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The Moral Economies of Reflexive Migration Studies

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Abstract

Reflexive Migration Studies has emerged as a subfield of Migration Studies. Drawing on moral economy perspectives, we explore how the entanglement of, and tensions between, moral and economic rationalities shape the development of a field of knowledge production in which we ourselves partake. Clearly, Reflexive Migration Studies has not emerged in a vacuum but through socio-material practices and in a specific scientific context and community. Using the case of the Migration Studies landscape in Germany, we suggest that a moral economies perspective allows us to examine the production of knowledge infrastructures, scholarly identities, and research outputs that are key in creating a new academic field. By scrutinizing these infrastructures, identities, and outputs, we point to tensions between some of the morally charged claims and the material conditions and labour contexts of *doing Reflexive Migration Studies*. With our contribution, we want to raise questions regarding the direction that we, as scholars participating in the field, are taking. We see the risk that the critique brought forward in Reflexive Migration Studies falters in light of prevailing economies of scientific knowledge production and academic labour.

Keywords: knowledge production; moral economies; Reflexive Migration Studies; reflexivity

Introduction

Since the 1970s, Migration Studies has grown, specialized, diversified, and expanded into different geographical contexts. According to Janine Dahinden (2016: 2207), the field has 'come into vogue' and seen rapid processes of institutionalization through 'a growing number of degree programmes, specialized journals and new university chairs dedicated to the discipline'. Similarly, Asya Pisarevskaya et al. (2020: 456) observe that Migration Studies has '"come of age": it has internationalized with scholars involved from many countries; it has institutionalized through a growing number of journals; an increasing number of institutes dedicated to migration studies; and more and more students are pursuing migration-related courses'. Bridget Anderson (2019: 2, emphasis in the original) has gone as far as noting that 'perhaps we are experiencing not an "age of migration" but an age of migration *research*'. The growth of Migration Studies further accelerated in the years following 2015, when over a million people crossed the external borders of the European Union and political and public interest in migration intensified. The field experienced a *post-2015 boost*, with the so-called migration crisis becoming 'a tool of knowledge and expertise production'

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(Rigo 2018: 507), and with knowledge on migration, its drivers, motives, dynamics, trajectories, as well as its economic, socio-political, and cultural impact and meaning becoming much sought after (Kleist 2018).

Observing these developments from *inside the field*, we want to discuss two trends that merit critical examination. On the one hand, we have seen a strong drive for application- and policy-oriented knowledge on migration in the context of the multiple 'crises' connected to Europe's 'long summer of migration' of 2015 (Kasparek and Speer 2015). Given migration's central place on the political agenda of EU member states and institutions, and the supposed urgency in finding adequate responses and solutions to migration 'problems', scholarly knowledge on migration has been portrayed as key in producing timely and evidence-based migration policies (Scholten 2018). Consequently, we have seen the establishment and/or growth of various research institutes, foundations, and funding schemes that focus on the *applied* study of migration. On the other hand, and partly in reaction to this desire for application- and policy-oriented knowledge, we have recently observed a body of *reflexive* scholarship solidify and institutionalize that directs analytical attention to Migration Studies' own practices of knowledge production.

Following Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller's (2002) critique of 'methodological nationalism' and its pervasiveness in migration research and the social sciences more generally, Reflexive Migration Studies aims to highlight and counteract the often state-centric, nationalistic, and naturalized assumptions underlying Migration Studies. This strand of research seeks to challenge, inter alia, forms of 'sedentarist thinking' (Lindley 2014: 1), dominant integrationist and assimilationist paradigms, as well as the reproduction of state and policy categories in scholarship. Proposing more introspection regarding power, positionality, and hierarchy in the production of knowledge, the 'reflexive turn' has been viewed as a 'paradigm shift' in migration research (Nieswand and Drotbohm 2014: 7), heightening awareness vis-à-vis concepts, methods, and categories through which migration is turned into an object of academic knowledge, political struggles, and governmental practices. While the 'migration knowledge hype' (Braun et al. 2018) among research institutes, think tanks, and international organizations has been critically examined and discussed within Migration Studies (Boswell 2009; Hess 2012; Geiger and Koch 2018; Kratzer 2021), we examine the new field of Reflexive Migration Studies that has come about, at least in part, as a scholarly counter-movement to the dominant application- and policy-oriented strands within migration research.

In this article, we develop a reading of the emergence and growth of a new research field in which we ourselves partake. Drawing on conceptual tools offered by moral economies perspectives and approaches (Thompson 1971; Fassin 2009), we focus on the entanglement of, and tensions between, moral and economic rationalities that shape the development of a field of knowledge production. We use the case of Reflexive Migration Studies to examine the moral convictions and value systems that drive the establishment of a new research field as well as the economic rationales and material conditions that facilitate and/or hinder it. Clearly, this field has not emerged in a vacuum but through socio-material practices and in a specific scientific context and community. In our contribution, we suggest that a moral economies perspective allows us to examine the production of knowledge infrastructures, scholarly identities, and research outputs that are key in creating a new academic field. By scrutinizing these infrastructures, identities, and outputs, we point to tensions between some of the morally charged claims and the material conditions and labour contexts of *doing Reflexive Migration Studies*. We discuss some of the pitfalls that this field faces, including the risk of (re-)producing a view from nowhere, the risk of detachment to activist practices and social movements, the risk of producing new (classist) exclusions/exclusive scholarly spaces, and the risk of disengaging from calls to de-centre and decolonize—and possibly even abolish (Schinkel 2023)—Migration Studies. With our contribution, we want to raise questions regarding the direction that we, as scholars participating in the field, are

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taking. We see the risk that morally charged claims and political critique brought forward in Reflexive Migration Studies falter in light of prevailing economies of scientific knowledge production and academic labour.

