The Glaring Gap: Undervalued and Unrecognized Knowledges and Expertise in International Migration Research.[1]

Abstract

As we reach the 60th anniversary of the International Migration Review, a key question for those engaged in migration research remains: has migration studies become more inclusive of knowledges and expertise outside the Global North? In short, the answer is no, and both the passage of time and the persistent awareness of this inequality require urgent and immediate action. In this article, we draw on our experiences as first- and second- generation migrant women, and as practitioner-researchers working in the humanitarian sector, to reflect on the significance of undervalued and unrecognized knowledges and expertise on migration research. We share insights from our recent work with the Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab, an initiative established to conduct migration research that informs humanitarian operations and advocacy, and we reflect on key opportunities and challenges that have impacted our efforts to generate knowledge that is more inclusive of migrants, and of practitioners and researchers from the Global South. In doing so, we highlight the possibility – even if still limited – of doing research that engages more ethically and meaningfully with those whose knowledge and expertise has long been excluded from dominant debates. We do this with a sense of hope and urgency that, by the 70th anniversary of this journal, the landscape of migration research will have changed – as a result of a concerted investment of time, resources and new ways of working – to broaden the questions asked, the objects of study and the methodologies adopted.

[1] The views presented here are the authors' own, and do not reflect the institutional view of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement or any of its components.

Introduction

"In a world of increasing interdependency, the inevitable effect of a shortfall of knowledge concerning international migration in the Third World is a glaring gap in scientific understanding of the overall subject matter". This was the reflection of the editors of International Migration Review (IMR) on the eve of the silver anniversary of the publication almost 35 years ago (Tomasi, Tomasi, and Miller 1989). These concerns were echoed by guest editors of IMR in the golden anniversary of the publication a decade ago, who noted that "not least in view of the policy dimensions of migration and the potential conflict of interests over migration issues, a fairer geographical distribution of migration expertise is desirable" (Lee, Carling, and Orrenius 2014, s13). Yet, as we reach the 60th anniversary of the publication, the question remains: has research on migration become more inclusive of knowledges and expertise outside the Global North? The answer, based on recent evidence, is no (Landau 2019; Piccoli, Ruedin, and Geddes 2023). Research on migration is still primarily driven by "experts" in high-income countries of destination, to the exclusion of academics and practitioners from outside North America and Western Europe, and of many migrants themselves.

As others before us have argued, this exclusion must be urgently addressed (Grosfoguel, Oso, and Christou 2015; Kabbanji 2014; Raghuram 2006). In this article we reflect on the significance of undervalued and unrecognized knowledges and expertise for both migration research and for the development of policies on migration, particularly those relating to migrants at the lower end of national and international hierarchies of rights and freedoms (Anderson 2015; Castles 2005). Our contribution has two objectives. First, by drawing from existing literature and from our experiences as both first- and second- generation migrant women of color, we provide a critique of knowledge production on migration and point to the

analytical benefits of more inclusive research that incorporates – at all stages, from design to dissemination – those with lived experience of migration, and practitioners and researchers working directly with migrants and communities affected by migration. Second, by reflecting on our work as inaugural staff members of the Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab (the RCRC Global Migration Lab),[2] we consider the real-life opportunities and challenges that have impacted our efforts to create knowledge that is more inclusive of migrants, and of practitioners and researchers in the Global South. Through this personal reflection as practitioner-researchers in the humanitarian space, we highlight the potential of alternative models of international migration research to engage more ethically and meaningfully with those whose knowledges and expertise have long been excluded from dominant debates. Based on these experiences, we conclude with a set of practical recommendations for structural change that realizes the promise and power of inclusive knowledge production.

To be clear, this is not a call for more policy-oriented research. Rather, it is a call to rethink research methodologies and established ways of working (Bakewell 2008; Khosravi 2024; Pittaway, Bartolomei, and Hugman 2010). It is an urgent call for academic institutions, research funding bodies, ethics boards and international institutions to invest time and resources in practices that can broaden the questions asked, the objects of study and the methodologies adopted with the objective of ultimately strengthening the impact and relevance of migration research (Clark-Kazak 2021; Southern Responses to Displacement 2022; African Centre for Migration & Society 2021). This is a call to challenge the way we

[2] The RCRC Global Migration Lab is a research initiative created in 2020 to support and inform Red Cross and Red Crescent operations and humanitarian diplomacy, including advocacy, on migration.

generate knowledge about migration, a call to reflect and take action to build a field that is it not only more diverse, but also more equal.

Where/Who Are We, and Why Does it Matter?

