



MOBILIZING GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE: REFUGEE RESEARCH IN AN AGE OF DISPLACEMENT

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ISBN 978-1-77385-086-3

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Conclusion: Reflections on Global Refugee Research Networking

Susan McGrath

Introduction

As part of the follow-up to the 2016 New York Declaration, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) proposed a Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in his annual report to the General Assembly in 2016. Along with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the GCR was adopted by a UN Intergovernmental Conference in Marrakech, Morocco in December 2018. The GCR calls for the establishment of 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). UNHCR initiated a consultation with researchers led by Professor Pene Mathew of Griffith University in Australia to develop a plan for the new network.

We support this initiative by UNHCR and have recommendations to facilitate the implementation of an ethical network of researchers and research institutions based on the experiences of the Refugee Research

Network (RRN) and the regular reviews of our work. We draw upon five key evaluation events of the RRN: 1) stakeholder interviews examining benefits and barriers to participating in the RRN by the Program Evaluation Unit of the York Institute for Health Research (YIHR) in 2009; 2) a mid-term report submitted to SSHRC (the funder) in 2011; 3) a mapping report of executive directors of institutional partners in 2014; 4) a finale workshop, “Innovations in Forced Migration,” held at York’s Glendon campus in 2015; and 5) the final Partnership Achievement Report submitted to SSHRC in February 2018. We have written previously about the challenges of engaging scholars at the global level particularly given deep structural inequalities among countries (Hynie et al. 2014). In the first chapter, Loren B. Landau writes about the difficulties of truly collaborative refugee research in what he considers an “era of containment,” when countries of the global north are working hard to keep refugees contained in countries of the global south.

The RRN has supported and facilitated the development of new networks of researchers and practitioners across Canada and globally, including the Canadian Association of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies (CARFMS) founded in 2008, the Latin American Network for Forced Migration/*Red latino americana de migración forzada* established in 2010 (see chapter 12), the Canadian Association of Refugee Lawyers (CARL) launched in 2011, the Global Policy Network launched in 2012, and the Asia Pacific Forced Migration Connection (APFMC) established in November 2013 (see chapter 3). A highlight was the establishment of the Emerging Scholars and Practitioners on Migration Issues (ESPMI) network (formerly the New Scholars Network, established in 2009) focused on creating a cooperative and helpful professional network for those starting out in the field of forced migration (see chapter 10).

Our reflections are focused on a number of issues that have emerged: the lack of information about who is doing refugee research, particularly at the level of a local research unit; the geopolitical challenges of ethically engaging researchers globally; the lack of adequate funding in the global south for locally relevant research; the need for a funded, decentralized organizational model to support an alliance of researchers and research institutions; the challenges of disseminating research in forms and formats that are accessible globally; and the need for guiding principles for an ethical network.

Mapping the Global Network

The number of research institutions focused on refugee issues globally is not clear although we estimate about fifty. The RRN has had partnerships with thirteen research centres (Bogotá, Cairo, Chicago, Johannesburg, Kampala, Kolkata, London (2), Oxford, Sydney, Tehran, Toronto, and Washington), but there are many more. The need for dedicated research centres and networking among academics was recognized as the field of refugee and forced migration studies was developing in the 1980s. The large movements of refugees in Southeast Asia in 1979 and the early 1980s formed the historical context for the establishment of research centres dedicated to refugee and forced migration studies. In 1981, under the direction of Howard Adelman, Canada's York University created the Refugee Documentation Project for the conservation and analysis of research documents and data collected by Operation Lifeline, an initiative to bring Indochinese refugees to Canada. The project became the Centre for Refugee Studies in 1988. In 1987, Chulalongkorn University created the Indochinese Refugee Information Center (IRIC) to observe and study the movement of refugees from Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, and other points of Southeast Asian origin in search of asylum in Thailand. IRIC evolved into the Asian Research Center for Migration (ARCM) in 1995. The 1990s marked the launch of other centres including: the Centre for Refugee Studies at Moi University in Eldoret Kenya in 1992; the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) at Wits University, South Africa in 1993; the Centre for the Study of Forced Migration (CSFM) at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 1995 (Rutinwa 2004); and the Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM) at Georgetown University, USA in 1998.

