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RETHINKING MIGRATION BEYOND THE ANALYTICS OF SUFFERING

Elena Borisova, Jérémie Voirol, and Jamie Coates

Abstract: In their search for better lives, migrants encounter numerous hardships. Structural violence, inequality, and precarity have long been central to migration research, but an exclusive focus on these dimensions risks narrowing the anthropological imagination and overlooking the reasons why many move in the first place. The contributions to this special issue examine how migrants navigate moral dilemmas and pursue meaningful lives by reflecting on value and well-being, through the lens of humor and irony, and by improvisation. Taken together, the articles propose a reorientation of migration studies that foregrounds ethnographic attention to moral experience and ordinary ethical life while remaining attuned to the structural conditions that shape mobility and immobility.

Keywords: aspirations, ethics and morality, humor and laughter, irony, migration, the good life

In an online news article, a group of visibly anxious young men, clad in grays and dark hues, wait on Moscow's Red Square as Russian police officers check their documents (Kislov and Zhanaev 2017). A tense atmosphere shrouds this encounter, which could potentially lead to deportation. When the authors of this special issue searched online for 'migrants in Russia', this was the first image that appeared. Subsequent photos depicted male migrants donned in work uniforms on construction sites, lining up for document verification in a notorious center on Moscow's outskirts, or immigration officials conducting raids on overcrowded 'rubber apartments' housing numerous migrants. Headlines from broadsheet journalism scream phrases like "xenophobia and vulnerability," "shattered dreams and uncertain futures," or "migrants caught between poverty and pandemic."¹ Surveying other public representations of migration in Europe, the US, and Australasia reveals eerily similar images. Overcrowded boats traversing the Mediterranean or Indian Ocean, barbed



wire barriers at borders and detention centers, migrants queuing or besieging these walls and centers—these scenes are common in journalistic portrayals of worldwide migration.

The need to attract readers and meet tight deadlines, amplified by narrow financial incentives, means that the eye-catching depiction of suffering, as Lillie Chouliaraki (2006) notes, is a prominent aesthetic spectacle that adds weight and significance to media stories. Although anthropologists face imperatives that are different from journalists, the need to demonstrate the significance and timeliness of our research can potentially draw us into using similar tropes. Working at the intersections of interdisciplinary fields such as migration studies, the need to tell a good story that speaks to funders, employers, colleagues across different disciplines, government stakeholders, and, indeed, the media means that it is difficult to escape the draw of wider analytical frames. Yet in this context, questions arise as to whether we are encouraged to explain more than we potentially can, to add weight and impact to our ethnographic stories, and perhaps to privilege some phenomena over others. This choice to explain or emphasize some of our fieldwork experiences is inevitable, but a concerning pattern seems prevalent within the wider field of migration research. Ghassan Hage (2015) has used an analogy to describe this tendency toward *miserabilism*, akin to the “suffering slot” (Robbins 2013), whereby migration anthropology and related disciplines often treat the research field as a crime scene. As Hage (2021: 10) has put it: “Somebody has committed a crime against, or at least done something very bad to, the migrant, requiring a meticulous analysis of the social forces and conditions leading to the criminal offense.” Sarah Willen (2019) has similarly argued in her work on migrants in Israel that these kinds of analyses have the potential to overshadow the lived experiences of our interlocutors and render them abject by reducing them to socio-political categories of ethnicity, suffering, and legal status. These observations are mirrored in publication and research funding trends. We surveyed over 1,300 article abstracts in migration studies and anthropology and found a strong and persistent focus on themes of suffering, marginalization, and crisis, with more than half of both fields relying on ‘damage-centered’ narratives (Tuck 2009).² This tendency is reinforced by academic incentives and funding structures, with a significant portion of UKRI grants awarded in migration studies that prioritize migrant hardship.³

