

Working

Paper

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# The International Institute of Migration and Development



*South-South  
migration:  
Southern  
interpretations  
of a Northern  
discourse*

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# **South-South migration: Interpretations of a Northern discourse**

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## **Abstract**

South-South migration, a term largely coined by the North, is one of the biggest misnomers when it comes to research into issues of global migration and mobility. The literature in this area is clearly Northern dominated, although there are many Southern scholars who also excel in this area. This working paper, based on personal perceptions of a Southern practitioner, looks at some of the more traditional Northern literature available on South-South migration, and interprets it in a Southern context, to identify a series of “perception deficits” in how the North perceives South-South migration. It identifies six such perception deficits on in Northern literature on South-South migration as being; i) singular, ii) temporary, iii) post-colonial in its formation, iv) a purely economic commodity, v) ignoring important Southern context and vi) the need for the South to take responsibility for its own knowledge. It does not challenge the evidence base of existing literature using these findings, nor does it deny the existence of Southern literature on the topic. Rather, it challenges the gap in perception that Northern researchers have about the South and as a result, about South-South migration. It thus reinforces the need for the South to take greater control over the research.

## **Author**

Themrise Khan is an independent development professional and qualitative researcher with over 25 years of practitioner and policy-based experience in international development, aid effectiveness, gender, and global migration. She has worked with a vast spectrum of multilateral and bilateral organizations, INGOs and civil society organizations in Pakistan, South Asia and beyond and has a number of publications and articles to her credit. She has also worked on labour emigration policies and legislation in Pakistan, as well as on gendered aspects of labour migration. She blogs, speaks and writes actively on notions of decolonization, North-South power imbalances in development, race relations and immigrant citizenship and integration.

## **Introduction**

It is hard to recall when I was first introduced to the term “Global South”<sup>1</sup>. Perhaps it was during the early days of my career as a development practitioner in Pakistan in the late 1990s. Or perhaps it was during my Master’s degree at the beginning of this century in the UK. But to suddenly realize, indeed, to be told that I and others like myself had been slotted into a geography nearly half the size of the earth, simply by virtue of our developmental and financially humble origins, was an irony that was not lost on me.

Subsequently, this term and its more powerful counterpart, the “Global North”, have become indelible in the context of discussions on inequality and power structures around the world. I too, as a development practitioner and migration researcher, have used both terms liberally over the years to juxtapose my research into development, inequality and migration against a more “global” context.

But by dividing the globe across its horizontal axis, into two upper and lower halves, scholars, academics and practitioners, have also divided their understanding of these two worlds. The upper half consistently defined as on the path to progress and wealth. While the lower half, on an inevitable downward trajectory of inequality and disparity. And never the twain shall meet.

This framing has had a marked impact on not only how countries view each other across this divide, but also on how socio-economic and political relationships are defined amongst them<sup>2</sup>. None is more contentious than migration.

Migration has traditionally been viewed in both academic and intellectual literature as movement from the “marginalized” South, to the “prosperous” North<sup>3</sup>. Literature that is widely authored by those in the North. Legal migration pathways have historically led, and continue to lead, from Asia, Africa and Latin America, to Europe, North America and Australia. But they also contend with being managed and controlled by the latter states. Not just conceptually, but also administratively, legally and politically. Even today, the North gets to decide who migrates, where and how.

But human movement does not simply move in one direction. It is multi-dimensional and multi-directional. As a result, people not only move between these two perceived halves, but also within them.

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “Global North“ and Global South” used in this article, do not necessarily denote the authors agreement with what these terms stand for. However, in order to ensure consistency in exploring the arguments presented, both terms are used in this paper as they are defined in the conventional literature.

<sup>2</sup>There is a plethora of widely available literature critiquing the use and application of these two terms, particularly in the social sciences and development studies. This paper does not delve into these critiques.

<sup>3</sup> One attempt to produce an objective classification uses the UNDP’s Human Development Index to differentiate between North and South. In brief, the Global North consists of those 64 countries which have a high HDI (most of which are located north of the 30th northern parallel), while the remaining 133 countries belong to the Global South with medium to low HDI.