Established in 1986 as the Refugee Studies Programme (RSP) under the direction of Barbara Harrell-Bond, Oxford's Refugee Studies Centre (RSC) played a central role in stimulating and facilitating research in the field of forced migration, including by holding conferences and international meetings. In January 1990, the centre facilitated the establishment and annual meetings of the International Research and Advisory Panel (IRAP) made up of national government representatives, heads of other centres specializing in the study of forced migration, and individual researchers renowned for their excellence in the field. The fifth meeting of

IRAP was held outside of Oxford in Eldorat, Kenya, hosted by the Centre for Refugee Studies at Moi University in April 1996 (Koser 1996). It was the founding meeting of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) (Koser 1996). The format for the IASFM biennial international conferences was set. The goal has been to provide an interdisciplinary forum for intellectual exchange and communication across sectors including academics, researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers (IASFM 2018) although the engagement of policymakers has been a challenge. The directors of the refugee research centres attending IASFM conferences usually have a side meeting; there is an informal network of predominantly English-speaking researchers.

An effort by UNHCR in 2007 to map refugee researchers and research centres globally identified twenty-one academic centres; however, the process was incomplete (Boano and Addison 2008). Several new centres have been formed since then particularly in the north, e.g., Northwestern University's Center for Forced Migration Studies (CFMS) and the University of London's Refugee Law Initiative. Centres with a broader migration mandate that incorporate forced migration have also evolved, e.g., Wilfrid Laurier's International Migration Research Centre (IMRC) and the Ryerson Centre for Immigration and Settlement (RCIS), both in Canada. The academic centres are clustered in countries that are receiving resettled refugees, e.g., UK, Canada, US, and Australia and in countries that have been coping with large refugee movements, e.g., Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania, Thailand, Egypt, and India. The capacity of these centres to conduct research and to network with other centres varies considerably with those in the global south facing the greatest challenges. A complete mapping of research centres across the global south and north is needed so that we know the actual extent of the field.

Global versus Regional Networks

While the RRN sought to be a “network of networks,” there have been tensions in seeking to develop a global platform for research, collaboration, and dissemination while being responsive to regional needs and contexts. Participants in the RRN Mapping Report called for a more decentralized approach, “less roots and more branches.” Regional networks were perceived to be more productive than wider networks (Oakes 2015). Three

regional networks were formed: in Canada, Latin America, and Asia Pacific. The most successful has been in Canada building on the thirty years of experience of the Centre for Refugee Studies (CRS), the RRN network of researchers and partners, and with support from the RRN and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. In 2008, the Canadian Association for Refugee and Forced Migration Studies (CARFMS) was established as a community of scholars dedicated to Canadian refugee and forced migration research. Since its founding, CARFMS has organized successful annual conferences at universities across the country and maintains a blog and a working paper series.

The social, political, and economic context of Canada has facilitated the development of refugee research and a refugee research network. Despite its modest population of about 36 million people, Canada is included in the Group of Eight highly industrialized countries in the world. It has pursued migration as a development policy (Liston and Carens 2008) and has a history of accepting refugees, e.g., Hungarian, Czechoslovakian, Roma, Ugandan, and Indochinese (Molloy et al. 2017). In 2015, a newly elected Liberal government launched the Refugees Welcome initiative, a program that ultimately brought 58,650 Syrian refugees to Canada between November 2015 and September 2018. The federal and provincial governments have sought input from researchers in the field of refugee studies in planning and assessing the Syrian resettlement program, and SSHRC offered twenty-five targeted research grants for research related to it (see chapter 13 for an example of an initiative that received funding through this program). With the support of UNHCR, the Open Society, and the Canadian government, Canada's private sponsorship program is being studied by other countries looking for new models of refugee resettlement. Canada has emerged as one of the nations taking leadership in the area of forced migration.

Establishing networks in Latin America and Asia Pacific has been more difficult. We have seen the challenges that the Latin American network experienced in sustaining itself without adequate resources (chapter 12). While the Asia Pacific network continues in place (see chapter 3), it has been more modest than the Canadian network in its level of activity. The lack of broad public or political support for refugees in both regions as well as the limited economic capacity of Colombia, where LANFM was established, made it more difficult to maintain an active network of

refugee researchers—who needed funds to pursue their work. The experience of the ESPMI network suggests that the creation of global networks is facilitated by a confluence of personal communications, collaborative activities, and strong leadership (see chapter 10).

While some participants in the Mapping Report voiced a desire to see a more decentralized network, the question of who should lead such a project was not clear. One participant did identify the need for a “connector of research clusters,” an entity that links international researchers in the field of refugee and forced migration studies to specific grants and topics. Overall, participants did express a wish to see more cross-fertilization among research topics, disciplines, and regions (Oakes 2015).