We take inspiration from Hage’s (2015) reminder that the politics of scholarship should not be relegated to fighting against existing injustices (*anti-politics*), opting instead to explore the potential of ethnographic research to better understand how things could be otherwise (*alter-politics*). As Hage (2021) notes, migrants themselves are acutely aware of these representational stakes, and our desire to think otherwise comes from our own ethnographic encounters in the field. In Elena Borisova’s (2024) work, for example, Tajikistani migrant workers took pride in their professional skills and their ability to negotiate

legal and economic uncertainties, and to navigate the Russian labor, housing, and documents production markets. They were constantly trying to make their lives livable in the space between their native villages in Tajikistan and Russian cities. More importantly, they were not simply looking for creative ways to get by, but were striving to be good kin, hospitable neighbors, generous friends, reliable workers, and good persons in their diverse social relationships. In Jamie Coates's (2015) work among young Chinese people in Tokyo, despite the many hardships they faced, his interlocutors were highly critical of the perception, as often seen in popular media, that cast Chinese migrants as vulnerable or victimized. Many articulated nuanced critiques of how portrayals of Chinese people as suffering inevitably fed other negative stereotypes (e.g., related to criminality) that would leave them subject to public scrutiny and processes of 'unseeing' (ibid.). Jérémie Voirol's work similarly highlights how Ecuadorian returnees, disappointed by the material outcomes of migration after the 2008 financial crisis, nonetheless emphasized what migration taught them, such as open-mindedness, cosmopolitanism, resilience, and a spirit of initiative—values they supported against what they perceive as their homeland's conservatism (Simoni et al. 2025).

Our own research and our reading of the literature thus compel us to move beyond the 'analytic of desperation' (Elliot 2020) and the focus on the 'suffering subject' (Robbins 2013) that is so common in the anthropology of migration. Instead, we attend to everyday ethics, hopeful practices, and alternative visions of 'the good'. Inspired by the 'ethical turn' in anthropology, such an approach may offer a way to unsettle the dominant hierarchies of suffering that continue to shape both academic discourse and policymaking on migration. This special issue asks what might happen if we avoid starting from an analytics of suffering. What emerges is a curious situation where ethnographic 'accounts' and anthropological 'analytics' remain in tension. That is, while the people we work with may share accounts of hardship and exploitation with us, they often prioritize sharing the parts of their lives that are joyful, humorous, and life-affirming. Faced with these kinds of fieldwork encounters, which parts of this ethnographic material do we privilege as the interpretive analytics that shape our written work? This distinction is what we refer to when discussing the problem of an analytic of suffering. Focusing too much on suffering encourages researchers to overlook important parts of life and diminishes the anthropological legacy of drawing on holistic research to provide alter-political insights (Hage 2015) through ethnographic theory.

All of the articles in this issue extend these kinds of insights and are grounded in ethnographic research that looks at migrants' and their families' projects of self-fashioning and creating valuable lives. Across the contributions, ethical engagement often emerges obliquely through humor, irony, ambivalence, and mundane adjustments rather than through explicit moral claims alone.

Holding these indirect ethical modalities together with articulated moral claims and reasonings, we take ethics and morality as an inspiring framework for understanding social and cultural life more broadly (Keane 2015). This approach allows us to attend to migrant enactments of ‘the good’ as they unfold in practice, whether through humor, absurdity, and improvisation, or through narratives and reflections that make moral aspirations explicit in migration contexts. We do not see this as necessarily a new approach, but rather a return to foci within ethnographic research that attends to how people reason, deliberate, and act in relation to the conditions that shape their lives. Anthropological approaches to the human sciences have long sought to balance empirical attention to lived experience with broader questions about the human condition, a concern sometimes framed as ‘cultural’ questions. Building on this orientation, the contributions to this issue show that decisions around migration or staying are not made automatically, and people do not just fit in the dominant patterns in the region. Neither are they determined by simplistic push-pull factors based on calculative logics of a rational subject. Migration decisions are the result of reasoning, debate, deliberation, and active reckoning with multiple dilemmas. They are rooted in the human capacity to imagine a different life elsewhere but also in people’s desire to cultivate themselves as a certain type of subject for their families and communities. These dimensions are best explored through long-term ethnographic engagements with the field. Analytically, however, it also requires the critical revision of widespread figures and tropes we use when writing about migration and migrants.