Writing this article has not been easy. Being ourselves situated in this field and in a particular institutional context, and with none of us having a permanent contract and position, we constantly asked ourselves how far we could take our analysis and what consequences this might have. Could it be misunderstood as an 'attack' on a particular strand of migration research that we have contributed to? Might it be considered a critique of particular colleagues and their work? Would it shut (career) doors or would we, to the contrary, benefit from our reflections on reflexivity and a publication in an established Migration Studies journal? Moreover, we wondered how it might be possible to write a self-reflexive article that requires a clear sense of us as authors, and our own situatedness in the field, but that also requires anonymity, given the double-blind peer review process. Trying to navigate these and many other challenging questions, we want to contribute to the growing field of Reflexive Migration Studies by highlighting the condition and context of its emergence. We believe that a strand of scholarship whose key characteristic is a reflexive posture needs to reflect on the relations between its morally charged claims and economic structures. We regard this article as a contribution to a conversation that is already well underway and we have benefitted from insights, thoughts, and critiques shared by colleagues, editors, and reviewers.

Our article is organized into three parts. We begin by briefly reviewing the changing landscape of Migration Studies in Germany before turning to the emergent field of Reflexive Migration Studies and its core claims. In the third part, we bring into focus three key socio-material practices that have brought this field into being: the production of research infrastructure; the production of researchers; and the production of research output.

1. The changing landscape of Migration Studies in Germany

In this first part, we focus on the academic landscape of Germany as we are ourselves situated in that specific context. We argue that the institutional developments in migration research here reflect some of the more general developments that the field of Migration Studies is undergoing internationally, particularly in Europe and Northern America. In Germany, Migration Studies as an interdisciplinary research field has become established only over the last thirty years. At the beginning of its institutionalization process, the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies (IMIS)—our current place of work—was founded in 1989/1990 at the University of Osnabrück and in 1993, the European Forum for Migration Studies (EFMS) was established at the University of Bamberg. While, from the start, EFMS focused almost exclusively on policy- and application-oriented—and often commissioned—research, IMIS pursued research critically accompanying migration-related politics and policy development (*kritische Politikbegleitung*, see Bade 2017). Additionally, scholars at IMIS undertook 'fundamental' or 'basic' research (*Grundlagenforschung*), examining complex migration-related questions that could not be answered under the pressure of needing to generate policy-relevance or when working in short-term funding schemes.

From the very beginning, both policy- and application-oriented research and fundamental research developed in parallel in the German Migration Studies landscape and both relied widely on third-party funding. Key research topics in the 1990s were the 'integration' of former 'guest workers' and their families into the labour market and education system, questions of language and cultural identity, migration movements caused by the end of the Cold War and the resurgent racist violence against migrants in the newly reunified Germany (e.g., Bommes 1993; Heitmeyer 1997; Straubhaar and Wolter 1999). That these research endeavours mainly revolved around issues of 'integration' can, at least in part, be

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explained through their 'deep impregnation' by the national paradigm in which this research was conducted (Bommes and Thränhardt 2010). At that time, political problematizations of migration in Germany revolved around questions whether or not migrants were able to integrate into the 'host society', provide for their own livelihoods, or would legitimately receive social benefits (ibid.).

Since the early 2000s, a growing number of migration scholars in Germany have become interested in the interrelated fields of Mobility Studies, Border Studies, Critical Security Studies, Transnational Studies, Postcolonial Studies, or Citizenship Studies—all contributing in different ways to new and differentiated research perspectives on migration and borders. Some of these scholars were involved in establishing the Network for Critical Migration and Border Regime Research (*Kritnet*) that has, since 2008, sought to produce 'knowledge about migration, racism, and border policies from a decidedly emancipatory perspective' and whose members have contributed decisively to advancing critical perspectives, such as the *Autonomy of Migration*.[1] Despite the influence of these approaches, questions of migrant integration and so-called ethnic minorities continued to dominate Migration Studies in Germany. This was partly reinforced by the establishment of the Independent Commission on Immigration in 2000 by the German government and the Expert Council on Integration and Migration in 2008 by a consortium of well-known German foundations which focused on issues of migrant integration and led to a further expansion of research in this area. Overall, Migration Studies in Germany remained an interdisciplinary but niche topic with very few chairs, institutes, and master programmes explicitly dedicated to the analysis of migration.

The rather slowly growing field of migration research in Germany experienced rapid expansion and a financial boost post-2015. Migration Studies scholars were largely taken by surprise when hundreds of thousands of people from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East overcame the fortified EU border regime in 2015 and moved on, often via the 'Balkan route' to north-western EU member states, including Germany. The German government reacted with a call for more scientific knowledge on migration (Kleist 2018), especially concerning groups claiming asylum, countries of origin, routes of transit, transnational ties, as well as 'cultural backgrounds'. A considerable number of funding initiatives to strengthen and expand migration research were established, with a focus on policy-relevant issues concerning (forced) migration, integration, and social conflict (Braun et al. 2018). As highlighted by Olaf Kleist (2018: 2, own translation), Forced Migration and Refugee Studies (*Flucht- und Flüchtlingsforschung*) experienced a 'research boom' in Germany, following the 'refugee crisis' of 2015: 'Scientists responded quickly to the ad hoc demand from politicians, practitioners and the media for scientifically validated information on flight and refugees'. Kleist notes that third-party funding sources were financing about half of the newly established research projects in Germany, with its themes being set a priori and with independent 'fundamental' research comprising only a small part of research activities. More than half of all new projects focussed on the topic of integration and even 84 per cent on Europe, showing, for Kleist (2018: 1), a neglect of forced migration-related issues in the Global South.

