

# Book review

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## **New Directions in South–South Migration (1st ed.)**

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### INTRODUCTION

For much of the past half century, migration scholarship has been shaped by a persistent epistemic asymmetry. It has been structured through a North–South optic that relegates South–South migration to a marginal, often descriptive role rather than a central object of theory. Even as South–South migration flows surpassed South–North movements by the early 2010s, conceptual innovation, comparative frameworks, and governance analysis lagged behind this demographic reality. Migration within the Global South was frequently subsumed under categories such as internal mobility, regional circulation, or irregular movement, with limited engagement with its political economy, governance failures, and implications for urban life, food systems, and social reproduction. As Chikanda, Crush, and Ramachandran note, its significance lies in rendering visible “processes of mobility and immobility that receive scant attention in mainstream, Northern-dominated migration scholarship” (2025: 1). This imbalance reflects not simply undercounting, but the uneven distribution of conceptual attention, methodological investment, and policy imagination.

*New Directions in South–South Migration* represents an ambitious and long-overdue attempt to correct this imbalance. Spanning 28 chapters across six thematic parts, the volume brings together interdisciplinary analyses of South–South migration across Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Its central claim is not simply that South–South migration is quantitatively significant, but that it is qualitatively distinct, requiring its own conceptual vocabulary, methodological sensibilities, and governance frameworks rather than reliance on North–South analytical models.

The volume is empirically dense, geographically expansive, and methodologically plural. Its strongest contributions draw on long-running research programs, particularly Migration and Food Security in the Global South (MiFOOD), offering rare comparative insights into migrant food insecurity and informal economies. Conceptual synthesis remains uneven, reflecting a field still consolidating rather than a weakness of the volume. This unevenness underscores

both its ambition and its role as a field-building intervention rather than a fully unified theoretical project.

More than an expansion of empirical scope, the volume signals conceptual shifts still emerging in the literature. Food insecurity is no longer treated as a downstream outcome but as a central analytic lens through which social reproduction and governance failure become visible. Informality is not a transitional condition but a structuring feature of migrant incorporation across urban contexts. Mobility is recast in relational terms, where movement, immobility, and containment coexist within layered governance regimes. In doing so, the volume intervenes in how the field defines its empirical center and conceptual priorities.

## ARCHITECTURE OF THE VOLUME: A DELIBERATE THEMATIC PROGRESSION

What is at stake is not simply a shift in empirical focus, but a redefinition of the analytical foundations of migration scholarship. The organization of the volume reflects this ambition. Its six parts follow a deliberate progression from conceptual reframing to empirically grounded analysis and, ultimately, to agenda setting. It begins by establishing the analytical stakes of taking South–South migration as a distinct object of inquiry, then moves through chapters linking mobility to food insecurity, gendered governance, rural–urban transformation, and contested regulatory regimes. The middle sections treat COVID-19 not as an anomalous shock but as a revealing moment that intensified existing vulnerabilities and exposed the selective presence of the state in migrants’ lives. Later chapters extend this analysis to digital remitting, trade-based circulation, and emerging forms of East–South globalization, before closing with forward-looking contributions on research infrastructure and theoretical direction.

Read across these sections, migration, food systems, and urban informality emerge as mutually constitutive rather than parallel domains. Food insecurity functions as a central analytic lens through which governance failure and social reproduction become visible, while informality operates as a structuring condition shaping migrant livelihoods, urban economies, and governance arrangements across the Global South. Policy frameworks are consistently shown to be misaligned with these realities, particularly where migration intersects with weak social protection, precarious legal status, and exclusionary citizenship regimes.

## RECENTERING FOOD, GENDER, INFORMALITY, AND URBAN SURVIVAL ACROSS MIGRATION SCALES

The early sections establish that South–South migration cannot be partitioned into neat domains, such as international versus internal mobility, economic versus forced migration, or remittances versus work. Across Parts I, II, and III, contributors advance a relational understanding of movement linking labor migration, gendered

recruitment, rural–urban transformation, and household survival to food systems and informal economies.

