IMISCOE

IMISCOE PHD BLOG

Towards Engaged Migration Research: Unpacking Positionality, Inequalities and Access

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

Participation

EDITORIAL

Towards Engaged Migration Research: Unpacking Positionality, Inequalities and Access

Irene Gutiérrez Torres & Connie Hodgkinson Lahiff

> *"We are Black, Indian, Mestiza, Sudaka, racialised flesh. We reject your PDFs and your disembodied lectures. We deny every trend of being and return to listening to each other, looking each other in the eye, telling each other stories, and building from lived experience."*
>
> *Manifiesto AFROntera – Terremoto (n.d.)*

This Special Issue proposes a panoramic journey through the practice and the politics of doing engaged migration research by unpacking three dilemmas: *positionality, inequalities,* and *access*. The core of our approach lies in identifying these specific research dilemmas as intertwined yet distinct ethical concerns within the field, involving hard choices in theorising, applying methodologies, and co-producing knowledge on migration. As researchers and practitioners from various fields who work with people on the move (POM), we collaborate on this special issue to share our insights with scholars, policymakers, and other stakeholders. We believe that these reflections are vital in academia and beyond, as they provide a means to challenge dominant regimes of im/mobility characterised by neo-colonial bordering dynamics.

In this endeavour, we have collected thirteen blog pieces from PhD migration scholars and practitioners in law, sociology, politics, human geography, development, architecture, education, communication, language, social medicine, and community health. As researcher-practitioners, we take a political position that aims to redress existing inequalities between citizens and non-citizens and to expose and mitigate gender, race, and class power imbalances in migration research. We introduce the Special Issue through three main recommendations to further explore *positionality, inequalities*, and *access* as critical elements of engaged research: 1) adopting an interdisciplinary approach, 2) connecting positionality and reflexivity for critical perspectives, and 3) using participatory methods to challenge migration epistemologies from below.

First, in their pieces, Berfin Nur Osso, Gianna Eckert, and Lauren Brown argue that an **inter/ transdisciplinary approach** is necessary to facilitate an ongoing critical dialogue between different perspectives and knowledges. Berfin supplements legal analysis with visual arts to analyse and compare the 'top-down' governmental and corporate shaping of the 'migrant condition' and the 'bottom-up' cultural, social, and political practices that help POM resist. The outcome is a novel transdisciplinary approach that aims to complement the dialectic between migration policies and their negative impact on migrants. Elsewhere, Gianna and Lauren organise a migration discussion group to promote collective reflection, intellectual exploration, and cross-disciplinary encounters within and beyond universities to unpack our own disciplinary prejudices and individual prisms through which we view migration phenomena.

Second, five contributions explore how to place **positionality** at the core of our research. Through reflective accounts, we underline how positionality shapes – and can shift – during fieldwork, how it functions as a critical element unveiling power balances and, ultimately, brings awareness of inequalities to our insights. This is the main topic of the blogs written by Pamela Hartley-Pinto, Connie Hodgkinson Lahiff and Lauren, Istikhar Ali, Rohini Mitra, and Khaoula Stiti. To introduce this theme, Pamela shares six 'fundamental principles' to implement as researchers and practitioners aimed at placing POM's knowledges and personal expertise at the core of the research. This aims to amplify the voices of POM not just as beneficiaries but also as leaders in the field. Then, Connie and Lauren reflect on how their subjectivity as researchers and their professional identity as legal and educational practitioners are socially constructed, leading to multiple in/out positionalities throughout time and space. Meanwhile, Istikhar and Rohini each talk about their ethnographic fieldwork and volunteer work in India by going beyond the outsider/insider divides. They recall gender, religious, and cultural identities as an 'ethnographic toolkit' that shaped their relationships with respondents and interlocutors, their understanding of their positionality, and the outcomes of their research. Lastly, Khaoula proposes a manifesto for putting value on being a migrant in academia and dismantling shame in neoliberal universities. She calls for acknowledging and embracing common experiences among migrant scholars to unite, share their stories openly, and address the discrimination they endure within the academic discourse of migration studies.

Third, we showcase the potential of **participatory methods** to challenge established knowledge about migration and borders while empowering and engaging POM to co-create knowledge about the migratory phenomena as experts. Here, we feature six cases of participatory methods used in different contexts. Irene Praga Guerro examines the advantages and challenges of using collaborative writing in independent transnational journalism. Jami Abramson explores the photo essay as a participatory visual method to share ideas of "home" among diasporic youth in Wales. Irene Gutiérrez Torres shares insights about using participatory filmmaking with people living in the borderlands of Ireland, Morocco/Spain, and Turkey/Syria. Stephen Agahi-Murphy offers critical reflections on methodological individualism based on his six-month ethnographic fieldwork in Uganda by privileging local knowledge through participatory research. Then, Miriam Adelina Ocadiz invites us to ask ourselves what it means to be an engaged scholar in migration research through an impressionist album of images of some of the most caring moments of her five-year PhD journey. She ends her piece with the *Manifiesto AFROntera – Terremoto* that opens this editorial, which perfectly links with the final piece in our Special Issue: Imen El Amouri's call to action towards a compassionate approach to migration studies. In this powerful piece, Imen argues that migration scholars must place the moral imperative to drive societal change over the current neoliberal academic imperatives of publishing, a tension particularly pronounced in our field.

In conclusion, we suggest that attempting **engaged** migration research by questioning *positionality*, *inequalities*, and *access* is key to moving towards a compassionate academic practice. Thinking critically about the ethical dilemmas their interrogation raises throughout the research journey helps to overcome the sense of producing knowledge solely for academia: we want to look beyond the ivory tower. As actors on the ground who have chosen to research migration in order to advocate for freedom of movement as a universal human right, we hope that these reflections can contribute to the efforts of activist migration scholars to mitigate the potentially negative effects of our endeavours, eschewing reductionist or extractivist scholarship in favour of co-production. May the personal reflections in this special issue provoke and inspire collaboration under the universal principle of 'I take, I give', and may each contribution be a starting point for challenging normative debates and terminologies in migration studies.

Interdisciplinarity

A Call to Action: Towards a Compassionate Approach to Migration Studies
Imen El Amouri

Imen El Amouri _is a PhD candidate at the Department of Criminal Law at Tilburg University researching state violence and the impact of policies and laws on the mental health of refugees in the Netherlands._

In the intricate landscape of migration studies, the tension between the academic imperative to publish and the moral imperative to effect societal change is particularly pronounced. This tension opened up to me during a conversation with an NGO worker in Amsterdam in the early stages of fieldwork. They said: _"We are desperate. We are putting all our effort into individual cases, supporting and guiding where possible. But it seems like nothing is changing, and there is something systemically wrong. How can your research help us help them?"_

This poignant question remains a driving (unresolved) question in the current endeavor in my PhD research in migration studies. In my experience, resolving this tension requires a compassionate approach that opens up the nuanced complexities of migration and its systemic challenges while rescuing migration studies from the ineffective pace of academic research.

The Academic Dilemma

Coming from a working-class migrant family, it was a step into the unknown when I

left my biology job for a PhD in migration studies. With this change came a constant underlying anxiety of not achieving the financial security expected by the community that had supported me in all my successes so far. The non-existent financial safety net put immense temporal pressure on my PhD trajectory, and the initial phase of my research was marked by a confrontation with the inherent challenges of academia's 'publish or perish' culture.

The pressure to publish papers to succeed in academia often comes at the expense of systematic solutions to the researched issues. Acknowledging the marginalizing and exclusionary practices that arise from the very nature of academia's organization urged me to reflect on my approach to data collection and conducting research. The fast-paced demand of academic environments impedes the ability to engage deeply with communities and hinders the exploration of nuanced perspectives crucial for understanding migration issues comprehensively.

Indeed, entering the field to extract data for a paper due in six months was not an ideal prerequisite for compassionate engagement with either research participants or facilitating organizations. Here I found that my pressure to 'finish' the job as fast as possible morphed with the academic condition of productivity for success. This is the stage where I felt the higher purpose of my research got lost – alleviating the harm of the humans we seek to support through our research.

How, then, could compassion be the answer to this problem if compassion itself is captured by such tension?

Embracing Compassion Amidst Academic Pressure

This disconnect between the culture of academia and my own ethical positioning has shaped my commitment to compassion in my research methodology. This principle extends beyond academic rigor to encompass a deep empathy for the lived experiences of asylum seekers. This approach is informed by my personal experiences as an immigrant and the recognition of the nuanced challenges faced by migrant and racialized communities in Europe. Engaging with refugee-led civil

society organizations, I sought to bridge the gap between scholarly research and asylum seekers' tangible needs and agency, aiming for a symbiotic relationship that benefits both the academic community and the individuals at the heart of our studies.

In my research, I engage closely with asylum seekers to understand their experiences of state violence and mental health harm. Yet, at one point during the preliminary stages, a volunteer friend working in refugee camps in Greece advised me against becoming emotionally involved with participants, which contrasts with the belief that empathy is crucial for addressing the colonial underpinnings and stereotypes in migration studies.

From a Compassion Gap to a Policy Gap

Streams of research generating evidence on dysfunctionalities and violence in the migration governance system are going either unnoticed, or noticed and disregarded. Despite the wealth of knowledge generated through rigorous research, much of this valuable information remains confined within academic journals and inaccessible if not ignored by the public and policymakers.

The 'publish or perish' culture often prioritizes individual academic careers over the societal relevance of research, further widening the gap between scholarly work and its application in policy and practice. As stated by the NGO worker, *how can our research help them?* I believe that without a strong foundation of compassion in our research approach, the drive to translate these findings into actionable insights for policymakers and changemakers is diminished. The absence of this effort not only maintains the status quo but also contributes to the persistence of harmful stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding migration.

A Call to Action

The poignant inquiry of the NGO worker in Amsterdam serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for migration studies to transcend academic boundaries and contribute to tangible societal change. By embracing a compassionate approach to research and fostering closer collaborations between academia, civil society, and policymakers, I advocate for a research paradigm that values empathy and

deep understanding over mere productivity: bridging the gap between academic pursuits and the urgent needs of migrants and asylum seekers. This commitment prioritizes human dignity and social justice at the heart of academic inquiry while addressing both the impossible rhythms of academia and its political and societal ineffectiveness in migration studies.

Image from my fieldwork in Amsterdam with a group of refugees and volunteers

Engaged Debates and Migration Research: Convening a Migration Discussion Group
Gianna Eckert, Lauren Brown

Gianna Eckert _is a PhD student at the University of Bristol Law School. Her research focuses on suspended removal cases and their human rights implications for 'unreturnable' migrants in Germany and the UK. She is a Research Affiliate at the Refugee Law Initiative and a co-convenor of the Migration Mobilities Bristol PGR Discussion Group._ **_Lauren Brown_** _is a ESRC funded PhD student in the Department of Sociology, Politics and International Studies at the University of Bristol. Her research focuses on constructions of the nation and national community within, and across, Great Britain. She is a co-convenor of the Migration Mobilities Bristol PGR Discussion Group._

Why convene a migration discussion group? What is the point of yet another event series, in which academics and PhD students debate the deeply violent nature of contemporary border regimes? How can we engage with well debated migration topics in a _disruptive_ way? We believe that critical debate and exchange are crucial prerequisites for excellence in migration research, as the exposure to different views and divergent approaches encourages critical reflection on our own disciplinary dogmas and epistemological assumptions. In launching our 'discussion group', we wanted to depart from existing formats, which bring migration scholars together. Our mission was to create a space of collective introspection and reflection, where participants can take a step back from their individual research and busy calendars in the hope of fostering cross-disciplinary dialogue on our

responsibility as migration researchers in an increasingly unequal and polarized world.