In this context, two new research institutes emerged in 2017, the Interdisciplinary Centre for Integration and Migration Research (InZentIM) at the University of Duisburg-Essen and the German Centre for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM). The latter, funded by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, consists of the DeZIM Institute in Berlin and the DeZIM Research Community which encompasses seven, already existing, research institutes all over Germany with a focus on migration-related questions.[2] Also in 2017, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research announced to fund a decentralized Institute for Social Cohesion that, established in 2020, comprises several migration-related projects. Moreover, and explicitly in response to 2015's summer of migration, the Centre for Global Migration Studies (CeMig) was

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founded in 2018 in Göttingen.[3] This institutional and infrastructural expansion of migration research went hand in hand with a strong increase in third-party funded and policy-oriented short-term research projects. It was also accompanied by a shift in focus towards questions related to forced migration, reflected in the foundation of the German Network for Forced Migration Studies (*Netzwerk Fluchtforschung*) in 2018 and the German Journal of Forced Migration and Refugee Studies (*Z'Flucht*) that published its first issue in 2017, both of which contributed significantly to establishing this subfield in the German Migration Studies landscape.

Besides policy-relevance and forced migration, another research focus became important during this historic moment for Migration Studies in Germany: *reflexivity*. In a situation in which many social scientists had quite suddenly become (forced) migration scholars in order to receive a share of research funding, a growing group of migration scholars felt the need to scrutinize the underlying foundations of existing migration knowledge (production). They, including ourselves, also believed that it was necessary to analyse how the dominant migration crisis narrative as well as calls for policy-relevance and short-term funding schemes influenced and shaped the scholarly production of knowledge on migration. Drawing on our own observations and experiences in the German Migration Studies landscape, which are, of course, very much shaped by our specific positions in the field, we argue that an openness to and demand for reflexivity among migration scholars emerged as a counter-movement and response to the strong post-2015 boost of applied and policy-oriented migration research. Our own research group 'The Scientific Production of Knowledge on Migration' at IMIS can be seen as an expression of this counter-movement, exemplifying at the same time—and not without irony—the numerous successful post-2015 migration-related third-party funding applications. Participating as members of this research group in the contested processes of knowledge production on migration, we have thus also benefitted from both the reflexive turn and its gradual institutionalization in Germany.

In our individual and collective work, we have highlighted the pitfalls of 'traditional' Migration Studies and have sought to contribute to critical and reflexive migration scholarship. For example, in a forthcoming article, we propose *double reflexivity* as an approach to critically and self-reflexively investigate the knowledge practices of other migration researchers (Bartels, Schäfer, and Stielike forthcoming). Drawing on feminist Science and Technology Studies and Critical Migration and Border Regime Research, we explore what it means to think with care as migration researchers who empirically investigate the knowledge practices of other migration researchers who might work for powerful institutions but who, at the same time, are our colleagues. In another project called the Inventory of Migration Terms (*Inventar der Migrationsbegriffe*), we have focused on the constitutive role of language in the production of migration as an object of knowledge, arguing for a more careful, reflexive, and historically informed use of migration-related terminology (Bartels et al. 2023). In addition, one of us has participated in the 'New Keywords Collective' (2016), a group of critical migration scholars that has sought to contest and denaturalize dominant migration terminologies and concepts, highlighting the crisis of knowledge categories and seeking 'to intervene in the politics of knowledge and theory governing the well-worn lexicon of politics, from the critical standpoint of migration' (New Keywords Collective 2022: 784). In addition, all of us have benefited from engaging in different migration research networks, first and foremost the aforementioned Network for Critical Migration and Border Regime Research.[4]

In the following part, we turn to the emergent field of Reflexive Migration Studies to consider some of its core claims. In doing so, we move beyond the previously discussed context in Germany, given that—of course—the turn to reflexivity can be observed in different Migration Studies landscapes in Europe and beyond, indicating that the post-2015 boost and the emergence and increasing institutionalization of Reflexive Migration Studies occurred in other scientific contexts as well.

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2. Claims of Reflexive Migration Studies

In order to get a sense of the emergent field of Reflexive Migration Studies, we highlight some of its core claims regarding, first, the situatedness of knowledge and the positionality of researchers; second, the crisis of categories and terminologies; third, the relationship between scholarship and policymaking; and fourth, the decentring and decolonizing of Migration Studies.

First, claims advanced in Reflexive Migration Studies revolve around suggestions that reflexive approaches acknowledge the situatedness, contingency, and boundedness of knowledge and the need to scrutinize the researcher's positionality in processes of knowledge production, including how experiences, identifications, privileges, or forms of racial-, class-, or gender-based discrimination have been central factors in shaping one's world-view, biases, assumptions, and, consequently, also one's research queries, methods, and analyses (see Sereke 2023). For example, Manuel Dieterich and Boris Nieswand (forthcoming, emphasis in the original) note that reflexivity in Migration Studies (and beyond) entails '*a shift towards the immanence of academic knowledge production*', meaning that knowledge production 'cannot or should not be separated from the social processes and power relations within which it is produced'. For them, there is no 'outside' or vacuum in which knowledge on migration is created; researchers are implicated in 'the realms of society, politics, morality and history' (ibid.). Acknowledging such 'social situatedness of knowledge production' would be central 'for the epistemic validations of knowledge' and in exposing and possibly challenging dominant and hegemonic knowledges (ibid.). Moreover, Janine Dahinden, Carolin Fischer, and Joanna Menet (2021: 536) emphasize the importance of acknowledging the situatedness of researchers in 'cultural scientific traditions' and consider reflexivity a 'methodological procedure' in the tradition of Pierre Bourdieu, where scholars apply their 'analytical tools to the reflexive analysis of one's own work'. Researchers 'should therefore convert reflexivity into a constitutive disposition of their scientific habitus in order to objectify their relation to the research object' (ibid.).