South-South migration, a term ironically also coined by the North, is one of the biggest misnomers when it comes to research into issues of global migration and mobility<sup>4</sup>. The idea that people not only migrate from the North to the South, but also from the South to the South, is one that Northern scholars and academics discovered in the late 1990s/early 2000s<sup>5</sup>. Since then, it has been a subject of constant investigation, and one that Northern scholars continue to define and dissect.

While South to North migration and mobility at least retains the North in its conceptual and practical application, South-South migration is solely contained within one sphere. Why then, is the study and conceptualization of this still viewed from a largely Northern standpoint? And subsequently, how does this impact on the ability of countries in the South to define, manage and benefit from such migration?

This paper will draw on some of my personal perspectives on migration and mobility within the South as both a Southern practitioner and researcher in migration and development, but also as a migrant myself. Albeit, one who belongs to the more traditional South-North corridor. It will look at some of the more traditional Northern literature available on South-South migration, interpreting it in a Southern context, to identify a series of “perception deficits”<sup>6</sup> in how North literature perceives South-South migration. Indeed, how it perpetuates the stereotypes of the South-South migrant, and how this could be detrimental to the study of the South, by the South, for the South.

### **An obsession with terminology**

The obsession with terminology over how to categorize and define countries according to their wealth and productive capacity, has long since dictated the Global North’s approach towards their policies and practices in several areas of human, economic and social development<sup>7</sup>.

Migration and human mobility too, has been subjected to this, via the focus on maintaining borders between countries and deciding who gets to move, where and how.

As a Southern development practitioner, these myopic views of the world have done much to influence my own view of the world as a researcher and also of how the world views migration as a whole. The words “migrant” or “immigrant”, which I myself am, have brought with them images of an outsider, which

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<sup>4</sup>The term South-South migration was originally coined by international development agencies, including the World Bank and OECD to estimate global migrant flows, as opposed to giving preference to knowledge produced by the South for the South.

<sup>5</sup> I say “discovered”, because in terms of mobility, migration within the South began long before this. The 1970s and 1980s for instance, were some of the most prominent decades in terms of labour migration from South Asian countries to the Gulf and within African regions post-independence of many nations in the 1950s and 1960s onwards. This era has been relatively understudied in the literature as a historical basis for South-South migratory patterns. See, Mehdi Chowdhury and S. Irudaya Rajan, 2018, *South Asian Migration in the Gulf. Causes and Consequences*, Palgrave MacMillan.

<sup>6</sup>I first referred to this term in an article written for *The Sociological Review* in June 2020;

<https://www.thesociologicalreview.com/research-by-the-developed-on-the-developing-view-from-the-researched/>

<sup>7</sup>There has been a great deal of discussion and literature on the divergences that these two terms create within both the social sciences, as well as in the international development sector. This paper does not specifically build on those discussions.

continue to haunt us generations beyond, of families moving between oceans and continents and a home left behind<sup>8</sup>. More importantly, for a better home elsewhere. Because the underlying assumption of such migration is that anywhere in the North, is certainly better than anywhere in the South.

In the context of South-South migration however, this terminology does not appear frequently, or even sporadically in the literature. Instead, South-South migrants are referred to as “labour migrants”, “temporary workers” or even “guest workers”. Families in this context, are “left-behind”, as the South-South migrant is a singular entity in search of livelihood and sustenance for his/her household. This is the *first* of the perception deficits by which Northern literature delineates South-South migration from other migration patterns – that such migration is *singular* in nature.

Strangely enough though, despite the North’s preoccupation with terminology, there is no “academic” definition of South-South migration per se. Simply put, it involves the movement of persons from one country in the South to another. In a policy context, it involves the transfer of human capital within such countries primarily on the pretext of employment (labour emigration). While this pretext also applies to South-North migration, in the context of South-South mobility, it precludes an assumption that since most countries of the South are less-developed, the purpose of such migration can only be temporary. The migration governance regimes which control South-South movement, also adhere to measures that assure these are only temporary migrants, and not permanent.

South-South migration can also include however, a search for safety from conflict or persecution (refugees/asylum seekers/displaced persons). This pretext is not identified so in the literature, as these are invariably forced migrants and do not fall under the traditional definition of South-South migration, which is largely voluntary. However, as will be discussed later in this paper, this is one of the nuances that is easily ignored in the Northern-centric view on migration.

