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Published online: 14 Feb 2024.

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Everyday immigration ethics: Colombia, Venezuela and the case for vernacular response

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ABSTRACT
In the last decade, Venezuelans have faced a range of challenges such that by 2023, nearly 7.2 million have fled, the vast majority hosted within the region. One country particularly stands out: Colombia has accepted over 2.5 million. Colombia's behaviour does not appear motivated by legal obligations or universal ethical principles; it is hard to make sense of in terms of international ethical and political theory. Rather, Colombian state and society make reference to mundane, localised concepts of friendship, fraternity and the reciprocity of a shared history. Such everyday ethics is generally ignored in existing debates. I argue that immigration ethics could helpfully begin from concrete, everyday ethical behaviour rather than idealisation and abstraction. Instead of initially asking what states and societies should do regarding immigration, we could ask what do they already do, why and how? This article therefore explores how Colombian politicians and civil society actors understood their welcoming actions through an awareness of entangled histories, reciprocity, friendship and solidarity: everyday, vernacular ways in which responsibility-taking is rationalised and practiced. My argument is not that Colombia's actions are normatively right, or an enactment of immigration justice. Rather, these actions were ambivalent: the messy, pragmatic result of negotiating different, competing responsibilities, principles and emotions. The results were imperfect, heavily gendered, but also unprecedented. Those advocating greater societal responsibility for immigrants would perhaps do best to look beyond the global north, shun the universal and start from local activities founded in vernacular, everyday ethics.

'Migration crises' originating in Syria from 2015 and Ukraine from 2022 have grabbed world headlines. Meanwhile, another mass exodus has been occurring: the largest of its kind in the modern history of Latin America and the Caribbean. Since around 2014, Venezuelans have faced a range of challenges to their everyday lives. By 2023, the UNHCR estimated that nearly 7.2 million

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have fled, with the vast majority hosted within the region. Colombia, however, particularly stands out, accepting over 2.5 million (UNHCR, 2023). European colonial territories such as Aruba and Curacao have concentrated on detaining and deporting Venezuelans (Camilleri & Hampson, 2018, p. 13), while Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Trinidad and Tobago have gradually closed their borders or made entry increasingly conditional. In contrast, Colombia has maintained a broad openness to Venezuelans (Selee & Bolter, 2020, pp. 10–11; Testa, 2019, p. 12). Despite historically being a country of *emigration*, with little history of welcoming foreigners and a total immigrant population of only around 110,000 in 2010, Colombia has undertaken the most ambitious regularisation drive 'in recent global history', offering a path to citizenship for over 2 million Venezuelans (Bitar, 2022, p. 38).

What has made Colombia's hospitality more surprising is that mobile Venezuelans are not easily classified as refugees. While a fifth of the population has fled, they rarely feared persecution (International Crisis Group, 2022), and unlike Ukrainians from 2022, Syrians from 2011, or those leaving Yugoslavia in in the 1990s, Venezuela was neither invaded nor succumbed to civil war. Rather, Venezuela was hit by a range of economic and political crises, including deep recession, oil price fluctuations, US sanctions, corruption, and economic mismanagement (Dachevsky & Kornblihtt, 2017; Testa, 2019, pp. 9–10). Estimates suggest its GDP fell by 74% between 2014 and 2022, with 95% of Venezuelans remaining in the country living in poverty, 77% in extreme poverty (ICG, 2022, p. 4). But Colombia's behaviour does not seem to have been motivated by legal obligations or universal ethical principles; it is therefore hard to make sense of in terms of international ethical and political theory. While the field of immigration ethics has been discussing abstractions drawn from liberal egalitarianism, Colombians have been getting on with the grounded work of (sometimes grudgingly) welcoming Venezuelans. Crucially, Colombian state and society has done this in creative, *ad hoc* terms, without reference to universal ideals. Instead, localised concepts of friendship, fraternity and the reciprocity of a shared history have been prominent. Beyond the recent rise in more 'grounded' forms of normative theory (Ackerly et al., 2021), such 'everyday ethics' is generally ignored by the methods and reasoning of debates in liberal theory.

I argue that explorations of immigration ethics could helpfully follow the lead proposed by feminists and begin from existing, everyday ethical behaviour rather than idealisation and abstraction. Instead of initially asking what states and societies *should* do in relation to people seeking to cross their borders, we could ask *what do they already do, why and how*? As an example, drawing on reports from a wide variety of NGOs, International Organisations and research institutions, the article will explore how Colombian politicians and civil society actors understood their welcoming actions through an awareness of entangled histories, reciprocity, friendship and solidarity. Rather than

abstract rights and freedoms, these are everyday, vernacular ways in which responsibility-taking is rationalised and practiced. My argument is not that Colombia's actions are normatively right, or an enactment of immigration justice. Rather, these actions were ambivalent, the messy, often pragmatic result of negotiating competing responsibilities, principles and emotions. Despite this, Colombia has been widely praised for its display of solidarity and compassion. With anti-immigrant sentiment and policy continuing to rise across much of the world, Colombia is bucking trends (Bitar, 2022, p. 37). As such, the field of immigration ethics has much to learn from Colombia's behaviour over the last 10 years, though not, as international refugee-protection agencies hope, in terms of its replicability (see Edwards, 2022, p. 2).

