

REPORT ON THE WORKSHOP “AFRICAN FORCED MIGRATION RESEARCH IN GERMANY”

On Saturday 11th June 2022, the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute (ABI) hosted a workshop on African Forced Migration Research in Germany to create a network of Africa-focused interdisciplinary researchers on forced migration studies and provide a space where these researchers can exchange ideas to strengthen the field of study. The hybrid workshop—which was organized by Franzisca Zanker from ABI, Ulrike Krause from Osnabruck University, and Nadine Segadlo also from Osnabruck University—had a total of 24 participants from universities and institutions across Europe and Africa, 5 of whom participated virtually. It was funded by the German Peace Foundation.



The workshop kicked off with a round of introductions, which was moderated by Khangelani Moyo, an independent researcher based in South Africa. All participants introduced their research interests, current project(s), and expectations from the workshop. The main part of the workshop

was divided into three sessions themed: Futures of African Forced Migration Research; Rethinking Research Methods and Ethics in African Forced Migration Research; and Conceptual Developments in African Forced Migration Research.

Futures of African Forced Migration Research

The **first session** which was moderated by Nadine Segadlo, involved discussions on the disciplinary position of forced migration research, sketching of new agendas, overcoming eurocentrism, as well as ways of addressing the inequalities between scholarships on Africa and African scholarship. The session received inputs from scholars such as Rose Jaji from the University of Zimbabwe, Dulo Nyaoro from Moi University, Tabea Scharrer from the University of Bayreuth, Ulrike Krause, and Franzisca Zanker.

Rose Jaji shared her observation of changes in terms of research methodologies in the field of forced migration studies over the past ten years that are clearly visible. However, she also remarked that there is still a hierarchy in terms of where knowledge is positioned. African scholarship in the field is still viewed as subordinate. She gave the example of African-based scholars being confronted with the question whether they actually did research, if their research is conducted in local languages. Thus, she demanded the overcoming of eurocentrism in forced migration and refugee studies by asking questions instead of telling people what should be in their papers, by African scholars citing scholars they would otherwise not cite and by studying Africa with Africans.

In his contribution Dulo Nyaoro asked the questions of how to study forced migration, who sets the agenda in the field and what is it that should be studied. He remarked that forced migration research in Africa is dominated by scholars and universities based in the Global North. In the large majority of cases, it is money that sets the agenda for research and this is very often distributed by institutions based in the Global North, such as the EU. In addition, tools and methodologies largely come from Europe. He mentioned that 80 % of research on forced migration in Africa comes from Europe. He thus concluded that forced migration studies, its methodology, theories and even modes of dissemination are controlled by Europe. There are few institutions that offer

study programmes in forced migration and refugee studies on the continent. Students are often reluctant to take the little available courses as they lack job prospects and career perspectives in the field on the continent. Furthermore, he touched upon the point of what is forced migration studies aiming for. Is it there for the sake of studying phenomena or should researchers also aim at impacting practices? In this context, he remarked that in many African settings state practices are not informed by research.

Tabea Scharrer spoke about the observation of a perceived standstill of migration research and that forced migration studies in Germany and border studies are very German- and European-centred. Basic research and policy-based research are often in a tense relation. She called for more comparative and mixed-methods perspectives, for digital ways of cooperation and for every forced migration researcher to also get involved in research at home. Furthermore, essentializing categories like nationalities must be challenged. Anthropology's insight into recognizing plurality without assuming hierarchies can be a fruitful perspective for decolonizing forced migration research and challenging the still-existent cognitive empire.

Ulrike Krause likewise pointed out the importance of collaboration and necessity for exchange and collaborative teaching, hereby keeping in mind the hierarchical system of academia. Franzisca Zanker added that power relations and inequalities remain albeit many fruitful collaborations do take place. In order to give more space to this in the future, more changes must be made in terms of funding. Practically, more can be done for publication practices including questions of where to publish and whom to cite.

The discussion highlighted the dominance of western scholarship and agenda in African forced migration research and emphasized the importance of studying Africa with Africa itself. It further drew attention to the danger of creating a binary between Africa and the West (or Africa and Europe) by employing respective language and herewith reinforcing differences. Moreover, participants called for more attention to be paid to the agency of (forced) migrants and to a better understanding of power constellations at play in the field.

Research Methods and Ethics in African Forced Migration Research

The **second session** discussed research methods and issues such as decentralizing knowledge production, usage of historical analysis, ethics of field research, migrant labeling, as well as questions of positionality from the perspective of the researcher. The session was moderated by Ronald Sebba from Makerere University, and it received contributions from Khangelani Moyo, Julia Stier from the Berlin Social Science Center, Ulrike Krause, Claudia Boehme from the University of Trier, and Gracious Maviza from the National University of Science and Technology in Zimbabwe.

One of the points raised was the idea of reciprocal research and a reversal in the trend of always going to Africa for fieldwork and subsequently always having Africans as objects of research. However, in this context the issue of research funding is still Global North centred. Khangelani Moyo spoke of the danger of African researchers becoming incorporated into the European university system and losing their critical perspectives from Africa. Forced migration research should furthermore also study white Germans and their attitudes and practices vis-à-vis refugees. Julia Stier added that research should be constructed together in a relational achievement.

