destination is Turkey. The literature suggests that in Turkey, local refugee accommodation lacks autonomy and is aligned with national policies. According to Turkish state policy, refugees, especially those from Syria, are not supposed to stay permanently. Correspondingly, state policy is not focussed on “integration” but rather on reception and hospitality (Daniş and Nayil 2018). Empirical work in Sultanbeyli, a peripheral district of Istanbul, shows how a shared understanding of faith and loyalty frames the work of local NGOs. In this way, the Turkish state is able to control local reception and hospitality practices; “it has developed new tactics and strategies for regulating and controlling the lives of migrants and refugees who have entered its soil” (Daniş and Nayil 2018: 153). Although this approach serves to offer hospitality to refugees, it also disciplines local NGOs and municipalities and stifles their ability to resist national politics of exclusion, which would be a characteristic of sanctuary and solidarity cities in the Global North.

Urban Sanctuary and Solidarity in Africa

People have always migrated on the African continent. Colonialism, however, imposed international borders that often split socially and economically integrated territories, thereby creating “migrants” in the contemporary sense. With the establishment of capitalism, labour became incorporated into the continent’s migration regimes (e.g. Baker and Aina 1995). At the same time, many parts of Africa lack the history of secure, liberal, and democratic ‘Westphalian’ states that characterise the Global North and which over centuries achieved a bondage of citizens to their nation states and national identities (Torpey 2000). In Africa, national citizenship and carrying a passport may not have the same significance as in the Global North. In fact, in many parts of Africa, even formal citizens lack birth certificates, state-issued identification cards, or passports, because these documents are of little relevance to their daily lives and to gaining access to services, entitlements, and rights (Bakewell forthcoming).

Similar to research on other parts of the Global South, contemporary scholarship on migration in African cities often focusses on urban refugees: “while many Western cities speak of illegal immigrants, rising sentiments of xenophobia, and racism against these ‘aliens’; African cities now speak of urban refugees” (Kassa 2019: 12). While this statement may not apply in all African countries or cities, “one feature of Africa’s urbanisation is the massive migration of displaced refugees from one country to another.” (Kassa 2019: 12) The circumstances of international migrants and refugees in Africa differ significantly from their counterparts in much of the Global North. Based on research in Johannesburg, Nairobi, and Maputo, Loren Landau (2010, 2019) warns against applying Eurocentric perspectives of cities and practices of inclusion and solidarity to an African context. In particular, Landau challenges three assumptions often made in the literature: First, it would be erroneous to assume that there is “a dominant host community or political order” like in cities of the Global North (Landau 2010: 171). He elaborates:



Much of the writing on inclusive cities explores how a preexisting and self-conscious host community makes space – or does not – for the poor, minority religions, migrants, immigrants, and disempowered genders, ethnicities, and racial groups. ... Without denying the existence of self-identified host communities within African cities (or parts thereof), one must be wary of ascribing undue social coherence to Africa's primary urban centers where ethnic heterogeneity, enormous economic disparities, and cultural pastiche are the empirical norms, not exceptions. (Landau 2010: 173)

Rather, one can speak of "archipelagos of belonging (Landau and Freemantle 2018: 279; also Landau 2019), characterised by diversity, fluidity, and fragmentation.

Secondly, "an effective, centralized authority has rarely governed the continent's urban centers" (Landau 2010: 176). Rather, "power is often shared in ad hoc ways" (Landau 2010: 176) between state officials, local private actors, and individuals and groups with authority; local government institutions may be dis-embedded from "the urban societies that they ostensibly protect and promote" (Landau 2010: 177). Furthermore, the national community in African states, with their different "history and dynamics" (Kassa 2019: 84), does not always serve as primary locus of belonging and identity (Bakewell 2007). The lack of state authority has important consequences on conceptualising urban sanctuary and solidarity: neither national legal status nor local residency may be a defining criterion for who gains access to services and belonging in the same way as in the Global North. Correspondingly, Landau and Duponchel (2011) find that refugee status does not strongly affect displaced people's welfare or security.

