# Report about the 2nd Workshop on "African Forced Migration Studies in Germany" focusing on *Peace and Forced Migration*

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The Osnabrück University in cooperation with the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute (ABI) hosted the 2nd Workshop on "African Forced Migration Studies in Germany" virtually on Thursday May 4th, 2023. This online workshop – which was organized by Franzisca Zanker from ABI, Ulrike Krause, Nadine Segadlo and Hannah Edler, all from Osnabrück University – had a total of 19 participants from universities and institutions across Europe and Africa. It was funded by the German Peace Foundation.

The second workshop of the series "African Forced Migration Studies in Germany" placed the focus on peace and forced migration. Whereas Forced Migration Studies has, in general, intensively addressed the relationship between conflict and displacement, peace constitutes a neglected area in research. This workshop sought to contribute to filling this gap by exploring meanings of peace in African Forced Migration Studies.

The workshop brought together interdisciplinary researchers in African Forced Migration Studies. To provide a forum of discussion, two thematic sessions were planned revolving around *what* research the participating scholars carry out on peace and forced migration and additionally *how* they conduct the research (on peace and beyond): The two sessions thus focused on (I) Setting peace at the core in African Forced Migration Studies, with Joy Owen (University of the Free State) as speaker, and (II) Research ethics, methods, and intersectional approaches in African Forced Migration Studies, with Rose Jaji (German Institute of Development and Sustainability, IDOS), Khangelani Moyo (University of the Free State), Margaret Monyani (University of Witwatersrand), Zeynep Pinar Erdem (MOSAIC Mena) and Philipp Schulz (University of Bremen) as speakers.

The following report summarizes key discussion points and outcomes. Brief presentations by scholars are noted but the exact or verbatim contributions to the discussion by participating researchers are not reproduced; instead, we highlight some of the most pertinent discussion points.

### Session I: Setting peace at the core in African Forced Migration Studies

This session aimed to elaborate on roles and meanings of peace in African Forced Migration Studies. Much research has been carried out about how violent conflicts contribute to displacement and what conflict-related risks of violence displaced people are exposed to in exile. However, peace has thus far received considerably less attention though it is often considered as a necessity for displaced people's return to places of origin. Moreover, some studies explore humanitarian approaches to 'peace education'

while other studies partly address displaced people as potential 'destabilisers' for peace. We drew on such debates in this session and furthermore engaged with questions about what roles peace plays in African Forced Migration Studies, and which meanings are attributed to peace (in research, by displaced people themselves, by humanitarian organizations).

The discussion was stimulated by a critical and thought-provoking input from Joy Owen, which revolved around the need for broad considerations of meanings of peace including reflections on ideas, symbols, and concepts, i.e. the semantics of peace. The following discussion furthermore addressed theoretical approaches on peace which are often captured in binary and hierarchical structures. Participating scholars highlighted the importance of moving beyond western research traditions and instead connecting peace for instance to gender, places, cultures, developments, or structures beyond *either/or* dichotomies of being *more or less peaceful compared to* its supposed *opposite* – men vs. women, North vs. South, civilized vs. uncivilized, etc. Participants highlighted that Eurocentric and male perspectives have dominated, overshadowing the relational, complex, and dynamic characteristics of peace. Certain hegemonic ideas and concepts of peace have been taken as the norm, marginalizing and invisibilizing additional notions and approaches. A guiding question in the discussion was how it is possible to move beyond such binaries and – along with it – deconstruct and adjust thinking and research. This is not limited to research with people with lived experiences of displacement but also when exploring policies, when sharing research findings with a broader audience, or how to frame areas broadly in research proposals to receive funding.

The discussion emphasized that moving beyond binaries in analyzing data can be accomplished by a bottom-up approach as well as a consistent critical self-reflection of one's own position in research. The advantage of relational and bottom-up approaches allows for wider and more varying perspectives on peace and lived experiences of peace. Most importantly, this requires the openness of scholars. In the discussion, scholars referred to diverse examples, including the roles of peace in the context of return showing the varieties of everyday understandings of peace. In addition to more common conceptualizations of peace related to political processes on state-level, it would be necessary to consider everyday micro perspectives. Including peace in research about return more broadly would thus require to take into account (1) the often top-down decision-making of when a state is 'peaceful' (enough) for return despite continued instabilities; (2) the involuntary and forceful nature of return or 'repatriation' as a form of deportation because of apparent 'peaceful' conditions in countries or regions of origin; (3) while also exploring the lived experiences of those affected in relation to families, friends, everyday activities, social, political and economic changes. Peace-focused research would require considering peace experiences in spite of, and parallel to, ongoing instabilities in respective contexts. At the core, the discussion revealed the need for complex analytical approaches on micro, meso, and macro level, which are not mutually exclusive but interdependent and highly dynamic.

Linking the above-mentioned binaries, the need for complex analytical approaches and postcolonial research, scholars repeatedly stressed the narrow approach to peace in Peace and Conflict Studies as well as the neglect in (African) Forced Migration Studies. As a way forward the discussion revealed the necessity to structurally incorporate postcolonial research. It demands to engage critically with prevailing binary perceptions and concepts of peace, linking them with discourses about 'least developed' or 'developing' countries in the 'Global South' as opposed to 'industrialized', 'civilized' and apparently 'peaceful' countries in the 'Global North', addressing the postcolonial framework of humanitarianism often tending towards 'white saviorism', and essentially making visible the variety of understandings of peace which have thus far been overlooked.