Migration, a global phenomenon, necessitates planetary knowledge that challenges dominant epistemologies and ethnocentrisms (Connell 2007; see also Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Fiori 2020; Khosravi 2024).[3] Yet, knowledge produced today is far from planetary or inclusive in its epistemological breadth or depth. Throughout this article, we use the terms "Global South" and "Global North" intentionally to bring to the fore "an entire history of colonialism… and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources are maintained" (Dados and Connell 2012, 13). While acknowledging that these terms can be sweeping, and create discomfort, their ability to pinpoint "the economic, political, and epistemic dependency and unequal relations in the global world order" (Mignolo 2011, 166), is particularly helpful for analyzing the dynamics of knowledge production on migration. In addition, we use the terms "local" and "global", while being mindful of the troublesome delineation of the "local" in binary and/or subordinate opposition to the "global" (Roepstorff 2020; Amelina and Faist 2012; Maubert and Allouche 2021). We use these terms to draw attention to "who claims to represent the local, who defines who the local is, and how this may lead to the marginalization of certain actors…" in both research on migration and in humanitarian spaces (Roepstorff 2020, 285).

[3] To quote Connel's (2007, vii) critique of the social sciences, "…only knowledge produced on a planetary scale is adequate to support the self-understanding of societies now being forcibly reshaped on a planetary scale".

We also recognize that migration is a phenomenon that dissects and problematizes these same terms. As put bluntly by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Fiori (2020, 181) "migration itself is decentering". Migrants defy neat categorizations and redefine and blur the meaning of physical and cultural borders, including those between the Global South and the Global North, and between the local and global (see also Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). There is evidence of this in the experiences of many researchers from migrant and refugee backgrounds in the Global North, who are in the suffocating position of being the subject and the object of migration studies, and whose knowledge and expertise is also undervalued and unrecognized through "an othering and sometimes antagonist science" (Khosravi 2024, 2356). As such, the reflections, critiques and recommendations presented here, and our call for more ethical and meaningful engagement, are not restricted to the binaries of North vs South, or local vs global, but also extend to others that have long been excluded from dominant debates.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to take account of our position as practitioners and researchers in this field of knowledge production (Kusow 2003; Carling, Erdal, and Ezzati 2014). We identify as first- and second- generation migrant women of color, however these categorizations are complicated by our own individual histories of inter-generational migration, including forced displacement and indentured labor. While our families "originate" from Mexico and South Africa (at least in the latest iteration), we currently live and work in Australia – a high-income country of destination, which we would categorize as belonging to the Global North in terms of the current world order, and the dynamics of production of knowledge on migration.[4] We are undeniably in a privileged position vis-à-vis fellow

[4] See Collyer (2021) for an alternative perspective on Australia's stance vis-à-vis the Global North and Global South.

migrants: we both now hold Australian citizenship, which matters in a material way given persistent hierarchies of im/mobility and rights (Castles 2005). We are aware that our wealth, education and language skills designate us as "honorary whites" in some, but not all, everyday activities (Grosfoguel, Oso, and Christou 2015). Yet, Australia's own colonial history – and what Hage (2012) labels the "White nation fantasy" – often reminds us of our status as itinerant "Others", as our names, accents, skin colors, cultural traditions, histories of migration, or affinities with other places still stand as strong markers of subordinate difference in many aspects of our lives, including as practitioner-researchers (Khosravi 2024).

In terms of our research work, as trained researchers in sociology and migration studies, we occupy what has been described as a "third position" that deviates from the archetypal insider–outsider divide (Carling, Erdal, and Ezzati 2014). For instance, our own histories of migration, the experiences of our families and friends in Mexico and South Africa, and our engagement with migrant/refugee activism in Australia and overseas, undeniably shape how we approach our research and our work in the humanitarian sector. This has often allowed us to build rapport with fellow migrants (including researchers, practitioners, and research participants) and with colleagues from the Global South, and it has enabled us to purposefully advocate for the inclusion of certain perspectives based on our own lived experience. Our positionality also reminds us of persistent inequalities in knowledge production on migration. Throughout our careers we have witnessed everything from casual belittling at attempts to communicate with others ("why should we bother publishing in that [non-English speaking] journal"?) to hollow and instrumentalist attempts to demonstrate engagement ("we could only fund the partnership if you can match our contribution, but we would like to showcase your previous collaboration for our global engagement"), to name a few. It is from this position that we provide a critique of knowledge production on migration and point to the analytical

benefits of more inclusive research. It is also from this position that we examine the opportunities and challenges we have encountered through our work with the RCRC Global Migration Lab.

Migration Studies: A Growing, but Unequal, Field

As has been well documented, research on international migration has grown exponentially in recent decades (DeWind 2020; Pisarevskaya et al. 2020; Vertovec 2020). There are more research institutes and academic journals on the topic than ever before. Yet publication after publication has demonstrated the persistent exclusion of many individuals, countries and regions from this growing body of work (Arias Cubas 2020; Kabbanji 2014; Kosnick 2021). For instance, most research institutes specializing in international migration – including academic institutes, think tanks, and networks – are concentrated in North America (excluding Mexico) and Europe (primarily Western Europe) (Piccoli, Ruedin, and Geddes 2023). The proportion of articles written in leading migration journals by authors outside these regions remains extremely low (only 8% of articles published in IMR between 2005-2014 were written by authors based in Asia, Africa and Latin America) (Lee, Carling, and Orrenius 2014; see also Neang, McNally, and Rahim 2022 for an analysis of the Journal of Refugee Studies; and Vargas-Silva 2019 for an analysis of Migration Studies). Likewise, individuals from the Global North are overrepresented on the editorial teams and boards of leading academic journals (approximately 85% of current editors and board members from IMR are based in the US, Canada and Western Europe) (see also Arias Cubas 2020). This evidence shows that research on migration is still primarily dominated by people based in high-income countries of destination to the exclusion of others, which in itself is a reflection of the selective way in which the term “experts” is applied.