Thirdly, African cities differ demographically from cities in the Global North. While African cities may be remarkably diverse, many segments of the non-migrant population, too, are politically excluded and experience poverty, violence, and exploitation. At the same time, many urban migrants and refugees belong to "mobile classes," creating a "liminal space" (Kihato 2010) where migrants imagine a future elsewhere. "Illegality" can permit these classes to avoid obligations while still providing access to state and local resources (Landau 2010: 179). Moving to a city in this way is not necessarily associated with claiming "rights to the city" in a way permanent settlement would (Kassa 2010). Rather, loyalties often exist to family members, and ethnic and tribal communities located elsewhere (Landau 2019; Landau and Freemantle 2018). In the context of the transitory character of urban migration and weak national identities, migrant discourses often stress pan-African identity, a cosmopolitan global youth culture, a universal urban lifestyle (Kihato 2010), or a selective "tactical cosmopolitanism" (Landau and Freemantle 2009), rather than urban or national belonging.

A reoccurring case in the literature that discusses urban refugees is Nairobi, Kenya. The city's urban refugees are diverse in origin, coming from Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Eritrea, Congo, Sudan, Uganda, and Rwanda (Kassa 2019). In 2014, Kenya was home to about 2.4 million citizens of Somali origin and – after deploying troops in Somalia – hosted hundreds of thousands of Somali refugees (Muhumed, 2014). Following a series of terrorism



attacks that occurred in Nairobi in 2013 and 2014, Kenyan security forces rounded up thousands of Somalis, triggering accusations of physical abuse and extortion by human rights organisations. The crackdown also instigated religious tension between Muslims, who see themselves as victims, and Christians, some of whom are depicted as “cheering the crackdown” (Muhumed 2014). In this situation, Kenya has been in a double bind (Kassa 2019: 49-75). On the one hand, the country generally supports a human rights framework, signed the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, endorsed the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Convention on African Refugees of 1969, enacted the Refugee Act of Kenya in 2006, and liberally issues residency certificates to urban refugees permitting them to obtain business permits, attend schools, function in urban society (e.g. open bank accounts), and acquire exit visas for onward migration. On the other hand, the “undercurrent” (Kassa 2019: 68) of securitisation frames urban refugees as threats to national security and encourages the suspension of their political rights. In addition, it is widely acknowledged that elements of the Kenyan police are corrupt, frequently humiliate and harass urban refugees, and exploit their vulnerabilities (e.g. Kassa 2019, Campbell 2015).

Many of Nairobi’s urban refugees are transient, using the city as a “launching pad” (Kassa 2019: 77) to onward migration to Europe, the USA, Canada, or South Africa; others – especially Somalis and Ethiopians – have lived in Nairobi for decades (Campbell 2015: 109). Nairobi’s refugees often seek economic opportunities and enhanced security relative to the rural refugee camps and engage in a wide range of economic activities, working as bus drivers and ushers, maids, cooks, waiters and waitresses, guards, janitors; many own shops, kiosks, restaurants, boutiques – some operate with a license, others without (Kassa 2019). While refugees share many problems with poor Kenyans, urban refugees are at an even greater disadvantage and often experience violent crime and robberies, harassment, and extortion from the Kenyan police and corrupt city bureaucrats (Kassa 2019). Many feel isolated and unwelcome in Nairobi (Pavanello et al. 2010).

The UNHCR assumes a major role in offering protection to Nairobi’s refugees and collaborates with local civil society actors and NGOs to reach the urban-refugee community; it also reaches out to local authorities, including local police stations. The national government also has “made positive steps forward in some areas of protection of refugees in Nairobi” (Cambell 2015: 104), creating the Department of Refugee Affairs and, in 2010, beginning to register urban refugees. As a result of these efforts, urban refugees have gained better access to health care and education, and they experience less police abuse and fewer arrests and detention. However, access to services and rights – including rights to housing, mobility, protection from arbitrary arrest and detention – hinges to a considerable degree on refugee registration with the UNHCR, which normally takes place in Kenya’s main refugee camps. Many refugees live in Nairobi without documents and without UNHCR protection, effectively as illegalised inhabitants. In addition many, especially Muslim refugees from Somalia, struggle with their discursive association with global terrorism (Jaji 2014).



