



Ethics in Forced Migration Research: Taking Stock and Potential Ways Forward

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Executive Summary

Migration research poses particular ethical challenges because of legal precarity, the criminalization and politicization of migration, and power asymmetries. This paper analyzes these challenges in relation to the ethical principles of voluntary, informed consent; protection of personal information; and minimizing harm. It shows how migration researchers — including those outside of academia — have attempted to address these ethical issues in their work, including through the recent adoption of a Code of Ethics by the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration (IASFM). However, gaps remain, particularly in relation to the intersection of procedural and relational ethics; specific ethical considerations of big data and macrocomparative analyses; localized meanings of ethics; and oversight of researchers collecting information outside of institutional ethics boards.

The paper concludes with the following recommendations:

- Institutional Research Ethics Boards should familiarize themselves with the particular ethical challenges in migration research, as well as available resources, such as the IASFM Code of Ethics. Ethics boards should include researchers and community representatives who are familiar with migration in reviews of related projects.
- Academic and training programs in migration studies should include sessions and resources on migration-specific research ethics.
- Nonacademic organizations, including migrant-led organizations, should provide information resources and training to their staff and clients to ensure that they understand procedural ethics requirements, relational ethical principles, as well as the rights of those asked to participate in research. Organizations conducting their own research should establish ethics review processes and relational ethics norms.
- A leading migration studies center or institution should map existing ethical guidelines and processes in different countries and contexts to be better aware of overlap and gaps. This mapping should take the form of an open access, interactive database, so that information can be accessible and updated in real time.
- Researchers should engage in more dissemination of lessons learned on ethics in migration. While there is some emerging consensus on key ethical principles for migration research, it is in their application that researchers face dilemmas. Honest reflection and sharing of these experiences will help researchers to anticipate and manage similar dilemmas they encounter while undertaking research.
- Researchers at all stages of their careers should not undertake migration research without having first reviewed some of the

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literature on ethics and migration, which is partially cited in this paper.

- Research centers should facilitate dialogue on ethical issues in languages other than English, particularly languages most spoken by people

in migration, and by people who are underrepresented in formal ethics processes and debates, especially those with direct experience of migration.

Keywords

ethics, methods, methodology, refugee studies, migration studies, mobility

Introduction

This article takes stock of current discussions of ethical issues related to research in contexts of migration. It highlights the specific ethical issues that arise in migration contexts due to legal precarity, the criminalization and politicization of migration, immobility, and power asymmetries. It then discusses how ethical principles of consent, privacy, and harm reduction need to be adapted to these migration realities. Building on the literature and resources in the field of refugee and migration studies, it argues for an approach that combines procedural and relational ethics. The paper concludes with some reflections on future directions and recommendations for greater knowledge-sharing and diversity of perspectives, especially from people with direct experiences of migration.

In this article, I refer to migration as a broad phenomenon related to the movement — and immobility (see below) — of people. While much of the literature and guidelines cited here are situated in contexts of “forced” migration, I have chosen to be more inclusive, especially given critiques of the forced versus voluntary binary (see, e.g., Adelman and McGrath 2007; Hathaway 2007; Bakewell 2008; Long 2013; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Erdal and Oeppen 2018), and contexts of mixed migration flows (Van Hear, Brubaker and Bessa 2009; Long and Crisp 2010; Linde 2011; Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera 2015). I have tried to avoid the term “migrants” because of its politicization (Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Goheen Glanville 2022) and the use of labels to dehumanize people (Zetter 1991, 2007). Therefore, I prefer to speak about people in contexts of migration to emphasize the structural phenomenon, rather than the particular legal category or label. When I do

use the term “migrants” — primarily for grammatical clarity — I intend it as an inclusive category to refer to all people in situations of migration, including refugees.

Specificities of Ethics in Migration Research

Migration research occasions particular ethical challenges due to a number of context-specific realities. First, migration often entails precarious, temporary, or semipermanent legal status (Goldring, Berinstein, and Bernhard 2009; Anderson 2010; Hari 2014; Castles 2015; Squire 2018). The right to remain in a state can be denied or revoked for a number of reasons, including criminality (Benslimane and Moffette 2019) and inaccurate information on immigration documents or in immigration testimony (Cameron 2018). Research findings can cast doubts on the credibility or veracity of the information provided in immigration claims or testimonies (Cohen 2001; Sweeney 2009; Kahn and Fábos 2017; Neylon 2019). In these contexts, researchers must be aware of the ethical risks that information we gather could jeopardize residency, migration status, and legal citizenship of the people with whom we work and their families, social networks, and communities. For example, Zedner (2016) examines the human rights implications for naturalized citizens in the UK whose citizenship can be revoked on national security grounds.