Since October 2023, we convened three discussion groups thanks to the funding support from the South-West Doctoral Training Partnership, which were enriched by three fantastic speakers – Professor Bridget Anderson, Professor Nandita Sharma and Professor Victoria Hattam. Thematically, we discussed definitions of what constitutes migration, the importance and risks of researching borders, (academic) activism and political imagination. Each session consists of several segments of small-group discussions addressing questions under these themes and ends with a plenary discussion followed by a closing speech by the invited speaker. Our participants include PhD students and established migration scholars from various disciplinary backgrounds, spanning anthropology, human geography, politics, education, music and law. The discussion questions are designed to challenge participants to interrogate their own disciplinary 'positionality' as well as the epistemological and ontological biases underpinning their research.

Discussing Definitions and Conceptualisations of Migration

Our first discussion group was dedicated to the question: "How do you define what constitutes 'migration' for the purposes of your own research?" Whilst at first glance, this question may seem simple, in a room full of migration academics and PhD students, it quickly became evident that it was anything but. Our first discussion group was structured according to an arguably 'unconventional' approach devised by a colleague of ours, which required participants to forge consensus on four keywords they considered fundamental to defining migration for their research. This 'method' intentionally put participants in a difficult position, as it seems near impossible to reduce such a complex and multifaceted phenomenon to four words. Rather than actually achieving consensus, we were more interested in the emergent (dis)agreements between participants during this process, as they argued for or against certain words which they considered more or less crucial.
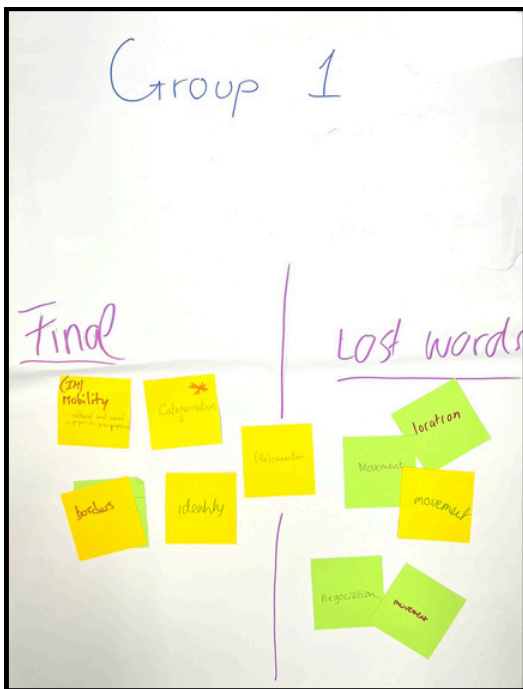
The set of final concepts agreed on by Group 1

The discussions uncovered different approaches to defining and conceptualising migration, with broad agreement regarding the inclusion of concepts on 'border(ing)', '(im)mobilities', 'disruption', 'categorisation', 'identity' and '(re)connection'. Particular disagreement formed regarding the question whether the 'nation state' should feature among the concepts deemed indispensable to defining migration. On one hand, participants contended that too much importance has been attached to the artificial construct of the 'nation state' and advocated for more research into transnational forms of belonging and bottom-up processes of identity forging.

On the other hand, participants (particularly those from a political science or legal background) argued that contemporary issues in migration research could not be explained without reference to the nation (state). To them, the 'nation state' was fundamental, given its role in creating and administering the borders between 'migrants' and 'citizens'. As the debates continued, participants continued to reflect on how their respective 'disciplinary' gaze affected the ways in which they approached migration. The ability to challenge these paradigms was one of the clear benefits of having an interdisciplinary group.

Researching Borders and Bordering Practices

Our second discussion group on 'Borders and Bordering' further developed this point in the context of exploring the risks and benefits of researching borders. While the institution of the nation state is indeed what makes 'borders', participants emphasised the need to refrain from 'methodological nationalism' and 'categorical fetishism' as approaches, which reify the bordered nature of our world.

Instead, drawing attention to the constructed and porous nature of borders opens up possibilities for their denormalization and deconstruction. Moreover, our discussants underscored the need for researchers to not only evidence the ways in which borders are 'symptoms' of a global system centered on racist, capitalist structures of exploitation, but to also construct alternative imaginaries which can replace a bordered world.

The collection of discarded concepts

Interrogating Existing Hierarchies of 'Knowledge'

In our upcoming third discussion group, we strive to further nurture this process. A crucial step towards the de-bordering of our world, in our view, is to interrogate and undo existing hierarchies of 'knowledge', which have structured our debates.

For instance, we observed that participants with first or secondhand experience of migration chose to not draw on these accounts, revealing the continuous gap between academic and personal accounts of migration. As migration scholars we feel a particular ethical responsibility to bridge this gap and ensure that knowledge of and discussions on migration phenomena centre on the experiences of migrants themselves.

Conclusion

With this entry, we would like to encourage other students and scholars to carve out spaces for collective reflection, intellectual exploration and cross-disciplinary encounters within their universities. Whilst academic debate mostly takes place during conferences and workshops, we have seen a number of benefits in opening up a more explorative discussion space, where no prior reading or structured presentation is required. We consider this reflective exercise a necessary precondition for any meaningful interdisciplinary research on migration, as it allows us to recognise and unpack our own disciplinary bias and individual prisms through which we view migration phenomena.

It Takes More Than Two? Doing Transdisciplinary Research on Migration Management and Refugee Struggles

Berfin Nur Osso

Berfin Nur Osso _is a doctoral candidate at the Faculty of Law, University of Helsinki, and a Teacher at Tampere University (Finland). Osso's doctoral research investigates the interplay between the internalization and externalization of migration management and the political agency of refugees with theoretical and empirical inquiries in the Greek–Turkish context. Osso is also enthusiastic as a political cartoonist about reflecting on the contemporary phenomena within the realm of law, politics, and society in her editorial cartoons._

Transdisciplinary research is essential to understand how migration management measures impact refugees and how refugees challenge these measures in their everyday struggles. As Martiniello (2022) described, '[t]ransdisciplinarity implies that each scholar ventures outside the comfortable borders of her/his academic discipline to learn from and understand other points of view and perspectives.' In this short piece, I explore the insightful contributions that transcending the boundaries of a single discipline may provide for elucidating the complex interplay between migration management and refugee struggles in the light of the measures of migration management adopted by the European Union (EU) and Member States following the summer of 2015, which continue to pose profound implications for migrants and refugees.

How can a transdisciplinary study informed by international refugee law, border studies, and visual approaches facilitate our understanding of this interplay 'from the perspective of law's subjects' (see Mulcahy, 2017), namely refugees, and that of states?

To answer this question, I will reflect on two case studies I conducted as part of my doctoral research project during 2022–2023, The Hope Project Greece and 'Now You See Me Moria'. I examine the interplay between migration management and refugee struggles with theoretical and empirical investigations in the Greek-Turkish context, with a particular focus on the Greek 'hotspot' islands in the wake of 2015. I consider the interplay between these two processes as a mutually constitutive, continuous, and agonistic 'border regime' (see De Genova, 2017) from the perspective of both the EU and Greece and of refugees themselves. From a state's perspective, I seek to find how different borders are (re)produced through migration management laws and policies over time in reaction to the mobility of people that the law distinguishes as 'irregular migrants.' From refugees' perspective or by 'not seeing like a state', to use Tazzioli's words (2020. Cf. Scott, 1998), I then explore how refugees in 'irregular' circumstances perceive, experience, and challenge these constantly changing borders.

Supplementing Refugee Law with Border Studies and Visual Arts

Part of my doctoral project was to transcend the conventional approaches of law and incorporate perspectives from other disciplines by juxtaposing the perspectives of states and refugees while highlighting the latter's experiences. Choosing the right approach for my doctoral research was not an easy task. However, given my positionality as a researcher with a background in law, political science, and international relations and experience in drawing political cartoons and after a lengthy process of exploration, I decided to supplement international refugee law (hence, EU asylum law and policy) with approaches from border and refugee studies and visual arts.

The methodological tenet of my project has been twofold. By adopting the critical lens of border and refugee studies, I first attempted to decenter the nation state as the primary unit of analysis (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002).

Instead, I underscored refugees as individuals whose stories must be considered in studying the implications of migration management for them. I then grounded a significant part of my research on visual methods to complement the limitations of methods that solely draw on textual data, paying particular attention to collecting and analyzing firsthand materials created by refugees in their natural setting and without my influence or prompts. The use of visual approaches and methods allowed me to attend to the visual narratives emerging from the artistic and creative practices of refugees themselves. For instance, I looked at the paintings, photographs, and videos that refugees created and shared online while they continued to inhabit the infamous Moria refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesvos.

The Hope Project Greece

Untitled, painting by Najib Hosseini at The Hope Art Project, 2021. The painting represents the fires that destroyed the former Moria camp in September 2020

In 2022, I came across the paintings of several refugee artists at an art center run by The Hope Project, an NGO established on the Greek island of Lesvos following the summer of migration. The artists brilliantly reflected on the impact of the EU and Greek asylum laws and policies on their migratory journeys and living conditions in Moria. To learn more about the artists, their artworks, and their experiences, I interviewed Philippa Kempson and Eric Kempson, long-term residents of Lesvos and the founders of The Hope Project [1].

My primary focus was on the visual narratives and practices of refugees emerging from their paintings. I qualitatively investigated the 70 paintings I sampled and interpreted them through the lens of critical border studies while also considering the contextual information I obtained from the interview with my respondents. I found that these paintings exposed the refugee artists as socio-political agents who challenged the state borders and the discourses that described them as 'victims' or 'villains'.