Majority of the literature on South-South migration flows therefore, focuses clearly on the South as a labour market for those, it is assumed, who cannot reach the North, either due to weak financial capacity or sheer distance between geographies. While this assumption can be easily challenged, it nevertheless creates an oppositional framework whereby South-South migration is economic, temporary and restricted.

Restricted because migrants from the South to the South, live precarious lives that depend on destination countries to support them. Walzer (1983) for instance, conceptualizes the foreign “guest worker” program, one of the prominent mechanisms through which Southern migrants access overseas employment, as the destination state attracting foreign workers by making their entry easier, but only for a certain period after

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<sup>8</sup>In a disturbing turn of events, the website of the UN Agency for Migration claims that there is no universally-accepted definition of migrant; <https://www.iom.int/who-is-a-migrant>

which they must return. They are limited to certain employers, housed in worker's colonies and their market mobility is restricted. Most importantly, and perhaps a defining feature, they are denied the right to bring family and settle permanently by the destination state. This is the *second* of our perception deficits – that such migration can only be of a *temporary* nature.

These characteristics are important from the point of view of Southern practitioners like myself. They reinforce the notion, that the perceived difference between the various forms of migration is based on wealth, skill and income, rather than the freedom of movement for all. This marked difference in viewing South-South migration as being set apart from South-North migration, therefore, has more to do with economic production than with constitutional human rights. Why is the North so minutely obsessed with differentiating migrants based on where they come from and how much they can earn?

### **The South as a metaphor for all that was**

It is no secret that the preoccupation of the North with everything that is the South, is an outcome of the vast European colonial legacy that was undone across the world, in some countries as early as only a few decades ago. Hot on the heels of post-colonial development theory of the 1960s and 1970s, development in countries of the Global South, has been seen as the *raison d'être* of more powerful Northern countries, as a way to exert control over their “lost colonies” under the watchful guise of altruism and aid.

The dominant narrative in migration today, is also largely focused on the impact of migration from the South *on* the North. This narrative is dominated by Northern academics and practitioners and does not necessarily give academics in the South the space to define the issue independently. Even migration theory espoused by the likes of North American academics like Michael Walzer, Michael Todaro and Joseph Carens, frames international migration as the free movement of labour from the South to address the needs of the North.

South-South migration however, has been a lesser known casualty of this post-colonial legacy. While migration from the South to North follows the path of the formerly colonized making their way to their former colonizers, South-South migration, does exactly the opposite. It traces the path of the formerly colonized making their way to other states, many of whom were also formerly colonized.

This should ideally be the fork where the discussion on migration diverges from current Northern-focused thinking on mobility. After all, the migration route is clearly headed in a different direction, which has nothing to do with the North and is now, legally independent. But Northern literature continues to (at times indirectly) frame South-South migration as a form of post-colonial oppression, so that the former colonizers must have some role to play in creating order and equality in these newly independent but Southern states. This is illustrated by attempts made by many Northern institutions to study South-South migration (some in

collaboration with the South)<sup>9</sup>. This is the *third* perception deficit Northern literature creates around the South – that such migration is largely influenced by post-colonialism.

Some Northern writers have argued that patriarchy, white supremacy, and global capitalism are all systems of oppression that shape migration flows and immigrant incorporation (Golash-Boza et al, 2019, 2). This is more dominant in the discussion on South-North migration and the tensions that exist between post-colonial states and their former wards.

Critical race theory, the antithesis to post-colonial theory which largely controls the narrative on migration, development and inequality, could strengthen the Southern position of South-South migration and reduce this disparity, as it sees race as a strength as opposed to a disadvantage<sup>10</sup>. One of its key founders, Derrick Bell has claimed in one of his seminal pieces, that critical race theory turns marginalization into an advantageous and concrete advocacy on behalf of those oppressed by race and other related factors such as gender, economic class, and sexual orientation (Bell, 1995, 902).

Applying critical race theory to South-South migration, would therefore benefit its understanding as former colonies now creating their own path to economic success and human development. But instead, the literature on particularly the economic benefits of South-South migration, juxtapose how the North could create a win-win situation for itself if South-South migration were further encouraged<sup>11</sup>. The former colonizers could still stand to gain from their former colonies.

