

A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

REMEMBERING NOT TO FORGET THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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Thirteen years ago, I spent a semester studying at El Colegio de México, a respected institution in Mexico City dedicated to the training of graduate students in the social sciences. At some point, one of my professors saw that, while historians in places such as the United States and Great Britain specialize in regions all over the world, their counterparts in the Global South tend not to. It's true—most medium-sized history departments in the United States will have a range of specialists who study anything from West Africa to China. Outside the United States, this is not usually the case. Even at El Colegio de México, which ranks among Mexico's most prestigious doctoral training programs, most of the professors study Mexico. Historians trained in Mexico for the most part study Mexico, while historians trained in Nigeria tend to study Nigeria. Mexicans rarely make Nigeria their focus; similarly, it is unlikely that there are many Nigerians specializing in Mexican history.

There are a lot of lessons that we might take away from that observation. Scholars concerned with postcolonial theory have long warned of the distortions that can spring from Global North scholars imposing their perspectives on the often-voiceless people of the Global South. While the entire discussion has taken more theoretical turns than we could possibly account for here, I took a simpler lesson from the professor's comment: Whether we like to admit it or not, it is a luxury for many of us to study the Global South. Most of us working in the United States can travel to Africa, Latin America, Asia, or the Middle East. We can occasionally secure adequate funding to live on a temporary basis in any of those places, and we return home when we like. We peer in, engaging to various degrees, depending on our level of comfort or the

necessity of the research at hand, and then we retreat. This lesson keeps coming back to me in the era of COVID-19: Some of us have more escape mechanisms than others.

By the time you read this editorial message, we will be fully in the throes of yet another surge of the COVID-19 pandemic, fueled by another new variant of the disease, the Omicron variant. As the infection rate and death count subsided in the late spring and early summer of 2021, most of us heaved a sigh of relief. All of us, in one way or another, had suffered, some more than others. Thankfully, for most of us, COVID-19 amounted to nothing more than a series of inconveniences that, while stressful and irritating, could be managed. Others felt it more—new evidence from the field of clinical psychology seems to arrive every day to confirm that mental health challenges either emerged for the first time, or were severely exacerbated as a result of the pandemic. Depression, anxiety, substance abuse, domestic abuse, and the like all got worse. In many cases, children, isolated from their friends and hurled into an impossible learning environment, bore the heaviest brunt. Then there were the financial implications: lost jobs, reduced wages, precarious housing situations. And finally, of course, there were those who actually got the virus. Again, some suffered nothing more than the temporary discomfort of cold-like symptoms. Others were hospitalized, some put on ventilators. Many overcame the contagion itself only to suffer the lingering symptoms of “long COVID.” Many—too many—died. Those who died left grief, bewilderment, and anger in their wake.

All of this is obvious as we were all witness to it, in one way or another. The reason I am yet again addressing it is that it is a global phenomenon, and the entire mission of our organization is to understand the human condition from a global perspective, with a particular focus on the Global South. You’ll recall that just as we saw coronavirus cases plummet in the United States this past spring and summer, we also saw them surge to horrifying levels elsewhere, most notably in Brazil and India. I have already taken a few attempts at analyzing why, and the answers are still patchy: lack of resources, lack of education, lack of responsive governance, lack of cooperation on the part of the population—these all seem to play a role. Yet, the uneven experience with the coronavirus from place-to-place defies the typical patterns one usually sees in Global South studies, or in the study of Global North/South relations or in comparisons between the two. My guess is that this inconsistent landscape of COVID experiences

will continue to confound researchers in both the social sciences and health-related sciences for some time.

So, as always, I implore you to do what you can not only for yourself and those close to you, but for the global community that we aim to serve. This, of course, means taking proper steps as an individual. Get the vaccine if you have not already. If you are hesitant about it, seek proper advice from reputable sources. Encourage those in your life—family, coworkers, friends, neighbors—to do the same. If you have friends or colleagues in foreign places that have been hit hard by the pandemic, check on them. Talk to them. If you have resources to spare, distribute them. If you have relevant expertise, share it. If you have useful skills, apply them. With our temporary inability to meet and work as an organization, find your own personal ways to remain connected to the Global South.