In the remainder of this introduction, we draw on the anthropology of ethics to address the limits of an analytic of suffering and to engage more fully with migrants’ life projects. We then develop this approach as a methodological intervention that creates space for alternative analytics attentive both to structural conditions and to how people engage with them. Finally, we outline how the articles in this special issue contribute to this intervention.

Taking Inspiration from the Anthropology of Morality and Ethics

Anthropological work on morality and ethics provides a vocabulary for approaching the concerns addressed previously, particularly through its attention to what people consider ‘good’ and how they enact their ideas in practice.⁴ Scholars associated with the ethical turn see ethics and morals not merely as the domain of researchers, but rather as a way to understand social and cultural life more generally (Keane 2015). Such considerations have promoted reflexivity on researchers’ own ethical positions and a focus on moral issues posed by social groups and actors (Fassin 2008) that go beyond the correspondence of a given ethics/morality system and a given society/culture

(Durkheim [1906] 1953). This approach to morality has allowed greater focus on the interplay of moral constraints and norms imposed by ‘society’ and the ability of individuals to think about moral issues and to act accordingly (Jackson 2013a; Mattingly 2017). In migration studies, this mode would imply that what constitutes the ‘good life’ or ‘better life’ that motivates mobile people (see, e.g., Graw and Schielke 2012; Schielke 2020; Vigh 2009) cannot be assumed by researchers (Borisova 2024).

This resonates with what Eve Tuck (2009: 416) proposed as “desire-based research” that is “concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives” as an alternative to damage-centered epistemologies. Migration projects are usually driven by various kinds of desires—not necessarily or not only by the desire to achieve a certain level of material well-being, but the desire to become a particular kind of subject recognized in place-based and transnational hierarchically organized familial and community networks (Chu 2010). The outcomes of the process of ‘locating the good life’ (Borisova 2024) cannot be predicted and go hand-in-hand with moving between different value regimes that are full of tensions, contradictions, and ambivalences. It is an “experimental and non-linear” process (Voirol and Simoni, this issue). Our job as researchers of migration is not to brush these off under the residual section in our articles titled, for example, ‘migrants have agency too’, but to make them central to our analysis.

Problematizing the link between physical and socio-economic mobility, Jérémie Voirol and Valerio Simoni (this issue) show how their interlocutors, returnees in Ecuador and Cuba, drew on various moral repertoires to carve out a “simple life,” one that debunks the consumerist aspirations that pushed them to migrate to Europe in the first place. Looking closely at how returnees reassessed and re-evaluated the notions of the ‘good life’, they highlight that pursuing a different kind of good in the environments where migration is firmly associated with wealth accumulation and the expectations of wealth redistribution among kin and peer groups, is a “fragile and ambivalent endeavor.” Maintaining “‘marginalized’ moralities” demands a great deal of work that goes into resolving ‘moral breakdowns’ (Zigon 2009) and resisting societal expectations. As such, it does not always result in a coherent long-term strategy of staying or migrating again. Sanderien Verstappen (this issue) addresses her interlocutors’ attempts to collectively identify where life is better in the aftermath of anti-Muslim violence and displacement in Western India through the lens of “reorientation.” She shows that reorientation is a “spatial and temporal” practice that implies “a great deal of cognitive and practical work to imagine and compare different potential destinations and the potential lives that could be lived in them.” Usman Mahar (this issue) proposes the notion of “mobility improvisations” to capture the dynamic and creative ways in which irregularized migrants navigate obstacles and seek well-being amid structurally

produced immobility, holding structural constraints and ethical striving in the same analytical frame. As these contributions show, people do not just ‘flow’ or move from one place to another, unreflexively pushed out by economic hardship and violence. They engage in moral, affective, and imaginative work that renders such moves possible and meaningful within their social worlds.