Second, related to legal precarity, migration is increasingly criminalized (Stumpf 2006; García Hernández 2014; Atak and Simeon 2018; Menjívar, Cervantes and Alvord 2018; Parmar 2020; Ben-Arieh and Heins 2021). Moreover, research takes place in contexts of wide-ranging

“anti-terrorist”¹ laws and national security legislation (Guild 2003; Huysmans and Buonfino 2008; Savun and Gineste 2019). As a result, people in migration face heightened surveillance and scrutiny (Aiken 2000; Kerwin 2012; Moffette and Aksin 2018). In addition, researchers may have a legal obligation to report activities that are in contravention of domestic and international legislation, even if they do not agree with those laws (Lowman and Palys 2001; Palys and Lowman 2014).

Third, discussions and policies about migration are heavily politicized (Buonfino 2004; Van der Brug et al. 2015; Thapliyal and Baker 2018). Consequently, research findings can be coopted for particular political agendas (Scalettaris 2007; Andersson 2018; Baldwin-Edwards, Blitz, and Crawley 2018). Data, statistics, and individual stories may be taken out of context or used to support xenophobic, racist, or anti-immigrant policies (Chimni 2009; Van Hear 2012; Bose 2020). For example, Landau (2019, 34) has “advocated the need to promote African-based interventions that can aid and absorb those who move by choice or compulsion. However, when the data is intended to feed European efforts to discourage movements within or out of Africa, Africa-based scholars may quickly become complicit in an enormous and highly funded containment apparatus.” Highly politicized migration policy contexts pose ethical dilemmas to researchers, who want to effect change, but who cannot control how their data will be disseminated and (mis)used.

Fourth, migration can sometimes involve long periods of mandated immobility due to border closures (Van der Velde and van Naerssen 2011; FitzGerald 2019; Schewel 2020), immigration detention (Garelli and Tazzioli 2018; Loyd and Mountz 2018), encampment as a “migration management” strategy (Kaiser 2006; Hyndman and Giles 2011), and extra-territorialization (Zetter and Long 2012; Brun 2015). People who are trapped in liminal or prolonged immobility, whose survival depends on “gatekeepers,” may feel obliged to take part in research,

undermining the voluntariness of consent (Hugman, Bartolomei and Pittaway 2011a). In some cases, they may (be led to) believe that participating in research could help them gain a visa, resettlement, or other benefits. On the other hand, if research findings are critical of gatekeepers or structures, people in situations of immobility — including those who did not partake in the research — may be subject to reprisals. For example, Krause (2017) recounts decisions by her research team not to hold certain discussions in the context of Uganda law criminalizing homosexuality.

Fifth, from a practical perspective, cross-border research involving multiple institutions in different countries can complicate procedural ethics requirements. Reflecting the socially constructed nature of ethics, countries, and institutions have different norms and approaches to research ethics approval, ranging from a complete lack of oversight to highly bureaucratized processes. Similarly, different institutions have different approaches to research ethics. Navigating these overlapping administrative requirements and procedures is a challenge for multi-sited projects with different partners.

Sixth, people in migration contexts are often heavily dependent on service providers or government officials for immigration status and livelihoods. As a result, the voluntariness of consent can be questioned (Hugman, Bartolomei, and Pittaway 2011a). This is particularly the case where service providers or governments are themselves conducting research and/or are acting as gatekeepers and key informants to external researchers (Maylea and Hirsch 2018). In some cases, research can be conflated with information-gathering for documentation or service provision purposes, such as food aid.

Power asymmetries in knowledge production

The researchers get the information from us and type it in books. I don't think they share it with concerned people. Instead they write some books and make personal use off of those books. And, after making the books, they make money with the ideas we gave them. So, they write a book and sell the book and make money off of our stories. That's what I think. They hustle – they do their work. They get what they want, and they get out. Maybe it's the anthem for the researchers [laughter] (RYP13).