Second, another key concern of Reflexive Migration Studies is the critical interrogation of migration categories and terminologies (see Reinecke and Löhr 2024; Yükseker and Çeler 2024). For Boris Nieswand and Heike Drotbohm (2014: 1), reflexive migration scholarship emerged as a response to an 'intellectual crisis' in Migration Studies, namely a 'crisis of categories', which prompted an examination of central categories and terminologies, including 'migration, culture and society'. For them (ibid.: 5, emphasis in the original) migration research has reified 'national identity narratives of self and other through a *paradigm of cultural otherness* of migrants'. 'Methodologically nationalist' analytical categories, considered to rest on 'the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 302), have reinforced perceptions of migration as an 'ethnic fringe phenomenon' (*Randphänomen*, Römhild 2014) and of '"migrants" […] as racialised, poor and subordinated people whose movements or presence are problematic and thus warrant state control' (Wyss and Dahinden 2022: 3). Migration Studies has thus been implicated in portrayals of migration 'as a problem to be managed or a danger to be fought' (Cranston and Duplan 2022). Reflexive migration scholarship suggests that there are 'alternative ways of doing research without reproducing essentialist views and reinforcing dominant power relations' (Dahinden, Camenisch, and Stünzi 2022). Instead of reproducing categories based on the 'national order of things' (Malkki 1992), reflexive approaches have sought to scrutinize and challenge naturalized and essentialized migration categories. A reflexive gaze, according to Anna Amelina (2020: 2), allows to consider 'how the social practice of moving from one locality to another becomes socially transformed into "migration", and how mobile (and some immobile) individuals become turned into "migrants"'. Drawing attention to the 'performative naming strategies' through which individuals become 'migrants', Amelina (2022: 7, emphasis in the original) highlights 'that the construct of "migration" is

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socially created according to categorical distinctions and classifications that differentiate between "migrants" and "non-migrants"'. In order to contest dominant categories, Anna Amelina and Thomas Faist (2012) propose strategies to 'denaturalize' migration while Dahinden (2016: 2208) calls 'to "de-migranticize" migration and integration research'.

Third, within the field of Reflexive Migration Studies, scholars have reflected on the role and function of researchers and their relationship with, or situatedness within, the 'migration dispositif' (Nieswand and Drotbohm 2014: 5). Dahinden (2016: 2210) suggests that the 'uneasy alliance' between migration research and 'the state migration apparatus' is built on funding relationships and the commissioning of research by 'state administrative units'. Moreover, Maurice Stierl (2022: 1085) has shown how this uneasy alliance intensified following the 2015 'crisis', with policymakers seeking out 'relevant' and 'actionable' knowledge on migration for 'evidence-based' policymaking and with researchers often catering to these needs, even if this meant replicating problematic and even harmful policy categories, definitions, and assumptions. By challenging state-centric categories on migration and reflecting on the potentially harmful consequences of research-politics relationships, Reflexive Migration Studies implies that researchers become aware of the 'coproduction of knowledge on migration' (Stielike 2022: 196; Zadhy-Çepoğlu 2023). Research results are not one-directionally translated into policy. Rather, as Laura Stielike (ibid.) argues, 'political and moral assumptions about what migration is, which problems it poses, and how it should be dealt with are already at the core of every research question, data visualization, or study design'.

Fourth and finally, reflexive scholars have vowed to decolonize and 'to de-center and reposition European migration research within global contexts', as noted by the IMISCOE Standing Committee 'Reflexivities in Migration Studies'.[5] Postcolonial scholars have made the case that Eurocentric perspectives continue to dominate the field of Migration Studies, with researchers predominantly from the 'Global North' studying 'migration from the "developing" or "Third" World to the "First World"' (Mayblin and Turner 2021: 31), thereby frequently reproducing power imbalances and problematic assumptions about migration (Nimer 2024; Torres 2024). Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Lucy Mayblin and Joe Turner (2021: 115) speak of 'a sanctioned ignorance' in Migration Studies, which would silence the colonial and racist histories and continuities in the governance of contemporary migration (see Schinkel and van Reekum 2024). Janine Dahinden, Aldina Camenisch and Robin Stünzi (2022) have highlighted three perspectives of addressing Eurocentric, supposedly universalistic, frames of understanding migration: first, by contesting methodological nationalism and an 'ethnic lens' in Migration Studies; second, by drawing from Critical Race Theory and postcolonial approaches in order to counteract 'many scholars' amnesia regarding colonial legacies and racisms of current migration regimes'; and third, by utilizing feminist and queer theories and Gender Studies 'to focus attention on the reproduction of patriarchal forms of knowledge production within migration studies'.

3. Employing a Moral Economies perspective to study an emerging field of knowledge

In the following, we seek to analyse how, based on these claims, a new field of research emerges within Migration Studies. In doing so, we are particularly interested in the moral and economic rationalities that shape the development of Reflexive Migration Studies. In order to grasp the entanglements of, and tensions between moral and economic discourses, practices, and motivations, we mobilize the conceptual tools offered by different moral economies approaches. Analysing protests against rising food prices in 18th century Britain, Edward Palmer Thompson (1971) first coined the term to make sense of the competing values that guided these struggles. Thompson argued that the protests were not

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mere 'rebellions of the belly' (ibid.: 77) but were caused by a clash between traditional notions of justice linked with and based upon pre-capitalist paternalistic social organization and a new capitalist market logic. Thus, for Thompson, *moral* referred to the norms and obligations, rights, and customs that play a role in the production and circulation of goods and services. While he focused on how such moral economies inform protests of the poor, class conflicts, and struggles about justice, we use this conceptual frame to investigate how norms, values, and routines in the academic sphere inform the production, circulation, and contestation of knowledge on migration.