This has made South-South migration almost like a malleable plaything in the hands of Northern researchers, who fashion its impact out of the frameworks they set for it themselves. Their “identification and measurement” as one UK-funded project on South-South migration has put it, is also up to Northern researchers, who relentlessly plough into the depths of Africa and Asia to understand “how ‘growth dividends’ from migration can be shared more equitably between the wealthier and poorer in society”<sup>12</sup>. Must South-South migration also be seen largely as a “project” of the North, in trying to assert its “re”-independence over the South?

Similarly, decolonization is fast becoming a prominent buzzword amongst academics and practitioners in many fields of social sciences and humanities. The impetus stems from a need to divorce the murky past of

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<sup>9</sup><https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-directories/current-projects/2019/ukri-gcrf-south/>

<sup>10</sup> Critical race theory's founding members are usually identified as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams.

<sup>11</sup> This literature discusses the importance of economic contributions such as workers remittances to migrant-sending countries which could contribute to their economic growth, creating stability and security, therefore reducing financial dependence on the North. But in return, such growth could also create opportunities for the North for greater economic exploration in Southern countries.

<sup>12</sup><https://www.mideq.org/en/blog/grappling-south-south-migration-and-inequalities-development-studies-association-annual-conference/>



many former Western colonizers from their counterparts in the developing world. But the fact that the decision to “decolonize” has also been decided upon by the former colonizers, is a troubling sign in itself<sup>13</sup>. So why is South-South migration such a fascinating form of research for the North?

### **Why South-South migration? Questioning the North’s rationale**

A recent article in the New York Times on the beginning of the “great climate migration”, uses modelled projections to show that by 2070, 19 percent of the world will be uninhabitable due to climate change<sup>14</sup>. “Where will everyone go?”, it asks. It frames climate as the great disruptor pushing people from the South to safety. Pushing them further to Northern countries – as in not cooler climes, but to the rich Western nations - who should “allow” more migrants to cross their borders.

It is arguments such as these that cut through the Northern-centricity of literature on who migrants from the South really are; those that are plagued with inequalities, both natural and human-created and who have no way out but to leave. And that the North must be their savior. It negates for instance, arguments (made by Northern intellectuals yet again), that climate migrants are not necessarily permanent, nor do they have the resources to migrate very far, even if they do<sup>15</sup>.

Many Northern researchers use a similar stance to justify the importance of South-South migration as a vital area of study in migration and mobility. This includes claims that “over the last decades, new migration patterns have emerged in the Global South that have not been fully analyzed so far. This includes “new” patterns not only intra-regionally but also inter-regionally” (De Lombaerde and Gup, 2014, 105). Studying South–South migration apparently also allows, “us [*as in Northern researchers*], to re-consider and/or question the meaning and relevance of other related social concepts and variables ... that often emerged in a Northern context and were then a-critically transposed into other contexts” (ibid, 107).

Others claim, that paying more attention to migration in the South is one way “to change how we [*again, the North*], understand and talk about migration, while trying to extricate ourselves from the dichotomies of South and North, rich and poor, black and white, which continue to dominate [*the Northern*] imagination” (Awad and Natarajan, 2018, 55).

But perhaps the most forceful and prominent argument made by many in the North in favour of South-South migration, is the large scale of remittances it generates via labour migrants, and the subsequent impact of

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<sup>13</sup>Some argue, that the theory and practise of decolonization actually originated from scholars in the Global South as a way to move beyond their post-colonial identity, such as Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire and Eduardo Galeano. In contemporary and more recent literature however, the discussion on decolonization has also been dominated by Northern scholarship and practice, who seek to investigate how they (the Global North) could shift perspective from the North to the South.

<sup>14</sup><https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/23/magazine/climate-migration.html?smid=tw-share>

<sup>15</sup>See commentary by Hien deHaas, <http://heindehaas.blogspot.com/2020/01/climate-refugees-fabrication-of.html>

that on the “migration-development” nexus, (Hujo and Piper, 2007, 20-21; Ratha and Shaw, 2007, 4).

Indeed, one of the oft-quoted studies in the international development community concludes, that in the African context, South-South migration “makes distinctive contributions to human development in terms of income, human capital and that the analysis of migration in poorer regions of the world and its relationship with human development requires much more data than is currently available” (Bakewell, 2009, Abstract).