This article makes three main contributions to existing literature. First, it unpacks the idea of everyday ethics in a specific immigration context. Where other fields include more grounded understandings of moral responsibility, the dominant scholarly debate about immigration ethics remains resolutely committed to the abstract and ideal. Therefore, second, it provides a critique of extant literature, making the case for an everyday approach. Finally, in exploring the Colombia-Venezuela situation, the article provides a reading of an understudied case. In doing so, it demonstrates the need for immigration ethics to look beyond the global north, to focus more on South-South migration, and the local, vernacular understandings of opening borders as an ethical duty.

The article proceeds in four sections. First, I sketch the field of immigration ethics and its dominant debate, demonstrating how it has traditionally bracketed or ignored grounded, everyday conceptions of ethics by searching for ideal, abstract principles that can be applied to guide action. The second section unpacks the idea of 'everyday ethics', focusing on its core aspects of the routine, practical actions, the negotiation of complexity, emotions and its expression in the vernacular. The third section offers a summary of Colombia's much-praised openness, concentrating on official policies and some of their problematic elements amidst state incapacity and rising xeno-phobia. Finally, the article outlines how the ambivalence of Colombia's welcome is best understood though the idea of everyday ethics, as a grounded, contradictory, non-replicable, often grudging acceptance of responsibility based in fraternity and reciprocity. The conclusion outlines why those who argue for societies to take more responsibility for displaced people would perhaps do best to shun universals and start from local activities founded in vernacular ethical understandings.

Immigration ethics, abstraction and the classical debate

The dominant debate within the ethics of immigration literature surrounds broad, familiar questions (Fine, 2013): who should be allowed to cross

international borders for the purpose of relocation, what rights they should have when they are inside, what rights states have to determine exclusion and, ultimately, coercive removal? Though these questions are vigorously contested, primarily by liberal cosmopolitans and liberal nationalists, both sides accept a basis in liberal egalitarian political theory and the primacy of democratic political institutions. However, the methodological restrictions of liberal egalitarian theory have worked to exclude everyday, localised actions that seek to welcome or reject immigrants, and the way these are experienced by 'immigrants' and 'natives'.

This is not a novel observation. Amy Reed-Sandoval (2016, p. 22) has argued that the 'Classical' debate in this area explicitly avoids reference 'to particular borders, or to migrants with particular social identities', whether national, racial, class- or gender-based. Thus, 'on a methodological level, these debates tend to occur in the realm of ideal and/or institutional theory. They tend to be highly abstract, right-and-principle-based arguments as opposed to arguments that draw central conclusions from particularities.' She illustrates this through reference to the formative work of Michael Walzer, David Miller, Joseph Carens, Michael Blake, Kieran Oberman and Philip Cole, amongst others. As Miller argues, it is best to avoid discussing specific immigration policies or individual cases; such stories are morally distressing, but 'our thinking about immigration must be holistic' (Miller, 2016, p. 159).

The aim of the 'classical' literature, then, is not to say what Colombia should do, or how any *particular* society should respond to immigration. Rather, it works by abstracting from the local and particular, proposing general principles for a just immigration system derived from liberal and democratic commitments and values. This can be illustrated with two prominent voices in the classical debate.[1] Carens describes his approach as trying 'to take a step back from the political passions and practical policy concerns that usually animate these debates in order to reflect upon the deeper moral issues that they entail' (2013, p. 2); his focus is therefore on broad 'democratic principles' that limit what states can do regarding immigration. For Miller this means looking at immigration by 'asking how the principles and values we collectively endorse can be pursued consistently with one another in the light of the best available evidence' (2016, p. 18).[2] This collective 'we' is not unpacked, but it is not any *specific* 'we': it includes liberal, democratic 'settled societies' whose members have a sense of being 'deeply rooted in a place' (2016, p. 18). And despite the role of 'evidence', most of this literature is rather 'fact-free' (Bauböck et al., 2022, p. 430).

Crucially, the liberal egalitarianism of classical literature on immigration ethics has emerged from a specific type of ethical theory critiqued at length by feminists (see Jaggar, 2013; Tronto, 1993; Young, 2013). Margaret Walker traces this method of moral theorizing to the 19th Century English utilitarian philosopher, Henry Sidgwick. The approach he laid out in *The Methods of*

Ethics (1874), she argues, has become 'a matter of course' for Anglo-American ethics scholars (2007, p. 36). Indeed, Rawls (1981: v) called this book the 'first truly academic work in moral philosophy', and it is significant that two important voices in classical immigration ethics both develop their work partly in conversation with Sidgwick (Miller, 2016; Walzer, 1983). Reference to John Rawls is even more common for both sides of the debate (Carens, 1987; Gibney, 2004; Miller, 2012, 2016; Walzer, 1983).