'Now You See Me Moria'

In the second case study I carried out with a colleague in early 2023, our focus this time was on the photographs and videos clandestinely taken and shared online by over 600 refugees who inhabited Moria for many years. 'Now You See Me Moria', as they named it, emerged as a reaction vis-à-vis protracted uses of containment and surveillance in Lesvos. Adopting the critical lens of border studies and visual approaches, we discussed how the imagery disclosed by refugees served as a visual-digital protest against the surveillant-digital technologies the Greek authorities, on behalf of the EU, utilized in Lesvos.
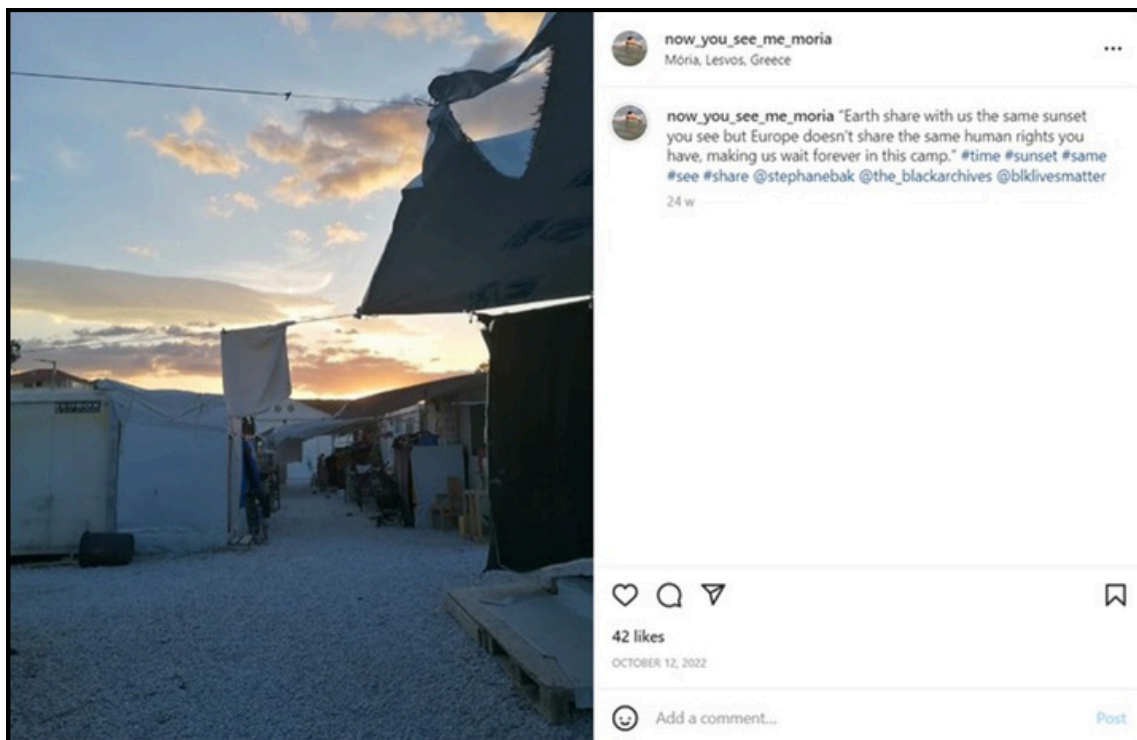
An image was posted on 'Now You See Me Moria'. Instagram page, 12 October 2022. Reproduced with permission. https://www.instagram.com/p/CjlwkqroiZP/

We qualitatively analyzed the screenshots of 50 images and the accompanying captions, and interviewed one of the founders of this movement, Noemí [2]. We explored how refugees documented their border experiences and their everyday life in Moria while they simultaneously 'visibilized' the atrocities they encountered and sought recognition for their struggles and their rights. In both cases the transdisciplinary approach provided me with a holistic perspective to grasp the constant interaction between the lived experiences of refugees and the continuous construction of border making with the EU's migration management measures.

Conclusion

In this piece, I explored in what ways supplementing refugee law with critical border studies and visual approaches contributed to dissecting the complex interplay between migration management and refugee struggles in the post-2015 European bordering regime. In my experience, transdisciplinary research, enriched by visual approaches and methods, offered a comprehensive understanding of this unremitting interplay. The case studies of The Hope Project and 'Now You See Me Moria' demonstrated how these methods can amplify refugee voices and 'rehumanize' refugees (see Martiniello, 2022), ultimately generating more informed and situated knowledge on refugee experiences. Seeing the world through the eyes of those directly affected is an essential step in our pursuit of grasping the challenges that migration management poses to them.

[1] Full names are used with the permission of respondents and artists.
[2] The last name of our respondent is omitted for anonymity reasons.

REFERENCES

De Genova, N. (Ed.). (2017). *The Borders of Europe: Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering*. Duke University Press.

Martiniello, M. (2022). Researching Arts, Culture, Migration and Change: A Multi (Trans)disciplinary Challenge for International Migration Studies. *Comparative Migration Studies*, *10*(7), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-022-00281-5

Mulcahy, L. (2017). Eyes of the Law: A Visual Turn in Socio-Legal Studies. *Journal of Law and Society*, *44*(1), 111-128.

Scott, J. C. (1998). *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press.

Tazzioli, M. (2020). *The Making of Migration: The Biopolitics of Mobility at Europe's Borders*. SAGE.

Wimmer, A., & Glick Schiller, N. (2002). Methodological Nationalism and Beyond: Nation–State Building, Migration and the Social Sciences. *Global Networks*, *2*(4), 301-334. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00043

Positionality

Defining Purpose: A Development Practitioner's Journey in Migration Research

Pamela Hartley-Pinto

Pamela Hartley-Pinto _is a development practitioner and researcher from Peru. She is an associate researcher in the Research Group on Urbanism, Governance and Social Housing CONURB–PUCP. She holds an MSc in Urban Development Planning from University College London, thanks to the support of the Chevening Scholarship and an MSc in International Development: Politics, Governance and Development Policy from the University of Manchester. Her work is interdisciplinary and lies at the intersection of politics, urban development, grassroots initiatives, and migration. She currently works at GIZ as a technical advisor on social protection and socio–economic inclusion._

As a development practitioner and researcher, I must maintain a sense of objectivity when working in the field of migration. At the same time, I remain engaged with the people and communities with which I work. For example, it is crucial to define who I am and the purpose of my work clearly and, most importantly, honestly. However, wearing multiple hats and occupying different positions of power and influence can be challenging, particularly in fields where positionality and networking play a significant role. The first step is to be aware of my privilege when navigating these spaces and to carefully communicate my role when interacting with various actors, whether at the grassroots or the technical level.

In this blog, I reflect on some fundamental principles to look for as researchers and development practitioners who do not harm and value migrants' experiences, including a diversity of voices, positionality, and management of confidential information. These reflections are based on my work's overall critical ethical standards and best practices.

"Do No Harm" and Valuing Migrants' Experiences

I recently researched migrants' journeys and their use of social media to find information. Under the principle of "do no harm", monitoring social media platforms and popular public accounts used by migrants and refugees in search of relevant information is a valid alternative to complementing official information from host-country government sources, international cooperation actors, and migrant-led organisations. As a priority, articulating with and interviewing diverse migrant-led organisations representing mixed groups and experiences is key. Refugees and migrants are the primary experts in their own experiences of displacement (Vera Espinoza, 2020). Listening to their experiences through their voices, words, and language is critical to understanding their migration journeys.

However, this recognition of shared experiences also comes with additional words of caution, especially concerning social media, since what is shared online often comes in the shape of social media narratives in which migrants restrict what they share to the positive part of the narrative (Eastmond, 2007). Therefore, as researchers and practitioners, we must recognise the possibility of partial storytelling and make additional efforts to complement the online data.

Including a Diversity of Voices

I prioritised the voices and experiences of migration experts of different genders, ages, and backgrounds, considering professional expertise and first-hand experience with migration and displacement situations. In other words, we prioritised reaching out to key informants who not only worked in the field of migration but also identified as migrants and/or refugees and were personally familiar with migration journeys, regularisation processes, and experiences of socioeconomic integration in different host countries.

Their personal expertise was invaluable for our research and served to amplify the voices of migrants and refugees, not just as beneficiaries but also as leaders and experts in the field.

Awareness of Positionality and Privilege

Being aware of our positionality and privilege as researchers and practitioners is essential to research ethics. However, it is fundamental when working and engaging with persons of interest who may experience an array of intersecting vulnerabilities, such as those who have undergone processes of forced displacement. In addition, recognising the existence of different power dynamics and how they impact our interpretation (positively or negatively) of data is relevant to acknowledging that we are partial observers of what is shared online and offline.

Being Intentional about Knowledge Sharing and Adapting to Different Communication Outlets

Sharing findings, results, and key information with those who participated in the research is critical, especially when it benefits advocacy efforts and facilitates horizontal communication. Moving away from academic language and jargon is imperative for communication. Based on our experience, being intentional about how information is shared is beneficial. Having the target audience in mind means sharing published papers or reports and hosting a space for dialogue and exchange with a broad audience. For example, we collaborated with "Capsula Migrante", a migrant-led social media outlet where those interested could participate in a safe space to ask questions and learn about key findings.

Taking Extra Protection Measures When Managing Confidential Information

Researchers and development practitioners must implement additional ethical considerations and apply flexible approaches to adapt to distinct scenarios when engaging with online information on social media for qualitative and quantitative research, policy design, and decision-making.

For example, we prioritise anonymity when dealing with confidential information and implement additional protection measures to ensure that social media posts remain unidentifiable to others to protect those facing extreme vulnerabilities.

Facilitating a Seat at the Table

As researchers and development practitioners, we have an agency and a role in bringing excluded voices to the table. In the context of the Venezuelan displacement crisis, many amazing migrant-led and refugee-led organisations are taking a stand and working collaboratively in regularisation, socioeconomic integration, and protection measures. Their work must be acknowledged and celebrated on all levels. Their data, collected at the grassroots level, mostly without pay, must be recognised and incorporated into official platforms. A solid step forward in this aspect is the Venezuelan Coalition (Coalición por Venezuela), a grouping of Venezuelan civil society organisations that collaborate with IOM and UNHCR and are part of the Interagency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants (R4V), joining efforts with 200 other organisations in their response to the Venezuelan displacement crisis.

In this blog, I reflected on how, particularly at the grassroots level, it is essential to be critically aware of the access I have gained to different spaces of trust and implementation. This requires investing in communicating effectively and managing relationships of trust to move away from transactional actions and towards communities of practice and solid networks. The six lessons I shared may be seen as different ways of engaging with the people and communities with whom we work and putting their knowledge and voices at the core of the research at all stages while protecting them from harm and exposure.

REFERENCES

Eastmond, M. (2007) "Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research. Journal of Refugee Studies, 20 (2), pp. 248-264. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem007

Vera Espinoza, M. (2020) "Lessons from refugees," Migration and Society, 3(1), pp. 247–253. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3167/arms.2020.030121.

Researcher, Practitioner, or Somewhere in-between? Reflecting on the Ongoing Negotiation Between Shifting Positionalities in PhD Research

Connie Hodgkinson Lahiff, Lauren Bouttell

Connie Hodgkinson Lahiff *is a PhD candidate in Law at the University of East Anglia, Norwich. Her PhD explores the administration of asylum applications in the UK.* ***Lauren Bouttell*** *is a PhD candidate at the School of Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of East Anglia. Her research explores learning in organisations supporting sanctuary seekers in England and Scotland.*

Interrogating positionality in qualitative research is a central concern due to the researcher's intimate role in data collection and analysis (Serrant Green, 2002). As white British women not from a sanctuary seeking background, we, Lauren and Connie, PhD colleagues at the same university, acknowledge this positionality informs our research. In this blog, we came together following a shared reflection: how do you negotiate practitioner-researcher identity in PhD research? Connie's research focuses on the administration of asylum applications, and she engages with immigration practitioners who support people seeking asylum. Alongside her PhD, Connie is a trainee immigration adviser and volunteer casework assistant in a community law center. Lauren's professional background is as an English language

and she currently volunteers as an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher. Lauren's ethnographic research explores adult learning in organisations supporting sanctuary seekers in the UK.

Below, we explore the professional identity we share with research participants. Rather than seeking to present an authoritative account of the practitioner-researcher identity, this piece aims to document one conversation to make sense of our reflections and untangle 'the fluidity of identities' that complicate multiple ways of seeing (Millora et al., 2020).

Connie: As a trainee adviser with 2 years of experience, I hadn't recognized myself as a practitioner-researcher until starting observational research at the immigration tribunal. In an ad-hoc conversation with a barrister ahead of a hearing, I mentioned my training and, as recorded in my fieldnotes, *'he says – 'oh so you know' and changed tone to be more open.'*

This interaction prompted me to consider how my identity was understood in the space. I became acutely aware that my role as 'researcher' and 'practitioner' was continually defined and re-defined by myself and others. This made me reflect, how does being seen as a practitioner impact the PhD research process?