In a recent book Derese G. Kassa (2019) uses a right-to-the-city approach to suggest that Nairobi is “Africa’s preeminent sanctuary city” (Kassa 2019: 2). Kassa’s research on Ethiopian refugees in Nairobi addresses some of the aspects characteristic of sanctuary cities in the Global North. First, support services exist at the local scale, for example in the form of the local Ethiopian church community providing assistance and community connections. Secondly, although many refugees lack full national status, they participate in the everyday life and rhythm of the city. Kassa (2019: 45) explains:

Because of their full-blown participation in Kenya, it is hard to define them only as ‘refugees’ even though most of them fled their country of origin for several reasons. It is also difficult to refer to them as ‘immigrants’ for the overwhelming majority of them define themselves as a refugee and await resettlement in a third and preferably Western country. Obviously, one cannot refer to refugees as full-fledged Kenyan citizens (Kassa 2019: 45).

Ethiopian urban refugees in Nairobi “live with fellow Kenyans in peace” and experience “integration from below.” They also claim their own space in Nairobi, concentrating in the Eastleigh neighbourhood, which Kenyan officials call “*their*’neighbourhood” and which the refugees refer to as “*their* space” (Kassa 2019: 79, original italics). Paradoxically, Ethiopian refugees are self-segregating, “reinforcing that identity of ‘otherness’, preventing local Kenyans from joining in” (Kassa 2019: 83). Kassa suggests that “the lack of integration on the part of refugees themselves dampens efforts for full urban citizenship in the Lefebvrian sense” (Kassa 2019: 83-84). Other research suggests that neither migrants nor established residents in suburban Nairobi feel strong connections to their place of residence but rather express transnational or ethnic sentiments of belonging (Landau and Freemantle 2018). In addition, Nairobi’s municipal government appears to be inactive in accommodating refugees, and “Nairobi’s city council does not have any formal line of communication with urban refugees” (Kassa 2019: 60). Finally, the police continues to discriminate against, harass, and exploit vulnerable refugees; the police force “stands out as the single most institution that draws the contours of a refugee-citizen divide in Nairobi” (Kassa 2019: 80).

Another city that received considerable scholarly attention in the context of urban migrants and refugees is Johannesburg, South Africa. After the fall of apartheid, many African countries lifted their travel restrictions, and South Africa’s comparatively strong economy attracted many migrants (Kihato 2007). Many migrants consider South Africa a temporary destination. In some cases, it may even be, similar to Kenya, “a gateway to Europe and other parts of the world” (Kihato 2010: 219). Although local governments have received greater autonomy after the fall of apartheid (Kihato 2007), I could not identify evidence in the literature that municipalities are using this autonomy to enact urban sanctuary or solidarity policies mirroring those in the Global North. Nevertheless, civil-society actors have implemented urban sanctuary and solidarity practices.

These practices can be observed in Johannesburg. This city has had a significant nonstatus population that tends to live under harsh conditions with poor housing and



limited access to education, health care, and basic services and necessities, such as clean water. Corruption is widespread among landlords and police, and government officials demand bribes for status documents (Kihato 2007). In many ways, Johannesburg can be described as an anti-sanctuary city. The City of Johannesburg has a history of hostility towards migrants. In 2003, police raids sought to “rid the inner city of illegal immigrants, who are perceived as responsible for crime and grime in the city” (Kihato 2007: 267). Often, these raids are carried out by the national authorities of the South African state, indicating that anti-migrant hostilities cannot only be attributed to the local scale but is also driven by national actions. In 2008 xenophobic violence against foreigners erupted in Johannesburg, with horrific images of Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave, a migrant from Mozambique, being set on fire while the police failed to intervene. Public sentiment has been fuelled by anti-foreigner stereotypes (Joseph 2015). In 2018, Johannesburg’s mayor, Herman Mashaba, clamped down on undocumented migrants and “announced that he is working with home affairs” to conduct raids and deport migrants without proper documents (Jadoo 2018, n.p.). In response to these conditions, migrant communities have established an infrastructure to cope with their “illegality”:

