

[Forum]

Gender, Migration, and Post-Disaster Communities: Call for Intersections and Dynamics of Local and Global Connections in Asia-Pacific Island Countries

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Abstract

Students, scholars, and practitioners comprise a vibrant community of knowledge seekers and movers to situate the particularities of island cultures in the intersections of gender, migration, and disaster locally and globally. This is a call to establish a collaborative forum of expertise, teaching and mentorship, and community participation at all levels to enrich understanding of peoples between the Global North and Global South, island cultures, and shared contributions and/or challenges in today's globalizing world facing a climate crisis. One established forum is the CAPIC (Canada and Asia-Pacific Island Countries) network hosted by Glenda Tibe Bonifacio at the University of Lethbridge.

Keywords

Gender, migration, post-disaster communities, intersectionality, island cultures

Introduction

This is a call to engage students, scholars, researchers, and practitioners of diverse perspectives and across disciplines to enrich knowledge co-creation, dissemination, and exchange on the thematic synergies that impact island communities in the Asia-Pacific region and its connections to the world. The framework is centred on the intersections and dynamics of gender, migration, and disasters locally and globally.

Why is there such a need to work collaboratively with local experts and international learners? As the saying goes, "all knowledge is local" (González 2003). Local contexts evince particularities of adaptations and negotiations, for example, of global climate change. The local is the window of the world we live in, but its importance is often ignored (Geertz 1983; Kapferer, Koch, and Sedmak 2016). International learners, be they students or scholars, seek answers to questions that local experts well contribute to

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knowledge production but these are often downplayed by hierarchies of perceived notions of excellence; in this case, Western epistemologies predominate and set “what counts as truth around the world” (Kincheloe 2008, 44).

In this exposition, I outline the state of scholarship on the intersections and dynamics of gender, migration, and disaster in the English language in the twenty-first century, the emerging field of intersectionality in disaster studies, and the medium of likely local-global knowledge exchange through CAPIC. Such endeavour aims to establish equity in knowledge production where the local becomes the converging point to broaden research, teaching, and transdisciplinary scholarship.

States of Scholarship: Gender, Migration, and Disaster

In the twenty-first century, the scholarship on gender, migration, and disasters remains central to political, economic, social, geographical, and environmental discourses (Enarson and Chakrabarti 2009; Hall 2016; Stalford, Currie, and Velluti 2016; United Nations Environment Program 2016). Most often, these topics tend to be politicized, which causes tensions, conflicts, and continued marginalization of groups rather than increasing understanding of experiences across cultures, spaces, and territories (Hannigan 2012; van der Brug et al. 2015; Watson 2020; Krizsán and Roggeband 2021).

Gender is a social construction of perceived roles, privileges, and social positions defined by power relations. Migration is mobility and involves the process of settlement and integration with varied connections to homelands as transnationals. Disasters occur anywhere, with certain areas having more exposure to risks and vulnerabilities, like the Asia-Pacific region (Terry and Goff 2012; Neef and Pauli 2020). But the integration of gender, migration, and disasters remains marginal to date, and the knowledge about contexts with global impact among students in Western societies is also negligible. Knowledge production about “others” for teaching and learning remains the purview of Western-based scholars. The voices of others are seemingly assigned to standard ways of knowing, of being spoken for and heard through extracted knowledge.

However, the progressive approaches of critical scholars from Western and non-Western academic milieus have paved the path for stronger collaborative relations in the production of knowledge and sharing of expertise across disciplines. For example, the field of gender and women’s studies is interdisciplinary and has offered critical spaces against oppressive systems and practices. Feminist scholars tend to break ground in new ways of seeing the world, our place, and aspirations for change towards better inclusive research practices. In the sociology of disaster studies, examples of influential works on gender include Fothergill (1996), Fordham (1999; 2011), Enarson and Chakrabarti (2009), Bradshaw (2013), Enarson and Pease (2016), and Kinnvall and Rydstrom (2019). These works and others have sustained scholarly and policy interests in the topic with the push towards gender equality from international frameworks like the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women since 1979 and the UN Sustainable Devel-

opment Goals, 2015–2030.

Migration and disasters reveal how the geophysical world is intertwined with human displacement. In April 2021, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reported that “the number of people displaced by climate change-related disasters since 2010 has risen to 21.5 million” (quoted in Ida 2021). The International Displacement Monitoring Centre reported that the five countries with the greatest number of new displacements by disasters in 2019, from the highest rank, were India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, China, and the United States (Ida 2021). These Asia-Pacific countries consistently top the list of “climate refugees” with over 17 million in new displacements in 2019 and are known as the “forgotten victims of climate change” (Ida 2021). Human vulnerability to rapid changes in the environment connect with various factors beyond geography.