Lauren: Being an ESOL teacher certainly impacted how I was perceived in the organisations I was researching with. Knowing I was a PhD researcher, teachers were keen to talk about my qualifications – sometimes in a manner which undermined their own experience. Doing a PhD seemed to be viewed as an elite practice, and even some of my teaching credentials were seen as impressive; some of the teachers were volunteers or had come into their role through alternative routes. One teacher said, *'oh I'm just a literacy tutor'.* This made me reflect on how I was viewed by those in the space, and provided insights into how they viewed themselves.

Connie: For me, too, researching while practicing had an unexpected impact upon the data collection process. In the first weeks at the tribunal, I noticed I was recording instances of 'best practice' as an adviser rather than centering my PhD research. Reflecting on this, I found this excerpt from my fieldnotes:

I realized that I 'understood' the hearings I observed with much greater clarity because I was training to represent clients in that environment. ... I wondered whether I was always thinking about how to use the observation as a learning exercise and not simply thinking about my PhD.

But, as time went on, and by being alert to this in my fieldnotes, I was able to negotiate this role confusion more effectively. I wonder if this was because I was a trainee... as a more experienced practitioner, how did you negotiate the dual role?

Lauren: Being an experienced teacher complicated my role as an ethnographic researcher, and I often found myself helping in the classroom. For example, I wrote in my fieldnotes:

Florence asks me whether I can help Mariam while she goes to get the milk for the tea. I say 'sure', and we work through some of the vocabulary on the worksheet.'

Rather than distracting from my research, however, I think these interactive moments have contributed to my analysis. Supporting in the classroom highlighted key themes for my research such staff shortages and the precarious nature of the work.

Connie: It's interesting to learn that your analysis developed in part because participants invited you to contribute both as a colleague and an observer. This made me think about what knowledge is shared and to whom. Certainly, as a junior researcher, I wondered at times whether I was relying on my practitioner status for credibility with research participants. It will be interesting to see how this negotiation between researcher positionality and professional identity develops throughout the PhD journey and beyond. As I gain more experience as a researcher, will my practitioner status take more of a back seat?

PhD researchers continually negotiate multiple identities through time and space. Reflecting on our field notes showed a need to engage with both researcher subjectivity and how professional identity is socially constructed. Going beyond the outsider/insider divides, our experiences precisely demonstrate the fluidity of in/out positionalities, which urges an engagement with the space between.

Photograph of handwritten fieldnotes; 'oh so you know'.
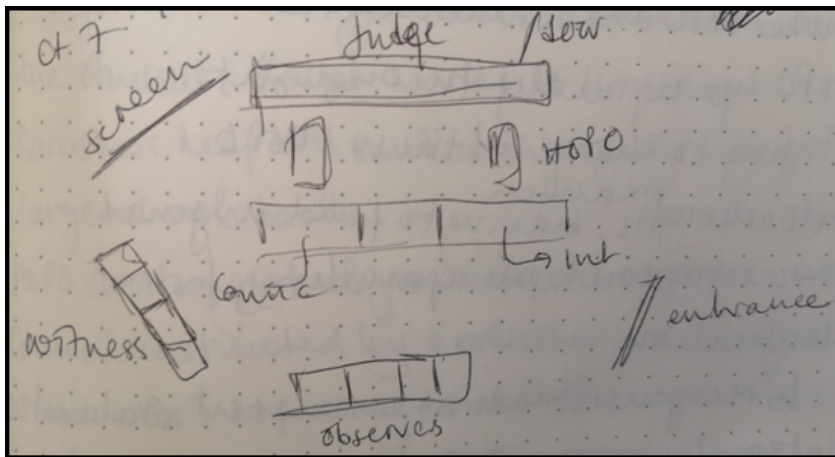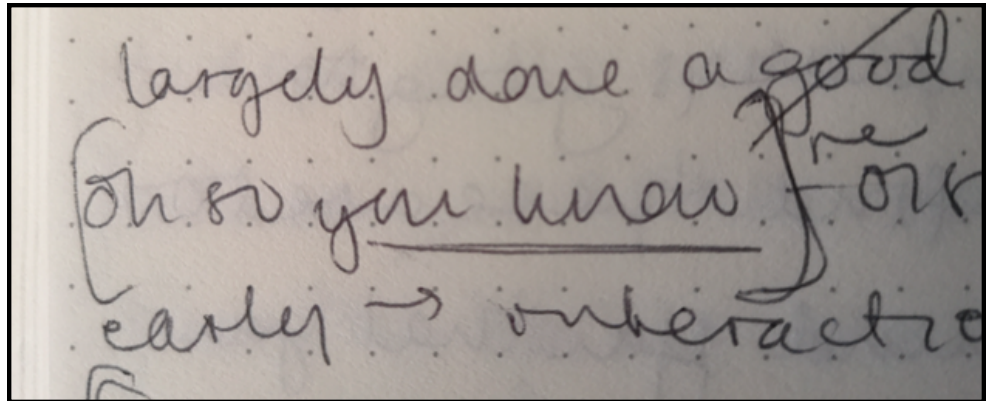
Author's sketch of the courtroom layout. Observational research at the Immigration tribunal.

Author's image of an ESOL classroom in Scotland

REFERENCES

Millora, C., Maimunah, S., & Still, E. (2020). Reflecting on the ethics of PhD research in the Global South: Reciprocity, reflexivity and situatedness. *Acta Academica: Critical Views on Society, Culture and Politics*, *52*(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa52i1/SP2

Serrant Green, L. (2002). Black on black: Methodological issues for black researchers working in minority ethnic communities. *Nurse Researcher*, *9*, 30–44. https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2002.07.9.4.30.c6196

"If you are a migrant in academia, don't be ashamed": the Role of Migration Studies and Migrant Scholars in Dismantling Shame in the Neoliberal University

Khaoula Stiti

Khaoula Stiti _is a feminist migrant architect based in(between) Brussels and Tunis. Her doctoral research is at the nexus of heritage, participatory praxis, and digital mediums. Simultaneously, she explores inquiries related to coloniality, migration, and ethnography, weaving a multidimensional narrative in academic exploration._

Migration toward the Global North introduces us, Global South researchers, to a challenging dance of global immigration policies. Our mobility becomes constrained, hindering access to scientific opportunities concentrated in the Global North. Upon arrival, a stark reality unfolds — we discover unequal treatment compared to our peers from the Global North, with glaring disparities in scientific, financial resources, and administrative procedures (Stiti, 2023). It's as if there are two separate globes, not one.

Though my academic focus may not align with migration studies, the urgency of discussing this topic resonates deeply with me. In this essay, I explore past challenges for Global South researchers in academia, focusing on the tension

between subjectivity and objectivity. I discuss the traditional exclusion of personal experiences, the concept of the "dirty self", and the associated shame within the neoliberal university framework. Despite a slow pace, I highlight recognising shared experiences in the academic literature of migration studies for fostering solidarity and contributing to a more inclusive environment.

In academia, the ongoing discourse on subjectivity versus objectivity takes centre stage. In my discipline, Architecture, researchers are often instructed to maintain objectivity in scientific writing by avoiding the first person and personal subjectivity, termed the "dirty self" (Reisinger, 2023). I argue that these traditions not only exclude positionality in research but also extend this expectation to the personal lives of migrant researchers, urging them not to bring "Global South problems" to the lab. These problems mainly revolve around slow responses from the university to address issues like precariousness, involving short-term contracts, visa insecurity, second-class citizenship, and transient relationships (Morley et al., 2018).

Within this framework, the university requires migrant researchers to navigate obstacles, akin to avoiding a real-life scenario of a "dirty self". Consequently, the "dirty self" extends beyond scientific writing, impacting the very identity of Global South researchers. This restriction is compounded by shame, strategically used in academia, particularly towards vulnerable Global South researchers. This creates an environment discouraging open discussions, perpetuating a culture of silence around the struggles faced by migrant researchers. Shame logics thrive within academic spheres due to the individualisation of struggles, particularly under the influence of temporal norms dictated by neoliberal performativity.

Within the neoliberal framework, Global South researchers are susceptible to experiencing this shame, likely internalising it during their research careers. I did so before freeing myself while still inside academia. Reading about one's experiences in another researcher's words, especially when shared experiences can be emancipatory and instrumental in shaping policy, shatters shame. This recognition not only validates the personal struggles of Global South researchers but also catalyses transformative change at the institutional level, albeit at a slow pace.

In the field of Migration Studies, the role of recognising shared experiences becomes even more profound. When a researcher, especially one from the Global South, discovers their own lived experiences mirrored in the academic literature of Migration Studies, it transcends the mere acknowledgement of personal struggles. This intersectionality of experiences provides a unique platform for the researcher to connect with a broader community grappling with similar challenges. The significance lies in the potential for these shared narratives to be not only emancipatory for individual researchers but also instrumental in shaping broader policies and systemic changes. Migration Studies serves as a conduit for amplifying the voices of those often marginalised within academic discourse, offering a space for collective reflection and advocacy. The discipline becomes a medium through which the nuanced and diverse realities of Global South researchers find resonance, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics involved in migration and academic life.

The recognition of shared experiences in Migration Studies acts as a catalyst for transformative change at the institutional level. Migration Studies can serve as a powerful catalyst for institutional transformation by inspiring concrete actions and programs aimed at minimising discrimination, particularly administrative, against migrant researchers. For example, institutions may establish mentorship programs specifically designed to support migrant scholars in navigating administrative hurdles and accessing resources. Additionally, they might implement policies to ensure fair and equitable treatment in hiring, promotion, and funding allocation processes, thereby creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for all researchers, regardless of their background or origin. This impact may unfold gradually, reflecting the pace of change within academic institutions, but it lays the groundwork for a more inclusive and equitable academic landscape.

To conclude, in this essay, I delve into past challenges faced by Global South researchers in academia, particularly regarding the tension between subjectivity and objectivity. I discuss the traditional exclusion of personal experiences and the concept of the "dirty self" impacting both scientific writing and the personal lives of migrant researchers. The narrative explores the shame associated with discussing challenges within the neoliberal university framework. However, amidst this backdrop of adversity, I propose grounds for optimism. I stress the significance of

acknowledging and embracing shared experiences within the academic discourse of Migration Studies, which cultivates a profound sense of solidarity among researchers. Moreover, I extend a heartfelt invitation to migrant scholars to unite, share their stories openly, and address the discrimination they endure. By actively advocating for accountability, particularly in holding the neoliberal university responsible for its discriminatory practices, migration studies scholars and migrant scholars can wield significant influence in catalysing systemic changes that pave the way towards a more equitable academic environment for all.

REFERENCES

Morley, L., Alexiadou, N., Garaz, S., Monteagudo, J. G., & Taba, M. (2018). Internationalisation and Migrant Academics : The Hidden Narratives of Mobility. Higher Education, 76(3), 537-554. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-017-0224-z

Reisinger, K. (2023). Some Words on Posionality. In M. Schalk, K. Reisinger, E. Markus, U. Leconte (Eds.), Material Practices: Positionality, Methodology, and Ethics (pp. 3). Munich: TUM Press. ISBN 78-3-948278-41-0.