Immigrant networks in inner city Johannesburg reveal remarkable resourcefulness in providing access to the most basic needs: shelter, security, job opportunities and ‘papers’, so much so that if a member of an association is a victim of crime, his/her first port of call is the leadership in the network who investigates the case or mediates between the victim and the police. (Kihato 2007: 263)

Research on Pretoria, not far from Johannesburg, corroborates how citizens and non-citizens who live in squatter communities self-organise in the absence of state services and rely “on solidarity and consent issuing from a sense of shared destiny” (Monson 2015: 45).

Back in Johannesburg, migrants who see themselves as temporary and transient residents, rather than permanent settlers, may have little interest in claiming local political inclusion. “Many do not necessarily want political rights, but they do want rights to economic opportunities. Migrants may separate themselves from South Africans, but they still want some form of social inclusion and acceptance” (Kihato 2010: 223). The term “usufruct ethics” (Landau and Freemantle 2018: 288) describes how in peripheral Johannesburg, migrants seek to benefit from local resources without a strong commitment to the local community. In this context, the conventional Western model of urban citizenship may not apply in Johannesburg. The sharing of residential space among migrants, refugees, and established residents does not “produce a ‘we’” (Landau and Freemantle 2018: 290) or common urban identity, which is an important aspect of urban sanctuary and solidarity in the Global North. Rather, mobile and transient migrants often embrace transnational identities or pan-African “patriotism” (Kihato 2010: 216). Local civil-society actors respond to this situation in ad-hoc ways. Christa Kuljian (2013) documented the events around Central Methodist Church in downtown Johannesburg. Under the leadership of Bishop Paul Verry, the church pursued



an “open door policy” (p. 122) and offered “hospitality” to migrants (p. 283), which meant hosting migrants and refugees, mostly from Zimbabwe. Between 2001 and 2014, the church sheltered almost 35,000 migrants and refugees (Joseph 2015: 60); at its peak in May 2008, more than 3,000 people lived there (Kuljian 2013: 17). The City of Johannesburg provided only very limited assistance, for example, by setting up portable toilets outside of the Church. By 2014, Verryn was removed from his position and Central Methodist Church had ceased to be a major migrant and refugee shelter (Joseph 2015).

There is a limited amount of literature on the role of cities in international migrant and refugee accommodation in other African countries. In Pointe-Noire, Congo, immigrants are claiming rights to belonging in the urban community and corresponding entitlements by negotiating access to physical space for self-employment and housing (Tati 2018). Arua in northern Uganda is embracing “its role as a destination for migrants and refugees from South Sudan” (Bauder and Landau 2018: n.p.). Refugees in Dakar, Senegal, are expected to integrate faster than those in camps, although they receive fewer UNHCR assistance than those in camps and confront barriers to the local labour market and entrepreneurship (Men-etrier 2016). Lubumbashi, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, has a history of tolerance towards internally displaced people, who “were encouraged to organise politically in order to articulate their interests with the local and national governments” (Kabwe-Segatti and Landau 2007: n.p.). In Fès, Morocco, Sub-Saharan African migrants “claim both the right to be mobile and rights to the cities through which they pass” (Berriane 2018: 79) and experience neighbourhoods as places of both “solidarity” and “social distancing” (Berriane 2018: 90-91).

Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, I reviewed the English language literature to examine whether urban sanctuary and solidarity policies and practices, as they are known in the Global North, also exist in the Global South, in particular in Africa. In this regard, the literature related to cities in the Global North is expansive, but sparse in relation to cities in the Global South. Only few works on migration and refugees on the Global South and Africa explicitly use concepts such as sanctuary city or urban solidarity. The literature on African cities other than Johannesburg and Nairobi is particularly limited. As a result of these limitations, the review does not provide conclusive evidence on whether urban sanctuary or solidarity policies and practices exist in Africa. In addition, these limitations raise the issue of the degree to which there is an “African” experience related to urban sanctuary and solidarity.

The above literature review suggests that the circumstances giving rise to sanctuary and solidarity cities do not exist in all parts of the world; nor should urban sanctuary and solidarity policies and practices as they occur in the Global North be considered universal. Rather the situation of migrants and refugees in African cities “reveals the specificity of the Euro-American experience” (Landau and Freemantle 2018: 294). One problem may be that the underlying theoretical foundations of urban sanctuary and solidarity are inherently



Eurocentric. For example, the Lefebvrian notion of the “right to the city” is rooted in Marxian understandings of labour-capital relations and localised belonging that does not apply in the same way to many contemporary African cities where populations are transient and surplus value is produced elsewhere (Landau 2019). Yet, the development of some concepts that are popular in Western urban theory, such as “urban citizenship,” have been highly responsive to the situation of cities in the Global South (Holston 1999, 2008). Future research could explore if and how the African experience can contribute to the development or reframing of theories that encompass urban sanctuary and solidarity policies and practices of the Global South and North.

Despite the sparse evidence in the literature and the Eurocentrism engrained in the concepts of urban sanctuary and urban solidarity, the review also revealed that African cities mirror some aspects of urban sanctuary and solidarity policies and practices. For example, civil-society actors in both Nairobi and Johannesburg have created a support infrastructure at the urban scale that provides important services to international migrants and refugees. In addition, in both cities international migrants carve out spaces of belonging. Furthermore, status categories imposed by the national government and international institutions do not always reflect the way in which migrants and refugees experience community and belonging. Nevertheless, whether individual sanctuary or solidarity aspects combine in ways that resemble urban sanctuary or solidarity, as they exist in the Global North, remains highly questionable.

The historical, political, and geopolitical circumstances of urban migrant and refugee accommodation in Africa clearly differ from those in Europe and North America. These circumstances have important consequences. On the one hand, many African nation states are weak and national status documents are not always as important for the governance of populations and the mobility of people as they are in the Global North (Torpey 2000). In situations in which both migrant and non-migrant populations do not need status documents to go about their daily lives and to access services and entitlements (Bakewell forthcoming), the question of legal sanctuary may be irrelevant. In some rural communities in the Gambia (Zanker 2018; Zanker and Altrogge 2017) or the Borderlands of Zambia (Bakewell 2007), village chiefs rather than national governments possess the authority to decide on migrant and refugee inclusion in the local community. Seen in this light, many African cities may already *be* sanctuary cities where national status papers are of little relevance. This perspective reflects, in particular, a view from North America where sanctuary cities primarily seek to protect people who are “illegalised” by the nation state. In Africa, local actors other than the local or national state often hold the key to offering urban inclusion and participation.

On the other hand, throughout Africa, transnationality and cosmopolitanism may often define community in a-territorial terms (Kihato 2010; Landau and Freemantle 2009; Landau 2019). An important question is whether transnational and cosmopolitan pan-African identities hinder framing ‘community’ and ‘belonging’ in urban terms. Answering this



question can offer important insights into the importance of urban belonging to migrant and refugee security. These insights are not only relevant to cities in the Global North but can also be critical for the development of urban theory.