Approaches in the anthropology of ethics and morality building on the philosophy of ordinary language, virtue ethics, and phenomenology and hermeneutics have sought to go beyond an often overly culturalist perspective on values and ‘the good’. They emphasize instead the indeterminacy and imaginative potential of ethical life, which cannot be straightforwardly deduced from a socio-cultural structure (Dyring et al. 2017; Mattingly and Throop 2018). These approaches pay close attention to everyday life and the experience of ethical subjects understood as relational and social, foregrounding how what is considered ‘good’, ‘right’, or ‘appropriate’ is often uncertain, debated, and contested within a social group (see, e.g., Fassin 2022; Howland and Mahieddin in Robbins et al. 2023; Keane 2015; Laidlaw 2014; Lambek 2010; Mattingly 2014; Sykes 2012; Zigon 2009). As Michael Lambek (2010: 1) argues, social actors “are trying to do what they consider right or good, are being evaluated according to criteria of what is right and good, or are in some debate about what constitutes the human good.” Ethical and moral life is often ordinary and tacit, grounded in practice rather than explicit rules or articulated beliefs (ibid.; see also Das 2012; Keane 2015; Laidlaw 2017). However, it becomes reflexively articulated and rationalized through the enunciation of values or rules in moments of uncertainty, rupture, or disagreement—what Zigon (2009: 261) describes as “moral breakdowns” or “ethical moments.” In this sense, ethical and moral life emerges through the intersection of “institutional, public, and personal moral discourses and ethical practices” (Zigon 2010: 5) as they are negotiated in daily life. Due to their mobile trajectories, migrants’ moral worlds may be shaped by a particularly wide range of ethical discourses, ideas, and practices drawn from a diversity of sources, including media.

In this issue, Voirol and Simoni show how moral ideas coming from transnational tourism or religion shape views of Cuban and Ecuadorian returnees about what counts as a “better life.” Their conception of a ‘good’ or ‘better’ life may focus on ideas of “rural beauty” and “harmonious human-nature relationships,” widespread in international tourism guidebooks and agencies about Cuba, or on religious spirituality. Claudia Böhme (this issue) highlights how ideas circulating through social media and digital technologies contribute to the constitution of an entrepreneurial self in the Kakuma refugee camp (in Kenya), while Verstappen (this issue) traces how developmentalist moralities privileging the ‘urban’ intersect with concerns about safety in post-violence Gujarat, India. Sébastien Bachelet (this issue) examines the cultivation of a “right mentality” among young irregular migrants from Central

and Western Africa in Morocco, understood as a form of moral self-fashioning oriented toward courage and endurance in contexts of violence and prospects of failure and death. Mahar (this issue) points to the defining role of families' moral judgments in keeping migrants engaged in "mobility improvisations" across Europe instead of choosing so-called voluntary return to Pakistan. Taken together, these contributions show that research on what constitutes 'the good' is particularly fruitful when it attends to the plurality of moral discourses and practices circulating in everyday life across different scales, rather than seeking a single 'paramount value' associated with a particular culture or group. An approach that treats 'value' as a driver of human action and associates specific values with particular social groups (Robbins 2013, 2025; Robbins et al. 2023) risks downplaying socio-economic context and historicity (Lockwood 2025), minimizing conflicts and tensions around values within particular socio-cultural settings (Knauff and Weiss in Robbins et al. 2023), stabilizing moral commitments (Mahieddin in Robbins et al. 2023), and simplifying ethnographic data through abstraction (Howland in Robbins et al. 2023). By contrast, adherence to values can be temporary, fragmentary, distant, or critical (Mahieddin in Robbins et al. 2023: 67), underscoring the need for ethnographically grounded approaches attentive to ethical ambivalence and change.