So, the impetus to study South-South migration is purely economic, even in human development terms by singling out the South-South migrant as an economic commodity to be traded between “poorer” Southern nations. This is the *fourth* deficit that emerges from the Northern literature – that this migration is a purely *economic* commodity.

Most of the literature that studies the impact of a returning labour migrant on his/her household, is seen in the context of the economic upliftment of family and social and economic indicators, than as someone who may have scarified more than was required to support his/her family and gained, perhaps not enough in return.

Migrants from the South to the North, have been portrayed as long suffering<sup>16</sup>, economically productive<sup>17</sup>, and even criminally dangerous<sup>18</sup> in their representations by Northern governments and the media. Indeed, my own representation as a regular high-skilled migrant from Pakistan to North America, has been characterized as a racial invasion into white territory, to “steal jobs” from white settlers, despite evidence to the contrary<sup>19</sup>. Anti-immigrant sentiment notwithstanding.

But those who navigate only the Southern routes should be more acceptable for Northern economies, because they do not “invade” Northern territory to settle permanently. Rather, they do not invade Northern territory at all. So, the threat perception of migration in this context is negligible for the North. Its win-win for all apparently, except the migrants. So, why must we pander to a Northern contextualization of South-South migration, that both creates and reinforces the stereotypes of Southern migrants?

### **South-South Migration as a Southern issue**

The OECD claims that the world’s 82 million South-South migrants form about 36 percent of the total stock of migrants worldwide<sup>20</sup>. These migrants trek across a series of geographic corridors which traverse the globe from East to West and vice versa. The major regions within these corridors include Latin America, Africa,

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<sup>16</sup><https://www.dw.com/en/world-in-progress-italys-long-suffering-migrant-workers/av-47196190>

<sup>17</sup><https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/02/here-s-how-migration-can-benefit-us-all/>

<sup>18</sup><https://thecorrespondent.com/235/europe-is-the-promised-land-and-nothing-will-convince-these-migrants-otherwise/268987003780-79d885f6>

<sup>19</sup>Ameilie F. Constant (2014) Do migrants take the job of native workers? IZA World of Labour; 10

<sup>20</sup><https://www.oecd.org/dev/migration-development/south-south-migration.htm>

South Asia and South East Asia. This includes migration *within* these various regions, as opposed to only *between* them.

As one can observe, the geographical scale of these migration pathways, is extensive. The assumption in most literature that those in the South prefer to migrate to countries that are closer to them, or those they share a border with (such as within regions), does not necessarily hold when African migrants move as far as South-East Asia and Southern America, or when South-East Asians move to the Gulf States. And that too, temporarily. This is one of the many nuances that the Northern literature ignores when it studies South-South migration pathways – the Southern contexts of movement<sup>21</sup>. This is the *fifth* deficit – that such migration ignores important *Southern context*.

The viewpoints of why, how and when people migrate between these regions, is based on country context – Southern country context. Anglo and Eurocentric analysis of these contexts tend to sidestep many of the nuances that such contexts provide. For instance, in my work observing the dearth of female labour migration from Pakistan to the Gulf States (vis-à-vis other South Asian countries), showed that women across most income levels would rather stay in Pakistan to work if they had the opportunity to do so. While in other South Asian countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, which had far higher levels of female emigration to the Middle East, female labour emigration, though problematic, was largely encouraged and supported by women as well as the state. So the region itself possesses great variation.

A Northern view of South-South migration also conveniently downplays the vital inclusion of migration and mobility within countries of the South. This includes seasonal migration for employment, particularly in agriculture and rural-urban migration for employment and livelihoods. It also includes internally displaced populations within countries due to civil and/or military conflict. Examples of military action against insurgents in Northern Pakistan, or displacement of populations in India due to the construction of large dams, are important aspects of intra-country forced migration.

Likewise, refugees and asylum seekers also do not come into the ambit of South-South migration, despite the fact that such movement has and continues to primarily take place between countries of the South. Jordan, Kenya, Uganda and Turkey, are host to some of the world's largest refugee populations from war-torn countries like Syria, Congo, Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan, among others.

The emphasis on the relationship between migration and development is also one that has received enormous attention in Northern literature. But it primarily focuses on South-North migration and the propensity of more people emigrating (both permanently and temporarily) as “poorer” countries get

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<sup>21</sup>This aspect has begun to receive greater traction in Northern literature when studying migration in these regions.

