

Internationalisation in Forced Migration and Refugee Research

Introduction

In general terms, higher education is rather nationally arranged (de Wit 2020). However, under conditions of globalisation, sciences increasingly internationalise. Internationalisation, however, is not to be seen as a goal in its own right, as de Wit (2020) argues, but as a means to an end, notably for advancing research, education and publications. But internationalisation is also determined by economic, political and socio-cultural considerations (ibid); in particular, the drivers of the global knowledge economy and competition for external funding or university rankings play a role. A central aim of the FFVT project is to specifically strengthen internationalisation in the field of forced migration and refugee studies, notably of researchers and research conducted in Germany. Thereby, it aspires to address various shortcomings identified in the ongoing debate on the politics of knowledge production. Internationalisation, however, is more than just a praxis, more than just doing internationalisation, but a concept based on critical theoretical reflections on scientific knowledge production. We thus aim to combine a pragmatic approach with some theoretical underpinning. To this end, this briefing note highlights the findings from some key publications on internationalising scientific cooperation in this field.

Premise

“Eighty-five percent of the world’s refugees [are] currently hosted in the Global South” [Hampton et al. 2020] and “the questions and issues raised in research and practice are most acutely experienced and addressed by actors in the global south” (McGrath & Young 2019: 3). As a consequence, “north–south partnerships have become prerequisites” for forced migration research and the acquisition of funds (Landau 2012: 55). Nevertheless, “the knowledge generation on forced displacement has been dominated” (ibid.) if not even “monopolised” (Hampton et al. 2020) by institutions in the Global North. And in case northern colleagues cooperate with southern scholars, the latter may well be exploited as yet another “tool for northern policy influence” (ibid. 564) even amounting to “scientific colonialism” (Binka 2005: 207, also see El Refaei 2020).

Further to this, an analysis of academic publications in one of the leading journals, *Refugee Studies Quarterly*, reveals that only a small proportion of articles involves authors based in the Global

South (ibid., also see McNally and Rahim 2020). A similar picture is found across migration and integration studies in general; however, internationalisation, notably of publications, has been continuously and significantly improving over time though remaining fairly uneven (Levy et al. 2020). Experience shows that well-funded long-term scholarly networks such as IMISCOE (International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion, formerly an EU-funded network of excellence) as well as the EU’s Framework (FP) and Horizon research funding programmes spur internationalisation in research (ibid). In any case, according to World Bank (2020) data, the EU employs 3,840 researchers per one million inhabitants whereas, for instance, low/middle income countries can only afford 288 researchers. This vividly illustrates some of the structural causes of the persistent global inequalities in science which determine the Global South’s limited capacity to invest in migration research. This is then reflected in the types of knowledge produced. For instance, in journals such as *Refugee Studies Quarterly*, articles on refugees in the Global North are overrepresented whereas the

refugee situation in the Global South is rather neglected (Hampton et al. 2020). In particular, research related to refugees and forced migration in the Global East, Russia, Ukraine and generally Eurasia and Central Asia is even further neglected. Also, in Germany, research on matters in the Global South or even other European countries is limited; instead, much research has so far been characterised by a focus on reception and integration matters in the country, as the FFT project (2016-19) found (Kleist et al. 2019). This illustrates the prevalence of an inward-looking perspective and thus “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller 2002).

These striking imbalances among the scholars and institutions engaging in and the research conducted on forced migration and refugees, as we observe them in Germany, are driven by deep structural differences and inequalities among countries and regions (Hynie et al. 2014) as well as politically inspired interests in some regions but not in others. Some of the drivers are related to different political economies of knowledge production. These may push researchers in the Global South into applied research whereas researchers in many countries the Global North seem to focus more on (theoretically driven) academic output (Dolan 2020). However, research in Germany too seems to be rather policy-driven and/or application-oriented (see, for e.g. Enzinger & Scholten 2015).

The politics of knowledge production, as Landau (2019) argues, have to be further seen in the context of an “era of containment” (also see McGrath & Young 2019: 2). This means that generally countries in the Global North are working hard to keep refugees at bay and contain them in the Global South, hence countries and regions of origin, first reception and transit.

However, over the past two decades, critical scholars and scholars from the Global South began changing the picture substantially. Notably, they pointed out that the categorisation of (forced) migrants into rigid groups of refugees, IDPs, forced migrants, economic migrants, etc. may be unhelpful, as Mc Grath & Young (2019: 10) argue (also see Qasmiyeh 2020). Meanwhi-

le, the internationalisation of research results in an increasing diversification of knowledge production and thus already challenges national models and paradigms (Scholten et al. 2015).

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Unfortunately, the sources quoted here are largely gender-blind but it can be assumed that female researchers are even further neglected and discriminated. For example, Levy’s et al. (2020) analysis of most co-cited authors includes comparably few women and even fewer from the Global South.

From this short reflection, a typology of research designs is emerging consisting either of (a) national(ist) research focussing on matters in one state only, (2) international research engaging in cooperation between national researchers, and finally (3) transnational research transcending national epistemological paradigms.