In addition to the analysis of values, some scholars draw on the notion of 'virtue', inspired by Aristotle, to examine how people cultivate lives worth living through everyday practices oriented toward the future (Mattingly 2014, 2017; Mattingly and Throop 2018). This notion foregrounds 'selfhood' (a psyche or subjectivity) as the seat of ethical character and the agential locus of ethical orientation, situated within material conditions and social relations (Dyring et al. 2017: 11). It directs analytical attention to questions about what is worth pursuing and what makes life worth living over time (see Lambek 2010; Mattingly 2014).

Bachelet (this issue) shows how humor and laughter operate as an indirect ethical practice among young irregularized migrants in Morocco, sustaining moral self-fashioning, recognition, and perseverance amid violent border regimes. Böhme (this issue) examines how entrepreneurial self-crafting through social media enables refugees in Kakuma camp to pursue alternative futures beyond refugee status, while also showing how the creation of meaningful lives within the camp can prompt a reorientation toward staying rather than onward mobility. Verstappen (this issue) studies how Gujarati Muslims, including those living abroad, cultivate a sense of belonging to the town of Anand in India through practices oriented toward a future 'good life', including residence, return visits, investment, and philanthropic engagement. Voirol and Simoni (this issue) analyze how returnees' efforts to cultivate alternative ways of life entail continuous moral work on the self, all the more when claims to a 'simple life' sit uneasily with dominant expectations of migration as economic success.

Mahar (this issue) shows how individuals initially perceived as *humdard*—the compassionate ones (volunteers who positioned themselves as friends to asylum seekers)—came to be re-evaluated as ‘traitors’ when they advocated ‘voluntary return’ as their best chance at restoring normal lives, revealing the moral stakes through which migrants assess advice, care, and possible futures. Taken together, the contributions underscore the importance of understanding ethical life as relational and experiential. They attend to how people are ethically engaged in the world and with others, how such engagement is embodied and ‘attuned’ (Zigon 2014), and how ethical lives are enmeshed into each other and the world that places demands on us (Al-Mohammad in Venkatesan 2015; Mattingly and Throop 2018: 483).

Across this special issue, migrants emerge not as isolated ethical subjects but as relational beings whose efforts to pursue meaningful lives are shaped through ongoing evaluation, obligation, and negotiation. Moments such as a researcher’s ill-timed joke (Bachelet, this issue) expose not only the asymmetrical power positions of the researcher and the researched, but also the immense pressures migrants face as moral actors within transnational family and community networks. These interdependencies do not disappear but become embroiled in new relations that migrants develop en route that can come at high cost and do not necessarily result in positive outcomes. As the contributors show, projects of self-fashioning and future-making are continually assessed, supported, or contested by others, underscoring how ethical striving unfolds through relational demands rather than by individual choice alone. In Böhme’s article, attempts to craft a successful entrepreneurial self as a yoga teacher are met with skepticism and critique from the community, exposing gendered expectations imposed on women’s bodies. Similarly, Voirol and Simoni’s interlocutors are confronted by expectations of displaying wealth and success upon their return, which contributes to—but also complicates—their attempts to re-evaluate what makes ‘the good life’ in a context saturated with stories and material signs of ‘successful’ migration.

Toward a Different Analytic

With regard to scholarship emerging from the European ‘migration crisis’ of the 2010s, Katerina Rozakou (2019: 79) observes that much research sought to expose the violence of border regimes by giving “voice to the voiceless,” often centering on narratives of suffering, exclusion, and misery. She argues that these persistent gaps in our understanding of migration do not stem simply from limited access to sites such as refugee camps or detention centers, but from the limits of our epistemological imagination. In particular, dominant modes of representation rely on “particular aesthetic modalities”