Intersectionality in Island Studies

Intersectionality is the foremost contribution of feminist scholarship to knowledge. Hill Collins and Bilge (2016, 2) noted its general description as “a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences.” Social realities such as racism, discrimination, and violence are not mutually exclusive but exist in a complex interplay of systemic factors of inclusion and exclusion historically, politically, and economically relative to gender, race, and class, among others. As a theoretical lens, intersectionality is a powerful analytical tool to deconstruct epistemic systems of knowledge: What is it for and who benefits? Intersectionality was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a feminist legal scholar, and the term is as potent as ever, for her, “as a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other” (Steinmetz 2020). In 2021, intersectionality gives us a compelling look into our structures of power, systems of relations, unearned privileges, outcomes of difference, and unequal challenges, among many possible applications, including island studies. Intersectionality allows learners and scholars in island studies to contribute to changing oppressive narratives. The seminal work of Marina Karides (2017) on island feminism sets the path for a “synergistic perspective” of the intersections of gender and sexuality “with other social forces, [which] contour the lives of islanders and the cultural and socio-economic conditions of islands.” Another pathbreaking work is *Gender and Island Communities* (Gaini and Nielsen 2020). And new projects are coming onboard, including this call for transdisciplinary collaboration on gender, migration, and disasters in island countries in the Asia-Pacific region. This includes nine island countries in Asia (Brunei Darussalam, East Timor, Indonesia, Japan, the Maldives, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Taiwan) and fifteen Pacific Island countries (Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna) (World Health Organization 2013). There are numerous ongoing ini-

tiatives sponsored by international organizations and professional networks, but this call is inspired by a “people approach” for knowledge co-creation, the sharing of teaching expertise, and collective research engagement in formal and informal modalities to bring broader perspectives and valuing of local knowledge, including Indigenous knowledges, to diverse groups of students, scholars, and practitioners. Broadening the knowledge base and reach between those classified as part of the Global South and Global North weave an interconnected narrative of human experiences of peoples, and shared aspirations.

CAPIC: Local Knowledge for the World

CAPIC stands for Canada and Asia-Pacific Island Countries. It is a hub for shared scholarship, teaching, research, and community practice endorsed by the Canadian Commission for UNESCO in 2021. The specific focus of CAPIC is the intersections of gender, migration, and post-disaster communities in the twenty-first century, with an emphasis on local knowledge production and collective scholarship for the world. Following the decolonization of epistemology (Kincheloe 2008; Isasi-Díaz and Mendieta 2012; Wood 2020), CAPIC sets forth insight into the rich contributions of scholars from the Asia-Pacific region and the Global South as sources of knowledge with their ways of knowing and understanding of islandness and their connections, broadly conceived. Equity in research and scholarship is a long call to action by anti-oppressive scholars and their ongoing critique of Western hegemony across disciplines. Partnerships with scholars under the CAPIC hub demonstrate possibilities for the co-creation of knowledge through shared research, teaching and mentorship with students in transnational settings, and the inclusion of emerging scholars and local practitioners connecting theoretical discourses with grounded realities among island communities and connections to a globalizing world.

Canada is a favoured destination of immigrants for permanent settlement, temporary migrant workers, international students, asylum claimants and refugees, tourists, and many more. It is the only North American country with a declared “feminist” international assistance policy since 2017 (Government of Canada 2021b) with gender-based analysis as a requirement in research and project initiatives under federal jurisdiction (Government of Canada 2021a). Of course, a policy being declared as feminist does not necessarily follow that it has a feminist approach or explain what feminism is in this context. Notwithstanding current critiques about the failures of such a Canadian feminist foreign policy, it is something to think about for governance and international cooperation, however it may unfold to empower women and girls and address gender inequalities and persistent practices of exclusion. The academic environment in Canada supports equity-based scholarship, transdisciplinary collaboration, and feminist perspectives embedded in the objectives of CAPIC.

CAPIC is hosted by the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada, and supports the programs and activities of related institutions. A UNESCO Chair in Island Studies and

Sustainability at the University of Prince Edward Island in Canada was established in 2016 and is one of the forerunners of academic and research collaboration in small island developing states and sub-national island jurisdictions. CAPIC is the potential base for a proposed UNESCO Chair in Gender, Migration, and Post-disaster Communities in island countries in the Asia-Pacific region. This vision now engages with interested scholars, researchers, students, and practitioners to enhance the growth of transdisciplinary studies in this subject area. The consequent output is a process that is unfolding. Welcome.

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