Stiti, K. (2023, June). "You Should Be Grateful for this Opportunity": An Autoethnography on the Injustice in Doctoral Research in Francophone Belgium. In AHM Conference 2023:'Diasporic Heritage and Identity' (Vol. 2, pp. 47-58). Amsterdam University Press

Charting the Terrain of Identities: An Ethnographic Exploration in a Muslim Neighborhood in Delhi

Istikhar Ali

Dr. Istikhar Ali _holds a Ph.D. from the Centre of Social Medicine and Community Health at Jawaharlal Nehru University, India, and was awarded the prestigious DAAD Fellowship at the Centre for Modern Indian Studies, University of Göttingen, Germany. Specialising in migration, ghettoization, and mental health, his research delves into the intricate determinants shaping these phenomena. Employing an ethnographic approach, he investigates spatial segregation, forced migration, mental health, and the daily experiences of the largest religious minority in India._

I found myself entangled in the dynamics of religious and gender identities and positionalities while embarking on an ethnographic exploration to unravel the socio-political fabric of Muslims in a Muslim neighbourhood in Delhi. This journey began unexpectedly, driven by a change influenced by both my identity and personal interest. It made me realize the significant impact of my identity and positionality on the integrity of the research. But before delving into my field experiences, let's briefly describe my ongoing struggle between identity and positionality.

I first began a transformative journey aimed at achieving detachment because respondents' experiences were similar to mine, and it was affecting my mental well-being. This learning enabled me to establish a distinct and discernible boundary between my identity and research—a challenging task that proved difficult but certainly not insurmountable. But I soon discovered the limitations of complete detachment, feeling the constraints of being perceived as an outsider and a male researcher. The lines below provide a further explanation of this process.

Living under the High-Tension Pole

Anti-Muslim Polarization

Commencing fieldwork in Jamia Nagar in October 2019 presented formidable challenges. There were limited opportunities for meaningful conversations in a context marked by intricate layers of constraints. The historical backdrop of the 2008 Batla House controversial encounter and the persistent stigma associated with the neighbourhood has resulted in various service and delivery partners, such as Uber, Amazon, Zomato, etc., either avoiding or hesitating to accept orders there.

During a casual conversation with an Uber driver, he expressed reluctance, saying, "I prefer not to come here." Surprisingly, this reluctance persists after 15 years, with the driver offering seemingly baseless excuses for steering clear of the area. This was further exacerbated by the movement against the discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) that began at Jamia Milia Islamia in December 2019, followed by propaganda around "Corona Jihad" in April 2020. This complex socio-political landscape strained the trust and rapport established during my preliminary study from June to August 2019.

The process of revealing or concealing my identity and positionality became a complex consideration, especially given my status as a Muslim researcher examining Muslims within a challenging milieu impacted by anti-Muslim laws.

Researcher and Agent Dynamics

As the aftermath of these events unfolded, I soon found that I had transitioned from being an insider to an outsider and a suspect in the eyes of the neighbourhood. 'You could be an agent of the BJP (Bharatiya Janta Party: India's right-wing Hindu nationalist party, currently in power)'.

Approaching the respondent's house along with the ASHA worker

When I showed my university and identity card, the response from another local was, 'It could be fake, and anyone can make it easily.' Majorly, people were afraid to entertain an outsider, let alone introduce themselves. I had to shift to conducting case studies with the help of references and apply a non-participant observation approach to understand the lived experiences of Muslims during socio-political turmoil in India, particularly in the Muslim neighbourhood.

One key informant advised that I should always reveal my name (a clearly Muslim one) to gain trust before divulging the research details. I often felt driven by fears of being labelled an informer rather than recognizing my role as a researcher. Though it did not fully convince many respondents, at least it often provided an opportunity for me to explain my positionality. This hesitation among community members often led to refusals and reluctance to participate in the study.

Stratified Interaction and Gender Dynamics

Reluctance from respondents also emerged due to my male identity. Despite my attempts to engage with male participants and seek their cooperation in arranging meetings with female family members, numerous individuals either declined, evaded the request, or failed to provide approval. The challenge of securing the participation of female respondents, particularly those from the middle class, became evident. Interestingly, a more enthusiastic response was observed among female respondents hailing from slum areas and the elite class, perhaps due to fewer cultural restrictions and greater accessibility. Collecting data from middle-class female participants proved to be a research limitation. As a male researcher, I faced a dilemma in directly approaching households, seeking permission, and initiating conversations. The prevailing atmosphere of distrust, fear, and various other factors contributed to a significant number of refusals, making it a formidable task to overcome these barriers.

To sum up, in ethnographic research, going through the complexities of identity and positionality proved both enlightening and demanding, revealing the delicate balance required to navigate the dynamics of a community in turmoil. The experiences in Jamia Nagar underscored the importance of acknowledging and addressing these dynamics to foster trust and facilitate a more authentic exploration of the narratives within the Muslim neighbourhood in India. Nevertheless, I found a renewed sense of enthusiasm for data collection, allowing me to visualize my findings with clarity, which marked a significant achievement in my research endeavours.

Ethnographic Tool(kit)s in Practice: Navigating Fieldwork with Refugee Populations in India

Rohini Mitra

__Rohini Mitra__ is a doctoral student at the Centre for Development Research (ZEF), University of Bonn, where her research is focused on forced migration governance, networks, and refugee transnationalism in and beyond South Asia. Her doctoral research examines these themes in the context of the Rohingya refugees in India. Her larger research interests include migrant (and refugee) transnationalism, migration governance regimes, diaspora politics, and the lived experiences of migration. She has completed a Masters in Development Studies from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and worked in the migration policy and research space in India.

Halfway through a nearly two-hour commute to the outskirts of the capital city of Delhi, India, where I was to meet with a group of community leaders, I was overcome by a sudden feeling of nervousness. It was the first month of my fieldwork, conducting life history interviews with Rohingya refugees living in Delhi, India and so far, I had little progress to show. This meeting had been hard to arrange, not least because of the increasingly hostile policy landscape for Rohingya refugees in India. In September 2022, the community was just emerging from a media storm set off by a controversial tweet from an Indian government official announcing the provision of low-income housing to the Rohingya in India on August 17.

This was withdrawn just hours later, but the damage was done and refugees across the city suddenly became the focus of journalists and reporters looking for bytes and quotes. "This won't come in the media, will it?" became a common refrain in my first few weeks, and I lost count of the number of times I reassured my respondents that I was not a reporter. My nervousness was warranted, but as the coming weeks unfolded, I found myself repeatedly confronted with the strange and unexpected ways that my various identities, my various positionalities - both ascribed and innate - influenced and mediated my access, my reception, and ultimately the relationships I built. Reyes, in her 2018 paper on the topic, argues that researchers often draw on an 'ethnographic toolkit' - the visible (race/ethnicity/language) and invisible (social capital) tools emerging from their multiple social locations to mediate the research process. In this piece, I briefly reflect on three such identities that came to definitively shape my fieldwork experience.

En route to one of the fieldsites in India

Researcher

"Hello, I'm Rohini, I'm a PhD student".

This was the identity I perceived as primary, the one I held up practically as a protective shield. I initially used 'researcher' and 'PhD student' interchangeably till a few respondents pointed out that calling myself a student would lead to me being viewed as less of a threat. Students and PhD scholars in Delhi have also been one of the key groups who have volunteered, worked, and advocated for Rohingya refugees in India and the fact that my work had educational motives would be viewed positively.

Calling myself a researcher certainly lent credibility. The use of standardised research procedures, including letters of introduction and informed consent forms, was reassuring to many respondents, who had had one too many experiences with fly-by-night data collection and unethical journalistic practices. However, asking for signatures on informed consent forms sometimes raised fears.

I had to frequently rely on previously built networks to vouch for me and my work, so that respondents felt comfortable to sign on a piece of paper that was being handed over to a total stranger. I was often cautioned by respondents to not highlight my connection to Germany too much in case it generated expectations around the interviews I was conducting, a piece of advice I was not always comfortable taking. My own position as a young, female researcher, living and travelling alone in India drew a lot of curiosity from my respondents, especially from younger female refugees who had similar academic aspirations.

Volunteer

"If you had not come to us through the community, we would not have spoken to you."

This was an identity that I did not give much attention to in the beginning but turned out to be of the most importance. Since the middle of 2019, when I began to nurture an interest in the topic of refugee policy and integration in India, I had begun to reach out to and have informal conversations with organisations working in the space. A series of interesting meetings and conversations eventually led to a volunteering stint with a refugee-led NGO based in Delhi - a position I still hold today. Over the years, I worked on internal reports, documentation efforts, and advocacy, and got to know several community leaders and prominent advocates for refugees in India.

The importance of these networks only became clear at the aforementioned hard-to-arrange meeting that I travelled 2 hours for. "Why are you doing this research" was the first question asked, as I sat before a group of refugee leaders who had taken precious time out of their workday to meet me. Of course, after multiple proposal presentations, it was not a new question, but suddenly the academic-and-policy-speak in which I usually parcelled the answer withered at the back of my throat. I spoke, instead, about my personal motivations. Later, on the long walk back to the auto-rickshaw stand from where I would begin the two-hour journey back home, one respondent began narrating a recent case of a refugee whose identity had been published by an unethical reporter. Since then, the community has been extra cautious about whom they engage with, he said, and had only agreed to speak to me because of the organisation that vouched for me as someone who had supported refugees through volunteer work.

Bengali

"They only eat dal and roti here, with achaar everyday!"
[dal: lentils, roti: flatbread, achaar: pickle]

I come from Kolkata, the capital of West Bengal, paradoxically located in Eastern India. There is an important reason for this strange moniker, a reason rooted in the shared, traumatic history of Partition violence and displacement. West Bengal, so named in relation to the erstwhile East Bengal, then East Pakistan, and today Bangladesh, is the first port of call for most Rohingya refugees coming to India.

Nearly all my respondents first arrived in Kolkata after crossing the border before eventually making their way to other cities in India. Many also spoke the Bengali language, from long years of residence in Bangladesh. Being from Bengal, where we share cultural traditions with Bangladeshis, and some also with the Rohingya (who hail from a border region of Bangladesh and Myanmar) was an unexpected bonding exercise as I soon realised. When my respondents spoke of the strange food habits of North India that they could not bring themselves to embrace, I, after days of subsisting on pure vegetarian fare, could not help but nod vigorously in agreement.

A chicken dish prepared by one of my respondents

In neither my world nor theirs can you eat dal and roti everyday, achaar notwithstanding. Where is the fish and meat? Starved as I was of adequate non-vegetarian food, some of the best meals I ate during fieldwork were in the homes of my respondents, where simple fish and chicken curries, often cooked as I conducted my interviews, were served with rice, almost exactly as in my home in Kolkata.

Conclusion

A number of overlapping identities, social locations, and privileges shaped my fieldwork experiences. Some, such as being from an upper-middle class, urban family, or my Indian citizenship, were anticipated. Others like the ones described above took me by surprise. I was surprised also to find how easily I came to inhabit these identities, allowing some to dominate and others to recede in different contexts. In the encounter mentioned at the beginning of the piece, I found that highlighting my academic background, my student status, and the proper procedures I planned to follow (informed consent, anonymisation, etc) were reassuring to respondents. In another city, where the security and protection situation is far more precarious, my insistence on proper procedure was a major hindrance, and it was rather the personal networks that vouched for me that enabled my interviews. In engaging with women within households, I often had to shed these entirely, relying instead on my identity as a young woman, as a newcomer to the city, and as a fellow non-vegetarian in a predominantly vegetarian city. All of it comprises the 'ethnographic toolkit' that I initially was not even aware I possessed but which has fundamentally shaped my relationships with respondents and interlocutors, the understanding of my positionality, and the outcomes of my research.

Participation

Collaborative Writing in Independent Journalism on Global Mobility: A Critical Note

Irene Praga Guerro

**Irene Praga Guerro** is an MPhil/PhD student in English and Humanities at Birkbeck College, University of London. Her PhD project identifies and conceptualizes the 'New Migration Cronica', a new form of political and aesthetic writing that is authored by people on the move. She studied literature at the University of Geneva for six years. Alongside her doctoral studies, Irene teaches French, Spanish and Creative Writing, and regularly contributes to non-mainstream magazines on mobility issues, Spanish politics, and independent films.