(cited in Bilotta 2019, 142–143)

¹I put “anti-terrorist” in scare quotes to underscore critiques that this legislation may, in fact, have purposes other than preventing terrorism.

Indeed, power asymmetries underpin many of the ethical dilemmas that researchers face when conducting work in migration contexts. From an epistemological perspective, unequal power relations are (re)produced in knowledge creation about migration. While the majority of people in situations of forced migration live in the global south, most of the research funding, training, and publications are based in the global north (Chimni 1998; Bradley 2007; Landau 2012, 2019). Researchers in areas most affected by displacement have the capacity and knowledge to undertake research, but lack human and financial resources to do so (Landau 2012). Moreover, they face financial, linguistic, epistemological, and technical barriers to disseminating their knowledge.

Similarly, people with experience of forced migration have not been central to research-creation. While they are often asked to “tell their story,” ownership of the research process and copyright often remains with researchers (Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman 2010; Chatzipanagiotidou and Murphy 2022; Godin and Dona 2022). Indeed, research ethics protocols and resources are similarly problematic — conceived of, and controlled by, those who do not have direct experience of migration (Bilotta 2019). There is only an emerging literature on the ethical and epistemological contributions of researchers who have also experienced migration themselves (Espiritu 2017; Espiritu and Duong 2018; Oda et al. 2022).

Power asymmetries leave those who participate in research with little, if any, possibility of redress (Pittaway, Bartolomei, and Hugman 2010). One of Bilotta’s research participants describe a parasitic relationship:

That kind of parasitic relationship is that researchers are — I feel that researchers, they come get our data, then waste our time. There is no mutual benefit, the benefit is on one side. Those guys collect the data, and for us at the end of it we don’t see any change. We expect to at least get some benefit back, but there is no benefit. You get your data, you go — maybe use it for your own benefit and you leave us hanging. So, I feel only one party is benefitting and the other one is not benefitting. So that’s why I say it’s kind of a parasitic relationship.

(quoted in Bilotta 2019, 134)

This “parasitic relationship” is not limited to people who experience forced migration; it also applies to staff working in these contexts, who devote time

and resources to research and do not necessarily benefit from the findings.

Colleagues in our field are beginning to challenge this dominant way of knowing and doing. For example, Critical Refugee Studies, led by feminist researchers who have experienced migration, critiques the deficit approach to migration research and suggests proactive ways of centering creative ways of knowing (Espiritu 2017; Espiritu and Duong 2018). Some scholars have drawn on decolonizing epistemology to reimagine migration methodologies and ethics. For example, Taha (2022, n.p.) advocates for “embracing other ways of knowing” as “a decolonizing approach that will require expanding one’s sociological imagination to include other theoretical explanations and methodological tools that could help us understand Othered experiences.” Others advocate for an antioppressive rights framework “to shift the ownership of knowledge from the researcher back to those who experience the research phenomena” (Bilotta 2020, 400).

Revisiting procedural ethical principles in light of migration-specific challenges

“My friend the professor!” exclaimed one of the participants in the PhotoVoice session about to begin, “What do you have for us this time? What do you want to learn about? What we eat? Where we go? How we get there? I hear you want us to take some pictures, is that right? What are you going to do with them? Hey, as long as you give us those giftcards, right? I’m trading you these stories for a giftcard, am I right? But they’re still my stories and you gotta do right by me when you tell them.”

(cited in Bose 2020, n.p.)

Given the specific contexts of migration research, discussions have emerged about how to adopt and adapt the standard ethical principles of voluntary informed consent, privacy and minimizing harm, and maximizing benefits. It should be noted that these principles are primarily embedded in procedural ethics, while other principles are more prominent in relational ethics, as will be discussed below (Bilotta 2019). I start with the procedural ethics concepts because they dominate discussions within institutional research ethics boards. However, most of the literature challenges researchers to think about these principles in a relational way. In this section, I summarize the current state of the field in relation to each of these principles and how they apply to migration research. This discussion is not intended to be

exhaustive; rather, my aim is to highlight some of the key issues and direct researchers to some of the rich literature that squarely addresses dilemmas in the implementation of standard ethical principles to migration research. In so doing, I argue for a hybrid approach that takes into account both procedural and relational ethics.

