Knowing Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change

The Self-Perpetuating Circle of Research, Policy, and Knowledge Production

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Abstract: A self-perpetuating circle of research, policy, and knowledge production has emerged around human mobility in the context of climate change, spurred on by a seemingly unquenchable thirst for knowledge. This article interrogates this circle, and the group of actors at its centre, through the lens of power-knowledge relations. The analysis interrogates the boundaries of the thinkable, the limits of how it is legitimate to know human mobility in the context of climate change. Four sets of boundaries feature: the presentation of the issue as a problem requiring technical solutions; the validation of particular elite spaces as sites of research, policy, and knowledge production; the admission of certain actors to these spaces; and the terms in which it is possible to talk about the issues. These boundaries are drawn around one particular knowledge created by an elite epistemic community at the expense of others that are not granted the same legitimacy. This knowledge is often employed (by its creators and by others) to make and support calls for increased migration control, as such potentially concretely effecting the lives of people on the move. This article therefore argues for breaking the self-perpetuating circle of research, policy, and knowledge production. This critique is not only important for understanding how we know human mobility in the context of climate change but for pushing the boundaries of the thinkable.

Keywords: climate change, human mobility, knowledge, power, UNFCCC

Human mobility in the context of climate change has emerged as a distinct area of research, policy, and knowledge production. It is neither a sub-set of work on human mobility, nor on climate change, but rather both areas touch on human mobility in the context of climate change, creating a distinct area of research, policy, and knowledge production in its own right. The space occupied by work on human mobility in the context of climate change therefore sits between two poles: prominent scholars from a variety of disciplines and both thematic foci have intervened in the debate; policy processes from human mobility politics (UN General Assembly 2016) as well as global climate change politics (UNFCCC 2010; 2013; 2016) have staked out an

interest; and human mobility and climate change are increasingly being constructed together as »interconnection clusters« of global risks (World Economic Forum 2016: 9).

This space has produced a great many *knowledge products*,[1] overwhelmingly as written documents, that are portrayed as imparting authoritative knowledge on human mobility in the context of climate change. In this article, knowledge production is not to be equated with research. Research is rather taken to refer to undertakings (whether conducted under the banner of academic research institutions or elsewhere) to establish and better understand the links between human mobility and climate change. There are of course significant overlaps, with many researchers also creating knowledge products. Still, these categories, though overlapping, are not synonymous.

However, research, policy, and knowledge production are inherently tied together when it comes to knowing human mobility in the context of climate change. Research is drawn into policymaking through knowledge products or is even commissioned in an effort to inform policy; policy draws on available knowledge products and supports calls for more knowledge; knowledge products draw on research, and are used to provide a rationale for further research, and are relied on heavily in policymaking. The three are mutually constitutive and unable to exist in isolation, with complex relations therefore underpinning everything that is known.

Researchers, policymakers, and producers of knowledge also sing from the same hymn sheet in terms of securing their own existence, with all of them incessantly calling for increased knowledge on human mobility in the context of climate change (McLeman 2014; Melde et al. 2017). These calls persist even though the links between human mobility and climate change have already taken on truth effects, as illustrated by the inclusion of human mobility as a central societal consequence of climate change in the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which itself compiles its reports based on already existing academic literature (IPCC 2014). By continuing to include human mobility in agreed-upon documents (even if just to call for more knowledge), policymakers also tacitly recognise the legitimacy granted to the linking of mobility and climate change.

Following Benoît Mayer (2013), perhaps it is not simply *more* knowledge that should be called for, but *different* knowledge. In reviewing a series of seminal works in the literature, Mayer identified a tendency to recognise conceptual difficulties in the study of the nexus of climate change and human mobility, but a failure to reflect

1 | The term *knowledge products* has been chosen here after it was used in a private conversation I had with a staff member for a UN agency on the margins of a UNFCCC meeting to describe their written outputs related to human mobility in the context of climate change.

deeply upon and move beyond these conceptual issues. In a similar vein, Calum Nicholson (2014, 2017) has identified six problematic tendencies in the literature: First, a tendency to make very generic statements; second, an opposite tendency of making very specific statements that cannot be applied beyond a very specific context; third, arguments relying on contradictory statements; fourth, a prevalence of tautological statements covering every eventuality; fifth, conclusions with equivocal statements calling for more research; and sixth, the laundering of categories to describe people on the move. To these critiques, I add a call to interrogate the power-knowledge relations underlying the creation of knowledge. Especially given that knowledge on human mobility in the context of climate change has been subject to such critique regarding its very foundations, it is paramount to question why and for whom it is being created (see also Baldwin 2017).