Applying Thompson's notion to the field of humanitarianism and migration governance, Didier Fassin (2009: 17) equally emphasizes the *moral* in moral economy when referring to 'the production, distribution, circulation, and use of moral sentiments, emotions and values, and norms and obligations in social space'. With this economy of morals approach, Fassin (2012) expands the notion beyond issues of material subsistence to include how moral sentiments and motivations are mobilized in the governance of different forms of suffering, including the suffering of those who have fled hunger, wars, and other disasters. In a similar way, we also seek to explore the moral convictions, motivations, and strategies of actors involved in the production, circulation, and contestation of knowledge on migration. However, while Fassin made the moral economies perspective more encompassing to the study of humanitarian government of migration, he underestimated the material dimension of the concept brought forward by Thompson. To analyse both moralizations and economizations and their impact on migration knowledge, we therefore draw attention to more recent anthropological studies. Seeking to bring 'capital and class into the equation', Jaime Palomera and Theodora Vetta (2016: 414) suggest a moral economies perspective that focuses on 'the inner workings of capitalism and the qualities of social reproduction at particular historical times and spaces' (ibid.: 428).

Following this line of thought, we are also interested in the interplay between moral values and economic logics that shape social practices of knowledge production on migration. In the next part, we employ a moral economies perspective to examine the ways in which value systems and economic structures affect the production of reflexive migration knowledge. This perspective directs attention to the ambivalent and often-contradictory relations between value-driven claims and economic rationalities in the field of knowledge production. Highlighting the entanglements of moral motivations and economic strategies, the moral economies approach further allows the investigation of how an emergent field of academic knowledge production is constituted. This approach permits the analysis of how processes of moralization and economization shape the production of research infrastructures, scholarly identities, and research outputs in Reflexive Migration Studies.

3.1 Infrastructures of Reflexive Migration Studies

For the past years, we can observe clear signs of an institutionalization of Reflexive Migration Studies. This process has not been driven by any single actor but is, rather, the result of parallel and intersecting dynamics and practices. We argue that the ongoing institutionalization is both reflected in and accelerated by the development of information infrastructures, that is, organizations and technologies which enable knowledge work—and which usually operate in the background or are taken-for-granted (Bowker et al. 2010: 97ff.). Taking into account information infrastructures allows us to identify and analyse the diverse static and dynamic elements involved in the making, practising, and delineating of the field of Reflexive Migration Studies.

The IMISCOE network, the worldwide largest network of migration scholars with currently sixty-three member institutes located predominantly in (north-western) Europe, has greatly contributed to both the institutionalization and internationalization of Migration Studies (Levy 2020: 6; Pisarevskaya et al. 2020: 458).[6] We argue that it has also played a key role in building infrastructures for Reflexive Migration Studies. In 2020, as part of a

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restructuring process within IMISCOE, the Standing Committee 'Reflexivities in Migration Studies' was established, promoting a 'reflexive (and self-reflexive) perspective within migration studies'.[7] It is managed by two directors, a coordinator, and a governing board consisting of nine junior and senior scholars. Since its establishment, the number of reflexivity-related panels during IMISCOE's annual conferences has significantly increased. Except for the workshop 'After Reflexive Turn' in 2014 and the panel 'Towards reflexive knowledge production in migration studies' in 2019, chaired by the Standing Committee's future directors, there have been no sessions with the term *reflexivity* in the panel title until the IMISCOE annual conference in 2020, which hosted four sessions entitled 'Reflexive Migration Studies'. The year after, even twelve sessions had reflexivity in their titles. In 2022, reflexivity was a key topic in seven conference sessions, and in 2023, nine sessions dealt with questions of reflexivity. This accelerating institutionalization of Reflexive Migration Research within IMISCOE is further underlined by the annual conference in 2024, entitled: 'Migration as a Social Construction. A Reflexive Turn'.[8]

Besides panels at IMISCOE annual conferences, the Standing Committee 'Reflexivities in Migration Studies' has co-organized various conferences, thereby creating important infrastructure for reflexivity-related knowledge circulation. Conferences include 'The Moral Economies of Knowledge Production on Migration' (online/University of Osnabrück 2020), with our research group as its main organizer, as well as 'Towards Reflexivity in Migration Studies. Knowledge Production in Times of Contested Politics and Post-Colonial Dynamics' (online/Technical University Berlin 2021), or 'Migration Studies and Social Theory: Problematizing Ontologies; De-centering Migration' (University of Tübingen 2023), in both of which we participated. Furthermore, the Standing Committee organizes ongoing PhD sessions for early career researchers who are 'sensitive to the power relations in the production of knowledge on migration and aim to de-nationalize and de-migranticize the study of mobility and diversity'.[9] This organizational infrastructure aims to enable the production of upcoming generations of reflexive migration scholars and the creation of new career opportunities. Finally, the Standing Committee also actively produced digital infrastructure, using the IMISCOE website and a blog series jointly organized with the Swiss National Center of Competence in Research on Migration and Mobility Studies (*nccr—on the move*).[10]