Voluntary, Informed Consent

Voluntary, informed consent means that those who consent to participate in research do so out of their own free will, with an understanding of the aims of the research and its potential risks and benefits. As alluded to in the section above, the voluntariness of consent can be questioned in many migration contexts due to extreme power asymmetries (Hyndman 2001). One researcher explains, “When I go into a horrendous camp situation as a white researcher, the people are so desperate for any form of assistance they would agree to anything just on the off-chance that I might be able to assist. It makes asking for permission to interview them or take photographs a farce... What does ‘informed consent’ mean in an isolated refugee camp with security problems and no proper interpreters?” (Personal comment, Linda Bartomolei, cited in Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman 2010, 234).

Access to migration spaces and people is often controlled by gatekeepers, such as the government, United Nations, or nongovernmental officials. These organizations may also undertake censuses, evaluation, or research projects themselves (Benelli and Low 2019; Nayton and Baker 2019). Not only do gatekeepers add another layer to the consent process, but also complicate the voluntariness of consent because individuals identified by gatekeepers may feel obligated to take part. As Ellis et al. (2007, 46) argue, “If a refugee’s experience has been that officials will stop at nothing to get a person to cooperate, and that authorities often hold inordinate power over one’s future, being told that a study is ‘voluntary’ may seem absolutely meaningless. Particularly if the study is housed within an official institution, or funded by a federal government, participation may be seen as mandatory. In other instances, fear of deportation or a desire to achieve legal status may lead a refugee to feel forced to participate.” In

contexts of forced immobility outlined above, these power relations are exacerbated. “Captive audiences” may believe that external researchers can help them (Block, Riggs, and Haslam 2013) or may fear risk of retaliation from gatekeepers if they do not take part in research.

When researching with children and young people in migration contexts, consent processes must take into account inter- and intragenerational power relations, as well as the standard requirement for consent from a parent or guardian (Lawrence, Kaplan and McFarlane 2013; Hart 2022). Parental or guardian consent for legal minors is especially complicated when migration causes family separation (Clark-Kazak 2019; Vervliet et al. 2015; Chase et al. 2020). For example, Uzureau et al. (2022) grappled with how to obtain consent to use graffiti left in “semi-public places” and with minors without legal caregivers. Adult consent is also difficult to navigate when children and young people are engaged in illegal or socially unacceptable activities, such as sex work.

The informed aspect of consent is the degree to which those who are asked to participate in research are fully informed of the study’s aims and the benefits and risks of their participation.

While anticipating risks of research is challenging in many research contexts, it is exacerbated in migration research because of the criminalization and politicization of migration, discussed above. It is also complicated when research focuses on sensitive topics that could cause social ostracization. For example, Chynoweth and Martin (2019, 23) explain how they navigated “multiple ethics- and accountability-related tensions” in researching sexual violence against displaced men and boys, including those who identified as LGBTQ+.

Voluntary, informed consent is usually not possible when using third-party data, including big data (Behnam and Crabtree 2019), social media screening (Brekke and Staver 2019), and administrative case files. These are widely used in migration research and are generally exempt from review by institutional ethics boards because they do not involve primary data collection with human subjects. Moreover, migration research often involves data collection from people — such as officials, service providers, lawyers, or sponsors —

with knowledge of other people's migration experiences. At times, they disclose this information to researchers, without obtaining the consent of the individuals whose stories they are telling. For example, Behnam and Crabtree (2019, 4) highlight an increasing trend among donors who insist that "once consent has been given to one organisation, that consent extends to the sharing of data with any other related party." In these contexts, donors expect access to "sensitive, personally identifiable case management and incident information" Behnam and Crabtree (2019, 4).