### *Food insecurity and international migration*

Part I places food insecurity at the center of South–South migration analysis. Dhakal's chapter on labor migration from northern Malawi to South Africa demonstrates that food insecurity is not simply a post-migration hardship, but an upstream driver rooted in rural livelihood erosion and cross-border dependency. This framing is reinforced by Kandjii's analysis of refugee exclusion and food insecurity in South Africa, where the relationship between legal status and hunger is not incidental but structural. Food insecurity emerges as produced through regulatory exclusion and constrained access to work and urban space rather than individual failure. The theme of food security as a governance problem is also developed in Kazembe, Tawodzera, and Nickanor's chapter on urban Namibia, while Thomas-Hope's contribution in Jamaica shows that even where remittances function as lifelines, they are embedded in uneven social development and cannot be read as simple development substitutes.

### *Gendered migration governance as a structuring force*

Part II performs a crucial corrective by showing that gendered vulnerability is not an additional layer placed on otherwise neutral migration systems. It is built into the architecture of migration governance. Hennebry, Hari, and Kimani-Dupuis demonstrate how women are excluded from fair recruitment pathways envisaged by the Global Compact for Migration, particularly in West and Central Africa, exposing the disjuncture between global normative frameworks and the realities of brokerage, informality, and risk externalization. Amirthalingam and colleagues' analysis of bilateral labor agreements in Sri Lanka reveals the limits of state-to-state governance tools when gendered segmentation is reproduced through recruitment and contractual regimes. Hari's chapter on Nepal pushes further by foregrounding how mobility and immobility coexist for women, where the ability to cross borders can coincide with intensified confinement within labor regimes.

### *Rural–urban links, internal migration, and the food system*

Part III shifts the focus to internal migration and rural–urban change without abandoning the volume's central preoccupations with food security and informality. The Nairobi chapter by Onyango, Crush, and Owuor is one of the most methodologically rigorous contributions in the book. Using household dietary diversity scores and food insecurity measures from a city-wide survey, the authors show that migrant households are not uniformly more deprived than non-migrant households. Dietary deprivation is stratified by education, employment, income, and housing, while length of stay and rural–urban links do not significantly predict improved dietary diversity. This is an important corrective to integration narratives

that assume time in the city, or sustained rural connections, necessarily translate into better diets. Zhong, Si, and Yuan's chapter on Nanjing similarly shifts the analytic gaze. Migrants are not merely consumers at risk, but central actors in urban food systems as farmers, wet-market vendors, supermarket workers, and delivery laborers. This chapter is a rare and valuable reminder that food security is as much about provisioning and labor as it is about consumption.

## CONTESTATION, CONTROL, AND THE BORDERING OF SOUTH-SOUTH MOBILITY

By this point, two features are clear. First, the empirical depth is unusually strong for an edited collection, with chapters grounded in robust survey data and rich qualitative work that render precarity, food insecurity, and informal livelihoods analytically visible. Second, this depth reveals a productive tension: while informality, precarity, moral economy, and governance recur, they are not always integrated into a single framework. This uneven synthesis clarifies the volume's intellectual posture as a field-building intervention that prioritizes evidentiary breadth and comparative reach over premature theoretical closure.

Part IV brings these tensions into sharp focus by demonstrating that South-South migration is not characterized by unregulated mobility or frictionless circulation within the Global South. Instead, it is structured through contested mobility regimes, regional gatekeeping, and layered forms of bordering that often mirror, and sometimes exceed, the exclusions associated with North-bound migration. The chapters assembled here reveal how mobility within the Global South is governed through selective access, immobilization, and jurisdictional fragmentation, even when migrants never cross into the Global North.

Heller, Rajan, and Walton-Roberts's chapter on international student mobility in medical education provides an instructive entry point into this argument. Focusing on Indian students pursuing medical training in non-Anglophone destinations, including Ukraine and China, the chapter demonstrates how South-South educational migration is shaped by structural scarcity within India's domestic education system and by the uneven geopolitics of crisis. Affordability and institutional access initially enable these mobility pathways, but war, pandemic disruption, and restrictive licensing regimes such as India's Foreign Medical Graduate Examination transform opportunity into precarity. The chapter is valuable not only as a study of student mobility, but as an illustration of how South-South corridors are embedded in state policy, class stratification, and crisis governance rather than operating as alternative or emancipatory routes.

This theme is extended in Percot's ethnographic account of Bangladeshi migration to Indian cities, where mobility is simultaneously normalized through regional proximity and criminalized through informal labor regimes and nationalist bordering practices. India emerges as a space of both familiarity and exclusion, where migrants are drawn by linguistic, cultural, and economic proximity, yet rendered

perpetually provisional through policing, documentation regimes, and urban marginalization. Percot's analysis underscores how South–South migration frequently operates in liminal legal and social spaces that collapse conventional distinctions between voluntary and forced movement.