Striving for an Ethical Practice of Engagement

When the members of the RRN first gathered in Toronto in November of 2008, for many it was for the first time they had met, particularly those from across the global south. While IASFM has been a forum for forced migration researchers to meet, it is often not financially feasible for those from lower income countries—particularly students—to attend the conferences. RRN provided funding for partners and the executive members of ESPMI to meet each year either in Toronto or at the site of the IASFM conference. These annual face-to-face meetings proved to be important in establishing new relationships and understandings of the different realities that members experienced. Partners shared their research and the issues they were facing in their regions.

The ability to create networking opportunities, and how this opened spaces of encounter, was seen as one of the strengths of the RRN (Oakes 2015). Participants in the RRN Mapping Report highlighted what they described as “the RRN’s ‘soft touch’—i.e., its ability to create an informal and stimulating atmosphere that allowed members to network at their own pace and through their own interests. It provided participants the space in which to feel out the research landscape and exercise agency and agility in choosing the topics and peers with whom they wished to collaborate” (Oakes 2015, 16). The RRN was lauded for being “a learning community that provided researchers in early and middle career stages with opportunities for personal and professional growth. Participants from less established and geographically isolated research centres indicated that the RRN

had helped to broaden their exposure and strengthened their ties with institutions, NGOs and peers in other disciplines and regions” (Oakes 2015, 15). Colleagues from Colombia and India discovered that they had a lot in common, e.g., both countries had the experience of coping with high numbers of internally displaced persons (IDP). They joined the IASFM executive committee and each subsequently hosted an IASFM conference (Kolkata, India, in January 2013 and Bogotá, Colombia, in July 2014).

Virtual meetings of the partners were held two or three times per year to discuss organizational issues, plan meetings, and address any outstanding concerns. Despite access to current communications technology provided by York University, the connections were not always good. Sometimes partners could not connect or were not be able to hear and someone always had to be up late—usually our generous Australian colleagues. We relied on email for most of our communication but its effectiveness depended on the relationships that had been established through personal contact. The formation of an inclusive global network of research centres will require opportunities for face-to-face meetings and support for ongoing virtual communications. Hopefully, the technology to support virtual communications continues to improve and access to the technology increases; nevertheless, the barriers of time and language differences will need to be negotiated.

The RRN’s model of research partnership based on respectful interpersonal relationships and open and transparent communications that recognize structural inequalities among researchers in low- and high-income countries has been highly productive. The principal impacts of the RRN include: 1) the building of research capacity within Canada; 2) linking Canada to new and expanded networks of researchers and research centres that span the global south and north; 3) the generation of new knowledge by clusters of researchers focused on major issues and practices; 4) the mobilization of new and existing knowledge to make it more accessible globally; 5) the development of a model of individual and institutional partnership that strives to bridge the social and economic inequities inherent in “south/north” relationships; and 6) training the next generation of refugee scholars, policymakers, and practitioners. With the support of the 2015 SSHRC Partnership Impact Award, the RRN continues to focus on the mobilization of the knowledge generated.

Mobilizing Knowledge

On 15 and 16 June 2015, the Refugee Research Network (RRN) hosted a conference entitled, “Innovations in Forced Migration,” at the Glendon campus of York University in Toronto organized by professor Christina Clark-Kazak. The event marked the formal finale of the first phase of the RRN’s collaboration and brought together sixty-one scholars (faculty and students), practitioners, and policymakers from across Canada and internationally to mobilize knowledge on innovations in forced migration. Organized in a workshop format, where all participants were able to attend all the sessions, the conference was comprised of seven panels, one public keynote address, and a book launch where three recent publications were showcased. A public book fair and poster session displayed publications from the field of forced migration from the past five years and highlighted success stories of the RRN’s research clusters and networks. The event concluded with a facilitated session that sought to identify and prioritize next steps in knowledge mobilization support for RRN members as the first round of funding was coming to an end. The workshop was supported with a grant from SSHRC’s Connection Program.

The conference was aimed at members of the RRN and key scholars and students in the expanding field of refugee and forced migration studies. RRN institutional partners at Georgetown University, Northwestern University, Oxford University, University of London, University of East London, Makerere University, Witwatersrand University, Calcutta Research Group, University of New South Wales, Javeriana University, and University of Tehran were invited to participate as presenters, panel chairs, and/or discussants. In the closing session, participants identified the potential role of the RRN in supporting their knowledge mobilization activities and focused on the audiences, useful media and modalities, and the tools and training needed. Their recommendations have informed our subsequent work and the focus on knowledge mobilization.