The standard, western-centric process of obtaining consent through signed forms can be problematic in migration contexts. Participants may be wary of completing forms, given past experiences with repressive or discriminatory authorities (Ellis et al. 2007). On the other hand, they may think it is part of a required immigration process and not understand the significance of what they are consenting to (Krause 2017). Consent forms proposed by Research Ethics Boards are often written in a technocratic language. This poses barriers to understanding, especially given linguistic and culturally specific understandings of ethics. To partially address this gap, a document, entitled "Your Rights in Research" (CCR 2018), has been developed and translated into several languages to explain in lay persons' terms concepts that migrants are likely to encounter in procedural consent processes. As Hugman, Bartolomei, and Pittaway (2011a, 659) argue, the consent form "relies heavily on a complex approach to legal rights and obligations (and limits to these) that in turn depends on the capacity of people to exercise their rights. It assumes knowledge, confidence and other personal and social resources to understand and to be able to claim redress should the need arise." Instead, as highlighted below, they advocate for consent as "an ongoing relational process, rather than a one-off event" (Hugman, Bartolomei and Pittaway 2011a, 663; see also Vervliet et al. 2015; Thapliyal and Baker 2018).

Privacy

Standard procedural ethics guidelines require researchers to respect the privacy of personal information. Given the heightened risks due to legal precarity,

criminalization of migration, immigration enforcement, and far-reaching national security legislation (discussed above), migration research poses particular ethical considerations.

Electronic data collection can be intercepted (Dimitrova and Brkan 2018) by information communications companies and in the context of the USA Patriot Act (Sylvester and Lohr 2005) and other similar "anti-terrorist" laws elsewhere. In many cases, researchers are not protected by professional-client privileges, such as doctors, lawyers, and journalists (Stiles and Petrila 2011). Moreover, researchers in applied fields may have an ethical and professional obligation to report (self-)harm (Furman et al. 2012). These limits to confidentiality need to be clearly articulated for research participants.

Methodologies that are popular in migration studies, such as narratives, do not lend them to protecting personal data (Powles 2002; Eastmond 2007; Sigona 2014; Cabot 2016; Chatty 2016). Even when pseudonyms are used and key identifying data are anonymized, detailed accounts mean that those who know the individuals in the narratives will be able to guess their identities. Moreover, the move to the coproduction of knowledge and coauthorship (see above), while partially resolving ethical and epistemological issues around ownership, poses challenges to anonymity. For example, Grabska (2022) and her colleagues faced ethical dilemmas in deciding whether or not to disclose the identities of young women who participated in coproducing films about their experiences of migration.

Finally, when research access is controlled by gatekeepers or for sampling techniques that rely on word of mouth or lists provided by third parties, these external actors may know — or can easily guess—who participated in the research. Similarly, when the researcher is very visible as an outsider in such spaces, her movements can be easily monitored and, consequently, others can trace back the sources of data.

Minimize Harm and Maximize Benefits

We think that researchers take pride in our increasing problems in order to research more. ...We are still facing the same problems despite the number of researchers we have met.

(cited in Karooma 2019, 18).

Procedural ethics processes involve standard questions to weigh the projected benefits of the research with the potential harms the research poses to participants and their communities. Several migration scholars, including, Hugman, Pittaway, and Bartolomei (2011b), Mackenzie, McDowell, and Pittaway (2007), Jacobsen and Landau (2003), and Bilotta (2020) suggest that “do no harm” is not sufficient in migration contexts. First, the potential harms are life-threatening (Jacobsen and Landau 2003). Second, ethical research should go further than simply preventing harm, to trying to contribute to ending the suffering that so often accompanies migration. For scholars within a critical epistemological perspective, research should not be limited to simply maximizing benefits, but to challenging the oppressive structures and power asymmetries that underpin migration contexts, including the research process. As Turton (1996, 96) argued several decades ago, migration research is only justified if alleviating that suffering is an explicit objective.

The increased use of big data and information technologies in migration research poses particular challenges in relation to minimizing harm (Behnam and Crabtree 2019; Molnar 2019). Martin and Singh (2019) highlight the need for political will to use early warning systems to reduce human suffering. Frydenlund and Padilla (2022) suggest that simulation and modeling could be used by governments to attempt to predict migration to block people from crossing their borders. Similarly, Molnar (2019) cautions that information technologies can be used to undermine rights, while Behnam and Crabtree (2019) highlight the ethical challenges of aggregated data that is not sufficiently anonymized.

Given heightened media and government attention to migration, there is also the ethical problem of causing harm through over-research (Luetz 2019; Omata 2019; Bose 2020; Banki and Phillips 2022). Participating in research diverts time and energy away from survival activities and also involves emotional labor of retelling one’s experiences over and over (Lammers 2007; Clark-Kazak 2017). This can lead to research fatigue: “Complaints about over-research tend to arise from a combination of the sheer repetition, frequency and often redundancy of research in the camp, as well as a sense that research fails to bring any tangible or substantive change or

benefit to the residents being studied” (Karooma 2019, 18).