Why does this matter? As argued by many before us, knowledge on migration is not "a set of disembedded practices, but also a located and historical entity … [that is] produced within, and may well be expressive of, the social hierarchies and inequalities of those who produce and circulate it" (Raghuram 2006, 14; see also Kabbanji 2014; Grosfoguel, Oso, and Christou 2015). In practice, this means that notwithstanding some critical and diverse voices among experts from the Global North (including some migrants), the dominance of voices from the Global North still limits the research questions, objects of study, and the methodologies adopted in migration research. Institutionally, the growing reliance on government funding – grants or contract research – has limited the possibilities of migration research and resulted in a concentrated focus on issues such as security, management, integration/incorporation, and South-to-North migration flows, that are primarily of policy relevance in countries of immigration in the Global North (Piccoli, Ruedin, and Geddes 2023; Hatton 2018). In addition, the positionality of experts, which is embodied in the privileges and inequities of race and class amongst others, continues to place their knowledge and forms of knowing above others (Collins 2022; Khosravi, 2024; Kosnick 2021). For instance, factors such as whether someone has the required languages skills (and desirable or "intelligible" accent) to communicate with authority, or whether someone can afford to do research or study overseas (or even obtain a visa to travel to certain destinations) represents a barrier to entry that, in turn, leads to the undervaluing of, and failure to recognize, certain knowledges and expertise.

This exclusion is particularly visible in our area of work, which centers on questions pertaining to the safety, dignity, and well-being of migrants in vulnerable situations,[5] including – but not only – asylum seekers and refugees who may, at one or more stages of their journeys, need humanitarian assistance and protection (Hoagland and Randrianarisoa 2021; Arias Cubas, Hoagland, and Mudaliar 2022). As noted by Landau (2019, 29), "even if the majority of the world's refugees and migrants and the bulk of humanitarian interventions are located in the south, southern-based scholars are hard to find in the leading (i.e. most broadly cited) scholarly journals on the topic" (see also Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Fiori 2020). Of course, this problem extends far beyond academic research on migration. Southern voices are a small minority in humanitarian research more generally (Humanitarian Advisory Group et al. 2022; Fitzpatrick et al. 2023). Despite a growing and sector-wide emphasis on "localization" (Barbelet et al. 2021; Roepstorff 2020; Shuayb 2022), which responds to both longstanding critiques of inequalities in the sector and calls to improve the "effectiveness" of humanitarian interventions, the practice of "fly-in" consultants (mostly from the Global North into the Global South) and the superficial engagement of local researchers and practitioners are still pervasive.

Relatedly, migrants are also commonly excluded as knowledge producers in migration research (Arias Cubas 2020). Migrants, particularly those racialized or otherwise "othered" – the female asylum seeker, the migrant with an irregular status, the "low-skilled" temporary

[5] Our use of the term "migrants in vulnerable situations" reflects the humanitarian approach of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and its focus on people's needs and vulnerabilities, rather than legal status or category (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2009).

worker, those in camps or detention centers – have traditionally been construed as "objects" of study and targets of policy interventions. This is particularly the case with migrants who are increasingly "subjects" of humanitarian intervention, as "every time an affected community or person is described as 'vulnerable', 'powerless', 'helpless', 'disempowered', or 'victim', it ascribes a certain level of dependency and lack of agency to them" (Rejali 2020). As we discuss in further detail below, the exclusion of migrants from the design, implementation, and dissemination of research has significant negative implications. This exclusion not only affects relationships of trust, collaboration and reciprocity between migrants, researchers and practitioners, but also limits our collective understanding of the world in theory, and of how problems, policy solutions and interventions are framed in practice (Fiorito 2023, Omata 2020).

The question of migrants vis-à-vis research on migration also brings to the fore the role of first- and second-generation migrants, such as us, who actively contribute to research on migration within the Global North and the Global South. Perhaps this is where our positionality as migrant women of color working on migration in a humanitarian organization most strongly influences our perspective. We do not have the lived experience of humanitarian vulnerability of many migrants, but we are constantly confronted by the ways in which they are construed as "objects" of study and targets of policy and humanitarian interventions – "those women", could be us, if not for plain luck. It is because of this luck that we were able to receive training in academic institutions of the Global North, a precursor for the jobs we hold. These are not the only reasons that one might be attuned to the imbalance in migration studies, yet it is why we recognize that a concerted effort is needed to support researchers with lived experience of migration or forced displacement who struggle

personally and professionally with “migrant objecthood… methodologies which are against us… [and] making oneself understandable in/for White ears” (Khosravi 2024, 2356).