Engaging political actors has been an ongoing challenge of the RRN. In December 2016, we presented four commissioned policy briefs on issues identified in collaboration with government officials to the staff of the departments of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, and Global Affairs Canada. This kind of collaboration was not welcomed by the previous federal government, which further demonstrates the importance

of the geopolitical context in knowledge production. The topics and authors were: *Age and Generation in Canada's Migration Law, Policy, and Programming* by Christina Clark-Kazak; *The Humanitarian-Development Nexus: Opportunities for Canadian Leadership* by Kevin Dunbar and James Milner; *The State of Private Refugee Sponsorship in Canada: Trends, Issues, and Impacts* by Jennifer Hyndman, William Payne, and Shauna Jimenez; and *Environmental Displacement and Environmental Migration: Blurred Boundaries Require Integrated Policies* by Michaela Hynie, Prateep Nayak, Teresa Gomes, and Ifrah Abdillahi. The papers were distributed to all interested government staff, made available in full and summary form to the larger networks, and posted to the RRN website.

Finally, a team of doctoral students at York continues to work on knowledge mobilization activities. A bi-weekly Refugee Research Digest was launched in May 2017 providing links to the latest articles and materials on refugee issues and is broadcast to over 60,000 people via the Centre for Refugee Studies listserv and other channels. It is produced in English and links mainly to English-language materials. The team is also developing the Refugee Research in Context resource, an online platform to contextualize and increase access to scholarship on contemporary refugee issues, experiences, and debates. These initiatives seek to incorporate a range of theoretical, geographical, and linguistic perspectives and resources to inform public awareness and understanding of current issues.

At the 2015 RRN conference, members of the IASFM executive committee discussed their vision for how their network and the RRN can continue to work together symbiotically. Then IASFM president Paula Banerjee reminded participants that the RRN emerged out of the IASFM and sought to extend and support the work of IASFM member institutions, promote collaboration, and develop innovative and effective knowledge mobilization tools and strategies. She noted that the achievements of the RRN in networking, research, and knowledge mobilization over its then seven-year history demonstrated what can be catalyzed with the strategic and timely application of resources in the form of seed funding and travel and research assistance support. She committed IASFM to take up these efforts and integrate the lessons of the RRN into its organizational structure, so that the IASFM can evolve into more than an organization that supports biannual conferences and that the lessons learned and achievements of the RRN can be sustained. IASFM has committed to increasing

its membership, funding emerging collaborations through seed grants, and supporting the ESPMI network (see chapter 10). Existing and emerging research clusters and networks would also be supported through the knowledge mobilization infrastructure that has been developed through the RRN project and is maintained at York's CRS.

Moving Forward

Whether there will be a new global network of researchers and research institutions as called for by the GRC, or what formation it will take, is unclear. The UNHCR has launched a consultation to determine who will be part of the network, how it will be structured, and what research will be pursued. Professor Pene Mathew, former Dean of Law at Griffith University in Australia, has been commissioned to guide the process. A discussion paper (UNHCR 2018b) was drafted under Mathew's direction and reviewed at a consultation held in Geneva in November 2018 with academics from Europe, North and South America, Africa, and Asia; ongoing consultations are being pursued. We draw on the experiences of the RRN and of the 2008 UNHCR report on a global network (Boano and Addison 2008) to comment on potential guiding principles and practices for the proposed GRC network.

The 2018 UNHCR discussion paper calls for a truly global network noting that the global south is the place of origin for most refugees, where 86 per cent of refugees are hosted, and that excellent scholars from the region would be in a position to share a more proximate, historically, and contextually informed perspective. It notes that these academics also have societal networks that will be important to ensuring that the network's research has an impact in their countries. The discussion paper (UNHCR 2018b) also recognizes the importance of maintaining academic freedom and the independence of the network and its members and cites the work of Christina Clark-Kazak in developing a model for the ethical practice of refugee research (see chapter 13). A truly global network must recognize the importance of the independent involvement of doctoral students and early career scholars (as argued in chapter 1 and demonstrated by the achievements of the members of ESPMI in chapter 10).