Aims and Objectives

The literature describes the aims of internationalising forced migration and refugee research as

- bridging silos, sectors, and regions and engaging across Global North-South tensions

(McGrath & Young 2019: 1);

- mobilising knowledge in many countries on state-of-the-art and innovations in forced migration (McGrath 2019: 296);
- democratising and decentralising the production of knowledge in the field of forced migration (McGrath & Young 2019: 12);
- providing room for new perspectives and the re-evaluation of key concepts (McGrath & Young 2019: 10);
- putting more emphasis on local experiences and local policies in the Global South and East and “relaying southern perspectives to northern policymakers” (Landau 2012: 555);
- seeking a progressive impact on refugee research and policy (McGrath & Young 2019: 1);
- generating and disseminating knowledge in ways that are accessible to multiple audiences and that would improve the well-being of refugees (McGrath 2019: 1); and subsequently as
- de-colonising forced migration research and negotiating partnerships of knowledge production in a geopolitical context of otherwise immense inequality (McGrath & Young 2019: 20).

Implementation

In order to achieve these aims, scholars suggest a whole range of general approaches as well as concrete measures. Among the general approaches are:

- stimulating the development of new research partnerships and projects, for instance, by setting up a dynamic web of global connections and relationships (McGrath & Young 2019: 3);
- applying a model of “strong internationalisation” (McGrath & Young 2019: 15, see Appadurai for this concept) (as opposed to “weak internationalisation” which would be limited to colleagues of a similar background, hence only involving researchers from the Global North);

- empowering southern and eastern membership (McGrath 2019: 298);
- ensuring structural equivalence between all southern, eastern and northern members, particularly regarding access to resources and participation in agenda setting (ibid);
- focussing on bottom-up (“grassroots”) processes, and be participatory in nature, meaning that research networks should facilitate the incorporation of southern and eastern institutions by fostering collaborative activities between its members (e.g. McGrath 2019: 299);
- adopting a dialogical and participatory approach (McGrath & Young 2019: 4); and
- basing activities on respectful interpersonal relationships as well as open and transparent communications that recognize structural inequalities (such as attempted by the Canadian Refugee Research Network’s model of research partnership – McGrath 2019: 295).

Further concrete conditions and measures suggested are

- engaging with scholars in the Global South and East in a debate over epistemology and research ethics;
- involving scholars from the region who would be in a position to share a more proximate, historically, and contextually informed perspective (McGrath 2019: 298);
- “proactively seek[ing] co-authors in the Global South” and East (Hampton et al. 2020);
- strong mutual interest, both partners should gain from the cooperation (Gaillard 1994);
- forming key institutions into “regional hubs” to facilitate the establishment and coordination of the network at regional levels (McGrath 2019: 299);
- developing online research and teaching tools

(ORTT) and practitioners fora (PF) such as in Canada), multi-functional online tools designed as a resource for the field of refugee and forced (McGrath & Young 2019: 16) as did the Canadian Association for Refugee and Forced Migration Studies (CARFMS);

- engaging with and supporting students and early career researchers to participate in research and attend conferences (McGrath & Young 2019: 5), in particular female researchers;
- encouraging the sharing of findings with policymakers, practitioners and advocates who work as part of the international refugee regime (McGrath & Young 2019: 3);
- building alliances and facilitate active involvement in the development of national and international policy frameworks and humanitarian practices affecting refugees and forced migrants (McGrath 2019: 4).

Further to this, the Canadian Refugee Research Network's (RRN) implementation of knowledge mobilisation activities include forming eight multidisciplinary research clusters or "networks within the network" addressing major questions in the field, three regional networks (Canada, Latin America, and Asia Pacific), and two issue-specific networks (emerging scholars and global refugee policy) (McGrath & Young 2019: 1). On top of this, a bi-weekly Refugee Research Digest is circulated and a RRN Mapping Report was prepared (Refugee Research Net, no date).

Challenges

A number of issues have been identified in the literature which complicate achieving these goals and implementing the various measures:

- lack of information about who is doing refugee research, particularly at the level of a local research unit; (McGrath 2019);
- facing a field that is fraught with (neo)colonial and imperial relationships and power dynamics (McGrath & Young 2019: 3);
- ethically engaging researchers globally;
- in cross-continental research partnerships, most researchers in the South rely on funding that comes with substantial risks of heightening inequality and of becoming complicit in the prevailing global strategies of migrant containment (Landau 2019);
- maintaining networks beyond a project's funding period (IMISCOE may serve as a precedence for a members-funded international network, see Levy et al. 2020);
- being prepared to reconsider [Northern] conventions about world knowledge and about the protocols of inquiry ("research") that are too often taken for granted (Appadurai 2020: 15);
- demand- and policy-driven applied and locally oriented research traditions and lack of space for reflexive thinking in many institutions the Global South (Landau 2012);
- lack of adequate funding in the Global South for locally relevant research;
- differences in scientific freedoms in different countries;
- the individualist logic of career trajectories and emphasis of single-authored peer reviewed publications in high-impact journals in the North;
- cooperation only with the well-established colleagues in the South which reinforces existing (gendered) hierarchies and marginalises new talents (Landau 2012);
- the need for a funded, decentralised organisational model to support an alliance of researchers and research institutions;
- generating knowledge through funding for networking which does not explicitly fund research;
- disseminating research in forms and formats that are accessible globally;
- long-term strategies and time to develop trust;

- language barriers;
- the need for guiding principles for an ethical network; and
- the nationally different complex relationship between research and policy.