The Analytical Benefits of More Inclusive Research

What – if any – are the analytical advantages of inclusive research on migration? Embracing other forms of knowledge and expertise can potentially re-orientate and reinvigorate the analytical breadth or depth of migration studies to better meet the interests and needs of migrants and communities affected by migration (Arias Cubas 2020). For instance, Omata (2020; see also Bakewell 2018) has highlighted the frustrations and complaints of groups of migrants who are over-studied or under-studied, a polarization he attributes to the pursuit of policy-driven studies that meet both the funding and recognition demands of academia, but do not necessarily meet the needs and perspectives of migrants themselves. This means that on the one hand, those over-studied expressed resentment and a lack of trust towards researchers, negative feelings that stem “from experiences of being asked the same or similar questions repeatedly without seeing any positive changes” (Omata 2020, 686). While on the other, those who were under-studied also expressed disappointment and frustration, feeling that “their voices are less heard in global arenas despite their hidden challenges and vulnerabilities” (Omata 2020, 682). In this context, seriously and meaningfully engaging with local experts (including migrants, but also practitioners and researchers from the Global South) to discuss how research is framed, how it is conducted, and how it is shared, could help ensure that research is not only viable, but also necessary and responsive to their interest and needs (Fiorito 2023; Kalinga 2019; Lokot and Wake 2022).

Meaningfully engaging with the knowledges and expertise of migrants, practitioners and researchers from the Global South would mean that the resulting research may challenge

taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin much discourse and practice on migration. It could stimulate a move away from emotive and essentialist language that perpetuates stereotypes and reinforces negative or arbitrary social expectations towards migrants (Fiorito 2023). Speaking from a personal point of view, neither of us (as first- and second-generation migrants) would frame migration as a problem or a threat to be solved, or migrants as helpless victims without agency (Ludwig 2016). Likewise, while we and our families have had to engage in performances of worthiness, gratitude and economic contribution in our personal and professional lives, we are conscious of the unfair and unjust burden of being seen as an exemplary or "good" migrant and the real harm this causes to others who do not fit this stereotype (Clark, Haw and Mackenzie 2024).

There are other normative or Northern-centric assumptions, beyond the binary of "desirable" and "undesirable" migrants, that also need to be challenged. For instance, in the humanitarian sector it was long assumed that humanitarians would be trusted by those in need, yet recent research by us and others has pointed to migrants' concerns about the association of humanitarian organizations with practices like detention, deportation, and discouragement as migration becomes increasingly securitized (Arias Cubas, Hoagland, and Mudaliar 2022; Weisner et al. 2023). In this context, listening and responding to the thoughts, fears, and concerns of migrants, brings to the fore the need to re-think the work of humanitarian organizations on migration. We can think of similar examples of how the framing of policies and practices about migration – such as the dominant narratives of safe, orderly, and regular migration, or of migration as a humanitarian crisis – could look radically different if they better incorporated the perspectives of more migrants, and of practitioners and researchers from the Global South (Pallister-Wilkins 2022; Triandafyllidou 2022).

Finally, a key advantage of engaging with migrants and with practitioners and researchers from the Global South is its potential to transform how research and knowledge on migration is owned, used and disseminated (Harley and Wazefadost 2023; Shivakoti and Milner 2022). Researchers from migrants and refugee backgrounds have highlighted how involving those with lived experience of migration or forced displacement could enhance the impact of research by helping disseminate findings to a wider audience through non-traditional outputs, and by implementing outcomes or recommendations beyond the relative short lifespan of a project (Aljadeeah 2022; LERRN 2024a). Key to this is the sense of ownership and empowerment that is created when "local" migrants, practitioners and researchers have a real say in the design, implementation, and dissemination of research. Indeed, and as we discuss further below, one of the key lessons from working with colleagues as part of the RCRC Global Migration Lab, is their commitment to own a project, and to be able to use different components of it to meet their own interests and needs. As trained researchers, this has involved a degree of learning and unlearning: that some of the language we communicate in, some of the methods we use, some of the timelines we work in, and some of the outputs we produce, simply must change (Pittaway, Bartolomei, and Hugman 2010).

Linking the "Global" to the "Local": our Work with the RCRC Global Migration Lab

The RCRC Global Migration Lab is a research initiative of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, a global humanitarian network long active in responding to, and advocating for, the assistance and protection needs of migrants in vulnerable situations (Le

Bihan 2017; Bonzon and Moretti 2017).[6] In 2020, the components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement agreed to create a leadership model to support and enhance their strategic response and action on migration and to enable early and well-coordinated global and regional steering on the matter (Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2022). As part of this migration leadership model, the RCRC Global Migration Lab was created with the aim to undertake evidence-based research into migration trends, policies and good practice responses that could inform and support Red Cross and Red Crescent humanitarian operations and advocacy on migration at a local, regional, and global level.