As members of this Standing Committee, and working in the research group on knowledge production on migration at IMIS, we are situated within this emerging field. Together with *nccr—on the move*, IMIS is one of the key institutional actors in the formation of the field of Reflexive Migration Studies. At IMIS, we can witness processes of institutionalizing this field with important economic and material effects on the landscape of reflexive knowledge production on migration. For example, in 2019, IMIS founded our research group with the aim to analyse forms of knowledge production on migration. In 2023, Osnabrück University created Germany's first (junior) professorship in Reflexive Migration Studies. From 2024 on, and possibly up to 2036, a Collaborative Research Centre (*Sonderforschungsbereich*) will investigate 'The Production of Migration', aiming 'to jointly develop a reflexive theory of the social production of migration'.[11] Able to hire twenty-one PhD or postdoctoral researchers, and allowing one of the authors of this article to extend his contract by several years, the research centre will become a key institutional setting, structurally anchoring reflexive research in the (German or German-speaking) landscape of migration research. This example, together with the aforementioned developments, clearly point to an accelerating process of institutionalizing Reflexive Migration Studies over the past years. This process has seen the (sub-)field's informational and organizational infrastructures strengthen over time, generating new spaces and long (er)-term working conditions so pivotal for academic knowledge work.

Considered together, the emerging infrastructures of Reflexive Migration Studies are established with the same tools as other academic infrastructures. They develop within

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an academic system that, overall, tends to promote and fund Eurocentric and governance-oriented migration research (Kosnick 2021). Set out to change epistemic (infra-)structures, reflexive migration research might have a hard time to escape these mechanisms and to develop alternative modes of knowledge production in line with its moral convictions. While it is its explicit normative aim to decentre knowledge production on migration and to work against social inequalities in academia, the (global) economies of academic labour—such as biased recruiting practices, short-term contracts, and precarious working conditions—and restrictive visa policies for scholars from the Global South might make it difficult for marginalized scholars in Europe and elsewhere to access and actively participate in the infrastructures of Reflexive Migration Studies. In this respect, it will be important to observe who will be included in these networks, events, and institutional settings, and have the opportunity to prove their academic 'excellence' by becoming heard and read as relevant reflexive migration scholars.

3.2 Reflexive migration researchers

Becoming a reflexive migration researcher can feel like finding an academic home. As Migration Studies is an interdisciplinary research field, a common ground with other migration researchers is not always self-evident. Disciplinary boundaries, dividing lines between qualitative and quantitative approaches, and historically grown national or regional specificities in examining migration-related phenomena make conversations and exchanges between migration researchers not always a straightforward endeavour. In this context, scholars, including ourselves, seek to carve out a space within the field that resonates with their own research questions, methods, and theoretical assumptions—so that a common ground does not need to be constantly negotiated. The more Reflexive Migration Studies becomes established as a subfield of Migration Studies, the more likely it is that researchers refer to themselves as 'reflexive migration researchers', thereby creating a new scholarly identity and a new community of like-minded migration researchers. We use the term 'reflexive migration researcher' as a discursive figure in the sense that, for us, it is a mode of subject formation, a way in which subjects are produced in discourses, as well as a mode of subjectivation, a way in which human beings position themselves as subjects of a certain discourse, project, or group (Stielike 2021: 234). This section explores what connects reflexive migration researchers beyond their research questions, methods, and theoretical assumptions and discusses the moral and economic motivations to becoming a reflexive scholar.

The term reflexivity itself can be identified as a first connecting element among reflexive migration researchers with various disciplinary backgrounds. Social Anthropology and Sociology are the key disciplines involved in reflexive migration research. In Social Anthropology, reflexivity became a main feature of the discipline in the mid-1980s, for example with Jay Ruby's anthology *A Crack in the Mirror: Reflexive Perspectives in Anthropology* (1982) and James Clifford and George E. Marcus' *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986). In Sociology, Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant's influential *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* was published in 1992, though Alvin Gouldner (1970) had called for a 'reflexive sociology' more than twenty years earlier. While reflexivity's anchoring both in Social Anthropology and Sociology does not suggest a shared meaning of the term across these disciplines (Langenohl 2009), it serves as a common ground for discussions on reflexivity in migration research. Critique of the ways in which migration research is commonly institutionalized and practised can be discerned as another important element that connects reflexive migration researchers. To exchange critique concerning power relations and hierarchies in academia, to share reflections on our own positionalities in research and teaching, and to rethink the ways in which we produce migration-related knowledge can create feelings of openness, trust, and mutual recognition. The claim of Reflexive Migration Studies to be (more) inclusive, power-sensitive, and

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diverse might thus help establish a space in which scholars who are marginalized in the academic system feel safer and more welcome to engage.

Reflexive Migration Studies is composed of a number of senior scholars and a significantly larger group of junior scholars, both of whom have moral and economic motivations to become reflexive migration researchers. Despite (individual) differences, we believe that some common moral and economic motifs and motivations can be discerned. Based on our own experiences, reflexive migration researchers strive to become more aware of their implicit research assumptions and modes of knowledge production. They try to reflect intensely on the dynamics and power relations between themselves and their research subjects. Moreover, they seek to scrutinize and question the structures and mechanisms of the scientific field in which they partake.