Overemphasis on some groups and issues can also lead to underresearch on other communities and topics (Omata 2019). Ethical guidelines developed in the Canadian context state.

“All efforts should be made to include a diversity of perspectives in research studies, with specific recruitment strategies and methodology to include differential perspectives and research needs based on age, gender, sexuality, ability, class, race, education, literacy, and language” (Clark-Kazak 2017, 13). To the extent that research is intended to influence policy and programming, there is an ethical obligation to ensure a wide variety of perspectives in research. Indeed, one of the reasons why the guidelines cited above were developed was because institutional ethics boards were categorically rejecting research with refugees as “too risky,” thereby denying the opportunity for those with direct experience of migration from influencing the research results.

Related to this latter point, researchers also have an ethical obligation to maximize the benefits of their research. However, too often research participants expressed concerns about persistent unfulfilled expectations and promises (Bilotta 2020). In response, several researchers suggest the importance of reciprocity (Lammers 2007; Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman 2010; Clark-Kazak 2013; IASFM 2018; Bose 2020). As Pittaway, Bartolomei and Hugman (2010, 234) explain, “the principle of reciprocity suggests that the risks and costs associated with participation in research can be offset by the delivery of direct, tangible benefits to those who participate. To achieve this, researchers need to return to the community something of real value, in forms determined by participants themselves. However, there is little guidance for researchers on how to negotiate benefits with participants, and current funding arrangements usually provide neither time nor resources to effectively do so.”

Current Gaps and Possible Future Directions

While the researchers cited above have drawn attention to the ways in which standard ethical principles need to be adapted to migration contexts, until

recently, there were no specific ethical guidelines in the field of refugee and migration studies. Oxford's Centre for Refugee Studies had adopted the ethical principles from the Association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth, but there were no specific provisions for the ethical issues posed by migration contexts, highlighted above. To partially address this gap in the Canadian context, the Canadian Council for Refugees, the Canadian Association for Refugee and Forced Migration Studies, and York University's Centre for Refugee Studies published bilingual (French–English) ethical considerations in 2017 (Clark-Kazak 2017), along with an executive summary and a “rights in research” document for research participants. In November 2018, the membership of the International Association for the Study of Forced Migration adopted a code of ethics (IASFM 2018).

The Canadian and IASFM documents are framed as “considerations” and “critical reflections,” respectively, to highlight the fact that ethical research is an ongoing process. They have sparked important conversations about other areas for ongoing reflection and action. In particular, they have articulated important distinctions between procedural and relational ethics (Bilotta 2019).

Procedural ethics are norms and principles that are upheld through institutionalized processes. As highlighted in the section above, researchers must satisfy ethics boards that their research corresponds to ethical norms and practices.

These procedural ethics are important to provide some checks and balances on research. However, they are only of limited utility in addressing the ethical dilemmas posed in migration contexts for several reasons. First, as mentioned above, institutional structures vary widely and are not present in all countries. The cross-border and cross-cultural nature of much migration research, as well as localized understandings of ethics, complicates these country- and institution-specific processes. Second, not all research is subject to procedural ethics approval. In particular, research that does not involve human subjects is exempt, but these studies still run the risk of harm because of their policy salience. Research conducted outside academia — including primary data collection undertaken by governments, service providers, and for administrative purposes — does not

usually require procedural ethics clearance. Third, institutional ethics boards do not always understand the specificities of research in migration contexts. Moreover, “Too often, IRBs are composed of academics and experts from the Global North with limited, if any, inclusion of individuals who can articulate the perspective of the research participants.” (Chynoweth and Martin 2019, 25; see also Pittaway, Bartolomei, and Hugman 2010; Hugman, Bartolomei and Pittaway 2011a; Bilotta 2019) Finally, as Bilotta (2019, 66) argues, procedural ethics do not necessarily prepare researchers for situational ethics, “the unpredictable, everyday ethical issues that surface during research encounters”. These “ethically important moments” (Guillemin and Gillam 2004) pose serious dilemmas to researchers even after they have obtained formal ethics approval.