Drawing on _testimonio_, collaborative writing – the technique or process of producing a written work as a group and not as an (isolated) author - is redefining the dominant narratives of migration and (im)mobility in journalistic writing. In this piece, I discuss what _testimonio_ is, its influence on contemporary journalism on migration, and the challenges and conceptual shifts of collaborative journalism. My research is influenced by my (privileged) position as a European, white woman who has been however living under various migration regimes with a visa for the past eight years.

In the early sixties, a transnational group of intellectuals supporting the Cuban Revolution conceptualized the genre of *testimonio*, which was soon institutionalized through Casa de las Américas (the most prestigious cultural institution in Latin America at that time). A new form of political and aesthetic writing, *testimonio* aimed to 'give voice to the voiceless'. The political ambitions of *testimonio* intended not only to rectify historical inequalities by documenting the personal experience of everyday people but also counteract the hegemonic representation of the Revolution by North American mainstream media.

Through works like Gabriel García Márquez's *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* (1955), Rodolfo Walsh's *Operation Massacre* (1957) and especially Miguel Barnet's *Biography of a Runaway Slave* (1966), *testimonio* set the foundations of a militant tradition in independent journalism that persists today. From Cuba to Latin America, and from there to different parts of the Global South, *testimonio* spread across the world as a form that uses documentation as a means for denouncing human rights violations. *Testimonio*, or rather the genealogy of activist writing that it initiated, has served as a model for an emerging movement in world journalism that seeks to redefine hegemonic narratives of migration and (im)mobility through a collaborative and transnational approach.

Works like Ibrahima Balde and Amets Arzallus Antia's Little Brother (2019), Helen Benedict and Eyad Awwadawnan's Map of Hope and Sorrow (2022), Doro Goumaneh and Brendan Woodhouse's Doro (2023), and Mariangela Paone and Rezwana Sekandari's Rezwana: un expediente europeo (2023) reconstruct collectively the experience of global migration. In doing so, they present an alternative narrative to dominant representations of people on the move [1]. In these works, collaborative writing blurs the line between the 'local' and the 'person on the move' – who is who? – besides challenging the traditional distinctions between the journalist and the 'informants'. This contrasts with the *testimonio* tradition, in which the groundbreaking principles of voicing the voiceless exposed, however an authorial power imbalance between the journalist-author, who 'owned' the story and memory, and their informants, who remained either unacknowledged or in the background. While collaboration fosters equality and broadens media access to stories of people on the move, expanding perspectives and re-imagining dominant narratives of exclusion and identity, it also introduces some conceptual shifts and major challenges, which I will briefly outline here.

Collaborative journalistic works like the aforementioned hint at a redefinition of authorship in journalism. In these works, writing and authorship are no longer intertwined. Ibrahima Balde, for example, is an outstanding oral narrator but he cannot write or read in any language. Sekandari, whose family perished in a fatal shipwreck near Lesbos, reconstructed her life story with Paone Paone, the co-author but did not draft her book in Spanish. The fact that Balde and Sekandari did not personally pen their works, nor did they shape the textual form either, does not diminish their co-authorship.

The inclusion of the authors of these books in the canon of world journalism suggests a revaluation of who counts as a journalist. *Testimonio*, and all the genres that it influenced like *nueva cronica latinoamericana* (Latin American long-form journalism), were, and still are, written by public intellectuals like Colombian García Márquez, Mexican Elena Poniatowska, Argentinian Martín Caparrós, and American Jon Lee Anderson. The new journalism on migration, in contrast, is authored by people who do not necessarily define themselves as journalists. Woodhouse, for example, is a British firefighter and volunteer sea rescuer with Sea Watch. This calls for a reconsideration of the definition of classic notions of author and journalist. Similarly, this movement emerges from transnational solidarity networks that are not formerly institutionalized – unlike testimonio with Casa de las América. This lack of institutional backing is precisely what has allowed the development of this new form of journalism in unconventional ways although it also poses challenges to its dissemination and circulation.

Collaboration might appear to be an effective means of expanding accessibility in migrant writing, but it still falls short of ideal. Journalist Mariangela Paone published *Rezwana* in Spanish, a language that co-author Sekandari does not speak – although she did read an earlier version of the story in English, a language in which she is fluent. A similar case can be observed in *Little Brother*, originally drafted in Basque, a language unfamiliar to co-author Balde. And the same can be said about part of the life stories gathered in *Map of Hope and Sorrow* as the author-narrators cannot communicate in English. Goumaneh, co-author of *Doro*, in turn, can communicate in English but he first wrote his story in French. He then had to translate it into English for Woodhouse to understand. In this translation process from French to a language that Goumaneh does not fully master, some parts were likely irreversibly lost, as anyone who communicates in a language other than their mother tongues knows well.

In essence, collaborative writing brings about new forms of putting into words the experience of global migration – and, in doing so, it weaves networks of transnational solidarity. However, it also reveals conflicting and ever-lasting inequalities as it is difficult to ascertain that neither of the authors involved is using the other author to strategically voice a story. Interestingly and also problematically, this is one of the ethical dilemmas of *testimonio*.

The solution to this problem is, perhaps, to take a Barthesian approach and claim *la mort de l'auteur* [2]. But then, again, anonymity would probably condemn people on the move to silence which is precisely what collaborative journalism is seeking to avoid and restore.

[1] I refuse to categorize people based on legal status (e.g., refugee, asylum seeker, citizen).
[2] The death of the author is a literary theory that argues that the work matters more than the author, the what over the who.

Ibrahima Balde and Amets Arzallus Antia. Courtesy of Blackie Books.

Using Ideas of 'Home' to Challenge Anti-Migration Narratives
Jami Abramson

Jami Abramson _is a PhD candidate in Human Geography at Swansea University. Her research aims to explore ethnic minority young people's experiences with places, particularly in relation to their idea of identity and sense of self. Informed by participant-led methodologies, Jami uses visual methods such as photography and collaging in go-along interviews with young women in Swansea._

'Home' is often weaponised by right wing media outlets. You only need to turn on the TV, radio, or check social media to see 'home' mentioned in relation to migrants. A quick Google search of the terms "home" and "migrants" will give you images of migrants on boats, as well as news articles concerned with "illegal migrants", "stop the boats", and "housing crisis", all in relation to migrants arriving and living in the UK.

What if we used 'home' as a ground of connection rather than difference and division?

As someone who was born and brought up in a small city in Wales - Swansea - I lack a nuanced understanding of the experiences of those who migrate. I have never moved to or lived in another place beyond a long holiday. I can research the different types of migration, the number of people who migrate, as well as the reasons behind their decision. But these ways of learning about migration are

simple and can reduce an individual's experience to a collective, a 'migrant experience' or 'journey'. Only through working with migrants over the past eight years have I begun to appreciate the nuances, depth, and richness of experience that migration entails.

In this photo essay I will show how eight young migrants living in Wales shared their ideas of home with me through images as part of my Master's research, which challenged ways of thinking about migration as homogenous. Home is shown as place, people, objects, as well as aspirations and fears for the future. Home connects us all. This idea could be a useful way to show the complex and multiple ways of looking at migrants' experiences, approaching the figure of the migrant as something more than binaries (home/not home, in/out of place, belonging/not belonging). Regardless of life experiences, we can all relate to these experiences of home, in turn understanding experiences as complex, multiple, and constantly in flux.

Home as Tangible

In the dominant narratives we hear about migrants we can often view home as a physical place, a structure, somewhere left behind. When asking young migrants to think about home in terms of the tangible - the things they can see, touch, taste - home was shown as a mixture of things which evoked different meanings, emotions, and memories.

Places

Sometimes home can be experienced by seeing a familiar landscape which evokes feelings of calm and peace. This photo of Swansea Beach reminds the young migrant who is new to Swansea of their home in Iran, and it also evokes similar feelings of home in the viewer.

*"This space connects me to home. Boushehr"* (Taken by Zara, 24 years old from Iran)

Food

"Mangoes always remind me of my back home ... in the morning my dad comes from work, he used to bring loads of mangoes ... we used to sit together with my mum, brother, sister, my dad. When we eat mango we feel like oh my gosh! That feeling is like, just out this world". (Taken by Hajira, 24 years old from Pakistan).

Home as intangible

Often migration narratives focus upon migrants as lacking, missing, losing something along their journey - 'leaving home'. Of course, this sense of loss and displacement is valid but is often the only experience which is represented. There is often a lack of focus upon stories of building, making and reimagining home.
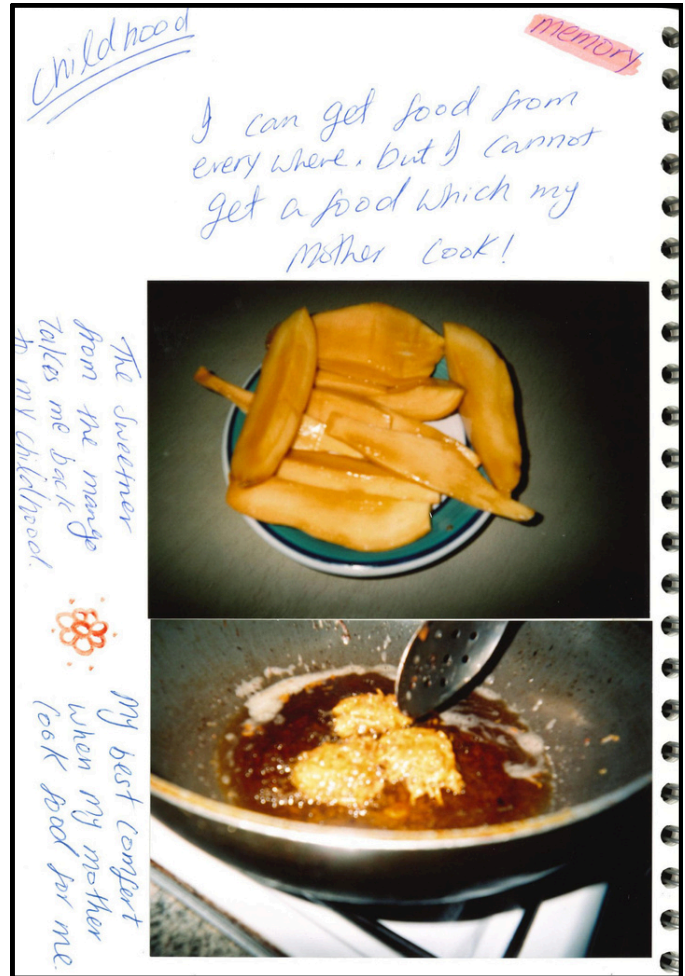
Routines

Against the backdrop of Mumbles Pier in Swansea, this young person shows her routine of meeting up with friends, smoking Shisha and listening to music. A routine that is being remade from Syria to Wales to create a sense of home.

Taken by Mariyah, 20 years old from Syria

Relationships

Home can be made by those we spend our time and experiences with, often with family. This photo was taken to show that regardless of place and objects, the bond between three generations of family creates a sense of home for this young migrant.

These intangible elements of home suggest the process of migration as far more complex that leaving one place to find another. As part of the human experience, we are all looking for people to share experiences with, including the highs, the lows, and everything in between.