“richer”<sup>22</sup>. It does not focus on the impact South-South migration could have on any of these factors, only reinforcing the disparity that South-South migration can only be temporary with no pathway or aspiration to

permanent emigration, whether to more prosperous Southern countries, or further proceeding to the North via<sup>23</sup>.

These arguments, also fail to see that in Africa for instance, despite the fact that migration represents an important livelihood strategy for poor households, the link between migration and poverty is often viewed more negatively. Much of the literature across much of the continent, assumes that it is poverty that forces poor people to migrate, rather than migration being a potential route out of poverty (Black et. al ,2006, 1). So why any of these stereotypes about South-South migration can't be refuted by the South?

### **The South must take responsibility – for the South**

The *sixth* and final perception deficit this paper identifies, is perhaps the most important. The South as a subject of study by the South and its own institutions is a rare occurrence in the literature. Its relative absence vis-à-vis Northern literature, only reinforces some of the actual *truths* that lie within some of our perception deficits.

For instance, there is clear indication of hierarchal power structures existing between migrant origin and destination countries within the South, where the latter are in control of migration governance and resources. New terms such as the “Asian factor” are beginning to play an increasingly significant role in South–South migration flows (DeLombaerde and Gup, 2014, 105), as more powerful countries such as the Gulf States, Korea, Singapore and China become new destinations in the South for lessor developed countries in South Asia and Africa. For example, considered a ‘minority within a minority’, African migrants and refugees are frequently discriminated against by the Chinese, on the basis of language and are even denied job opportunities solely based on the colour of their skin (Khattab and Mehmood, 2019, 4). Similarly, South Asian labourers and African caregivers and domestic housekeepers to the oil-rich Gulf States and Saudi Arabia, are consistently abused and humiliated, with no social or job security, because of their poorer origins, widely documented in the literature<sup>24</sup>. The South-South migrant remains a victim.

But what is the greatest matter of concern to myself as a Southern migration professional, is that there has been little resistance from the South towards the Euro/Anglo-centric framing of South-South migration, particularly in recent years, as interest in the subject has been growing exponentially. From a Northern

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<sup>22</sup>See arguments by Hien deHass [Why development will not stop migration](#); and Michael Clemens research on the [emigration life cycle](#).

<sup>23</sup>Granted, many migrant-receiving countries of the South, particularly in the Gulf and South-East Asia, do not offer, or make it very difficult for migrants to achieve a pathway to citizenship or permanent residency, particularly low-skilled migrants.

<sup>24</sup>See Google Scholar search;

[https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as\\_sdt=0%2C5&q=%22migrant+workers%22+AND+gulf+AND+abuse&btnG=](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=%22migrant+workers%22+AND+gulf+AND+abuse&btnG=)

standpoint, perhaps the piece of resistance that stands out the most, is historian Adam McKewon's 2004 article which raises the issue of "Euro-centrism", or "North Atlantic centrism" in much of the migration

literature over the last century or so,<sup>25</sup> highlighting the significance of non-European patterns of migration in shaping global economies (Mohapatra, 2007, 115).

Supporters of McKewon claim, that Eurocentric perspectives divide global migration flows by granting individual choice and economic incentives to migrants of European origins while denying the same to non-European migrants. (Mohapatra, 2007, 114). But there has been little from the South itself to both further emphasize this point, as well as study it from a Southern migrant's perspective by the South. While there is an emerging body of academic work which acknowledges the Anglo/Euro-centricity of migration, it is still not being led by researchers from the South<sup>26</sup>. Instead, it is more focused on looking at migration within and between countries of the South, as opposed to ensuring that literature on migration from the South is produced by Southern scholars themselves<sup>27</sup>.

Campillo-Carrete (2013), has similarly identified in her review of the literature on South-South migration, that the term itself throws up a multitude of references online, but upon closer inspection, most of the results have nothing to do with migration per se. Indeed, my own search on the term has revealed thousands of hits. But upon closer inspection, the top 20-30 hits focus on just the earning and remitting power of migration, thus reinforcing the Northern view of South-South migration being simply about economic commodification of temporary labour. This is reinforced for instance, by a study of the literature on South-South migration for domestic work that shows that there is little discussion of the reasons for such migration and the impact that it has on migrant households in origin countries. The literature is dominated by the shortcomings of legal frameworks for regulating working conditions and recruitment practices to avoid exploitation, and only a few papers discuss worker agency, which treat migrant domestic workers as victims (Deshingkar and Zietlin, 2015, 169).