In a nutshell, in order to truly understand human mobility in the context of climate change, it is necessary to backpedal and re-consider the core ontological and epistemological assumptions of the field (see Nicholson 2017). Building in particular on Andrew Baldwin's work (2017), this article therefore interrogates how we know human mobility in the context of climate change through the lens of power-knowledge relations. The following section outlines this theoretical positioning, based on Foucauldian power-knowledge theory. Section Three considers the calls from both academia and the policy world for increased knowledge in greater depth. Section Four then moves to consider the power relations that drive these calls, the self-perpetuating circle of policy, research, and knowledge production that is created and sustained, and the boundaries that are drawn around the thinkable by this circle. The concluding section then argues for breaking this circle to open up the boundaries of the thinkable, to include previously overlooked perspectives and marginalised voices.

What this article does not attempt is an in-depth analysis of the *content* of the discourse on human mobility in the context of climate change, focusing instead on some of the mechanisms by which it has emerged and is being perpetuated. This is not to say that the content of the discourse being analysed here is independent of the power-knowledge relations that this article diagnoses. Indeed, particularly given the conclusions this article draws regarding the domination of particular elite knowledge on human mobility in the context of climate change, demonstrating these links is incredibly important. However, such a critique is beyond the scope of this more targeted intervention. I do encourage this article to be read in conjunction with existing critiques of the discourse on human mobility in the context of climate change, which have drawn necessary attention to the securitised nature of the discourse on ›climate refugees‹ (Bettini 2013) and imagery often used in the discourse (Methmann/Rothe 2014), which have critiqued the neoliberal concept of resilience (Felli 2013; Bettini

2014), which have raised concerns regarding the neglect of climate justice (Bettini et al. 2017), and which have identified the discourse as being highly racialised (Baldwin 2012, 2016) as well as gender blind (Myrttinen 2017) or even reproducing clichéd narratives (Rothe 2017).

This article is part of a larger study of policymaking on climate change and human mobility between 2010 and 2015 (Nash 2017). This study was framed by Foucauldian genealogy (Foucault 1977), and traced the emergence of human mobility in the context of climate change as an area of global policymaking. This analysis drew on a document corpus of 150 documents from organisations carrying out advocacy work on human mobility in the context of climate change. Both draft and final documents from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) were also included in the corpus. This document analysis was complimented with a series of 13 semi-structured interviews conducted with individuals active in this area of policymaking in 2015 and early 2016, before and shortly after the Paris climate change negotiations. In addition, a substantial literature review of the academic literature has also fed into the analysis, as well as the author's own observations from attending a number of international conferences, where it was possible to observe the interactions between policymakers and academics.

Foucault, Knowledge and Power

> »[W]e are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth« (Foucault 1980: 93).

Power, according to Foucault, is not a resource; »it is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth« (Foucault 1980: 98) and as such, it cannot be owned by anyone and is instead imbued in all social relations. Power is also normatively neutral, not only constraining but also a productive force, »it does not only weigh on us as a force that says no, but [...] it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse« (ibid.: 109). As this quote already hints, knowledge exists in a relationship to power, with the exercise of power being mutually constitutive, historically contingent, and performative. Performativity, following Judith Butler, »that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains« (Butler 1993: xii), provides a particularly useful avenue by which to understand the self-reinforcing power-knowledge relations at play in the discourse on human mobil-

ity in the context of climate change and performed in particular arenas such as policy negotiations. It is not only the *content* of knowledge on human mobility in the context of climate change, but the language employed to talk about the issue, the visuals used in knowledge products, the adherence to strict rules of conduct in particular settings, the institutional affiliation of the speaker and even the display of an UN agency lanyard that can cause power and knowledge to continue to reverberate.

Baldwin and Bettini have already identified the actors who do pass the threshold to be considered as legitimate to speak on human mobility in the context of climate change as constituting an epistemic community.[2] They argue that power-knowledge relations can be best observed in »the coming into being of an epistemic community of experts and researchers, bound together through a shared set of assumptions about the nature of human mobility in the context of climate change« (Baldwin/Bettini 2017: 5). They go on to argue that power-knowledge relations become visible in the boundaries that are drawn by an epistemic community around »what can and cannot be said about a specific area of knowledge, distinguishing, sometimes formally, sometimes tacitly, the parameters for legitimate speech« (ibid.: 5–6). These boundaries can also be referred to as the »boundaries of the thinkable«.