"Wherever I go and my family with me is my home". (Taken by Layla, 22 years old from Iraq)

Home as in-between

Everyone has hopes, dreams and a curiosity for what is yet to come. These young migrants relayed a common experience of feeling under pressure to decide on one trajectory in life, such as studying or getting a job, and do it as quickly as possible due to a perceived idea of being 'behind' other young people the same age as them, due to their migration journey.

Dominant migration narratives matter for these young people. Ways of thinking about migrants in a binary way (here/there, belonging/not belonging, Welsh/Not Welsh) can not only simplify experiences when represented to those who have not migrated (people like me) but can also cause young migrants to feel negative emotions, such as anxiety, loss, and a pressure to choose one culture, language, and identity.

The frustration of "belonging at the place but not feeling like home, constantly seeing it but feeling different, waking up to the reality of where I want to be, but here I am" (Winta, 23 years old from Saudi Arabia)

'Home' as a ground of connection?

As we live in a time of opposites, a time of polarisation and the rise of anti-migrant narratives, could it be helpful to focus on 'difference' as an opportunity to **connect** with the unknown or less familiar?

Home connects us all. These young migrants may have different backgrounds, stories, and journeys, but they all connect to 'home' as something more complicated than just a place. Could focusing on commonalities in human experience, such as 'home', be a useful way to understand experiences that appear wholly different to yours?

"Do not be afraid of complexity. Be afraid of people who promise an easy shortcut to simplicity."
— Elif Shafak, How to Stay Sane in an Age of Division

Individually, we can work to overcome the tendency towards simplification - when experiences are so seemingly different from ours, the urge to connect and empathise vanishes. This is even easier to do when we are surrounded by dominant narratives from the government and media institutions about migrants. By embracing the multiple and complex experiences of others, we can begin to challenge the focus on difference to divide and see migration as an opportunity to make unexpected connections, to learn and to empathise - even, in my case, connecting to experiences beyond my small city in Wales.

On Participatory Filmmaking in Borderlands
Irene Gutiérrez Torres

Irene Gutiérrez Torres _is an award–winning documentary filmmaker and a PhD fellow at Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and University Carlos III of Madrid (UC3M). She is part of the REEL BORDERS ERC project, which focuses on participatory filmmaking as a tool for challenging border epistemologies from below. Her research addresses themes of im/mobility, migration, and everyday bordering. Her films have been screened at film festivals such as the Berlinale, Rotterdam IFFR, Jeonju IFF and the MoMA Documentary Fortnight._

My PhD project combines participatory visual methods with ethnography and archival research to understand the meaning of the border for its inhabitants. As a sub-study of the Reel Borders ERC project, I hosted Participatory Filmmaking (PF) workshops to study 'border narratives' in three distinct borderlands: Derry, at the Irish border; Ceuta, the Moroccan-Spanish border; and Adana, a Turkish city that has become home to over a quarter of a million Syrian displaced people.

PF involves collaborating with a community to create films. This process draws from various practices such as storytelling, performance, archival collection, autoethnography, interviews, voiceover, video recording, and viewing. In border and migration research, PF has been used to create counter-narratives that provide a first-hand understanding of displacement, placemaking, and belonging. It has the potential to make bordering and migratory experiences more tangible. However, it's crucial to acknowledge and consider power dynamics that may arise

during PF projects, especially in borderlands, where cultural, gender, class, agency and political inequalities are exposed. In this entry, I will share what I learned from my PF practice on how to engage the participants as well as some reflections on power dynamics.

In the field: Co-creating Films in the Borders of Ireland, Spain-Morocco and Turkey-Syria

In April 2022, we started a three-month PF workshop in Derry. We recruited nine participants from both sides of the Irish border to create four documentaries portraying their visions on the border. Later, in October 2022, we conducted a three-month workshop in Ceuta with 13 Moroccan women living and working in the city undeclared. They created 26 short web documentaries highlighting their forced immobility after the COVID-19 border reinforcement. Finally, we concluded our fieldwork in December 2023 with a third workshop in Adana, where 25 participants addressed the intricacies of the city's conviviality between Turkish and Syrian communities for one month.

Throughout my journey of working with different border contexts and human experiences, I became aware of the need to modify my workshop designs to meet the unique needs of each group. Two fundamental principles guided me: reflexivity and reciprocity. Reflexivity involves questioning our methods systematically (Hibbert et al. 2010: 48), whereas reciprocity involves mutual negotiation of power and meaning through give-and-take (Lather, 1986: 263, mentioned in Roberson 2000: 311). In other words, I considered participants experts and not mere 'data providers' and critically examined my research design to tailor it to their goals.

The Importance of Understanding Participants' Objectives

One of the most effective ways to keep participants engaged during and especially after the fieldwork is to understand their motive for participation. For example, Irish participants wanted to improve their filmmaking skills and showcase their films at film festivals. Participants in Ceuta aimed to share their experiences with policymakers and citizens rather than becoming filmmakers themselves. In Turkey, students wanted to use filmmaking to connect with Syrian colleagues and neighbours. In this way, discerning the unique objectives of each participant group

helped me adjust the method according to the spaces and geographies of the border.

Four participants of the PF workshop in Derry, Emer O'Shea, Seamus Gordon, Michael McMonagle, and Tom Hannigan, were part of a Q&A session moderated by Sunniva O'Flynn, Head of Irish Film Programming at the Irish Film Institute in Dublin on September 2023

Remaining Methodologically Flexible

Another strategy is to tailor interviewing methods to better suit the individual background of the participants. For example, I employed different interviewing techniques depending on geographical context and citizenship status. In Ireland, walking interviews along old checkpoints and today's blurred territorial borders were helpful in discussing cross-border and cross-community experiences. In contrast, in Ceuta, participants could not cross to Morocco due to the border reinforcement after COVID-19, which forced us to remain on the Spanish side. Moreover, they requested that I work *for* them as a filmmaker to help develop and share their stories of immobility and long-term precarity with politicians. The reason was simply that these women attended the workshop after working 8 hours cleaning and caring for others, which is physically demanding. Hence, although we had a few filmmaking sessions, we relied on visual archives created before the workshop.

During the sessions, the participants wanted to share their stories over a cup of tea in a way that felt safe and would not negatively impact their chances of regularisation. Indeed, most of them wanted to remain anonymous. To ensure this, we used non-visual methods such as oral storytelling and reflexive voiceover recording. Moreover, we created films with blurred faces and faceless films to safeguard their identities. As I wrote during my fieldwork after one of the first sessions: "Can film be a useful tool to make their stories visible while keeping their identities anonymous? How can our cinematic collaboration respond to the situation they are experiencing without re-victimization? And what is my position as a Spanish woman born and raised in Ceuta, coming from a coloniser country that historically subjugated our neighbour, Morocco?"

Involve Everyone in the Dissemination Process

When working with individuals excluded from citizenship, it is crucial to be aware of their vulnerabilities in terms of (im)mobility and exposure. This requires critical reflection on how to achieve genuine participation at all stages, especially when it comes to sharing their films. In Ceuta, we came up with a solution to create individual web documentaries, which we collected in _ABCeuta: the Alphabet of the Border_. This approach made their films available online since the participants could not physically travel to discuss and present them. The webdoc responds to their demand to increase their visibility to local, national, and European politicians and also includes a petition for their regularisation.


Two participants of the PF workshop in Derry, Basmae and Laila, during a filming session in Ceuta on November 2023

Promote Dialogue and Cross-cultural Encounters

When a PF workshop involves different communities, the film can foster dialogue and provoke encounters that are otherwise unlikely to happen. The workshop in Adana involved students from Turkey, Algeria, and Syria. During these sessions, participants highlighted the economic and cultural challenges of integrating Syrian communities in Turkey due to everyday bordering and racism, exacerbated by language barriers separating the communities. Their experiences were captured in the two films we co-created, which were subsequently screened for Syrian students from the Çukurova University Academy. They shared their reactions on Instagram:

"The creators of the films were happy to share their stories with the Syrian people to provide a nuanced portrayal of the Syrian community without resorting to generalisations. One of the films was filmed on Syrian Street (Koca Vazir), a street in Adana that is often unfairly judged. One of the student groups visited and filmed the street, and their portrayal somehow challenged preconceptions."

After the workshop, the Turkish students began referring to themselves as "the generation of change".
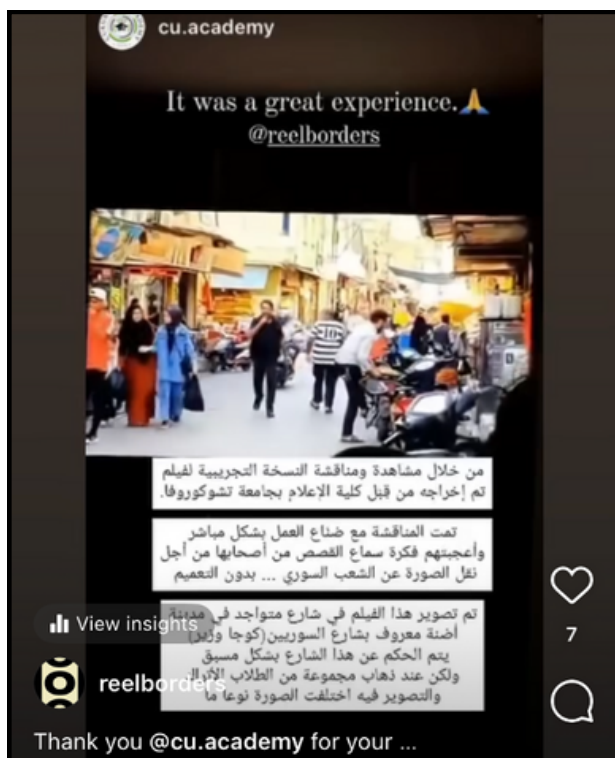
The Çucurova Academy students shared their experience on Twitter after discussing the workshop pilot film in a screening at the Faculty of Communication of the Çucurova University in December 2024

Through my fieldwork experience, I learned that Participatory Filmmaking (PF) can be a powerful tool for knowledge production and education that can positively change the communities we engage with. When combined with a reciprocal approach, the flexible nature of PF allows for deploying different methods and practices in each location to co-design unique workshops that align with participants' goals. While measuring the impact of our efforts can be challenging, we were able to meet the needs of all parties involved and work towards creating engaged science.

REFERENCES

Hibbert, P., Coupland, C., and MacIntosh, R. (2010) 'Reflexivity: Recursion and Relationality in Organizational Research Processes', Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal, 5/1: 47–62. Lather, P. (1986) Research as Praxis, Harvard Educational Review, 56, pp. 257–277.

Robertson, J. (2000) The three Rs of action research methodology: reciprocity, reflexivity and reflection-on-reality, Educational Action Research, 8:2, 307-326, DOI: 10.1080/09650790000200124

Beyond Methodological Individualism: Understanding Youth Aspirations by Bridging Positionality and Local Knowledge in Participatory Research

Stephen Agahi-Murphy

Stephen Agahi-Murphy is a doctoral candidate at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. His research examines the migration–education nexus in Jinja, Uganda, with the aim of transcending "for" or "against" perspectives on migration by exploring the forces, conditions and policies that shape (im)mobility. This work is driven by an interest in how individual livelihoods, institutional practices, and community dynamics are redefined in the context of social transformation.

In this blog, I will highlight the importance of centralising participants' voices in migration research and describe how I navigated the pitfalls of methodological individualism throughout my project. Methodological individualism is a theoretical principle that emphasises 'the individual' as the primary unit of analysis (e.g., Hayek 1942) for theorising 'the social'. Often overlooked in the context of migration research, this viewpoint is considered the gold-standard of qualitative interviewing (Zahle and Kincaid 2019) yet often goes unquestioned despite its far-reaching methodological and ethical implications.