There is clearly a dearth of analysis, as well as intellectual space from a Southern perspective which not only creates an imbalance between the quantity of research available on South-South migration, but also the perceptions such research creates about its subject.

### **Where do we go from here?**

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<sup>25</sup>McKeown, Adam, 2004. "Global Migration 1846-1940." *Journal of World History* 15(2):155-189

<sup>26</sup> See for instance, <https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/migration-and-society/3/1/migration-and-society.3.issue-1.xml>

<sup>27</sup>There are several emerging resources within the South, authored by the South on migration and development. See for instance, African migration, mobility and displacement at <https://ammodi.com>.

One of the biggest contradictions in research on migration and mobility that I see as a Southern researcher,

is that none of the research on migration as a whole, focuses on the North as an *origin* country<sup>28</sup>. If people can migrate from the South to the South and from the South to the North, why can they not move from North to South or North to North? This lacking observation refutes the entire premise of Northern literature and scholarship on migration, particularly from the South.

Barring any conversation on this, this essay identifies six perception deficits observed in the Northern literature on South-South migration as being; i) singular, ii) temporary, iii) post-colonial in its formation, iv) a purely economic commodity, v) ignoring important Southern context and vi) the need for the South to take responsibility. This final deficit is one that is not reflected in the literature but *should* be.

As a Southern practitioner, these perception deficits reinforce stereotypes of migrants and their pathways in the following ways:

- i) Singular: South-South migration allows only one person per household to migrate because it is contractual, temporary and expensive – and the migrant is usually poor.
- ii) Temporary: South-South migration is controlled by destination countries who do not want migrants to establish permanency in their countries – because the migrant is an outsider.
- iii) Post-colonial in its formation: South-South migration is a way to develop former colonies from which the North can equally benefit.
- iv) A purely economic commodity: South-South migration is purely for purposes of employment which is controlled by destination countries who view the migrant as a short-term gain for their economies.
- v) Ignoring important Southern context: South-South migration does not need to take in to account nuances such as conflict, displacement or geographies – because the transaction is purely economic.
- vi) The need for the South to take responsibility: South-South migration literature is largely dominated by Northern research which does not give space to Southern points of view.

Anyone can prove me wrong on any of these counts using existing evidence of which there is no paucity, that says to the contrary. But that is not the objective of this paper. These perception deficits are not meant to

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<sup>28</sup>In a google scholar search of the term “North-North migration”, only one response was returned; N Oishi, A Ono, North-North migration of care workers: “Disposable” au pairs in Australia - Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 2019

challenge the data on South-South migration by the North. Instead, they are meant to challenge the *perceptions* of the North on how their analysis views the South as a whole, either by using this data or by other forms of critical analysis.

Indeed, there is no evidence in either data or literature, that proves that South-South migration can be only these things, or just one of them. Migrants can migrate in groups for employment, even from one household. They do not necessarily have to be poor. Their pathways to emigration do not have to be temporary and their families do not have to be left-behind. They do not have to migrate just for employment and if so, that employment does not have to be temporary. And it certainly doesn't have to be for the benefit of former colonies, rather independent nations. And it can and should include several different scenarios that take place between Southern nations.

While this may sound pedantic and simplistic, the reality is that if South-South migration were viewed and studied by the South, it would produce very different viewpoints such as those above. There would still be strong contradictions given the Global South is not a singular, static entity either. But they would be juxtaposed within a context that would consider far more than just economic growth and remittances. Given the Global South's dearth of resources to encourage academic and policy research, sending countries have few tools with which to create a counter-narrative or self-narrative on South-South migration. But this is exactly why these narratives above need to be challenged and questioned with greater authority from the South.

At a time when migrants and asylum-seekers from conflict-ridden countries of the South are being repelled back to those countries by the European North without even a thought for their lives or safety, for South-South migration to be dominated by Anglo/Eurocentric perceptions, is nothing short of both an opportunity lost to build on migration dividends, as well as narrow the gap between the globe's upper and lower halves.

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