To sum up, the discussions exposed that more research in this field is needed, and that peace should not be subsumed as a romanticized status-quo in certain regions in the world, but rather as a messy, dynamic, and complex social, political, economic, cultural, religious, etc. process relevant at the micro, meso, and macro level. It is an everyday phenomenon and therefore intrinsically social, individual, normative, and historical.

## Session II: Research ethics, methods, and intersectional approaches in African Forced Migration Studies

This session focused on ethical issues, (new) research methods and approaches, with a particular focus on gender, postcolonial, and intersectional approaches, in African Forced Migration Studies. Inputs by Rose Jaji, Khangelani Moyo, Margaret Monyani, Zeynep Pinar Erdem and Philipp Schulz addressed a range of issues, including the idea of 'Do No harm' as a guiding concept in research with people with lived experiences of displacement, ethical dilemmas and opportunities when conducting research with vulnerable individuals and groups, potentials for capturing gendered and intersectional experiences, avenues to decolonize knowledge production, and questions of positionality. Drawing on the inputs, a number of guiding questions ran through the discussions, including how harm can be prevented and who decides what harmful is, how collaboration can work in research and which methods might be particularly useful, and in what ways voluntary consent can be ensured.

All speakers and participating scholars widely agreed that ethical questions must guide research and criticized that ethical considerations receive varying attention across disciplines and are often insufficiently discussed with students. One main point of discussion that received wide agreement concerned the 'Do No harm' principle which exceeds a physical and psychological understanding and includes doing no *intellectual* harm. Herein lies the quest for critical knowledge production, ownership of knowledge, as well as the threat of violence through language. Focusing on *African* Forced Migration Studies, criticism revolved around research *about* African countries from the *outside*, while

simultaneously muting people's voices from *within*. Hence, it would be important to continuously consider who is shaping Africa's images, meanings, and places; how people with lived experiences of displacement in Africa (and other parts of the world) are depicted and by whom; whether those researching can sufficiently consider views; and whether those involved in the research can broadly take part. This is central to counteracting intellectual harm. (Not) Being able to share what one sees as knowledge needs to be an ethical question of high importance in research. Knowledge production in research has long-lasting impacts on people, communities, ways of (critical) thinking, and structures.

Scholars at the workshop considered forms of knowledge gatekeeping as sources of intellectual harm by scholars toward interlocutors in research. It was stressed that critical discussions would be required within the scientific communities to prevent such harm and to overcome knowledge gatekeeping in the long run. Structures of racism and sexism are ingrained in academia allowing room for reproducing harmful and discriminatory narratives.

Moreover, there is a fetishization in academia to constantly produce 'new' research and supposedly 'new' knowledge through it. However, interlocutors have already had their knowledge, questioning researchers' claim to producing 'ground-breaking new' knowledge in their publications. Knowledge production considering doing no intellectual harm should be regarded as communicative, discursive, relational, and collaborative. This also includes the reflection on academic knowledge neither being accessible to everyone equally nor at the same time. Further, a supposedly well-researched field could experience new ways of knowledge production if viewed from a different perspective. Perhaps this can be guided with a certain notion of naivety shaking up 'common' or 'taken-for-granted' ideas and concepts through new forms of questioning.

Taking such critical perspectives on intellectual harm and knowledge seriously would ultimately pave the way for stronger collaborations with those involved and placing emphasis on agency of the individuals. While collaboration is not automatically 'ethical', the discussions revealed how, for instance, longitudinal participatory research contributes to individuals engaging in de- and reconstructing as well as critically reflecting on research questions, further elaborating on methods, and essentially developing more complex research. Moreover, intersectional and participatory approaches can prevent homogenizing images of those involved or viewing them as passive without or only limited agency. Methods, that enable explorative processes, involve open-ended questions and dynamic dialogues, as well as ensure space for expressing personal experiences that those involved want to address, and facilitate developing trusting relationships during research. At the core, this would aim to build research processes with the potential to move beyond binary, marginalizing and intellectually harming approaches. For those conducting the research, it would be key to continuously reevaluate processes and remain open for feedback.

These broad discussions and suggestions by the scholars at the workshop did not neglect to involve challenges and limitations for carrying out more ethically considerate research. Such limitations can also include institutional and funding issues, which can clash with ethical considerations, participatory and collaborative research (methods). Also, the timeframe, research context, cultural dynamics, and the interlocutors' willingness to be involved in the research process need to be considered sensitively. In addition to promoting ways of how ethical norms can be considered, consciously and perhaps boldly refusing certain established research methods plays an equally important role. The idea of refusal should be guiding from start to finish during research as ethical considerations should be. Refusing to instrumentalize and exploiting people and their views, experiences and (intellectual) properties has to be the driver of methodological/methodical refusal. Consequently, the deconstruction of alternative frameworks should remain an ongoing quest in research.

## Conclusions

Peace has been discussed as a phenomenon involving complex and dynamic social, cultural, political, normative, individual, historical, and many more factors shaping individuals' ascribed meanings over time. In research revolving around conflict-induced displacement as well as forced migration and migration more broadly, peace is still insufficiently explored and requires more attention moving beyond a romanticized, Eurocentric, and dominantly male noting. Rather, postcolonial approaches are needed to consider the social dynamics and contradictions as well as peace as part of everyday life.

While conducting research, the ethical considerations are central throughout. Merely wanting to 'Do No harm' cannot be enough; especially intellectual harm is a threat to interlocutors and fellow researchers from various backgrounds. Bottom-up intersectional, participatory, and collaborative approaches are meaningful ways to conduct research, particularly with vulnerable and marginalized individuals and groups. Such approaches need to uphold and respect the interlocutors' agency and power over their own minds and knowledge. Through this, possibilities arise to go beyond hegemonic academic views.

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