Since its establishment, the RCRC Global Migration Lab has worked closely with the different components of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to build and strengthen the capacity of staff and volunteers to conduct research on migration and to ensure that the lived experience of migrants guides and informs humanitarian advocacy and operations (see for instance Hoagland and Randrianarisoa 2021; Arias Cubas, Hoagland, and Mudaliar 2022). For example, for our latest project, we conducted quantitative and qualitative research in 15 countries across the Americas, Africa, the Asia Pacific, and Europe, and for our current project we are conducting qualitative research in 20 countries across the Americas, Africa, and Europe. These collaborations have included consultations with national Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and volunteers at all stages of research (from designing the project and

[6] The International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement is made up of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and 191 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (National Societies).

writing research questionnaires, to analyzing data, drafting major outputs, and participating in dissemination activities); the provision of training on research ethics, data collection and analysis; the collection of primary data by "local" staff and volunteers with ongoing support from core staff at the RCRC Global Migration Lab; regular opportunities for peer-to-peer learning with colleagues in other countries and regions; and the dissemination of findings and recommendations, internally and externally, through various channels and languages. In many situations, and on a case-by-case basis, funding (e.g. for equipment, transport, per diems, etc.) has also been provided to colleagues, particularly to those in the Global South, to support their participation in the research.

The RCRC Global Migration Lab's research model follows a broader trend towards alternative models of international migration research that seek to elevate forms of knowledge that have been traditionally excluded from the field. This includes, but is not limited to, research centers and researchers in the Global South that approach migration in distinctive ways, for instance by focusing on South-South flows or intra-regional migrations (Awumbila, Kandilige, and Setrana 2022) or by drawing attention to the relationship between migration and inequality and the human and labor rights of migrants (Delgado Wise 2022). This also includes several research projects and initiatives implemented from the Global North, which aim to support researchers with lived experience of migration and displacement, or to mobilize resources for research partners in the Global South. To name a few, this includes the Refugee-Led Research Hub in Kenya – an initiative of the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford, and funded by a variety of private philanthropic organisations (Refugee Studies Centre 2024); the IDRC Research Chairs Network on Forced Displacement – supported by Carleton University, and funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre (LERRN 2024b); and the MIDEQ research project – led by a consortium of

universities, and funded by the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) (Migration for Development and Equality 2024).

The distinctive feature of our research model is that the RCRC Global Migration Lab is part of a large humanitarian network and consequently our institutional, and intentional, focus is on research that promotes the safety, well-being and dignity of migrants and communities – a humanitarian ideal that resonates with Turton's (2003) appraisal that research on migration should relieve and prevent human suffering. To achieve this, the RCRC Global Migration Lab is in many ways strategically placed to meaningfully engage with migrants, researchers, and practitioners in the Global South and the Global North. This is because of the "global" nature of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in that it encompasses National Societies in 191 countries,[7] as well as collaborations between National Societies, the IFRC and the ICRC to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection to various groups of migrants in different regions of the world (Le Bihan 2017; Bonzon and Moretti 2017). Our capacity to reach the "local" is also strengthened by the operation of thousands of Red Cross and Red Crescent local branches which are deeply embedded in communities, and by the invaluable knowledge and expertise of staff and volunteers – including migrants – working on migration programming and advocacy across these countries. However, and as we

[7] When someone thinks of the "Red Cross" or "Red Crescent" in their home country, this is most likely a National Society, which is neither a government body, nor a wholly separate non-governmental organization. Rather, National Societies have an "auxiliary role" to public authorities in the humanitarian field, including on migration (Hoagland and Arias Cubas 2024).

discuss below, realizing such potential to connect the "local" to the global, and to create more inclusive knowledge on migration, is not without challenges.

Funding as a (Dis)Enabler of Inclusive Research

One of the biggest challenges to a truly global approach to migration stems from age old problems: funding and associated power dynamics continue to direct where attention is placed and whose voices are heard, with significant policy implications (Hatton 2018; Shivakoti and Milner 2022). In this respect the RCRC Global Migration Lab is fortunate to have been formed as part of an organized effort to coordinate internationally across Red Cross and Red Crescent national and regional humanitarian responses to migration and to be funded by multiple Red Cross and Red Crescent actors.[8] In practice, this means that our research agenda and work is informed by a group of Red Cross and Red Crescent practitioners and leaders representing all regions of the world. This collective effort also means that individual funders give the RCRC Global Migration Lab considerable freedom to determine a research agenda that responds to the interests and needs of the broader collective (and to the recommendations of our own academic advisory board) – rather than to the individual interest of specific funders or donors from a single country or region.[9] Indeed, it has been partly due to the global and dispersed nature of the RCRC Global Migration Lab's governance, and our internal

[8] The RCRC Global Migration Lab was created under the auspices of the Migration Leadership Group, an internal leadership body which comprises senior leaders from the IFRC, the ICRC and 25 National Societies who are actively working on migration (Council of Delegates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2022).

