

## INTRODUCTION

by [Tobias Schwarz](#), [Andrea Hollington](#), [Oliver Tappe](#), [Tijo Salverda](#) (GSSC)

How can we achieve a better understanding of the variations in international migration to, from, and within the Global South? To facilitate a dialogue about this topic, we asked a number of contributors to write or to provide a video statement about their region of expertise. To some we explicitly posed the following question: Is it possible to distinguish current or historical experiences or patterns of migration in the Global South that differ from patterns in the Global North?

To affirm this central question implies a commonly shared migration experience in the Global South, at least in contrast to ostensibly different patterns in the North. Arguments in favor could rely on the assumption that international migration within/from the Global South was and continues to be the result of unequal distribution of economic resources and of the broader post-colonial power relations on a global scale. This draws on, among other things, histories of colonialism and exploitation, experiences of slavery and bonded labor, and also partly on ideological solidarities or political collaborations between countries within the Global South. The counterposition brings forward the argument that specifically Southern migration patterns are implausible, in light of either a great empiric diversity within the juxtaposed categories North and South, or because of the world's profound global connectedness, both historically and current, which renders such categories (next to) meaningless.

The statements assembled in this issue of *Voices from Around the World* strive to establish a better understanding of the different perspectives on international migration across the globe. To do so, we privilege perspectives on the Global South, as an attempt to counter the hegemony of research on the classic countries of international immigration – the USA, Canada, Australia, and Western Europe.

Even those who support the claim that patterns of migration in the Global South differ from those in the Global North are ambivalent about the implications of this statement. As an anthropologist devoted to in-depth case studies, Andrew Gardner is critical of making comparisons beyond one's own region of expertise, and also reluctant to speak of patterns typical for the Global South. The Arab Gulf States themselves, he points out, are not at all 'typical', but unique (just imagine: 90 percent of Qatar's inhabitants are foreign workers). He prefers to think instead of a broad diversity of contemporary migration systems. But still he sees much of that systemic diversity as being located in the Global South, while, in his view, Northern migration policies are more 'patterned' due to their longer history of mutual references and standardization.

This view is seconded by Michaela Pelican. When asked about specific features of migration in the Global South, she points to the informality of the practices of African emigrants. Many African traders move into and out of their international destinations in the Persian Gulf and in China without gaining the formal status of settled immigrants. More affordable ways to cross borders, greater informality, and increased flexibility seem to her to be particular characteristics of South-South migration.

Guita Hourani and Eugene Sensenig-Dabbous take for granted that profound differences between "Northern" and "Southern" parameters of immigration/asylum policy exist. They argue, however, against judging policies in the South from the perspective of the North. The International Labour Organization, the International Organization of Migration, and the Swiss Development Cooperation actively intervene, with their Northern concepts, in the Middle Eastern refugee crisis, but the institutions' suggestions are ill-equipped for the challenges at hand. Instead, as Hourany & Sensenig-Dabbous argue, it is precisely the "Global South approach to migration and asylum" that has enabled some countries in the MENA region to absorb disproportionately large numbers of refugees.

In his contribution, Adam K. Webb engages with an exemplary, distinctly non-Western pattern of immigration policy. He focusses on the often

explicitly racist exclusion from immigration that abounds in the legislation of many Asian states. While there are many studies of immigrant selection and exclusion by Western countries – most prominently of 19th and 20th century US immigration acts and the “White Australia” policy – few works are looking for patterns of such institutionalized forms of non-Western racism. Examining states in the Persian Gulf, and in East- and Southeast Asia, Webb argues that scholars can no longer neglect the fact that their immigration policies treat foreign immigrants as transient guests who should be grateful to be allowed in, if at all, and calls for a global debate about how to soften boundaries instead of hardening them.

Loren Landau reminds us not to see case studies on the South simply as “deviations” from an ostensible norm that has been modelled around “Northern” or “Western” cases. He points to the fact that scholars from the South are underrepresented when it comes to theory-building, and calls for “a conversation between Southern specificity and global theorizing”.

Indeed, Min Zhou gives an example of “gaps” in the current (Western-biased) theories about migration. She first points out that Asia is a large continent with very diverse experiences of migration, yet most countries in South and Southeast Asia are both receiving and sending societies, so the patterns with regards to the consequences of emigration and the way in which immigrants are incorporated are not the same as they are in the North. She mentions Singapore as an example: Contrary to the typical Western pattern where immigrants are required to assimilate to a “core group”, this society self-defines as “multiracial” and stresses that there is no such dominant culture. Some of the contributors argue that regional patterns are indeed distinguishable, but still stress their embeddedness within larger (or even global) configurations. Amarjit Kaur describes historical and contemporary migration flows in Southeast Asia and argues that this regional pattern even appears across historical periods. During the 19th century, Southeast Asia became integrated into a globalized system of production and trade, which also facilitated massive migration flows of mainly unskilled laborers from southern China and South India to Southeast Asia. From the 1970s on-

wards, less-skilled foreign workers (as well as highly educated migrants) again became of crucial importance to some Southeast Asian economies (Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand).

Adapa Satyanarayana adds an Indian perspective to this. He looks at the linkages between South India and particularly Burma, Malaysia, and the Gulf States during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He argues that in this period, Asian migration was comparable in scale to trans-Atlantic migration. In other words, the South Asian regional system has to be considered part of a globalizing migration pattern.

In an interview, Vincent Houben also reflects on the question of whether there is a shared migration experience in the Global South. From his perspective as a historian of Southeast Asia he presents strong arguments for approaching North and South as historically connected (mainly through the colonial organization of un-free labor migration), which makes it difficult to theorize two distinguishable patterns. On top of that, he notices an increasing blurring of this dividing line between North and South today.

Ibrahim Awad, who works on the Middle East, makes a similar point. From his perspective, each and every regional migration movement has to be understood as an element of a larger, and ultimately global, system. He points to the example of the emergence of nation states: the drawing of new state borders continues to cause much human displacement, and is often directly influenced by the interest of big international players.

Noting that European politicians (or more generally, those in the rich West) on the one hand praise mobility, while on the other hand seeing immigrants from Africa as a “predatory inconvenience”, Francis Nyamnjoh also argues that taking into account the history of (neo-) colonialism is crucial in order to understand today's pattern of migration in a deeply unequal world.

Finally, some answer our central question emphatically in the negative. Alejandro Grimson decidedly rejects a comparison between patterns of the South and the North, because to him these are overgeneralizing categories that obscure differences between migration processes all over the world. First, he says, there are some similarities across large regions that span the North-South divide. Second, there are differences within “the South” in some regions,

particularly when migration is concerned. In Latin America, for example, there would be various migration patterns rather than just one. Jorge Durand also outlines the existence of regional migration systems within the Americas, and stresses the diversity between migration patterns of nearby countries: some receive immigration, some experience complex configurations of emigration, others are primarily transit countries. But in his view, in the Americas the northern and southern parts must be seen as elements of an integrated system.

He therefore considers a conceptual distinction between North and South to be of little use.

Tobias Schwarz is puzzled by how statistics on international migration are often visualized, for instance when the total amount of “South-North” migration is presented in a diagram, or when continents are taken as the basic components of a bar chart. In his contribution he reflects upon the effects caused by the use of different ways of visualizing the statistics of migration, and rejects North/South as suitable units of comparison.