(ibid.: 79) that foreground the suffering migrant body, whether as a reified material presence or as a symbolic object. Extending this critique, Heath Cabot (2019) highlights how the same crisis moment generated a surge of fundable research aligned with prevailing imperatives of public relevance, impact, and humanitarian logics of ‘doing good’. Urgent funding calls encouraged rapid, often short-term research in unfamiliar contexts, frequently undertaken without the local knowledge, cultural familiarity, or linguistic competence necessary for sustained ethnographic engagement. Such dynamics, she argues, can make anthropologists “complicit in perpetuating the increasingly neoliberal business aspects of our discipline (in funding mechanisms, position openings, project designs, and status hierarchies)” (ibid.: 262–263). In this special issue, we position attention to questions of ‘the good’ as a methodological intervention. In doing so, we seek to open space for more holistic ethnographic engagements that foreground moral plurality, relational and processual understandings of ethical life, and sustained attention to contradiction, ambivalence, and change.

It is impossible to comprehensively describe all aspects of life through a single ethnography. With this special issue, however, we aim to tell stories that are at least a little more complete by displacing suffering as the primary analytic starting point. Beginning from ethnographic encounters marked by humor and laughter, creativity, future-making, or spatial and temporal reorientation, we found that ‘the good life’ was often actively communicated and enacted as a central concern that our interlocutors wished to share. Their desire to explore these themes did not negate the fact that they sometimes unfolded under conditions of extreme violence, global inequalities, and uncertainty. Rather, it created space for different analytics, experiences, and questions that we can learn from migrants. Far from ignoring or diminishing structural constraints, the contributions gathered here put them front and center in their analysis. By exploring how these structural conditions shape people’s responses, mobility strategies, and subjectivities, the articles attend to both the historical and political processes that led to the formation of these conditions and how people engage with them, carving out ‘viable’ lives (Hage 2025). ‘The good’ that emerges in these accounts is thus not a fixed value already ‘out there’ (Knauff in Robbins et al. 2023; Lockwood 2025), but one that takes shape in specific historical and social contexts, through practice, negotiation, and relation.

Holding both dimensions in the same analytical frame allows the authors to show that practices which might sit uncomfortably with portrayals of migrants as suffering subjects, such as humor and laughter, are not alternative registers opposed to suffering but emerge in response to it and are deeply entangled with it. This does not escape our interlocutors’ awareness, so why should it escape ours? Responding to a question about why migrants discuss the violence they face every day jokingly, one of Bachelet’s research participants

exclaims, “What do you want us to do? Shall we always cry then?” This answer also reflects our interlocutors’ awareness of the prevalence of damage-centered research. They know what kind of stories we are after, so perhaps telling us different kinds of stories is their way of questioning being reduced to analytical categories, whether suffering or otherwise.

Migration studies are permeated with certain universalist ideas of what constitutes a ‘good life’, particularly when framed in neoliberal and neo-classical economic terms (Coates 2017). Such assumptions are usually rooted in normative evaluations bound up with modern development (cf. de Haas 2007). Ethnographically grounded accounts have illuminated how, in many places in the world, it is not war or environmental change that push people to migrate, but rather the ‘force of hope’ and the work of imagination (Pine 2014; Schielke 2020; Vigh 2009). However, even accounts that critique the ongoing production of categories such as ‘the deserving refugee’ and ‘the undeserving economic migrant’ often rely on the language of desperation, poverty, and structural violence. This reiterates the idea that “while in the ‘Global North’ travel may be about curiosity, indecision about the future or love, others may travel—and indeed only *desire* to travel—out of ‘desperation, poverty, fear’” (Elliot 2021: 117; see also Olwig 2023). Echoing this critique, we argue that we should not assume that we know ‘what’ is being sought when people feel compelled to move. The questions that migration research has always asked—why people move (or stay), how they move (or stay), and the place that movement (or stasis) comes to occupy in their cosmologies—are inevitably entwined with people’s ideas about what counts as ‘good’ in their lives.