[9] The academic advisory board is formed by senior academics based in Australia, Denmark, Ghana, Singapore, Türkiye, and the UK.

sources of funding, that we have been able to conduct research on issues of broad humanitarian concern across countries in the Global North and the Global South. This includes topics such as the exclusion of migrants from basic services (including health and vaccination) during the Covid-19 Pandemic (Hoagland and Randrianarisoa 2021), or on migrants' perceptions of, and trust in, humanitarian action in the context of the increased securitization of migration (Arias Cubas, Hoagland, and Mudaliar 2022) – topics that may not necessarily had been a priority for other funders.

Despite these advantages, there are still concerns about funding and power, not only because the humanitarian system remains under financial strain (Loy 2023), but also structurally – due to persistent inequalities within the humanitarian system along the Global South/Global North divide (Aloudat and Khan 2022; Rejali 2020; Asante and Co-authors 2023). Indeed, and as argued by Rejali (2020), "… some aspects of humanitarian action remain rooted in neo-colonial legacies, weighing down efforts of fostering genuine progress". We are acutely aware that the RCRC Global Migration Lab has been run by a small team of researchers and practitioners based in Australia. And although many of us come from the Global South or from migrant backgrounds, and we strive to work in collaborative ways, we still hold institutional decision-making power over the research and partners. While we enter discussions with colleagues in the Global North from a position of relative equality, this is not necessarily the case with colleagues in the Global South, especially since the latter relationship sometimes involves a financial transaction. Given that the humanitarian sector is still primarily funded by donors from the Global North and this shapes the work that takes place (Loy 2023), it would be naïve to ignore that when designing research projects, we are implicated in decision-making based on the geographic priorities and interests of key Red Cross and Red Crescent actors and donors. In this context, we must not forget the inequalities

associated with funding dynamics: first, we must find practical ways to continue to elevate and support the participation and views of researchers and practitioners from the Global South to disperse power, authority and leadership (for instance, our team has recently expanded to include colleagues from, and based in, Kenya); and second, we must continue to assess the influence of donors' agenda on our own work (particularly in response to growing concerns about the instrumentalization of aid in the broader context of the securitization of migration) (Hoagland and Arias Cubas 2024).[10]

The Barrier of Language, its Unequal Burden and Invisibility

In addition to funding, language continues to be a significant barrier to inclusive knowledge production, as English continues to dominate as the lingua franca of migration research (Pisarevskaya et al 2020) and humanitarian research as well (Fitzpatrick et al 2023; Maubert and Allouche 2021). As noted by Kosnik (2021, 87) in her contribution on decolonizing migration studies, "mastery of academic English globally is – depending on the geopolitical context – both racialized and class-stratified, particularly in countries outside of direct Anglo-American influence and colonial legacy where the language is spoken more widely". Furthermore, as Alexander, Milner and Philip (2023) have highlighted, English also remains a significant barrier for refugee researchers and others who have experienced displacement, while Khosravi (2024) has written a sharp and much-needed critique of the challenges of doing migration studies with an accent. Thus, when one works across multiple countries and regions, it is simply misguided to proceed as though potential partners or contributors will be

[10] Instrumentalization has been described by Donini (2012, 2) as "a shorthand for the use of humanitarian action or rhetoric as a tool to pursue political, security, military, development, economic and other non-humanitarian goals."

able or willing to communicate in English as a second-, third-, if not -fourth language – and resources and time must be allocated to ensure that their contribution will be informed, understood, valued, and represented. Indeed, from the start, the RCRC Global Migration Lab has tried to work in the four official languages of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Arabic, English, French and Spanish) at all stages of the research process. Our objective is to be as inclusive as possible in project meetings, training sessions, the development of research tools, the drafting and revisions of outputs and publications, and the dissemination of findings. Yet we also recognize that these 4 languages – some of which have a strong colonial legacy on their own – represent a compromise given the linguistic and geographical diversity of our colleagues.

In addition, the financial, logistical and cultural challenges posed by language barriers remain prohibitive. While many of our colleagues at the RCRC Global Migration Lab can speak and write in more than one of these four languages, it is an unfair burden to expect them to do the extra labor of translation and interpretation on a routine basis – in fact, we would argue that this is a hidden form of labor that is expected of multilingual colleagues (often from migrant backgrounds) (Hassemer and Garrido 2020). And while we have developed strategies to minimize costs, on average a third of the budget for a typical research project, and considerable administration time, is spent on professional translation and interpretation services. Finally, we are also still confronted with an institutional culture that often fails to see language as a barrier to participation (Maubert and Allouche 2021) and that questions and devalues the need for these formal services. In many ways, the invisibility of language as a barrier to inclusion and equality – which emerges in practices such as the reliance of whispered commentary provided by multi-lingual colleagues, or the use of AI tools that are

still limited in translating and interpreting technical language – reinforces our advocacy and commitment on the matter.