The governance of immobility is explored with particular clarity in Yeoh, Baey, Platt, and Wee's chapter on Bangladeshi construction workers in Singapore. Here, migration is defined less by movement than by containment. Through employer-controlled dormitories, surveillance regimes, and short-term contracts, mobility is tightly regulated to maximize labor extraction while minimizing social integration. The authors' insistence that migration regimes govern time and space as much as borders offers an important conceptual bridge between mobility studies and analyses of labor discipline, showing how South–South migration can produce enforced stasis within formally sanctioned movement systems.

Mohan's chapter on Venezuelan migration trajectories through Trinidad and Tobago further complicates assumptions about transit and destination. Islands are not passive waypoints but active interruption sites where enforcement practices, detention, and deportation reshape migrant plans and futures. Migration trajectories are not linear but repeatedly re-engineered through encounters with state power, producing uncertainty and prolonged vulnerability. This insight resonates strongly with Wilson-Forsberg and Beggar's life history-based chapter on sub-Saharan Africans stranded in Morocco, which demonstrates how mobility aspirations collapse into prolonged immobility under externalized European border regimes. Here, abandonment, extortion, and violence are not aberrations but integral to how South–South and South–North bordering logics intersect.

Kelly, Marschke, and Vandergeest's chapter on migrant labor in Asian distant-water fisheries broadens this analysis by foregrounding jurisdictional complexity as a mechanism of governance. Through overlapping legal regimes, flags of convenience, and fragmented accountability, responsibility for labor protections is systematically diffused. Migrants are rendered exploitable precisely because they move across spaces where no single authority assumes obligation. This chapter powerfully illustrates how South–South labor migration is often governed through legal ambiguity rather than regulatory absence, producing a form of structural invisibility that erodes rights while sustaining global production systems.

Taken together, Part IV dismantles any assumption that South–South migration offers a less-regulated alternative to North-bound movement. Instead, it reveals a dense landscape of bordering practices, immobilities, and governance failures that structure mobility within the Global South. Mobility does not equate to freedom, and proximity does not guarantee inclusion.

## CRISIS AS REVELATION, NOT RUPTURE: COVID-19 AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SOUTH–SOUTH MIGRATION

The COVID-19 section is among the strongest parts of the volume, because it refuses to treat the pandemic as an aberration. Instead, it is a stress test that exposed long-standing vulnerabilities embedded within South–South migration regimes. Across the COVID-19 chapters, crisis is not episodic but constitutive. Pandemic governance intensified conditions of precarity that were already deeply entrenched in migrants' everyday lives.

Crush and Ramachandran's chapter provides a conceptual anchor through the language of crisis of immobility and pandemic precarity. However, its deeper contribution lies in showing that mobility restrictions did not simply halt movement—they restructured migrant survival systems. Pourmehdi's analysis of emigration aspirations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) reinforces the point that pandemic precarity operates through state capacity failures and economic dissatisfaction as much as through infection itself. Tawodzera and Crush's chapter on Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa then grounds these concepts empirically, demonstrating how pandemic precarity must be read through intensified food insecurity, loss of income, exclusion from relief, and constrained translocal support.

This section is particularly strong in challenging the assumption that stay-at-home orders are neutral public health interventions. Such policies presuppose stable housing, formal employment, savings, and welfare inclusion. For many South–South migrants, these assumptions do not hold. Pandemic governance functioned as a filter that protected those within formal citizenship and labor regimes and amplified precarity among those already positioned at the margins.

## REMITTANCES, DIGITALIZATION, AND MORAL ECONOMIES OF CARE

One of the volume's most original and conceptually generative contributions lies in its treatment of remittances, particularly its departure from the long-standing privileging of cash transfers in migration-development scholarship. This intervention emerges most clearly in Part V—COVID-19 and Mobility Disruptions—where remitting practices are examined not as neutral financial flows but as socially embedded responses to crisis, precarity, and institutional failure.