My doctoral research focuses on the role of education in the context of youth migration. I spent six months conducting ethnographic fieldwork in two neighbouring villages in Jinja, Uganda. The incorporation of reflexive note-taking during my fieldwork helped me to interrogate several assumptions underpinning

my project, expand my awareness of how knowledge flows, and situate my position as a researcher.

A 'boda-boda' driving youth with a mother and her children in Budondo, the rural subcounty of Jinja, Uganda, where I conducted my research

On arrival, I planned to conduct life history interviews with individuals by curating 'ethically sanitised' settings with youth in rural Jinja. Quite quickly, however, I realised that I had to modify my approach. At the beginning of my fieldwork, individual interviews with youth would commonly turn into group conversations, as my interviewees subsequently invited their friends or family to join the interview. My initial response to this was apprehensive, with a concern that this could somehow impact the integrity and quality of the research. After a day of what became group interviews, I would ask myself, "What if the presence of others hasn't allowed individuals to fully express their thoughts, concerns, and aspirations?"

As my fieldwork proceeded, this pattern became familiar. Together with my local research assistant, we would arrange, often through snowball sampling, to meet with youth in the village, only to find groups of friends waiting for us when we arrived. To engage reflexively with my question, I spoke to locals about how they naturally explore topics, discussed them with my research assistant, read relevant papers on the legacies of coloniality and the philosophy of social science, and began to document my own thoughts and impressions.

Throughout this process, my perspective on participatory research gradually shifted. As I expressed in one entry of my fieldwork diary:

"The other day I checked with one of the participants if they were OK to proceed with the interview as we were now a small group sitting on the clay pathway outside her family

home, to which she responded: "Why would I not feel comfortable speaking in the presence of my friends?". Though not a position on cultural relativism per se, the thought still holds: who am I to say what is an appropriate way to explore themes of relevance in a meaningful manner? I am learning from the participants throughout this process and must be aware of my situated position as a white mzungu".

Crucially, my reflexive practice enabled me to challenge my 'seemingly' neutral choices, open myself to nuanced cultural expressions, and harness the potentialities of participatory approaches. As I continued in my notes:

"The research isn't an end, but we should see ourselves as part of a common exploration of the aspirations held by these groups of youth, as well as their perceptions of the social reality in which they are immersed."

Another key moment of my journey towards overcoming methodological individualism was during the analytical phase of my research. In my interviews, I noticed how youth frequently described their own aspirations by referencing their family, education, or community experience. During the coding stage, I realised these aspirations could not be understood in isolation. As a result, I used my analysis to map the interconnections of individual aspirations with household strategies, community structures, and institutional practices, all of which led to four narratives of "rural prosperity" outlined in my thesis that seek to contextualise the migration aspirations and capabilities of youth in rural Jinja. This showed me how drawing on local knowledge to challenge seemingly orthodox approaches can significantly impact the conclusions of migration research.

Throughout this process, utilising reflexivity to identify the challenges of methodological individualism also ensured I didn't swing to the other extreme. While I incorporated insights from methodological holism (Iosifides 2016), I sought to do so in a way that didn't suffocate the legitimate expression of individuality nor reinforce cultural relativism, with many one-to-one interviews still taking place alongside more fluid focus groups. Instead, ensuring an ongoing dialogue between methods and culture helped me to locate my own position in the research, to engage in a learning process alongside the participants, and to make my own research more engaged.

REFERENCES

Hayek, F. V. (1942). Scientism and the study of society. Part I. *Economica*, *9*(35), 267-291.

Iosifides, T. (2016). *Qualitative methods in migration studies: A critical realist perspective.* Routledge.

Zahle, J. and Kincaid, H. (2019) Why be a methodological individualist? *Synthese*, *196*(2), pp.655-675.

A (Fragmented) Portrait of Engaged Scholarship
Miriam (Mimi) Adelina Ocadiz Arriaga

Miriam (Mimi) Adelina Ocadiz Arriaga _is a multidisciplinary researcher and creative writer focused on migration and mobility from an (African) decolonial perspective. She holds a MA in African Studies (cum laude) and currently works at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam within the Refugee Academy project Engaged Scholarship Narratives of Change. As a PhD candidate, Mimi has theorised and put into practice manifestations of care that enable epistemic justice, which in turn support the decolonisation of academia._

What does it mean to be an engaged scholar in migration research? As I walk the edges of my PhD, I would like to share five key lessons on this challenging and open-ended odyssey. With the support of images of some of my most affectionate moments during this project, I will draft a kaleidoscopic portrait of what it means to be(come) an engaged scholar.

My PhD trajectory within the Engaged Scholarship Narratives of Change project has been guided by the questions: "What is knowledge, how is it (co)created, by whom and why?". As part of a multidisciplinary and transcontinental team, I have had the opportunity (and privilege!) to dedicate the last five years of my life to exploring the crossroads of power, migration, and knowledge in the context of South Africa.
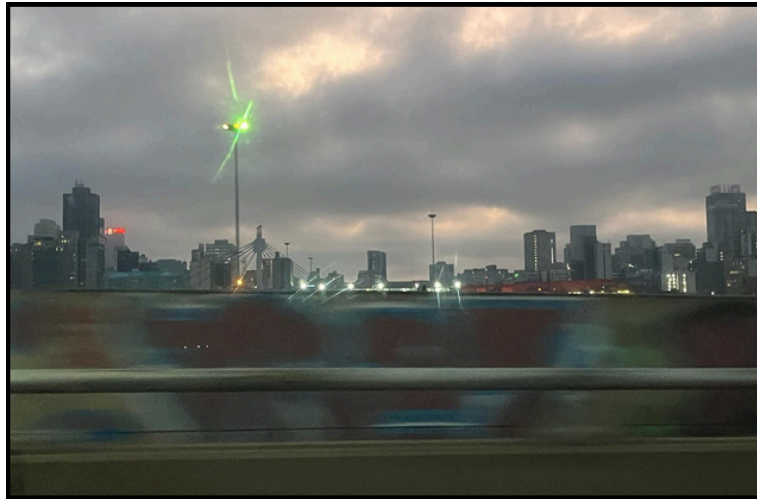
One last glance of J´burg. (Photo taken by the author, October 2023)

When I applied to my current PhD position, I was moved by the belief that academia is much more than speeches in lecture halls and peer-reviewed journals, as I wrote in the motivation letter to get my current position: to "searching for opportunities to have a meaningful impact on societies in the Global South". Academia is (and should be) also relevant to society, particularly in the face of injustice. That is why I wanted to be part of a project inspired by outstanding black feminists such as Patricia Hills Collins (2022) , who traced an unbreakable compromise between knowledge cultivation and justice.

In South Africa, where the university is entangled in histories of colonialism and apartheid, I departed from a decolonial approach that recognise the country's strong tradition of engaged scholarship as the academic work that seeks to challenge and transform structures of exclusion and inequality. Nowadays, this tradition continues by addressing the ways universities may (re)produce power imbalances, for instance, by problematising the way (white) elites often produce knowledge about, rather than with, marginalised (black) communities.

If engaged scholarship departs from how knowledge is cultivated, I was rightfully questioned about my positionality as a Mexican, mestiza, writer and researcher based in the Netherlands. Perhaps one of the most meaningful conversations on this matter was with <u>Ruvimbo Tenga</u>, an influential, Zimbabwean activist and artist who looked right into my eyes one evening in April 2022 and said: "Academia is all about publishing and making money, about transcribing and making money, about conferences and making money. Scholars can be such extractivists!"

Ofrenda de día de muertos for deceased friend and activist Ruvimbo Tenga. (Photo taken by the author, November 2022)

That was not the first time (and surely not the last) that someone questioned academia's (good) intention. Moreover, what made Ruvi's voice different was what came after. She was not interested in my answer. Instead, she stood up and took time to dance, laugh, and enjoy the evening. Later, through her actions, she showed me that she wanted action, not empty promises wrapped in "fancy" academic words.

A reminder that silence in times of injustice is not "neutral". (Photo taken by the author, University of the Western Cape archive, September 2022)

Ruvi's critique on extractivism became a ground-breaking point in my inquiry into engaged scholarship. Her voice resonated with that of other migrants involved in academic projects who described how critical approaches, especially those with the best of intentions, promptly notice structural injustices. However, they fall short of translating this knowledge into relevant actions.

In response, African women's movements in collaboration with African feminist scholars (e.g. Mama, 2019) offered significant advances in re-imagining research as a

collaborative, communal and reciprocal process that centers the worldviews of marginalised communities. In doing so, they argue for a scholarship that weaves tidily the research process (e.g. methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and modes of dissemination) and research outputs that contribute to migrants' struggles for a dignified life.

I once crossed the borders to be at Mundo das Mulheres in Maputo.
(Photo taken by the author, September 2022)

Meeting Ruvi revealed yet another layer to the analysis of engaged scholarship. She showed me that engagement must not only be critical (i.e., addressing power in relation to knowledge) but also be caring. Ruvi unpacked care as a responsive, collective, and complex praxis that sustains the well-being of individuals and communities. While care is deeply affected by inequalities, for instance, in the way that care practices have been primarily undertaken by women of colour, often unpaid, for Ruvi and other LGBTQI+ forced migrants, care is the foundation of engagement because it enacts a process of re-humanisation.

Care soon became a pillar of my approach to engaged scholarship, as my PhD took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. The narratives of migrants called upon a visceral approach to engagement that paid close attention to invisible acts of everyday resilience. This led me to focus on the daily encounters between scholars and communities as a departure point for transformation. From this angle, cultivating knowledge is also a process of recognising the humanity of migrants

(and other marginalised groups), enabling a sense of community and connectivity that enhances people's capacities for resistance.

My very first view of Johannesburg was with Sara. (Photo taken by the author, February 2022)

Concluding Thoughts

Approaching engaged scholarship through a decolonial outlook means working with a living document. I remain convinced that academia has the potential and the responsibility to contribute to more just societies. Nevertheless, given the historical legacies of inequalities within and around the university, this is not an easy task.

Because oppressive structures operate on many fronts, a reading of critical and caring engagement must focus on collaborative strategies to disrupt power inequalities. In my PhD trajectory in South Africa, I found great inspiration in African decolonial activists and feminists who (re) centre migrants' capacities as agents of transformative knowledge. By doing so, migrant voices, such as Ruvi, highlighted that engaged scholarship also entitles transforming academia itself, unsettling how knowledge is cultivated and disseminated.

This call for a more caring and critical way of engaging with society resonates with ongoing movements of non-hegemonic communities, such as the collective AFROntera in my native Mexico, which summarises well the core argument of this post:

"We aren't theory. We are Black, Indian, Mestiza, Sudaka, racialised flesh. We reject your PDFs and your disembodied lectures. We deny every trend of being and return to listening to each other, looking each other in the eye, telling each other stories, and building from lived experience." (Manifiesto AFROntera - Terremoto, n.d.)

REFERENCES

Collins, P. H. (2022). *Black Feminist Thought, 30th Anniversary Edition: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge.

Mama, A. (2011). What does it mean to do feminist research in African contexts? *Feminist Review*, *98*(1_suppl), e4–e20.

Manifiesto AFROntera—Terremoto. (n.d.). Retrieved 29 January 2024, from https://terremoto.mx/revista/manifiesto-afrontera/