The Gap between Researchers and Practitioners

In addition to barriers relating to funding and language, there is a need to understand and address the tension and dilemmas that exist between researchers and practitioners working on migration – as this limits the production and circulation of inclusive knowledge. As characterized by Ridde (2021), in the humanitarian sector, "[researchers] are still sometimes perceived as preaching from the comfort of their ivory tower while [humanitarian practitioners] are seen as hard-pressed when it comes to thinking before acting and deciding how to use the most recent evidence-based findings to shape their actions." The RCRC Global Migration Lab has been criticized by practitioners for being too "academic" and by researchers for producing research that is insufficiently rigorous or representative. This only underscores the gap identified by Ridde and the need for researchers and practitioners to work together to reconcile our respective institutions and ways of working. The problem is aptly summarized by Jamet and Maclean (2021) as one of competing priorities and timelines – of "how to ensure research relevancy, an often complex and slow-moving process to initiate, in a domain that by its very nature is action-oriented and focus on tangible and frequently short-term results?". There are other barriers that harm inclusive knowledge production, including different understandings about what research means and entails, disagreements over what methods and disciplines matter, and pervasive assumptions, capacity burdens, and institutional barriers that limit how "locals" can take part in joint and equitable "global" work (Lokot and Wake 2023; Maubert and Allouche 2021).

In this context, the RCRC Global Migration Lab is fortunate to have the support of an Academic Advisory Board that gives us their time to ask questions most pertinent to our ongoing projects without seeking to shape or benefit from our research. Their generosity enables the RCRC Global Migration Lab to benefit from their academic expertise and is an incredibly valuable model to connect practitioners and researchers. It is not, however, a response to the underlying structural problem that the incentives, structures and goals of researchers and practitioners are fundamentally different. To bridge this gap requires concerted thinking by both researchers and practitioners and an attempt to develop mechanisms and processes within their own institutions. Indeed, as our core team consists of both researchers (who have previously worked in the academic sector on migration) and humanitarian practitioners (who have previously worked on humanitarian operations and development programs with migrants), we face and navigate this gap on an everyday basis. From our perspective, there are two other key barriers to address to bridge this gap – one related to how knowledge is communicated and shared, and the other related to how meaningful exchanges can take place.

First, and notwithstanding the efforts of researchers to consider the practical implications of their work, the reality is that research insights and analysis are often inaccessible to humanitarian practitioners engaged in migration-related activities. In some cases, research published in scientific journals may be too difficult and time consuming for practitioners to read, as academics lack the incentive (or perhaps the training) to write in a way that clearly and efficiently conveys the implications of their research. In other cases, research may also be hidden behind paywalls which prevent those without an academic affiliation from accessing it at all. Second, while there are opportunities for researchers and practitioners to meet and share insights, these are ad hoc, and usually occur in the context of conferences or seminars

organized either by and for researchers with practitioners attending as observers, or vice versa. There are few (if any) forums, designated for researchers and practitioners working on various aspects of migration to work together to identify shared interests and concerns, nor is there an established mechanism or modality to facilitate an ongoing exchange in a mutually beneficial way. Notably, while both criticisms relate to the gap between researchers and practitioners in general, and to the difficult collaboration between Global North and Global South researchers and practitioners, they could equally apply to the difficult collaboration between researchers and migrants as well.

Un/ethical Approaches to Collaboration

Relating to this, the final challenge we have identified through our work relates to the ethics of engagement with migrants, and with researchers and practitioners from the Global South, and the need to move from extractive or top-down approaches to ethical approaches of research and collaboration (Bilotta 2023; Clark-Kazak 2021; Hugman, Pittaway, and Bartolomei 2011; Pittaway, Bartolomei, and Hugman 2010). This circles back to the problematic realities of "over-researched communities" (Sukarieh and Tannock 2013; Omata 2020), the utilitarian or tokenistic use of migrants, and practitioners or researchers in the Global South to collect data for researchers in the Global North (Lokot and Wake 2023), and the associated "long history of implicitly and explicitly dismissing the intellectual and conceptual work of people positioned outside of the Northern academy" (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020, 10). In our own work, unethical approaches include for instance requests by academics to access operational and personal data about migrants held by different Red Cross and Red Crescent actors without due regard to concerns relating to personal security, data protection and privacy standards, and without much – if any – of the ongoing and mutually beneficial exchange mentioned above. Unethical approaches also include an explicit lack of self-

awareness in our dealing with colleagues across different regions of the world – where the assumption remains that some in the Global North "know better" or "know more" than our counterparts in the Global South.

If anything, our contribution should highlight that there are alternative approaches, albeit limited, that could pave the way for more ethical forms of engagement and more inclusive forms of knowledge on migration. This resonates with now well-established arguments on the need to adopt relational ethics – or ethics of care – in migration studies to go beyond the principle of "do no harm" in practice (Bilotta 2023; Clark-Kazak 2021; Hugman, Pittaway, and Bartolomei 2011; Pittaway, Bartolomei, and Hugman 2010). According to Bilotta (2023), relational ethics refers to the recognition of value and respect, reciprocity, reflexivity, positionality and collaboration. Likewise, we have previously argued for methodologies that confront broader issues of power and which can be translated into practice through a research strategy of collaboration, consultation, respect and volunteering or reciprocity (Arias Cubas 2020). The "Guidelines for Co-Produced Research with Refugees and Other People with Lived Experience of Displacement", drafted by Harley and Wazefadost (2023) in consultation with multiple stakeholders, also highlight the centrality of key principles of joint ownership, inclusion and respect, reciprocity, accessibility, ongoing care, safety, transparency, trust, and reflexivity. McGrath and Young (2019) also draw attention to the importance of mutual trust, respect and reciprocity; while Fiorito (2023, 8) highlights the centrality of "building, honoring, and respecting sustainable, long-term, honest, and respectful relationships of care, humility, and personal involvement, and a correlating focus on process and relation, rather than on outcome" (see also Lokot and Wake 2023). Ultimately, a more ethical approach to research and collaboration is needed to both recognize and value the knowledges and