The 2008 UNHCR report (Boano and Addison 2008) argued that a global network must operate primarily for the *empowerment* of its

southern membership. This was defined as ensuring structural equivalence between all of its members, particularly regarding access to resources and participation in agenda setting. The network must be focused towards the grassroots, and be participatory in nature. The report further calls for the network to facilitate the incorporation of southern institutions by fostering *collaborative* activities between its members. The discussion paper for the GCR network calls for the interests of and scholars from the global south to be well supported. The equitable engagement and participation of researchers of the south is consistent with the philosophy of the RRN and the position of Loren B. Landau at the University of the Witwatersrand's African Centre for Migration & Society. Landau provides some cautions and guidelines about the research relationships between northern and southern partners in what he calls an era of containment (see chapter 1).

Boano and Addison's (2008) report also called for the network to be built upon already existing relationships between institutions and individuals; it should seek to support, nurture, and strengthen already existing networks in a *complementary* manner. The RRN has engaged multiple research centres and has supported the creation of new regional networks. In his critique of the proposed global network, Jeff Crisp (a former head of research at UNHCR and an early member of the RRN), points out that the field of refugee studies is already highly networked and that there is a need to clarify the added value of the proposed new GCR network (2018).

In the call for the global network, the GCR states that "efforts will be made to ensure regional diversity and expertise from a broad range of relevant subject areas" (2018b paragraph 43). This position is consistent with reviews of the RRN recommending "more branches and less roots" (Oakes 2015) and the 2008 UNHCR report (Boano and Addison 2008) that calls for *regionality*. They proposed key institutions form "regional hubs" to facilitate the establishment and coordination of the network at regional levels. The structure and governance of the network have been key elements in the early discussions about its formation. The discussion paper suggests that existing academic networks may be tapped into for membership of the GCR academic network citing the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM) and the MENA Civil Society Network for Displacement as examples. While the UNHCR has been mandated under the GCR to establish the network, it is not clear whether the UNHCR will act as the secretariat or whether an academic

institution or an association such as IASFM will be asked to take it on; either way, the recognition of regional diversity is crucial.

A key issue for the proposed network is its *sustainability*. The Boano and Addison (2008) report argued that this entails that funds not only be available for network activities but also to southern partners in an equitable manner. Over eight years, the RRN had a budget of \$2.1 million (CAD) to maintain a modest infrastructure, provide seed funding to research clusters, support student travel to conferences, and bring about fifteen to twenty partner institution members to an annual meeting either in Toronto or at the site of the IASFM meeting. A truly global network would need to be much more extensive and expensive. Crisp (2018) raises serious questions about UNHCR's capacity to maintain a global academic network covering the whole range of refugee, forced displacement, and statelessness issues at a time of serious funding shortfalls. He points out that previous research initiatives by UNHCR eventually fell by the wayside because of changing priorities and personnel.

While refugee researchers are typically striving to create knowledge that will benefit refugees, the impact of research on policy and practice is questionable. Crisp (2018) argues that academic research plays a very modest role in the formulation of UNHCR policy and the design of its programs. He claims that factors such as the pressures exerted by host and donor states, UNHCR's relations with other agencies, policy differences, and rivalries within the organization, as well as the changing priorities of its senior management, are greater determinants. Landau also questions the impact of research on policy noting that "even when research is commissioned or funded by governments and aid agencies, it is often ignored if the recommendations are politically or financially inconvenient" (see chapter 1).

What format the proposed GRC academic network will take is not yet clear, although indications are that it will be a top-down structure driven by UNHCR. It seems unlikely that there will be a fully functioning network given the cost; there may at the very least be a portal hosted by UNHCR to store relevant research and materials. The need for more cross-fertilization among research topics, disciplines, and regions is well recognized. The practices and experiences of emerging researchers and practitioners, existing researchers, and research centres as documented here suggest that there is capacity in the field to organize and support

research networks although the financial capacity to do so is found mainly in the north. Existing researchers and regional networks can look to the IASFM to provide an independent platform for building on those networks and collaborations and working to expand and connect them. Established institutions and networks can be called upon to support true partnerships with emerging research centres and early career researchers in the global south. One of the goals of our work together as the RRN has been to contribute to a more global, equitable, and ethical practice of refugee research. We hope that this collection documenting the stories, practices, and contributions of a network of refugee researchers collaborating for more than ten years sheds light on both the possibilities and the ongoing challenges of such an endeavour. At a minimum, our collaboration underscores the potential of research networks to generate knowledge that is strong internationally and inclusive of multiple traditions of inquiry as Appadurai (2000) imagines.

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