In line with an epistemological position that rejects the possibility of pursuing *objective* analysis of the real world, knowledge cannot be taken to be a singular true representation of a social phenomenon. Rather, particular knowledge may take on truth effects, where certain knowledge is privileged and taken to be particularly legitimate, giving it the impression of depicting a true, objective reality (Foucault 1980: 93). However, this should not be read as a rejection of scientific standards, and the aim is not, through rejection of *objective* analysis of the real world, to fall into a relativist quagmire. In the analysis of climate change this is particularly important, so as not to leave oneself open to being read as a climate change denier; indeed I explicitly take the stance that »climate change is a real, material circumstance with potentially dire consequences for much of the world's population, especially those already living on the fringes of capital« (Baldwin/Bettini 2017: 2). This conviction is based, largely, on my understanding of knowledge produced by scientists working on climate change. Therefore, although not necessarily *objective*, knowledge production

2 | According to Noel Castree, epistemic communities, a term coined by Peter Haas, refer to communities of professionals from various disciplines and backgrounds, which »gain their distinctiveness, and sense of self-identity, through a mixture of their value-set, ontological beliefs, questions of interest, objects/domains of concern, methods of inquiry, the criteria favoured for determining worthy ideas, knowledge or information, and their chosen genre of communication« (Castree 2014: 42).

is still linked to things that are actually happening.[3] In approaching knowledge therefore, the aim of this article is, following Donna Haraway, to »have *simultaneously* an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects [...] *and* a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a ›real‹ world, one that can be partially shared« (Haraway 1988: 579). Knowledge is approached as »situated and embodied knowledges« (ibid.: 583), »where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims« (ibid.: 589).

A Never Ending Thirst for Knowledge

The thirst for knowledge in relation to human mobility in the context of climate change appears never-ending. Significant contributions to scholarship on human mobility in the context of climate change frequently dedicate space to identifying future directions for research and how their contribution could be built upon in the future. One example of this tendency is in the work of Robert McLeman, with an entire chapter of a monograph on climate change and human migration dedicated to »emergent issues in climate and migration research« (McLeman 2014). Although the area of research that is human mobility in the context of climate change has continued to develop since McLeman identified it as »very much in its infancy« (2014: 210), this has not halted continued calls for more knowledge. The recently completed MECLEP project (Migration, Environment and Climate Change: Evident for Policy), one of the

3 | Climate change is material and has impacts that are felt by societies. However, how climate change is perceived by these societies is built on complex webs of meaning. In an example used by Methmann, Rothe and Stephan, »a glacier is, in physical terms, a mass of ice with certain properties, it depends on its discursive representation whether it counts as an object of scientific inquiry, an emblem of pure nature or a witness of dangerous global warming« (Methmann/Rothe/Stephan 2013: 5). Therefore reactions to climate change, including potential changes in human mobility, cannot be explained purely by physical, material changes, but also their discursive representations. A similar statement can be made in regard to people on the move. While it is not to be disregarded that people are moving, it depends on discursive representation whether people are considered as victims of displacement due to climate change, as heroes of adaptation, or as masses of ›illegal migrants‹, with each of these representations framing people on the move in a different way, which in turns differs from if people on the move were considered as persons with individual biographies, ideas and personalities (see Andersson 2014).

largest empirical research projects to have been conducted on human mobility in the context of climate change,[4] also identified a series of ways forward, largely involving the use of new methodological innovations, to be employed by »the next generation of empirical research on migration in the context of environmental change« (Melde et al. 2017: 43).

This thirst for knowledge that was already diagnosed by Mayer (2013) typifies a field of scholarship aware of but unable to react to conceptual tensions underpinning the entire field. Thus, whilst knowledge has been created that definitely adds to the *breadth* of knowledge on human mobility in the context of climate change (for example, including case studies about new locales) the conceptual *depth* of the scholarship has not always been added to, with many studies failing to react critically to the scholarship that has come before them.