Besides these moral motivations, becoming a reflexive migration researcher can certainly also be motivated by career interests, or, more broadly defined, by economic factors. In the expanding field of Migration Studies in Germany but also elsewhere in Europe, each institute and every individual scholar has to legitimize their work and prove eligibility for funding. New labels help carve out distinctions, suggest originality, and signal expertise. Being associated with the latest 'turn' or 'paradigm' can be considered one of the key currencies in the academic world. Coining a new conceptual approach promises not only academic prestige but also opens up new opportunities for cooperation and third-party funding. 'Reflexive migration researcher' can thus be an attractive professional identity, especially for 'junior scholars'—a form of self-branding that may prove helpful for job applications or when presenting oneself at workshops and conferences as a promising scholar. In this way, 'reflexive' becomes part of a self-marketing strategy in an extremely competitive academic job market that demands both originality and recognizability.[12]

We believe that this production of a reflexive scholarly identity entails methodological and ethical risks. Reflexivity implies observing how migration-related phenomena are observed, how these observations are transformed into knowledge, and how this knowledge is enacted in an academic field. This perspective, which may entail presenting oneself as more reflexive than conventional approaches and possibly even as morally superior to them, may reproduce a bird's-eye view, at risk of implicitly reintroducing the subject position of a neutral observer who observes the observers from distance, thereby undermining feminist calls for situated knowledge production (cf. Haraway 1988). We wonder whether, maybe counter-intuitively, becoming a reflexive migration scholar produces distances to scholars who position themselves explicitly as *critical, feminist, postcolonial, or anti-racist*. These research perspectives are always at risk of being viewed as 'non-scientific' or 'biased' whereas the self-labelling as a reflexive migration scholar—an identity that can fit these perspectives under its umbrella and could thereby allow to free oneself of their unruly reputation—may make it easier to *not* take a political stance.

In this way, a reflexive perspective might also bear the risk of becoming detached from migration-related activism, for example, border struggles, protests against institutional racism, or resistance against repressive integration policies. Relatedly, focusing on categories and processes of knowledge production might serve as a strategy to prevent reflexive migration researchers from being emotionally touched by the difficult and often violent conditions under which so many people move and migrate. We do not argue that reflexive migration researchers' common ground is distance and disengagement. However, we see a risk that a (self-)reflexive mode of knowledge production on migration might reintroduce the role of a seemingly uninvolved observer and thereby create distances: distances between reflexive migration researchers and, inter alia, their colleagues who produce 'conventional' knowledge on migration or migration scholars who take an explicit political stance, as well as distances to migration-related activism, and the hardships many people, constructed as migrants, face.

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3.3 Reflexive migration knowledge

Whereas the previous sections of our article have analysed the conditions of the emergence of Reflexive Migration Studies, its information infrastructures, and the creation of reflexive migration researchers themselves, we now turn to its 'products': the knowledge that reflexive migration scholars produce and make public in various publications, conference papers, or talks. We argue that we witness first signs of a canonization of reflexive migration knowledge that comes with tensions between the moral aspirations to do knowledge production on migration differently and the participation in the conventional economies of academic knowledge production and diffusion. Since Nieswand and Drotbohm announced a reflexive turn in Migration Studies in an edited volume in 2014, we have seen a considerable increase in 'reflexivity products', often publications in highly ranked international Migration Studies journals that challenge 'traditional' Migration Studies by criticizing its sedentarist, integrationist, and methodologically nationalist point of view. Often referring to the work of Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002), these publications have advanced widely echoed claims to de-migranticize Migration Studies (Dahinden 2016) or to envisage Migration Studies' remaining potential 'after the reflexive turn' (Amelina 2020: 1). In our view, three issues become apparent when assessing these reflexive knowledge products.

First, thus far, reflexive knowledge production and dissemination on migration follow the same structural rules and logics that also apply to research output in other academic fields. As elsewhere in the Social Sciences, knowledge production intended to contribute to debates in Reflexive Migration Studies must adhere to a certain form and fulfil quality criteria in order to attain academic validity. As the economy of academic publishing is rather exclusive, academics not trained in English-speaking universities as well as scholars at less well-funded research institutions without access to costly international academic journals and without resources to pay for copy-editing and open access publishing are clearly disadvantaged. The emerging community of Reflexive Migration Studies will have to engage and creatively deal with the tension between the moral aim to open, decentre, and decolonize Migration Studies through new knowledge formats and practices and the current logic of the academic system to publish in exclusive high-ranked academic journals in order to gain attention and rewards in terms of career advancements, citations, external funding, and other forms of academic recognition. So far, it seems that reflexive migration scholars cannot escape or circumvent the structures and conventions of the academic system if they seek to remain part of it.

Second, reflexive knowledge production comes with risks and possible limits. We ourselves have been cautioned against being too (self-)critical when turning a reflexive eye to the broad field of migration research itself, so as to not jeopardize our academic careers—a caution that may well be justified and empirically grounded (Hatton 2018). And this caution has also instructed our writing of this article, at least in part: We wondered how to be both *critical* and *careful* in writing about knowledge production (and producers!) in the field of Reflexive Migration Studies. For example, how explicitly could we write about the knowledge practices of our colleagues, but also about our own? For us, these autoethnographically informed observations show that doing research on the knowledge practices of other migration researchers can be a risky endeavour that might 'harm relations between colleagues, between supervisors and those supervised and between researchers and those being researched' (Bartels, Schäfer, and Stielike forthcoming).

Finally, in our own research practices, we observe tendencies of restricting or self-censoring the reflexive gaze. While the research group in which we work was explicitly set up to shed light on the conditions and practices of *scientific* knowledge production on migration, it was probably not by chance that we all focus on knowledge actors in adjacent fields and sites of knowledge production: state and non-governmental organizations that research various migration-related topics—from computational social scientists to police research facilities, from national statistical offices to alternative knowledge producers of

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migration data. Focussing on often powerful knowledge producers outside academia seems to be highly relevant for critical and reflexive migration scholarship. It may also be seen as a counter-movement to reflexive navel-gazing. However, it could also be considered an attempt to circumvent the study of knowledge practices *within our field*, as a way of avoiding the (career) risks that such analysis of the (knowledge) practices of one's colleagues might entail. Understood in this way, it seems easier to focus 'epistemic others' as subjects of a critical-reflexive analysis than to scrutinize one's own field of knowledge production. From a self-critical perspective, we see the risk that—despite its (self-)reflexive ethos—Reflexive Migration Studies has a tendency to shy away from truly challenging the structures and conventions of academic knowledge production.