Sidgwick is significant because he sought to adopt the *form* of scientific discovery; progress in 'ethical science' required 'an application to it of the same disinterested curiosity to which we chiefly owe the great discoveries of physics' (Sidgwick, 1981, p. viii). The task of students of ethics is therefore to 'attain systematic and precise general knowledge of what ought to be'. The aim is to not only understand human action, 'but also to regulate it' (Sidgwick, 1981, pp. 1–2). In accomplishing this task, as Walker notes, 'concrete historical and cultural circumstances' could be largely set aside (2007, p. 41), deemed the purview of anthropology and sociology. After all, 'mundane experience' could never offer the 'complete solution' Sidgwick sought to the problems of ethical philosophy (Sidgwick, 1981, p. xviii). In contrast, the version of moral theory that emerged from Sidgwick and came to dominate the academic study of ethics, particularly in the US, could be summarised thus,

> A *moral theory* is a consistent (and usually very compact) set of law-like moral principles or procedures for decision that is intended to yield by deduction or instantiation (with the support of adequate collateral information) some determinate judgement for an agent in a given situation about what is right, or at least morally justifiable, to do. (Walker, 2007, p. 43)

There is no doubt a degree of caricature here,[3] partly to emphasise the contrast with Walker's alternative model of moral theory. But we can see this model operating in Reed-Sandoval's depiction of the classical approach above; in Carens' stepping back from passions and practice to focus on democratic principles; and in Miller's attempt to make values and principles consistent regarding immigration.[4] Ultimately, it has generated a wide range of abstractions that aim to guide decisions and judgement regarding immigration – including values of moral equality, freedom or non-domination (Carens, 1987; Honohan & Hovdal-Moan, 2014), non-coercion and personal autonomy (Abizadeh, 2008), 'stakeholdership' (Bauböck, 2009), justice as fairness (Miller, 2008), freedom of association and associative ownership (Pevnick, 2011; Wellman, 2008).

However, for feminists this approach inevitably excludes the personal and particular; the reason, values and experiences of the vast majority of people, particularly women. Its reductive conception takes no account of its own production of authority through privilege and power (Jaggar, 2013), and has been increasingly challenged by grounded methods of normative theory that

stress the need for greater comprehensiveness, recursivity, epistemological inclusion and accountability (see Ackerly et al., 2021 for a useful summary). In the immigration ethics debate, the classical approach effectively erases the views and experiences of communities in the global south, as well as sub-altern, racialised, gendered and under-privileged positions *within* liberal democratic societies of the global north (Cole, 2000; Reed-Sandoval & Cepeda, 2022). As I have argued elsewhere, this methodological choice limits the spatial reach and applicability of its analysis to liberal democratic states and audiences in the global north – primarily Europe and North America (Bulley, 2023a). Places like Colombia, with a long history of political instability, insecure democratic foundations and violence between state and non-state actors, are marginalised except as 'senders' of migrants. Furthermore, the abstract principles this model generates cannot speak to, engage with, or make much contribution to the lived experience of immigration. They effectively speak from and to a provincial Eurocentric vernacular that makes claims to universality (Bulley, 2023b).

Everyday ethics

The notion of 'everyday ethics' has been used in a variety of contexts, with varied meaning. It has been opposed to 'textbook ethics' (Banks, 2016), 'dramatic ethics' (Zizzo et al., 2016), 'procedural' approaches (Rossman & Rallis, 2010), and more traditional 'Kantian' ethics that aim for the 'universaliz-able, abstract, generic and thus eminently impersonal' (Peterson, 2009, pp. 15–16). Most of these oppositions emerge from practical and caring scholarly fields such as healthcare, education and social work. In contrast, when mentioned in international political theory, 'everyday ethics' is rarely fully explained. In this article, I am using the term to designate *the multiple ways in which people negotiate complex, often clashing responsibilities, values, emotions and intuitions that are embedded in the structures and realities of conducting normal, often repetitive, relationships. Understandings of these negotiations, if and when they are the subject of reflection, are generally expressed in vernacular languages that navigate the local and the global, the personal and political, the general and the particular*. Scholarly abstractions are rare in articulations of everyday ethics. This section will proceed by unpacking this definition.

First, everyday ethics is embedded in the repetitive existence and inter-personal interactions of everyday life (Kremer-Sadlik, 2019). In terms of immi-gration, this draws our attention to the way in which people's movement across borders is often perfectly mundane, something people often do for work, trade, to see family, friends or due to seasonal changes. This is also true in the global south, a region ignored by immigration ethics. In 2019 it was estimated that around 30,000 people travelled back and forth daily across the

Venezuela-Colombia border to work, shop and trade (Roth, 2019, p. 10; Testa, 2019, p. 13). Immigration in much of the world is rarely the 'crisis' portrayed in Europe and North America. However, this fact poses a problem for research, such as my own, that often depends upon the work of International Organisations and NGOs for empirical detail.[5] Understandably, their reports focus on 'crises', helping constitute migrations as such – there is much less research interest in prosaic movement, something the IOM and AU have recently collaborated to begin correcting (Adepoju et al., 2020). The Colombia-Venezuela case is useful because it is both spectacular and part of entangled histories of everyday movements.

