

GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT “PATTERNS” OBSCURE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MIGRATION PROCESSES ALL OVER THE WORLD

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I believe the answer to the question “Is it possible to distinguish patterns of migration in the Global South from patterns in the Global North?” is a simple no. The so-called “Global North” and the “Global South” are “entities” which are extremely heterogeneous in every respect. What is demographic homogeneity? Exaggerating the homogeneity of “the North” a bit, let us assume that there the birth rate is decreasing and the numbers of immigrants are rising. But are the United States of America with a little under three hundred million inhabitants, around forty million of which are immigrants, comparable to all countries of the north? Obviously not.

It is important to clarify that when speaking of “migration”, we are not only talking about economic or labour migration, we are also talking about people living in exile and political refugees or those affected by displacement, for example, as the result of war. In my opinion, migration includes every phenomenon that involves human displacement in a given territory. If we had to specify the date around which human migration began, the most adequate answer would be the beginning of the human race. Archaeological finding and, more recently, the Old Testament, demonstrate just this, as one of the books of the Old Testament is called “Exodus”.

One could say that we are witnessing large-scale migrations from the South towards the North, or from the ex-colonies to the metropolises. But these are very limited descriptions within time and space. For example, one hundred years ago we saw large-scale emigration from Europe to the Americas and Australia. After the Second World War, there was also emigration in the same direction, for example, Italians that migrated to Argentina ([Fernando Devoto: Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina](#)). If we limit these movements to the current epoch (which is already a very crass limitation) the idea of patterns still would not work. What if

the United States had ex-colonies in the European sense? Well, one could consider the relationship with Puerto Rico as a colonial relationship and there are, in fact, four million Puerto Ricans in the United States. However, if any example were to break with the idea of patterns, it would be Puerto Rico: Puerto Ricans are born with the right to a United States passport and their migration to the United States is completely legal and it grants them the same rights and obligations as any other citizen of the United States. One also cannot compare the legal relevance of jus soli (citizenship by birth on the territory) in all American countries to the matching norms in Europe. Nationality laws are more similar in the United States, Canada, Argentina, and Mexico, than between the United States and Germany, for example. And although the legal framework is not homogeneous on every continent, there are even more issues that separate the continents than separate the “North” and the “South”.

The most populated country of the supposed “South” and at the same time the most populated country on the planet is China, whose demographic situation, process of urbanisation and some migratory norms do not comply with generalised patterns. It is obvious that Chinese emigration to various countries is very high, but the destinations of emigrants are not exclusively in the North, as they include Latin American and African countries. Furthermore, there are internal limitations with respect to migration within the country as well as with respect to civil rights, which are not feasible in most other countries of the world. Another relevant question is that generalisations of “patterns” essentially hide migratory processes in different world regions: migration within Africa, within South America and between Central America and Mexico.

According to the United Nations ([International Migration Report 2013](#)), one can divide all of the international migrants in the world into three groups: Those who migrate from the south to the north, those who migrate between countries of the south, and those who migrate between developed countries. Regarding this last group, I can comment on the migratory system in the Southern Cone. Specialists have pointed out that, around the 1980s, there was a “regional migratory system” including Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay and Bolivia as countries of emigra-

tion, and Argentina as a receiving country. Currently, Chile and Brazil have clearly become receiving countries, but if we consider South America, we must add three further elements: 1) The Peruvian diaspora living in approximately twenty different countries; 2) the Ecuadorian emigration with an especially strong migration to Spain; 3) the Colombian emigration that includes large numbers from middle classes. (For those wanting a better understanding of certain migratory dynamics in the Southern Cone I recommend my book "[Argentina and the Southern Cone](#)", co-authored with Gabriel Kessler.)

In short, thinking in terms of patterns of the North and South will not help us to comprehend the complexities of contemporary migratory processes, which are a key issue to understanding where "the global" is heading to.

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