expertise of migrants and of practitioners and researchers from the Global South, and to strengthen the impact and relevance of migration research.

How an ethical approach to research and collaboration looks in reality may vary from context to context (Pittaway, Bartolomei, and Hugman 2010), but the focus should be on increasingly moving from *less* to *more*, to ensure that we create space for the knowledge and expertise that has long been excluded from dominant debates. For instance, at the RCRC Global Migration Lab we spend a significant amount of time consulting and collaborating with colleagues across the various regions we work: having one-on-one meetings before the start of a project to hear their individual interests and concerns; sharing concept notes, draft methodologies and publications in multiple languages and responding to feedback and suggestions; and having fortnightly catchups to discuss challenges and potential solutions to some of the issues they may be facing while conducting research. Fundamental to this approach is the centrality of building relationships based on respect – respect for colleagues' timelines, their own ways of working, their own priorities, and their own knowledge, which often forces us to question and modify our own. Central here too, is the reciprocity that we aim to have between the RCRC Global Migration Lab and colleagues that contribute to our work. This includes relatively simple steps, like ensuring we provide training and ongoing support, that we communicate and share all research findings, that we make ourselves available to answer any questions or concerns colleagues may have, and that we create outputs that are helpful for their operations and advocacy (which is an ongoing learning curve for us).

Yet, we are very conscious that we could better include migrants, as well as researchers and practitioners from the Global South. We have explored initiatives such as having a Lived Experience Advisory Committee (LEAC), composed of Red Cross and Red Crescent staff and

volunteers with lived experience of migration or forced displacement to provide technical advice and guidance for specific projects. As noted above, we have also fundraised and re-directed funds to researchers and practitioners in Africa, and we are exploring avenues to replicate this in other regions – with the goal of dispersing power, authority and leadership. We provide these concrete examples not only to illustrate the potential of alternative models of international migration research, but also to invite colleagues to reflect and take concrete action towards building a research field that is it not only more diverse, but also more equal.

Conclusion

In this article, we have discussed the glaring gap of undervalued and unrecognized knowledges and expertise in migration research. In doing do, we join a long list of critics – including former editors of IMR – who have noted with concern the dominance of "experts" from the Global North, and the parallel exclusion of migrants and of practitioners and researchers from the Global South, and the ways this limits our collective understanding of migration. Drawing from our own experiences as first- and second- generation migrant women of color and as researchers and practitioners in the humanitarian sector, we explored some of the key opportunities and challenges we have encountered in our efforts to conduct migration research that is more inclusive through our work with the RCRC Global Migration Lab. From this unique (and privileged) vantage point, at the intersection of academia and humanitarian practice, we identify key challenges – that help explain why so little has changed despite longstanding acknowledgment of these persistent inequalities in migration research – including in this publication.

In this context, the recognition of the knowledges and expertise of migrants, and of practitioners and researchers from the Global South, is broader that an increase in citations or

representation on boards and positions of power (although that is an important – and visible – indicator). More fundamentally, the recognition of these knowledges and expertise must translate into new ways of working to disperse power, authority and leadership over migration research in practical and ethical ways. We need to recognize that addressing the historic global inequalities that result in the Global North influence over funding and associated power dynamics is a long-term project that has been, and will continue to be, the work of generations. But in addition to contributing to that project by naming and documenting the problem, there are concrete immediate steps that can be taken now. First, as researchers in a position of power or privilege, we must move towards more ethical approaches to research. This means that those of us in a position of authority must accept that our ways of doing research need to change, that we may need to produce fewer outputs and invest more time and resources to do research, and that this is worth doing not just out of the need to address systemic inequalities, but also to make our work richer by expanding the questions asked, the objects studied and the methodologies adopted. Second, inclusive knowledge production requires tangible commitments from others in positions of power (including funding agencies, ethics boards, and academic publishers). This could mean dedicating time and money to translation and interpretation or to writing and communicating in ways that are accessible to people outside academia, and acknowledging – and calling out – failures to act in an ethical manner.

Through this contribution and recommendations, we highlight the possibility of doing research that engages more ethically and meaningfully with those whose knowledge and expertise has long been excluded from dominant debates. We do this with a sense of hope and urgency that in 10 years, by the 70th anniversary of this journal, another article will be written

to reflect on the tangible steps, commitments and results that have taken place to position migrants, and practitioners and researchers in the Global South as rightful experts in our field.

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