Second, everyday ethics is about *actions*, it is embedded in mundane, situated practices, of doing and not doing, responsibility-taking and responsibility-avoiding (Walker, 2007). Maria Puig De la Bellacasa (2010) draws this out by analysing Permaculture, a movement that seeks to manage land and settlement through attention to, and care for, the flourishing of natural ecosystems. Its work promotes a variety of locally-based ways of living, democratically organising, and producing food and alternative energies that work with natural ecosystems. In doing so, Permaculturalists operate from grounded understandings of 'concrete relationalities' between the human and nonhuman in ordinary life, rather than an abstract 'normative morality'. The ethical is thereby reconceived as an 'everyday *doing*', with particular, practical obligations emerging from local realities (De la Bellacasa, 2010, p. 152). Focusing on *doings*, an everyday immigration ethics draws attention to how responsibilities are locally generated, taking the form of practical care and carelessness, attentiveness and inattention to the needs to immigrants regardless of their abstract 'rights' or 'freedoms'.

Third, this situated vision of ethics is about responding to the 'everyday complexity of moral life' (Tronto, 2012, p. 314). Our routine existence seems humdrum and tedious, but it is a multifaceted arena of individual and collective relationships that throw up 'singular situations requiring singular responses' (Anderson, 2012, pp. 85–6). It is not that we operate without, or somehow reject ethical norms and rules, some of which we may hold to be universal – such as human dignity, gender equality or self-determination. Rather, each time we confront a specific situation, our responses 'simultaneously reshape, reconstitute, reinvent' those norms (Anderson, 2012, p. 86). Thus, Americans who firmly uphold their state's right to exclude and deport 'illegal' immigrants can respond with compassion and empathy to individual 'undocumented' Mexicans with whom they have everyday contact. Likewise, Europeans supporting peoples' right to cross borders may experience an 'influx' in their locale as a threat to their 'way of life'. Far from a world of absolutes and imperatives, everyday ethics is about the *negotiation* of moral obligations in a messy, tangled, non-ideal world. This need not be a problem; indeed, it is normal. People are rarely consistent or rigorous in their ethical

reasoning. While the clash of deeply held values and feelings may trouble philosophers who seek universals, they 'reflect the structure of everyday ethics' which always admit the possibility of exceptions (Onuf, 1998, pp. - 690–692).

Fourth, the latter point indicates that everyday ethics is not just about principles, but also competing *emotions*. This is part of its 'messiness'. Everyday ethics confronts situations in which we are implicated, in which decisions and doings directly affect ourselves and others, and we often cannot escape seeing and *feeling* the results. Thus, emotions are inextricably wrapped up in the experience, politics and ethics of both migration and immigration (see Boccagni & Baldassar, 2015; Gill, 2018; Sirriyeh, 2018). These include feelings of belonging and non-belonging; security and insecurity; anxiety and assurance; vulnerability and invulnerability; powerlessness and mastery; compassion and hate; fear and empathy; feeling 'at home' and 'out of place'. As we have seen, immigration ethics has tended to sideline emotions and feelings, but they are central to how policies and decisions regarding migration are 'made, justified and operate' (Sirriyeh, 2018, p. 16), including the way responsibilities are negotiated in local, situated contexts.

Finally, everyday ethics are rarely rationalised or understood by participants in abstract, rigorous scholarly language. Rather, they are rendered in the vernacular, by everyday notions that capture conflicted readings of right and wrong, responsibility and abandonment. The 'vernacular turn' has led to important interventions in security studies and human rights, but has had little impact in ethics. 'Vernacular' can be used to refer to socially specific articulations that are historically and contextually situated (Jarvis & Lister, 2012, p. 159). In decolonial theory, the vernacular also refers to 'the exercise of ethical and political agency' by sub-altern, marginalised groups, articulated in collective terms, local languages and paying particular attention to their political imaginaries and histories (Madhok, 2021, pp. 14–15). Normative abstractions such as non-coercion, national self-determination or universal rights play little role – rather, these are reconceived as a specifically Eurocentric, scholarly vernacular. Instead, everyday ethics uses locally specific ideas of home, friendship, solidarity, welcome, belonging, hospitality, honour and duty. Whilst studies of vernacularisation generally focus on the non-elite, Colombia's response to Venezuelan immigration involves a language shared by elite and non-elite, one that emphasises friendship, solidarity and reciprocity to justify an ambivalent welcome.

To be clear, I am not arguing that practices of everyday ethics are necessarily 'good' or caring; they can just as easily be xenophobic, aggressive, careless or inattentive. As a negotiation of multiple responsibilities and emotions, they are rarely one or the other, at least not for long. But what makes this an 'ethics' is that it is a negotiation of *oughts*, a 'practice of mutually allotting, assuming, or deflecting responsibilities of important kinds, and

understanding the implications of doing so' (Walker, 2007, p. 67). We may not like the responsibilities assumed or denied in particular everyday contexts, they may be unpalatable, but they remain *an* ethics. And the aim of ethical theory must be to *understand* those negotiations, opening them to critical reflection and reinvention, often through their confrontation with norms or responsibilities that are being erased.

Reed-Sandoval (2016) points out that 'classical' immigration ethics has already been challenged by a range of feminist, liberal and postcolonial perspectives. These approaches critique key aspects of the classical debate; most importantly, they reason from particular situations of racial and gendered inequality. Notably, however, the studies Reed-Sandoval includes all engage, or are relevant to, classical debate questions of whether there exists a universal 'human right to international migration' and/or whether and how states can 'permissibly exclude' potential immigrants (2016, p. 28). Thus, whilst starting from particular situations, they work towards more-or-less idealised abstractions such as Shelley Wilcox's (2007) 'Global Harm Principle' (arguing that liberal states ought to prioritise admissions from states' whose citizens they have harmed), or Eva Feder Kittay's (2009) 'right to give and receive care'.

