

Scholars in the Global South: Between Precarity and Persecution

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Note: PLOS is delighted to once again partner with the [Einstein Foundation Award for Promoting Quality in Research](#). The awards program honors researchers who reflect **rigor, reliability, robustness, and transparency** in their work. The Einstein Foundation received dozens of stellar submissions. We asked this year's finalists to write about their research in the run up to the ceremony on March 14th in Berlin. This is the third blog in our [5-part series](#).

Author: See complete bios at the end of this blog.

The Global South, comprising a majority of the world's population, lives in knowledge production ecosystems which are not fully captured in formal institutions. Universities are not necessarily at the heart of knowledge creation in the South. Academic institutions often suffer from political capture, limited academic freedom, resource constraints and little access-to-networks to develop long term research expertise. Much of the knowledge mobilization happens outside the academe—through actors like nonprofits, think tanks, activists, local communities, and social movement activists. Much of this knowledge remains disaggregated, inaccessible and anecdotal. The net result then is its unrecognized potential for building general models for understanding the world, and longer gestation period for existing models to translate into policy action.

If one considers for instance, informal markets. More than 90 percent of Indian workforce is informal in nature, and yet, the modern economics is built around the assumption of formal contract and property rights in place, with informal contracts relegated to some footnotes, rendering invisible much of what the Global South studies experiences in their day-to-day experience. Consider another instance of programs for economic reform and debts. The bulk of the university or institutional top down research tends to focus on macroeconomic implications and ignore household debts. For many borrowers, loan recovery is done through the full force of criminal laws, something expressly prohibited under the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. Yet countries as diverse as India, Nigeria and Egypt all lean on similar approaches to debt recovery—with women being particularly disadvantaged. A third example includes knowledge production around Climate Change. It is an intensely political subject in some Global North contexts such as the USA; and globally, Climate Change is enmeshed with democratic and other social movements. . Studying its effects, therefore, cuts across disciplines, and the formal and informal divide of where knowledge is located. The absence of frameworks to holistically understand the Global South experiences leads to knowledge production models and systems with hugely inefficient outcomes. Focusing solely on the the university-centric model, therefore, gives us an incomplete picture.



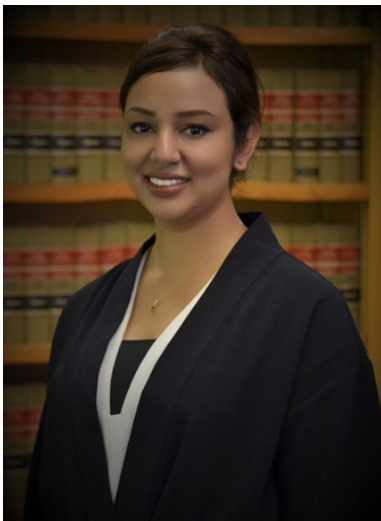
Our project studies and aims to offer a comprehensive global platform and network to unify some of the different sites through which knowledge is produced, mobilized and disseminated in the South.

Academics in the South wear multiple hats – they work in traditional research spaces but also practice and connect with local knowledge centers, activists and community actors and organizations, and even governments. The overlaps and exchanges between these actors generate knowledge, mobilize it, and drive calls to action. These knowledge stakeholders could be called as scholactivists. They innovate models of knowledge production and mobilization by integrating or strengthening the links between formal knowledge and the tacit knowledge gained through experience of actors on the ground.

We propose to work through a range of methods to build knowledge/data from the ground up through the local/informal sites of knowledge production and connect them to formal institutional networks. There is a need to introduce diverse and plural perspectives into the mainstream and dominant knowledge models.

The dominant model of knowledge creation has indeed been built around assumptions about a simple transfer from North to South. This approach pushes formal models that work in the North, into the South for reform projects without taking into consideration context, culture, history and politics. The Global South, therefore, provides fertile grounds to study how we can unify knowledge systems and make them more resilient in larger and real-world contexts. The project is therefore about recognizing the plural sites of knowledge production, something that will integrate and transform knowledge globally.

