

Getting to Grips with Gatekeepers in African Migrant Research

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Abstract

This paper examines the methodological challenges and ethical dilemmas posed by gatekeepers in migration research. Although the topic has been an issue of interest and debate among research practitioners globally, it continues to attract fervent scholarly attention. This paper contributes to this growing body of scholarship by focusing on research in contentious terrains, particularly undocumented or irregular migration. The paper explores how the negotiated transactions and interactions between researchers and gatekeepers have continued to colour the research discourse especially in the African context. It maintains that gaining access to research sites and (or) populations is an ever evolving, multi-layered and complex power balancing art which is characterised by compromises and trade-offs as each party seeks to protect its own interests. As central elements to securing entry, access and consent, gatekeepers have a profound capacity to both enable and constrain data collection. Finally, the paper provides some suggestions for formulating strategies to assist researchers to manage gatekeepers.