The method of such approaches is to reason from the particular to the universal, from the concrete to the abstract. As such, while they may start from the everyday and the concrete, the aim is to reach a high level of abstraction, to speak in terms of general principles and rights that will allow a level of acceptance by the classical literature. They start from a different place but travel to a similar destination. In contrast, an everyday ethics approach tries as far as possible to *stay with* the local and particular, to take it seriously and understand it *as such*, and abstract where necessary for critical reflection without straying too far from the concrete situations that generated that specific negotiation.

Colombia's response to Venezuelan migration

The multifaceted crisis in Venezuela has produced one of the largest population displacements in modern history. Whilst the exodus began slowly, it multiplied in 2016–17 as around 80% of Venezuelans had to reduce their food intake to cope with significant scarcity and 78% of hospitals reported shortages of medicine (Ramsay & Sánchez-Garzoli, 2018, p. 4). Over 6 million Venezuelans are now scattered across Latin America and the Caribbean. Colombia, with nearly half this total, made immediate sense as a destination; the countries share a long, porous border of around 2,200 km. But Colombia was also peculiarly ill-suited as a host. Its historical concern not to allow 'racial degeneration' meant hostility to south-south migration, whilst 50 years of intermittent organised violence and lawlessness made it

somewhere to leave rather than enter (Pineda & Jaramillo, 2018, p. 15). 'Colombia has had no previous experience of offering shelter and respite to so many migrants, and its lack of know-how and capacity is conspicuous' (ICG, 2022, p. i).

Nonetheless, the government argued that receiving, welcoming and integrating Venezuelans was an 'ethical duty', granting them access to healthcare, social services and education to 'guarantee their well-being' (Government of Colombia, 2020, pp. 12–16). Felipe Muñoz, advisor to former President Ivan Duque (2018–2022) and leader of the government's response to Venezuelan migration, described its policy as one of 'generous openness', welcoming Venezuelans with 'open arms' as an 'ethical imperative towards a population fleeing from a catastrophe' (GoC, 2020, p. 37). Duque himself spoke of rejecting xenophobia and demonstrating that Colombia knows how to confront migration crises with a 'sense of solidarity' (in Baddour, 2019b). Whilst it is early days for President Gustavo Petro's new government, signs suggest migrants will still be able to make a home in Colombia (see Edwards, 2022, p. 1; ICG, 2022, p. 2). There are certainly a range of motivations for this policy of openness – including the potential for economic gain (from the skills and labour of Venezuelans), geopolitical considerations (maintaining US funding and favour) and the inevitability of this movement (see below). Everyday ethics is specifically about negotiating an *array* of responsibilities and motivations. Nevertheless, as we shall see, welcoming as an ethical duty has been maintained as a motivation through a range of crises (such as the COVID-19 pandemic). And, as we shall see, it has resonated with Colombian civil society, making moral sense to the population who *do* the welcoming.

Colombia's openness has been borne out through *ad hoc* development of three policies. As the arrival of Venezuelans rose significantly in 2017, two initiatives were developed. The first was the introduction of a Border Mobility Card (a TMF – *Tarjeta de Movilidad Fronterizal*) that allowed entry to Colombia for up to seven days and only needed proof of national identity and residence. This regularised easy 'circular' migration for those who would have crossed the border anyway to trade and pick up food and medicine to take back into Venezuela. It was especially important for women with caring responsibilities. The TMF was valid for two years and by the time it was discontinued due to Covid restrictions in March 2020, 5.2 million had been issued (Banulescu-Bogdan & Chaves-Gonzáles, 2021; Selee et al., 2019, pp. 5–6). The second initiative was the creation of a Special Stay Permit (a PEP – *Permisio Especial de Permanencia*), allowing two years of legal residence for those crossing by regular means with a passport and registered their stay. The PEP was renewable and offered access to emergency healthcare, subsidised health insurance, education and the right to paid work (Banulescu-Bogdan & Chaves-Gonzáles, 2021; Selee et al., 2019, pp. 6–7). Crucially, PEP offered no

path to regularisation – Venezuelans could not count their years of residence towards the five needed for permanence (Selee & Bolter, 2020, p. 16).

The limitations of PEP were clear: it was temporary, required legal entry, registration and a passport. Given that most Venezuelans arrived by irregular means – an estimated 63% - following *trochas* (informal tracks) across unprotected borders (ICG, 2022, p. 6), under 700,000 PEPs had been issued by 2020 (Banulescu-Bogdan & Chaves-Gonzáles, 2021). To remedy these faults, in February 2021 Colombia took the extraordinary decision of replacing PEP with the Temporary Statute of Protection for Venezuelan Migrants (EPTV – *Estatuto de Protección Temporal para Migrantes Venezolanos*). This offered 10 years of legal residence, including a path to regularisation for those who registered, even if they arrived via *trochas*. By 2022, over two million Venezuelans had registered for the EPTV, allowing them to work, access subsidised health insurance, social services and free education (Bitar, 2022, p. 25).