In more general terms, Landau (2012: 561 and 562) argues that various structural problems often “work against the successful incorporation of southern-based scholars and students in research collaborations”. Therefore, northern scholars may “have little choice but to lead intellectually” whilst also exercising “managerial control”, even if having the best intentions to pursue a dialogical and participatory approach (ibid.).

Impact of internationalisation

The principal impacts of successful internationalisation include:

- 1) the expansion of research capacity within the Global North, notably Germany, as in our case, and in the Global South and East;
- 2) the linking of research in Germany to new and expanded networks of researchers and research centres that span the Global South, East and North;
- 3) the generation of new knowledge by clusters of researchers focused on major issues and practices;
- 4) the mobilisation of new and existing knowledge to make it more accessible globally;
- 5) the development of a model of individual and institutional partnerships that strives to bridge the social and economic inequities inherent in South/East/North relationships;
- 6) the training of the next generation of refugee scholars, policymakers, and practitioners (McGrath 2019: 295).

Most of these impacts and generally the advancement of the practices of global research and knowledge generation (McGrath & Young 2019:

10) can be measured and thus easily evaluated. However, some authors suggest that the impact of research on policy and practice remains questionable (Crisp, quoted in McGrath 2019: 300).

Implications for FFVT and beyond

Partly in response to these shortcomings and challenges, The Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) calls for establishing a “global academic network on refugee, forced displacement, and statelessness issues involving universities, academic alliances, and research institutions, together with UNHCR, to facilitate research, training, scholarship opportunities and other initiatives which result in specific deliverables in support of the objectives of the global compact” (UNHCR 2018a, paragraph 43). The UNHCR already initiated the Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network (see GAIN 2019). The FFVT network seems to be well prepared to contribute to according efforts. However, Jeff Crisp suspects the GCR academic network to rather be a “top-down structure driven by UNHCR” (300), hence driven by policymakers and not by researchers.

For the FFVT project, the above raises various questions and a range of possible implications:

How do we position ourselves with regards to the already existing international networks, like those of the Oxford-based RSC, the Canada-based RRN, GAIN and others? Would it make sense to concentrate only on regional networks, notably, because these are “perceived to be more productive than wider networks” (McGrath 2019: 292 referring to Oakes 2015)?

What could be our added value to the existing landscape? How to develop a gender-sensitive internationalisation strategy that avoids perpetuating gender-based inequalities in research? A number of the FFVT activities already correspond with several of the above-mentioned measures, notably our funding activities, such as conferences with over 940 international participants and workshops, all with a strong participation of researchers from the Global South, the international fellowship programme and the

facilitation of international research cooperation. Also, the FFVT online research map, the newsletters and social media digests are all already increasing the visibility of research and strengthening outreach and the research-policy dialogue. Finally, our reflexive approach aims at facilitating the production of new knowledge and support developing new perspectives. The list of suggestions and practices sketched here is substantial and implementing this in full would amount to a radical reconfiguration of knowledge production in forced migration and refugee studies. Whilst aiming high is not wrong, achieving this in the short term is certainly unrealistic; therefore, it would already be a success if we could contribute to progressing on some of these points.

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Project Info

Forced Migration and Refugee Studies: Networking and Knowledge Transfer

The cooperation project “Forced Migration and Refugee Studies: Networking and Knowledge Transfer” (FFVT) aims to strengthen interdisciplinary forced migration and refugee research in Germany. To this end, the project, which is funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), brings together research on migration, development, conflict and violence, climate change, health, governance and human rights and other topics. In this way, FFVT supports the networking of researchers and institutes working in all relevant research fields dealing with forced migration. To provide young academics with teaching and training opportunities in forced migration and refugee studies, it plans to establish study and graduate programmes. Furthermore, FFVT plans to promote the internationalisation of German research activities further and, therefore, offers a global fellowship programme, among other things. The dialogue between academia, practitioners, the media and politicians is another key element of its work. FFVT is to contribute to establishing a sustainable infrastructure for research on forced migration and refugee studies in Germany to facilitate excellent academic work in this field.

FFVT is jointly run by the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), the Centre for Human Rights Erlangen-Nürnberg (CHREN, University of Erlangen Nuremberg), the German Development Institute (DIE, Bonn) and the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies (IMIS, University of Osnabrück).

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