The literature review indicated that despite the weakness of African nation states, municipalities in Africa are not assuming a primary role in defining community and belonging in the way one would expect based on the experience of the Global North. The open political confrontation between urban and national scales over migration governance that can be observed in the Global North appears to be largely absent in the scholarly literature on Africa. This does not mean that local and national policies are necessarily aligned. Nevertheless, the structural problem of migrant exclusion and illegalisation at the national scale does not seem to be a cause for urban politics of resistance. In fact, the relationship between migrant agency and urban and national scales of governance may be an altogether different one than in the Global North. In Nairobi,

...urban refugees employ agency to chip away from the confining, monitoring, and fixing acts of the state both at urban and national levels. Hence, struggles for 'right to the city' do not happen exclusively or detached from parallel struggles of 'right to the nation-state'. These processes are happening simultaneously. They are intertwined both in essence (what urban refugees demand) and in scale (whether they demand it at national or urban levels). (Kassa 2019: 75, parentheses in original)

Based on the literature I reviewed, collective agency and resistance against national migration and refugee politics exercised by the urban community and municipality – a key ingredient of sanctuary and solidarity cities in the Global North – seems to be lacking in Africa.

From a critical scholarly perspective, the African experience of weak nation states and urban municipalities may provide opportunities to rethink the centrality of legal national status and political membership at the urban scale in the context of migration governance that Eurocentric and Western perspectives often assume (Landau and Bakewell 2018). Instead of the legal and state-centered perspective, other aspects of discursive, identity-formative, and scalar process of urban inclusion and participation may play more important roles in shaping the lived experiences of international migrants and refugees in positive ways. For example, negotiating access to urban space may enable international migrants and refugees to gain access to rights and entitlements (Tati 2018), resulting in what could be described in the Global North as postnational citizenship (Soysal 1994).

Despite the apparent differences between cities in the Global North and South, in some contexts, we can observe that municipalities in the Global South are asserting a role in migration management. Although the above review suggests that African cities have largely not assumed a strong role in migration management compared to some cities in the Global North, there are city networks emerging with representation from Africa and other parts of the Global South to solve problems related to the accommodation of migrants and refugees: Cities Alliance, established in 1999 with the help of the World Bank and the United



Nations Centre for Human Settlements, is working with “secondary cities” across Asia, Africa, and Latin America to address the arrival of migrants and refugees; the Mayors Migration Council (MMC) was launched in Marrakesh in December 2018 “to help cities have their voices and interests reflected in international deliberations and policies concerning refugees and migrants”.¹ In Latin America, Ciudades Solidarias (Cities of Solidarity) was established in 2008 as part of the Mexico Plan of Action to serve a similar role. While these networks involving mayors and city administrations may represent a top-down approach, the role of community-driven, bottom-up international networks is less clear.

The consolidation of migration and refugee management at the urban scale may also be observed in a different way: an apparent commonality among cities in the Global North and the Global South is that many cities are using their relative autonomy to oppose sanctuary policies and solidarity practices. Cities throughout the world are restricting the right to residency for international migrants and refugees, are withholding services, and are reproducing exclusionary migration and refugee discourses (Gargiulo 2017; Haysom 2013). Effectively, these are anti-sanctuary and anti-solidarity cities. That Africa has its fair share of such cities illustrates the continuing and emerging importance of the urban scale.

The above review illustrates the need for future research. First, reviewing the French language literature may provide valuable insights that my review of the English language literature missed. Secondly, there is the need for empirical research to fill existing gaps in the literature. This research must address the scarcity of knowledge on urban sanctuary and solidarity policies and practices in cities in the Global South that have not attracted the same scholarly attention as, for example, Nairobi or Johannesburg. In this context, it would be important to examine the variability of such policies and practices throughout the Global South, and Africa in particular. This research would inform larger issues of urban governance vis-à-vis migration and how the intersectionality of international actors, regional geopolitics, national policies, and local politics, histories, and socio-economic circumstances affect approaches to urban governance and migrant and refugee accommodation. Comparative research, in particular, could illustrate urban differences and similarities in this respect. Finally, future research should seek to uncover the linkages between conceptualisations of urban sanctuary and solidarity in the Global North and urban initiatives in the Global South and explore if the concepts of urban sanctuary and solidarity can and should travel between global contexts.

¹ <https://gfmd2010.files.wordpress.com/2019/01/mmc-explainer.pdf>



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