As noted, Colombia's hospitality has been widely praised. The UNHCR and IOM applauded its 'extraordinary generosity and its commitment to ensure protection for displaced Venezuelans'. The EPTV was described as a 'model of pragmatism and humanity . . . an example to the world' (UNHCR/IOM, 2021). The International Republican Institute described Colombia's 'welcoming and open stance' as 'laudable' (2019, p. 7), while a critical report from the ICG notes that Colombia's 'policies stand out for their compassion' (2022, p. i). Earlier, aid workers on the ground for the International Rescue Committee could not recall seeing a government 'trying this hard to register people and leave the borders open' (in Baddour, 2019a).

Even before the EPTV therefore, Colombia was widely praised for its 'creative' and 'innovative' policies (Selee & Bolter, 2020). But this left open the question of whether Venezuelans were in fact *entitled* to protection as refugees. Whilst some of those fleeing fit Refugee Convention or broader Cartagena Declaration definitions of a refugee (Camilleri & Hampson, 2018, pp. 9–10), the most common drivers of migration were difficulties in accessing the material necessities of everyday life – food, healthcare, education and work (see Pineda & Jaramillo, 2018, pp. 32–34). Treating Venezuelans as migrants rather than refugees allowed countries such as Colombia to innovate, creating the PEP, TMF and the EPTV, without remedying their inability to process asylum applications. Some NGOs saw this as a tactic of limiting their obligations (Camilleri & Hampson, 2018, p. 10), though such a form of 'complementary protection' is increasingly common in the global north (see McAdam, 2007).

As the full practical details of the EPTV become apparent, recent analysis suggests that legal residence and citizenship will be harder to achieve than initially thought. A kind of 'liminal legality' has been created for Venezuelans, somewhere between documented and undocumented status (Del Real,

2022). Though the headline policies have been generous, Colombia lacks the capacity and competence at national and local level to fulfil its promise, particularly for women with caring responsibilities (see Angeleri & Murphy, 2023; Bitar, 2022; Edwards, 2022; ICG, 2022; Masullo et al., 2021). For example, though free access to emergency healthcare and subsidised insurance is generous in principle, only around a quarter of Venezuelans were registered with the health system in 2021 (Bitar, 2022, p. 17). Meanwhile, emergency treatment was often 'narrowly interpreted' at the local level (HRW, 2020, pp. 34–35), a factor that worsened during the COVID pandemic (ICG, 2022, p. 10). Enrolment in education becomes patchy the older Venezuelan children become – over half were enrolled in primary school by 2020, this fell to 4% in later grades (Chaves-Gonzáles et al., 2021, p. 26). As for work, most Venezuelans, like Colombians, were employed in the informal economy but with harsher conditions (ICG, 2022, p. 7) and especially bad exploitation for women (Bitar, 2022, p. 14). Responsibility-taking was thus thoroughly gendered and varied. Meanwhile, shelter and housing remained paltry, the majority of recent arrivals living on the streets (see Pineda & Jaramillo, 2018). Many later graduated to crowded informal arrangements and cramped, urban *pagadiarios* (pay-per-day rooms), leaving them vulnerable to eviction particularly during the pandemic (ICG, 2022, pp. 7–8). As we will see below, the everyday needs of, and care for, the Venezuelan population (food, shelter and water) were often met by Colombian civil society, in the form of churches, volunteers and NGOs.

It is also important, as indicated earlier, that Colombia's openness has been as much an acceptance of inevitability as of an ethical responsibility. The extensive shared border includes only seven official crossings (Chaves-Gonzáles et al., 2021, p. 14). The government knew there was 'no real way to stop flows, so it is more practical to prepare for and try to proactively manage migration' (Banulescu-Bogdan & Chaves-Gonzáles, 2021, p. 17). Much of the land in these regions is outside the control of either state. The borderlands in La Guajira are settled by the indigenous Wayuu, who do not recognise national borders (Testa, 2019, p. 36). Meanwhile the border regions of Arauca, Norte Santander and La Guajira are fought over by guerrillas, smugglers and traffickers who often control the *trochas* for irregular crossings (Pineda & Jaramillo, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2020; Testa, 2019). As such, these regions have long felt abandoned by the central state; the reality of the situation on the ground has left Venezuelans extremely vulnerable to recruitment by the guerrillas and, particularly for women, sexual exploitation and human trafficking (Bitar, 2022; ICG, 2022; Testa, 2019).

The reality of Colombia's welcome to Venezuelans is therefore far more complex than enacting an abstract philosophy of open borders or free movement. Rather, the state response has been an emerging negotiation of political realities, ethical responsibilities and, as we shall see, entangled

histories of reciprocity. However, though the TMF and PEP could be viewed as an attempt to gain some control of what could not be prevented, the conditional commitment to regularisation contained in the EPTV was surprising and exceptional. It was regionally unprecedented and politically unnecessary. Likewise, despite rising xenophobia, resentment and distrust amongst much of the Colombian population (of which more below), many Venezuelans report feeling 'welcomed by, were thankful to and had an immense sense of solidarity with their Colombian hosts', commenting on the 'kindness' of local residents (International Republican Institute, 2019, pp. 8–12). The ambivalent reality of Colombian hospitality is therefore best captured as an enactment of everyday ethics rather than the application of liberal egalitarian principles.