Due to these limitations of procedural ethics, researchers have called for greater attention to, and implementation of, relational ethics (Hugman, Bartolomei and Pittaway 2011a; Hugman, Pittaway and Bartolomei 2011b; Vervliet et al. 2015; Bilotta 2019), sometimes referred to as an ethics of care. According to Bilotta (2019), relational ethics is rooted in value and respect, reciprocity, reflexivity, and positionality. Goheen Glanville (2022, n.p.) argues for an ethical praxis that goes beyond ethics protocols and is embedded in ways of doing research that “remains responsible to the communities being represented.”

More work needs to be done to complement the dominant focus on procedural ethics within academic institutions, with examples and resources on relational ethics. For example, in the IASFM Code of Ethics (2018), there is a section on the ways in which procedural ethics principles should be applied in migration contexts, but also key principles of research relationships, including autonomy, equity, diversity, competence, and partnership. This is only a starting point. Given that institutional ethics boards are both firmly entrenched in the ethics landscape, but also insufficient, more dialogue across institutional and relational ethics is required.

Similarly, migration studies are only starting to seriously grapple with the power inequalities in knowledge production in our field. Procedural ethics policies, as well as discussions on relational ethics have been dominated by White, Anglophone,

academics based in the Global North. More needs to be done to diversify our processes and the conversation to better reflect the realities of those who experience migration, and the multiple perspectives of research. On the latter point, more attention should be paid to localized meanings of ethics, as well as oversight of research undertaken outside the scope of institutional ethics boards.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has provided an overview of the emerging literature and conversations about ethics in migration research. While the partial bibliography cited here demonstrates a rich array of issues, researchers still require more documentation and dissemination of lessons learned. The IASFM Code of Ethics points to an emerging consensus on key ethical principles for migration research, but it is in their application that researchers face dilemmas. Sharing of these experiences will help researchers to anticipate and manage similar dilemmas they encounter while undertaking research.

Given the hegemony of English in academic and policy-making circles on forced migration, more needs to be done to facilitate dialogue on these ethical issues in other languages, particularly languages most spoken by people in situations of forced migration. This is not simply about translation, but also a conscious effort to include other sociolinguistic perspectives in the conversation. Moreover, as mentioned above, the discussion has lacked a diversity of perspectives. More efforts should be made to make space for, and amplify, diverse perspectives on ethics. In particular, as Bilotta (2019) recommends, people who have experienced migration, especially those who receive regular requests for information, should consider establishing their own ethics processes for evaluating research requests in their communities. Similarly, community organizations should establish ethical guidelines, principles and practices for data collection and reporting they undertake within their organizations.

In a similar vein, a leading migration studies center or institution should map existing ethical guidelines and processes in different countries and contexts to be better aware of overlap and gaps. This could also facilitate collaboration across institutions and

borders. In any such research collaboration, power inequalities in the production of knowledge need to be clearly acknowledged and addressed. This is an iterative and long-term process that requires deep behavioral and organizational changes to the way we do research.

To contribute to these new ways of doing and knowing, academic and training programs in migration should include resources on migration-specific research ethics. Such resources should move beyond a traditional focus on procedural ethics, to make researchers aware of practical and relational ethics in migration. Nonacademic organizations should also provide information resources and training to their staff and clients to ensure that they understand procedural ethics requirements, as well as rights of those asked to participate in research. Those who conduct research themselves should also think seriously about how to integrate procedural and relational ethics into their work. Institutional Research Ethics Boards should familiarize themselves with the particular ethical challenges in migration research, as well as available resources, such as the IASFM Code of Ethics. Such boards should include researchers and community representatives who are familiar with forced migration in reviews of related projects.

The exponential growth in the literature and resources on research ethics in migration over the past decade is a testament to the importance researchers attach to conducting research in a fair, equitable, and just way. This paper has summarized this literature in an attempt to provide an overview of where we currently stand, as well as a potential road map for future work in this area. It is my contention that migration researchers need to acknowledge the complementarity of institutional and relational ethics, and to take concrete steps to meaningfully diversify our understandings of ethics — and research — by amplifying the experiences of our colleagues with different perspectives on research ethics, particularly people who have experienced forced migration and researchers in nonacademic settings.

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