In addition, the challenge of labels in academia vis-à-vis how research participants talk and think of themselves (e.g., migrant's vs travelers) was discussed, alongside the categorization of labels, their politicization, and the association they invoke in people's minds (e.g., a white student in Africa vs a black student in Europe). For researchers this raises the important question of maneuvering through, on the one hand, self-descriptions and self-identifications brought forward by research participants and, on the other hand, the need to speak to academia and political decision-makers often requiring the usage of certain labels and categorizations. Ulrike Krause noted "Labels carry power and it is important to reflect on these different labels and how they reflect agency from the perspective of the researcher and that of the respondents."

The scholars further highlighted the different methodological challenges and questions in conducting forced migration research. These include relationships with field researchers and how to work with them, also touching upon the question of working with refugees as peer researchers vs. refugees as research assistants. Judith Altrogge stressed that researchers should also become

aware of the limitations of their research access that their positionality engenders in the field. Further discussions highlighted the widespread notion that African scholars are not seen as someone producing theories. S*he is rather associated with data collection which draws the connection to the image of considering African scholars as research assistants in the field. Another aspect highlighted the departure from considering (forced) migrants as objectives of research, instead of focusing on their agenda. Additional points included dealing with lots of online data; research challenges in securitized contexts; dealing with the real world; self-representation of the researcher; knowledge or competencies needed to deal with respondents; categorization of interviews; defining trust and truth; being considered an outsider, as a researcher, even among people you grew up with; monetization and politicization of knowledge production; defining when a method becomes participatory (at conception or data collection); feeling of inclusion-exclusion from the respondents and balancing the insider-outsider dynamics; ethics of correcting or not correcting data that one is sure is not true/accurate; handling the different motivations and expectations of the respondents in participating in the interview etc. Amidst these issues raised, the importance of diversity in data collection, and the awareness of all the different interests at play, were stressed.

Conceptual Developments in African Forced Migration Research

The **third session** on the other hand addressed conceptual questions on forced migration research such as transitions from humanitarian to development approaches, its overlap to peace and conflict studies, the degrees of volition for people on the move, and transnational migration networks. The session, which was moderated by Franzisca Zanker, received inputs from Joy Owen from the University of the Free State, Ronald Sebba, Nadine Segadlo, Judith Altrogge, Laura Lambert from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Margaret Monyani, Lasse Juhl Morthorst from the University of Erlangen, with major discussion points raised by Grace Atuhaire from the University of Tuebingen, and Tabea Scharrer.

Judith Altrogge raised the questions on what forced return means and who the force behind a return is. This helps to categorize the different spatial categorizations of a returnee as

governments, academics, and returnees themselves have different purposes for using the label 'returnee'. Joy Owen reflected on shared experiences despite different labels, asking the question "how do we relate despite of the social markers that are there?" Also, the agency of institutions as well as their objectives, goals, and aims, were brought into question, underscoring the need to understand the different interests at play in the humanitarian and development framings of migration. Laura Lambert probed the absence of the state from migration research in West Africa, prompting the question of 'is the neglect of state actors due to their absence in the implementation or forced migration measure or is research largely blind to their everyday efforts?'. Ronald Sebba reflected on the transition from humanitarian to development projects and the agency of institutions in shaping these processes, whereas Lasse Juhl Morthorst emphasized the need to focus on local and urban practices to circumvent methodological nationalism as well as the importance of listening and reflecting, especially as white (male) researcher.

Other points that were raised include: addressing the temporal approach of forced migration research; the silence of the international community; conversations on legitimacy when considering the socio-cultural, economic, and religious context of migrants; governing regimes of migration (e.g., Kenyan Government vs UNHCR); peace within the context of forced migration from the perspective of forced migrants; the legal, analytical, and social categorization of the terms 'migrant', 'forced migrant', and 'refugees'; change in conceptual understandings or the complete abandonment of certain concepts (e.g., 'informal', 'governance', etc.); and the need to push knowledge across micro, meso, and macro levels. In the end, participants reflected on the question of what Europe could learn from Africa in addressing forced migration and called for more inter-regional collaboration as well as continuous exchange.

Final Discussion

After the third session, there was a final discussion on the next steps and the way forward in this group. The participants proposed a number of ideas to continue the conversation and come together more regularly. These included:

- regular meetings, e.g. a colloquium to discuss one issue at a time (more concrete/thematic focus for meetings)
- regular activities, e.g. seminar series, presenting research regularly
- creating a platform to maintain contact and share research outputs, literature, opportunities, challenges, and successes.
- Other ideas included an application for a DFG research network, a joint research project, an internal peer-reviewing mechanism
- Other suggestions were: mentoring programs between seasoned scholars and early-career scholars; come together in smaller groups and discuss in-depth (break-out sessions during meetings); hosting a workshop on the African continent; expanding the network and having more regional representation from the African continent.