Sithole, Tevera, and Dinbabo's chapter on Zimbabwean migrants in Cape Town is exemplary in this regard. Drawing on survey data and in-depth interviews during the first year of the pandemic, the authors document a marked reconfiguration of remittance practices away from courier systems toward digitally mediated food provisioning platforms. This was not driven by technological novelty. It was driven by necessity. Cash remittances lost effectiveness amid hyperinflation, price volatility, and recurrent food shortages in Zimbabwe, while border closures and transport disruptions compromised informal delivery channels. Food remittances increased in

relative importance because they allowed migrants to intervene directly in household consumption, bypassing dysfunctional markets and unstable pricing regimes.

The chapter's conceptual contribution lies in its insistence that remitting food is not surplus-driven or discretionary. It is ethically compelled, embedded in kinship obligations and crisis management, and performed under conditions of systemic constraint. Digital platforms enabled continuity of translocal food flows but introduced new exclusions tied to documentation, banking access, digital literacy, and platform costs. The effect is not a simple story of innovation but a reconfiguration of precarity, where access becomes stratified and uneven. Read alongside Crush and Ramachandran's broader remittance discussion, this chapter strengthens the volume's argument that remittances in South–South worlds must be theorized as material practices of care and social reproduction rather than abstract financial flows.

### TRADE, CIRCULATION, AND GENDERED RISK IN SOUTH–SOUTH WORLDS

The volume's engagement with transnational trade adds a necessary dimension to South–South migration studies by refusing to treat migration as only displacement or wage labor. It foregrounds circulation economies and entrepreneurial mobility, while also exposing their fragility.

Tagoe and Quartey's chapter on Ghanaian transnational traders is particularly strong in demonstrating how COVID-19 did not simply interrupt trade but restructured it. Traders shifted toward remote ordering through agents and WhatsApp, reducing travel costs but introducing quality uncertainty, delays, and reduced bargaining power. The chapter's gender analysis is one of its most valuable contributions. It shows how women traders were disproportionately constrained by limited access to credit and reduced capacity to absorb losses. The traders are presented neither as victims nor as heroic entrepreneurs, but as strategic actors navigating constrained institutional environments.

These insights resonate with other chapters that show how mobility can reproduce precarity even when movement is formally sanctioned. Kelly, Marschke, and Vandergeest's chapter on migrant labor in distant-water fisheries is especially instructive here, demonstrating how jurisdictional complexity enables exploitation and diffuses accountability across states, vessels, and regulatory regimes. Mobility is not synonymous with freedom, and transnational labor governance is often designed to externalize risk and erode protections.

### INFORMALITY AS STRUCTURE, NOT RESIDUAL: THEORETICAL CLOSURE AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Part VI offers the volume's clearest move from empirical documentation to agenda setting. Dinbabo, Belebema, and Quarshie argue that South–South migration in Southern Africa is analytically under-institutionalized despite its centrality to

regional integration. Moreover, they make a persuasive case for a regional research agenda grounded in stronger data infrastructures, multi-stakeholder networks, and policy relevance. Ramachandran and Chikanda then widen the lens to East–South globalization and Africa–India migrations. They show how preferential mobility regimes and trade ties can expand movement without eliminating racialization, legal precarity, or exclusion.

Young’s concluding chapter provides the book’s most explicit theoretical intervention. It confronts what many earlier chapters imply. South–South migration is structurally entangled with informality and rights deficits. Drawing on comparative indices of democracy, labor rights, and informal employment, the chapter demonstrates that major South–South destinations are frequently characterized by weak political rights, limited labor protections, and extensive informal economies. Migrants face dual exclusion—as non-citizens and as informal workers—with constrained access to political participation, collective bargaining, and social protection. By situating these dynamics within debates on Southern urbanism, the chapter forces a rethinking of foundational assumptions about migration, work, and the city.

## CONCLUSION

*New Directions in South–South Migration* is a field-defining contribution. It recenters South–South migration as the dominant global form, embeds food security and informality at the core of analysis, and shows that crisis is revelatory rather than exceptional. Its empirical depth is remarkable, and its commitment to agenda setting is clear and sustained.

The volume is not without limitations. Theoretical integration remains uneven, gender analysis varies across chapters, and climate-driven mobility, while present, is not consistently integrated into the book’s central framework. These limitations reflect the volume’s scope rather than shortcomings of execution. What emerges is not a closed framework but an open research agenda for the next generation of migration scholarship.

Ultimately, South–South migration cannot be understood through borrowed theories or Northern analogies. It demands its own concepts, ethics, and political commitments. In doing so, the volume does not merely expand the field; it compels a reconstitution of migration theory from the standpoint of the Global South.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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