From classical ‘total social facts’ (Mauss [1925] 1954) to existential and phenomenological approaches, anthropologists have shown how the different spheres of social experiences are related and constitutive of social subjects. Within his existential perspective, Michael Jackson (2013b: 13) argues that migrants’ ethical and existential issues resonate with anyone else’s, such as those related to attachment, loss, love, and livelihood, and that migrants, even in their darkest days, “do not *ontologize* themselves as drudges, floating, or liminal.” Building on this perspective, we contend that a methodological commitment to avoiding suffering as a point of analytical departure is needed. It potentially provides more nuanced accounts of migrants’ lives—accounts that address “how life is made livable both through acting upon the world *and* submitting to it, engaging with others *and* holding oneself back from them, accepting reality *and* imaginatively denying it” (Jackson 2013a: 18).

Life for migrants worldwide can be harsh, and their presence in receiving countries is often inflected with multiple vulnerabilities, legal and economic precarity, and uncertainty. However, life also cannot be reduced to these conditions alone. We should not halt our attempts to expose the violence of migration regimes and their underpinnings but rather add to these accounts

with nuance and attention to a wider spectrum of experience. Many of our interlocutors might agree with the journalistic and scholarly representations of the hardships and injustices in their lives. Yet across the contributions, the contributors' and editors' interlocutors—be they regular or irregular migrants, refugees, or returnees—emerge not primarily as suffering subjects, but as people struggling to construct a livable and 'viable' (Hage 2025) world under constrained conditions.

In arguing to move beyond the suffering subject, we hope to open new modes of looking forward in social science research on migration. Further research into the practical implications associated with the figuration of migrants as suffering is also needed. Through discussions with our authors, we identified a problem we summarized as the 'fear or avoidance of suffering subjects.' Considerations of liability and risk increasingly inform ethics guidelines, data collection processes, and feedback loops within research. Out of concern for the inherent vulnerability of 'migrants' as a category of research subject, it is becoming increasingly difficult to propose ways of conducting research with people on the move without heavy institutional mediation, strict a priori consent procedures that are often poorly understood by the participants, and fewer opportunities for exploratory and collaborative research methods which may be difficult to define at the beginning of a project. We believe that a shift away from damage-centered frameworks toward more holistic approaches that leave space for us to understand how people strive for meaning, dignity, and flourishing even amid harsh structural constraints may be a more productive way to address these issues.

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Notes

1. See the recent photo project on the lives of ‘illegal’ migrants in Russia, “Bird in Flight,” https://birdinflight.com/ru/vdohnovenie/fotoproect/20161014-volkov_illegal_migration.html.
2. We analyzed 1,309 article abstracts published between 2013 and 2023 in four leading migration journals: *International Migration*, *International Migration Review*, the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, and *Migration Studies*. Our findings show that between 42 percent and 55 percent of these abstracts contained keywords such as ‘suffering’, ‘marginalization’, ‘exclusion’, ‘inequality’, ‘death’, ‘crisis’, ‘displacement’, ‘trauma’, ‘violence’, and ‘precarity’. A similar pattern emerged from our survey of migration-related articles in six anthropological journals: *Ethnos*, *Social Anthropology*, *Social Analysis*, *Cultural Anthropology*, *American Ethnologist*, and *American Anthropologist*. Across these publications, we identified 121 migration-focused articles over the past two decades. While anthropological work tended to show greater contextual nuance, just over half (approximately 51 percent) still relied on similar themes and terminology as those dominating the broader field.
3. Between 2015 and 2021, UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) funded 77 migration-related projects. Of these, 34 explicitly focused on death, violence, displacement, exclusion, trauma, depression, poor mental health, marginalization, and urgency.
4. Some argue that the anthropology of morality and ethics emerged as a specific field about two decades ago. Laidlaw’s (2002) article, “For an Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom,” is often considered the milestone for the development of what became known as the ‘ethical turn’.

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