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Breaking the Silence: An Intersectional Organizational Behavior Framework for Refugee- Led Organizations

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Abstract

While scholarship extensively documents the external suppression of refugee voices by host states, a critical blind spot exists regarding the internal organizational lives of Refugee-Led Organizations (RLOs). This conceptual paper addresses this gap by investigating the phenomenon of organizational silence within Malaysian RLOs, identifying it as a structural barrier to ethical human rights advocacy. Operating within legally restrictive civic spaces, refugee staff frequently navigate a "culture of silence" induced by legal precariousness, fear of deportation, and internal hierarchical pressures. This paper introduces an integrated framework combining organizational silence and ethical leadership, underpinned by psychological safety and intersectionality. This multi-lens approach moves beyond traditional displacement narratives of passive victimhood to focus on internal organizational agency and internal human rights. By examining how leadership styles and structural intersectionality impact the internal "voice climate," the paper models how organizational silence can inadvertently marginalize female and ethnic minority staff, thereby hindering inclusive institutional efficacy. The purpose of this framework is to guide the co-creation of organizational toolkits that cultivate safe, transparent, and ethically resilient advocacy environments. Moving beyond state-centric paradigms, this study provides a crucial foundational blueprint for practicing peace, voice, and human equity within grassroots humanitarian organizations in the ASEAN region.

Keywords: ethical leadership; intersectionality; organizational silence; psychological safety; Refugee-Led Organizations