Colombian immigration ethics: fraternity and reciprocity

The uncertainty of the welcome Colombia has provided Venezuelans must not obscure its historic proportions and creativity, nor its claim to fulfilling an ethical duty. But it is notable that abstract, universalising language of democratic principles, the right to free movement, the national right to self-determination, or associative obligations, has been almost entirely absent from both state and civil society. In its place, we have seen two more everyday, vernacular and thoroughly gendered conceptions of ethical duty come to the fore: fraternity and reciprocity. For instance, tweeting in support of the new EPTV in February 2021, President Duque stressed the importance of fraternity in prompting mass regularisation,

> At the toughest moment of migration, when there is xenophobia, persecution and rejection, Colombia opted for fraternity with the #TemporaryProtectionStatute for Venezuelans [#EstatutoDeProtección Temporal para venezolanos] and we show the world that although we are not a rich country, we are in solidarity. #JóvenesALaCancilleria.[6]

This was a continuation of Duque's earlier rhetoric in which he spoke of the countries being 'united in fraternity' (in Janetsky, 2019). Contrasting Colombia's hospitality with the hostility of the global north, whilst announcing a decree that would give citizenship to thousands of babies born to Venezuelans in Colombia, Duque observed: 'Even though we have a per capita income of less than $8,000, much less than European countries that have confronted migratory crises, we know how to act in brotherhood and a sense of solidarity' (in Baddour, 2019b).[7] Despite speaking of a policy that would offer some security to pregnant women, responsibility was conceived as masculine: fraternity and brotherhood.

This close, gendered relation does not emerge from a generalised commitment to Venezuelans as humans with ethical or legal rights; it is

a *particular* responsibility based on a historical relationship of entanglement. As then Foreign Minister Trujillo put it, this 'solidarity' emerges from a sense of 'historical gratitude' (in Werner, 2019). The shared history of these populations encompasses the experience of Spanish colonialism and independence won by the Venezuelan liberator Simón Bólivar, who became the first president of Gran Colombia which united the freed territories of the two countries along with Panama, Ecuador and parts of Peru and Brazil in the 19th Century. Most importantly, Venezuela has itself welcomed hundreds of thousands of regular and irregular Colombian immigrants over many decades, either seeking work or fleeing the violence of drug cartels, guerrillas and the state (Pineda & Jaramillo, 2018, pp. 15–16). Indeed, many crossing into Colombia are themselves Colombian, displaced over the previous 50 years (Ramsay & Sánchez-Garzoli, 2018, p. 8). It is estimated that, though Venezuelans in Colombia could reach 3 million in 2024, Colombian returnees could hit 900,000 (R4V, 2022, p. 132). Meanwhile, border regions have always been areas of intense, regular cross-border movement (Pineda et al., 2018, p. 65), with an estimated 5 million Venezuelans regularly crossing back and forth to shop, work and study (Chaves-Gonzáles et al., 2021, p. 14).

An entangled history and present have therefore generated an ethics of debt and reciprocity, as well as fraternity. Both elements are emphasised in President Duque's introduction to the Colombian government's glossy book that summarised its policy regarding Venezulean immigration as one of 'Welcome, Integrate and Grow' (GoC, 2020). In a few short paragraphs, Duque mentions Venezuelans as 'our brothers and sisters' three times, arguing that Colombia is 'transform[ing] fraternity into a feeling of solidarity'. But these 'ties' that 'unite' the two are in part because 'we remember how Venezuela welcomed millions of Colombians who made Venezuela their home in the past' (in GoC, 2020, pp. 30–32).

However, as noted above, the state's ability to fulfil this promise has been hampered by a lack of experience and capacity, underfunded social services, a paucity of international aid, lawless border regions, and a global pandemic (Bitar, 2022; ICG, 2022; Masullo et al., 2021), demonstrating the competing responsibilities motivating its actions. Much of the mundane *work* of welcoming, integrating and growing has thus been done by Colombian civil society and local government, where geopolitics, realism and economic gain appear far less of a motivation. Local organisations are finding innovative ways to fill the gaps left by central government and meet the everyday needs of migrants for food, shelter, clothing, medical and psychological help settling into their new home (Roth, 2019). This work has included relying on volunteers, partnering with community groups, Catholic and Protestant churches and redirecting resources from existing programmes for the internally displaced (see Roth, 2019, p. iii). These are the *doings* of an everyday ethics.

And it is notable that the same vernacular ethics appears to operate in this context. According to research led by the Migration Policy Institute, a narrative of brotherhood, compassion and solidarity echoes throughout wider Colombian society, reinforced by the idea that 'They welcomed us, so we should welcome them', as the 'population draws on a collective memory of emigration' (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2021, pp. 10–13).[8] This is borne out by interviews on the ground, often repeated by Venezuelan migrants themselves (see Baddour, 2019a, 2019b; IRI, 2019). Even in the border cities of Cúcuta in Norte de Santander and Maicao in La Guajira, where the majority of Venezuelans cross into Colombia, this understanding resonates. A local migrant leader in Cúcuta, Caña Pérez, observed that 'Venezuela has always been a brother . . . And in the border zone, we are practically neighbours. We are practically Venezuelans' (in Janetsky, 2019). As such, one large and wealthy Protestant church has organised a shelter for 50 people in Cúcuta, smaller shelters along the route out of the city, and provides food and clothing to over 300 people per day (Roth, 2019, pp. 12–13). Meanwhile, local government officials in Maicao reported that, especially initially, Venzuelans were 'welcomed . . . with affection' because 'in this area, we don't forget all that we have received from Venezuela in the past'. Another official noted that the ability to sustain this affection emerges from the relationship being more than just economic, 'we are made from the same clay, the same umbilical cord unites us, we are brothers, we are the same people' (in Pineda & Jaramillo, 2018, p. 65). It is therefore local community and neighbourhood groups who are working together with vulnerable migrants to disarm and feed them, developing 'peaceful tools for co-living' (Masullo et al., 2021, pp. 180–182).