A thirst for knowledge on human mobility in the context of climate change is not limited to an academic pursuit. Policymakers have also increasingly called for more knowledge on the links between climate change and human mobility. The clearest examples are contained in the agreed-upon texts of the UNFCCC that concern human mobility, all of which call for more knowledge. The first inclusion of human mobility in an agreed-upon text at the global level (Warner 2012) in the Cancun Adaptation Framework invited Parties to undertake »measures to enhance understanding, coordination and cooperation with regard to climate change induced displacement, migration and planned relocation, where appropriate, at national, regional and international levels« (UNFCCC, 2010: 14(f)) as an aspect of climate change adaptation. In 2012, a further UNFCCC decision (UNFCCC 2013, 3/CP.18, 7(a)(vi)), this time as part of the UNFCCC's ›loss and damage‹ area of work, referenced human mobility, acknowledging work being undertaken to advance »the understanding of and expertise on loss and damage«, one aspect of which is »how impacts of climate change are affecting patterns of migration, displacement and human mobility«. Ending the period that began with Cancun in 2010, the UNFCCC's decision from the Paris climate change conference in 2015 moved beyond purely calling for more knowledge (Nash 2017). This decision created a task force »to develop recommendations for integrated approaches to avert, minimize and address displacement related to the adverse impacts of climate change« (UNFCCC 2016: 49).

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4 | The MECLEP project, funded by the EU and implemented by the IOM with a consortium or research institutions, carried out comparative research in six countries (Dominican Republic, Haiti, Kenya, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, and Vietnam) to ascertain how migration could benefit or undermine adaptation to environmental and climate change (Melde et al. 2017).

As an explicit response to the call for more knowledge made in the Cancun Adaptation Framework, as well as in initiatives headed up by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (see also Hall 2016), the Nansen Initiative was launched in late 2012, based on pledges made by the governments of Norway and Switzerland to cooperate with other states and actors »with the aim of obtaining a better understanding« of cross-border movements in the context of disasters (Government of Norway 2011). In order to carry out its mandate, the Nansen Initiative carried out sub-regional consultations which were supplemented by newly commissioned studies where a particular knowledge gap was perceived to exist. Therefore, the Nansen Initiative both collated and created knowledge products in weighty outcome documents (The Nansen Initiative 2015).

The creation of a self-proclaimed Advisory Group on Climate Change and Human Mobility (hereafter Advisory Group) in 2013, mainly from UN agencies[5] working together with the purpose of informing the UNFCCC negotiations on issues of human mobility (UNHCR 2014: 18), created an intermediary between knowledge producers and policymaking. This group has proven to be a vital channel for providing knowledge to policymaking actors, particularly the UNFCCC, with an air that the knowledge provided in briefing documents by the Advisory Group (2014, 2015, 2017) is objective knowledge, with truth effects being created in a number of ways. First, the language used to talk about the issues corresponds to UN standards. For example, one briefing document from 2015 includes an opening section highlighting the numerous international agreements that the briefing document is in consonance with, repeating the phrase »in line with« (Advisory Group 2015: 1) reminiscent of a UN agreement. A similar pattern is used in a 2014 submission, which opens with the phrase »*Recalling* decision 3/CP.18 paragraph 7(a(vi) [...]« (Advisory Group 2014: 1). This language can be fairly impenetrable to outsiders and conforms to many of the elaborate constructs of the UN world within which the text operates. The insider status of the Advisory Group in the UNFCCC is also emphasised, with briefing documents explicitly identifying contributions that they have already made: »The Advisory Group participated to [sic] the drafting of the work programme to be adopted by the COP20 in December 2014 during, the Executive Committee first two initial meetings suggesting one of the activities on human mobility« (ibid.: 11). Second, the knowledge

5 | The Advisory Group is an informal group composed of the UNHCR, IOM, the United Nations University section on Environmental and Human Security (UNU-EHS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Norwegian Refugee Council/Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (NRC/IDMC), Sciences Po-CERI, and Refugees International (Advisory Group, 2014).

presented to policymakers by the Advisory Group is put together in a very deliberate manner. It is highly condensed, built up around an air of consensus that depicts it as authoritative knowledge, highly polished, and presented in formats that appeal to policymakers (Nash 2017).

When one begins to deconstruct not necessarily the content, but the performativity of knowledge on human mobility in the context of climate change, the power-knowledge relations become apparent. Human mobility in the context of climate change is created as a phenomenon (a phenomenon requiring responses from the policy world) in incredibly elite and remote institutional circles. The centricity of Geneva, and the UN bubble that the city often represents for the majority of agencies involved in the Advisory Group, also introduces an additional geographical bias.