The project has two components, namely (a) curation (with online repository, regulatory mapping, and resources for scholars at risk), and (b) research component (with global and regional workshop and supporting communities within and outside academia). One of our hopes is that this project helps build legacies and shapes alternative futures. In the Global South, where we are claiming knowledge resides in the intersection of overlapping, dynamic and often informal fields, legacy building becomes challenging. Knowledge is neither systematized, nor institutionalized, or carried forth. Building knowledge systems takes generations and the task ahead of us is intergenerational to build knowledge commons and reinforce the power of community.



Dr. Cynthia Farid is currently a Global Academic Fellow at the University of Hong Kong Law Faculty. She is also a member of the Global Young Academy, and a lawyer at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. She has longstanding experience in research, legal practice, law reform, and a range of rule-of-law programming with INGOs, think tanks, and legal rights organizations. Her research interests include constitutional law, legal history, law and development, and knowledge production processes in the Global South. She is the organizer of two International Research Collaboratives at the Law and Society Association, USA that focus on South Asian Legal Systems, and Scholactivism in the Global South. These collaboratives have facilitated collaboration between researchers from around the world, particularly those located in the Global South.



Yugank Goyal is associate professor in FLAME University (India) where is founder-director of Centre for Knowledge Alternatives. The Centre is pioneering large-scale documentation of district-level statistics and cultures across India.

His research interests include regulation, law and development, institutional economics, knowledge systems, informal markets and psephology. His research has been published in high-impact journals. He is also a reviewer in several of them. He also regularly contributes to national dailies and other popular fora as well.

He enjoys teaching interdisciplinary subjects, including public policy, new institutional economics, law and economics, futures studies and ethics.

Yugank engages with the government on public policy issues regularly. He is Member, National Education Policy (NEP) Steering Committee, government of Maharashtra, Regional Advisory Council Member, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, government of India, and Consultant, Procurement Research Cell, AJ National Institute of Financial Management. He sits on the academic board of the Indian School of Public Policy, which he helped set up. Recently, he sldo co-founded a philanthropic, crowdfunded school in rural, western UP.



Dr. Sergio Latorre is Assistant Professor in the School of Law at the Universidad del Norte. He has an LLM and JSD from Cornell University. Before starting his postgraduate studies, he served with the Jesuit Refugee Service, working with internally displaced communities in different regions in Colombia. Sergio is interested in exploring innovative approaches toward bridging gaps between law and local cultures and communities, in particular rural peasants (campesino) communities victims of violence and land dispossession in

the region of Montes de Maria (northern rural Colombia), where he has done extensive fieldwork research in the past 14 years. His research concerns the resolution of land tenure disputes and engages with debates on property, bureaucracy, transitional justice, international environmental law and peace.



Full-time Commissioner of the South African Human Rights Commission

Commissioner Tshepo Madlingozi studied law and sociology in South Africa, Cameroon, and the United Kingdom. Before being appointed to the Commission, he was the Director of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at WITS University and an Associate Professor at the same university where he taught human rights and social justice. He has been a consultant for local organisations and inter-governmental organisations including the Pan-African Parliament and the U.N. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.



Dr. Suraj Yengde is currently a W.E.B. Du Bois Fellow at Harvard University. His prior appointments were Senior Fellow at the Harvard Kennedy School, a non-resident fellow at the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research and was part of the founding team of the Initiative for Institutional Anti-Racism and Accountability (IARA) at Harvard University. Dr. Suraj Yengde is also a DPhil candidate at the Faculty of History at the University of Oxford. He is an International Human Rights attorney by qualification from India and the UK and a transnational Dalit rights activist involved in building solidarities between Dalit, Black, Roma, Indigenous, Buraku and Refugee peoples in the Fourth World project of marginalized peoples. Currently, he is involved in developing a critical theory of Dalit and Black Studies.