While it seems that the reflexive agenda has been set, the reference points clearly defined, and the core claims outlined, the question of what reflexivity means in and for migration research is still contested and up for debate. This certainly accounts for the dynamics of an up-and-coming field of research and opens up opportunities to distinguish oneself as a reflexive migration scholar. In a way, reflexive migration scholars are boundary workers, whose task it is to explore the boundaries of the field. Taking the core idea of turning Migration Studies upside down seriously, they are challenged to develop new concepts of knowledge dissemination beyond traditional publication formats. In collaborative ways or through unconventional methods, they will need to explore novel possibilities of 'doing reflexivity'. By looking at the actual knowledge migration scholars produce, one of the main challenges Reflexive Migration Studies faces in the future will be to expand the reflexive turn both geographically and thematically (Acosta and Freier 2023), and to further 'deparochialise the canon' (Alatas 2021) by, for example, including scholars who do not write from the academic 'centres' and who do not (yet) operate within the infrastructures we have analysed.

Conclusion

In this article, we have developed a reading of the emergence and growth of Reflexive Migration Studies as a subfield of Migration Studies. We explored the production of knowledge infrastructures, scholarly identities, and research outputs that are key in creating this new academic field. Using a moral economies perspective, we discussed tensions that came to the fore between some of the morally charged claims and the material conditions of *doing Reflexive Migration Studies*. A field that defines itself through a (self-) reflexive posture needs to closely scrutinize its own moral and economic conditions, claims, and practices. As participants in this field, we have faced the critical issues and questions that we have raised in this article in our own academic labour practices. In many long discussions between the four of us, we have reflected on what it means to do reflexive research, become a reflexive researcher, and contribute to an emerging field of reflexive scholarship. The article is the 'product' of these reflections and we conclude by pointing to some of the key questions and issues that continue to accompany our ongoing discussions and that require further scrutiny.

When Donna Haraway (1988: 583) called 'for situated and embodied knowledges', the intention was precisely to position oneself 'against various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims' and to allow oneself 'to be called into account'. Is Reflexive Migration Studies locatable and can it be called into account? Does the reflexive posture risk distance, detachment, and disengagement? Given the difficulty to escape exclusionary academic (infra-)structures, we are concerned that Reflexive Migration Studies is running the risk of reproducing them by shying away from the challenge to counter the dominant structures, conventions, and global hierarchies of academic knowledge production. We wonder, in reference to Adorno's famous phrase in *Minima Moralia* (1951): Is right migration research in the wrong academic system possible? There is good reason to be sceptical

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as to whether the subject of reflexive migration research is and should be 'migration' at all. Would the 'dismantlement' of Migration Studies (Schinkel 2023) open up possibilities for more profound analyses of unequal power relations in a globalized economy of knowledge production? Or would it be the wrong move to deconstruct and destabilize Migration Studies as a scientific field in a world in which the issue of migration has become one of the most 'toxic' political issues, and is used and abused for violent hegemonic, divisionary, and racist projects?

Notes

1. See: http://kritnet.org/ (accessed 20 April 2023).
2. The DeZIM Research Community, https://www.dezim-institut.de/en/dezim-research-community/about-the-dezim-research-community/(accessed 31 March 2023)
3. See: https://www.uni-goettingen.de/de/%c3%9cber+uns/550568.html (accessed 12 February 2024)
4. We are particularly grateful to three members of the network—Fabian Georgi, Sabine Hess and Bernd Kasparek—who have kindly given their time to discuss the ideas that we advance in this article.
5. IMISCOE Standing Committee: https://www.imiscoe.org/research/standing-committees/reflexivities-in-migration-studies (accessed 21 April 2023)
6. Only four out of 63 member institutes are situated outside of Europe. IMISCOE: About IMISCOE. https://www.imiscoe.org/about-imiscoe/mission (21 April 2023); IMISCOE: Members. https://www.imiscoe.org/about-imiscoe/members (accessed 03 May 2023)
7. Standing Committee Reflexivities in Migration Studies, https://www.imiscoe.org/research/standing-committees/927-reflexive-migration-studies (accessed 21 April 2023)
8. All IMISCOE conference programmes (except for 2022) can be found on www.imiscoe.org (accessed 16 January 2024). These figures were collected through a keyword search in the corresponding annual conference programmes. They suggest an increase in discussion formats explicitly linked to debates on the reflexive turn in migration research. This keyword search did not include events that discussed reflexive approaches without explicitly stating this.
9. Standing Committee Reflexivities in Migration Studies, https://www.imiscoe.org/research/standing-committees/927-reflexive-migration-studies (accessed 21 April 2023)
10. Standing Committee Reflexivities in Migration Studies, https://www.imiscoe.org/news-and-blog/sc-blogs/reflex-studies (accessed 14 December 2023).
11. IMIS, https://www.imis.uni-osnabrueck.de/en/sfb_1604/profile.html (accessed 15 January 2024).
12. Of course, while the label 'reflexive migration scholar' might help in some contexts, it might also have a limiting effect in other settings, both in the field of Migration Studies as well as outside the academic sphere, as it can be perceived as too specific, too demanding, not relevant, or hardly useful in practical contexts.

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