Knowledge and policy on human mobility in the context of climate change are therefore inherently linked, with knowledge being created explicitly in order to inform policymaking processes. In an academic culture where policy-relevant research is increasingly something to be revered, this is an interesting opening for academics who can feed their work directly into policy processes and avoid having their work consigned to a dusty bookshelf. In the continual fight for academic funding, work that is aligned with particularly hot policy topics also has greater chances of being funded. Tapping in to these priorities can therefore be a path for academics to keep their heads above the water in a financial sense.

An Inside Job: Knowledge Narcissism and Marginalised Knowledges

When interrogating knowledge in relation to work on human mobility in the context of climate change, it is nevertheless important to go beyond mere recognition of the links between academia and the policy world. These are not particularly hidden, and therefore uncovering them is not much of a revelation. What might be less apparent upon first glance is the self-reinforcing nature of these links and the self-perpetuating circle of policy, research, and knowledge production that has formed, driven by calls for more policy, research, and knowledge embedded in knowledge products, and the activities of an elite epistemic community who continues to legitimise the very existence of the community through the necessity of continued policy, research, and knowledge production work.

To analyse this circle, it is important to look at the epistemic community on human mobility in the context of climate change, which is pushing for inclusion of the issue in international agreements and the like. Certainly in the UNFCCC context, many

of the central figures are representatives of the various member organisations of the Advisory Group. However, in addition to being involved in influencing policymaking processes and pushing for provisions that call for more knowledge, these organisations are themselves involved in knowledge production. Therefore, the ones involved in policymaking, supporting calls for increased knowledge, and carrying out research and creating knowledge products in order to respond to these calls are all the same actors.

This not only reinforces the power of those who are already in a position to provide relevant knowledge, but also places actors involved in the policymaking process in a position to suggest particular ways in which to frame the calls for more knowledge according to their organisational strengths, institutional mandates, and priorities. This is potentially problematic for two reasons: First, the dominance of the same actors in both fields, setting the questions to be answered and providing the answers to them, is likely to lead to an echo-chamber effect, with few new perspectives being introduced into the discourse (Baldwin 2015). Second, the organisations that are heavily implicated in both knowledge production and policymaking on human mobility in the context of climate change are tied up in complex funding structures, with many relying on national governments for financial support. As others have already warned, especially given current discourses surrounding human mobility, and in particular a tendency towards increased calls for migration control, there is a risk that the starting point of striving for increased migration control could become transposed into the policymaking on human mobility in the context of climate change (Bettini 2014).

The third element of this self-perpetuating circle, research, is also not immune. There is not always a clear distinction between knowledge production by non-academic actors and academic research, with large academic research projects into human mobility in the context of climate change being carried out in conjunction with civil society organisations (CARE International and United Nations University 2012), or funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the IOM (Melde et al. 2017). Whilst there is no suggestion here that academic rigour is lacking in the formation of conclusions in any of these research initiatives, the involvement of policy and advocacy actors in the conceptualisation and question-setting stages of these projects should not be overlooked.

Also key to the continued rotating of this circle is a knowledge narcissism on behalf of the actors at its centre: they display self-assurance that their perspective is vital to work on human mobility in the context of climate change; they portray themselves as authoritative sources of knowledge; and they publicise their role in previous policy successes. Therefore, consideration of the creation and sustenance of this circle, and

the actors at its centre, can provide insights into how we know human mobility in the context of climate change.

In the policy-research-knowledge production circle surrounding human mobility in the context of climate change, four sets of boundaries of the thinkable have been drawn. The remainder of this section will be concerned with identifying these sets of boundaries, before some of the implications are touched on.

The first boundary of the thinkable is around human mobility in the context of climate change as a *problem* that needs to be *solved*; to once again cite Baldwin and Bettini (2017), it is »overly represented as a crisis that demands technical and expert solutions« (ibid.: 5). This particular boundary is very important for the policy element of the self-perpetuating circle identified above, as this boundary justifies the very existence of the circle. Therefore, knowledge products that sustain this idea are the ones that get filtered into policymaking spaces. Although dissident voices exist that question the suitability of policy processes as a response to human mobility in the context of climate change (see Baldwin 2017), or attempt to de-naturalise the existence of policymaking in this area (see Nash 2017), these rarely enter the circle.

