

WORKING PAPER 21: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & KEY TAKEAWAYS

CO-PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE IN FORCED MIGRATION STUDIES: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES AND THE POSSIBILITIES FOR THE EMERGENCE OF BEST PRACTICES

BY PARIN MISTRY

- ✦ Although 80% of the world's refugees are hosted in the global South, the majority of research in forced migration studies is produced and disseminated by researchers and institutions in the global North.
- ✦ Refugees, impacted by both displacement and immobility, are the most affected by the consequences of policy decisions on a daily basis, yet are furthest removed from the processes of policy creation.
- ✦ The paper asks: what can we learn from development studies, feminist studies, and Indigenous studies about the issue of knowledge production in forced migration studies? What best practices do these fields offer for scholars of forced migration and how can they be wielded to navigate the dominant structures of knowledge production in forced migration research?

KEY ISSUES IN KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION WITHIN FORCED MIGRATION

1) Institutional and

Structural Barriers: The knowledge produced tends to reflect the concerns and interests of the global North, leading to a lack of voices from the South in international policy circles and scholarly journals.

2) Hierarchy of Knowledge:

While North-South partnerships can help global South institutions overcome issues related to underfunding and understaffing, partners in the Global North carry significant weight, value, and influence, especially through the funding regime.

3) Extractive and

Imperialist Research

Practices: The global South is treated as a “laboratory of the North” for data extraction, while “legitimate” theorization and analysis are in the hands of the North (Zingerli 2010, p. 6).

CONCEPTUALIZING AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

DEVELOPMENT STUDIES: GLOBAL SOUTH PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Demeter (2022) finds that 85% of the leading development studies journals are published at global North locations, and within these journals, approximately 83% of the articles are written by scholars in the global North.

FEMINIST STUDIES: POSITIONALITY AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL HEGEMONY

Feminist studies views knowledge as situated, meaning that what is known and how it is known reflects the situation and perspective of the knower, which is shaped by their lived experience and social location, emotions, attitudes, interests, relationships, beliefs, and worldview.

INDIGENOUS STUDIES: EXTRACTION AND COLONIALISM

Indigenous studies similarly calls for an embodied approach to knowledge production, critiquing notions of “legitimacy” and “hierarchy” that have shaped the relationship between Western/colonial knowledge and Indigenous knowledge (Akena 2012).

SUGGESTIONS FOR BEST PRACTICES IN FORCED MIGRATION RESEARCH THROUGH AN INTERSECTIONAL LENS

“READINESS” TO LISTEN

Asking “what does it mean for the hegemonic ear to hear the subaltern voice?” is to both critique the processes and structures through which subaltern voices are silenced and alternative frameworks are excluded, and to inquire about the “readiness” of the hegemonic ear to meaningfully “listen” (Saffari 2016, p. 41).

REFUGEE AND MIGRANT KNOWLEDGE AS COUNTER-HEGEMONIC

Knowledge production about refugees has the capacity to challenge these deeply engrained structures of domination, but only if they begin from a perspective that positions refugees as contemporary manifestations of wider historical problems that concern constructions of community, belonging, identity, responsibility, and value.

LEARNING FROM A FEMINIST RESEARCH ETHIC

A feminist research ethic can support the cultivation of best practices for knowledge production as feminist theories “reveal the politics in every aspect of the research process” and commit researchers to exploring the power of epistemology (Ackerly and True 2008, p. 694).

CRISES OF REPRESENTATION AND OWNERSHIP

Forced migration scholars must consider the distorted representation that emerges when knowledge about refugees and forced migrants is generated through extractive practices, and implement practices that

recognize these communities as humans with sovereign research jurisdictions, a right to provide informed consent, and to have expectations of reciprocity, accountability, and respect.

RESPECTING STRATEGIC SILENCES

A methodological overemphasis on storytelling and narrative can actually lead to the fetishization of the refugee voice and instead, propose “methodological dubiety” as a collaborative determination between researchers and research participants to craft representations in ways that speak openly to the need to maintain certain kinds of gaps, erasures, and absences (Chatzipanagiotidou and Murphy 2022, p. 83).

Knowledge production is only one half of the equation and future pathways of inquiry should also examine processes and practices of knowledge dissemination, similarly drawing from other disciplines.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

What can we learn from development studies, feminist studies, and Indigenous studies about the issue of knowledge production in forced migration studies? What best practices do these fields offer for scholars of forced migration and how can they be wielded to navigate the dominant structures of knowledge production in forced migration research? In response, this paper conducts an interdisciplinary analysis of knowledge production, drawing on the theoretical insights of development studies, feminist studies, and Indigenous studies, to make visible structures of power and oppressive practices and values within forced migration research.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR FORCED MIGRATION RESEARCH THROUGH AN INTERSECTIONAL LENS

“READINESS” TO LISTEN

Speaking for is distinct from speaking with, and modes of knowledge production are shaped by the existing context of asymmetrical power relations, making hearing the subaltern difficult (Saffari 2016). Asking “what does it mean for the hegemonic ear to hear the subaltern voice?” is to both critique the processes and structures through which subaltern voices are silenced and alternative frameworks are excluded, and to inquire about the “readiness” of the hegemonic ear to meaningfully “listen” (Saffari 2016, p. 41).

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