The second boundary that has been drawn is around the spaces where work on human mobility and climate change should (legitimately) be carried out. For almost ten years, the premier stage for policymaking has been the UNFCCC. This setting alone is an indication of unequal power relations: the UN climate change negotiations can be impenetrable for outsiders, discussions are shrouded in jargon and abbreviations, and even once inside the negotiations as an observer, there are many closed spaces that are only accessible to UN insiders or State Parties. Therefore, power-knowledge relations are present both in the fact that only actors that have gained access to the UNFCCC are party to knowledge that is shared there, but also that in order to bring knowledge to the UNFCCC, actors need to have been deemed ›legitimate‹ and granted access.

In the research world, a geographical bias has also been observed in terms of where knowledge on human mobility in the context of climate change is produced. A study of the geographies of research in this field concluded that whilst the majority of case studies focus on the Global South, the majority are carried out by researchers based in the Global North (Guélat et al. 2016). Initiatives that focus on collating existing research (with the IPCC as a prominent example) will therefore also have this inbuilt bias. A geographical bias is therefore present not only in policymaking on human mobility in the context of climate change, but also in the production of knowledge through academic studies. This dovetails with an argument that has already been made by Baldwin (2017) that the discourse on climate change and human mobility represents a European form of power.

The third set of boundaries is somewhat more subtle and concerns what knowledge is deemed ›legitimate‹ and, in the context of the UNFCCC, admissible to the process. As an area that has been set up as demanding technical and expert solutions, knowledge has to conform to these codes in order to be deemed legitimate. For academia, this may mean publication in the correct journals or with academic publishers; in fora such as the UNFCCC, knowledge should conform to the language of the institution, and be presented in short, digestible formats. Here, the actors at the centre of the policy, research, and knowledge production circle, especially the Advisory Group, have become dominant, producing strict narratives that all members have agreed upon, and they have outlined these in very short documents, aimed at influencing policymakers (see Nash 2017). Their dominance can be equated with a gatekeeper role in the passage of knowledge into the UNFCCC.

The fourth set of boundaries are drawn around in what terms it is acceptable to talk about human mobility in the context of climate change. This refers both to the pure semantics of what terms are acceptable, but equally to the ideational components that are attached to them. The prevalence of UN actors in the discourse, as well as the desire to be policy-relevant on the part of academics, has contributed to an over-reliance on established categories of human mobility (see the dominant formulation of »displacement, migration and planned relocation« contained in the Cancun Adaptation Framework (UNFCCC 2010: 14(f)) and a fascination with distinguishing between different categories of movement based on the degree to which movement was forced or more-or-less voluntary. This leaves little room to conceptualise mobilities that fall outside of these categories, or outside of previously conceptualised types of movement, and this continues to bolster the role of UN agencies that have mandates defined around these terms.

These four sets of boundaries (which are by no means an exhaustive list) have the important implication for work on human mobility in the context of climate change that one type of elite knowledge (with particular geographical, institutional, and linguistic biases) comes to dominate. Knowledge that falls within the four sets of boundaries, and conforms to the expectations laid out therein, acquires truth effects. However, in order to open up this area of work to make knowledge production more diverse and accessible, an important question is: what voices are being excluded? What knowledges are being marginalised because of the knowledge narcissism displayed by the players at the centre of the self-perpetuating policy, research, and knowledge production circle? One startling omission is the voices of the people whose mobilities are/may be affected in the context of climate change. This is unsurprising in a discourse dominated by technical contributions and experts; however, it can nonetheless limit the perspectives represented.

Conclusion: Breaking the Cycle

This article has set out the argument that a self-perpetuating circle of research, policymaking, and knowledge production exists in relation to human mobility in the context of climate change, and argues, from the perspective of power-knowledge relations, that this circle revolves around a particular elite set of actors who promote their knowledge on human mobility in the context of climate change. A vital part of this circle has been the never-ending thirst for more knowledge, often pushed for and delivered by the same actors, and adhering to norms for knowledge production that they have already established.

The point of this argument is not simply to rock the boat, but should be read as a first step to opening up this circle to interrogation and expanding the boundaries of the thinkable. Staying within established fora such as the UNFCCC, a more open knowledge production process could heighten the transparency of policymaking processes and of academic research. It may also provide the impetus for previously marginalised voices to be included more fully. However, the real potential impact of this analysis is not within the tight confines of established policymaking processes. By casting the net more broadly, beyond the research, policy, knowledge production circle, new perspectives may come to light that would change the direction of how we think about human mobility in the context of climate change.

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