However, this everyday, vernacular understanding of responsibility based in fraternity and reciprocity is neither uniform nor easy to sustain as the displaced population grows and moves towards permanence. In fact, the reception has been marked by deep ambivalence. Venezuelan migration is commonly viewed as a threat to local resources and public infrastructure, jobs, and as a source of crime (Banulescu-Bogdan & Chaves-Gonzáles, 2021, p. 10). Venezuelans report experiencing wide-spread xenophobia and discrimination in local contexts (Bitar, 2022, pp. 33–34; ICG, 2022, pp. 22–23; IRI, 2019, pp. 9–10; Pineda & Jaramillo, 2018, pp. 44–45; Testa, 2019, pp. 26–28). Public opinion surveys demonstrate the deterioration of Colombia's welcome and a growing hostility towards Venezuelans associated with jobs, crime and public provision. According to Oxfam in 2019, seven in every ten Colombians believed that migration brought rising crime, lowered salaries and worsened working conditions, while eight in ten thought migration had caused a collapse of social services (Oxfam, 2019, pp. 8–12).

These feelings and perceptions are heavily gendered, reflecting the broader androcentrism of Colombian society, with a particular threat and

drain associated with female Venezuelans. Almost half of respondents thought Venezuelan women would become prostitutes (Oxfam, 2019, pp. 11–12). Meanwhile, wider research shows that Colombians frequently link Venezuelan women with the spread of STDs, such as HIV, and drug consumption (IRI, 2019, p. 9). The gendering of Colombia's everyday ethics makes the choice of *fraternity* – with its masculine origin in *brother*hood – especially apt for its vernacular expression. It is no surprise, then, that Venezuelan women have had to work longer hours, for less pay and faced much greater discrimination than men (Bitar, 2022, pp. 14–15; GoC, 2020, p. 21). Just as Venezuelan women had suffered the most from the collapse of Venezuela's healthcare and social security (IRI, 2019, p. 14), the same was true of their stay in Colombia.

Ultimately, this has led to rising hostility and calls for a change in policy. Whilst in 2017 fewer than 50% of Colombians had an unfavourable view of Venezuelan migrants, this had risen to 64.1% in 2019 (Bitar, 2022, pp. 33–34). When the COVID pandemic began, this rose to 80% in 2020 – though such unfavourable views have fallen back since the pandemic abated (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2022, p. 19; ICG, 2022, p. 22). However, discrimination, distrust and androcentric hostility do not somehow *disprove* the idea of openness and solidarity to Venezuelans based in fraternity and reciprocity. Rather, this demonstrates the value of an everyday approach to immigration ethics, one which deals in the *complexity* of situational moral life rather than with absolute or universal moral norms.

What we can see in this picture then is the negotiation of competing feelings and principles – belief in, and feelings of, solidarity, compassion, gratitude and empathy concurrent with fear, threat and a sense of burden (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2021, p. 8). Thus, Oxfam found contradictory, ambivalent responses of tolerance and concern, admiration for migrants alongside a desire to control them to be common (2019, pp. 13–14). Whilst Venezuelan women were seen as a threat and a drain, 62% of Colombians also felt that they deserved more support because they faced greater challenges (2019, p. 12). Likewise, it is perfectly possible for three-quarters of Colombians to support the extension of free education and healthcare to Venezuelans during the pandemic (Chaves-Gonzáles et al., 2021, p. 33) whilst nearly nine out of ten also want to close the borders to new arrivals (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2022, p. 15). The government's policies can both be inclusive *and* impose a liminal legality on immigrants at the same time – without this contradiction being simply unethical or irresponsible.

In place of simple judgements, a deep, contextual understanding of the way ambivalence and contradictory feelings and principles are being negotiated opens these situations to our appreciation *and* critique. It generates an awareness and appreciation of how millions of immigrants can be welcomed, expanding our vision of what is ethically and politically possible in an

apparently immigration-hostile world. But it also directs attention to where that welcome could be improved, its need to be re-gendered and key areas of daily life prioritised. An everyday approach to immigration ethics, based in vernacular understandings of responsibility, offers us a richly textured account of how grounded, complex situations, with multiple competing emotions and principles are navigated, with the possibility of improvement and no expectation of perfection.

Conclusion

This article has argued for a different approach to immigration ethics. In place of moral theorising that asks how states and societies *should* respond to immigration, working from abstract principle, it suggests we begin from how societies already *are* responding. I have made the case for an everyday approach to ethics that begins with the more mundane reality of how responsibilities for immigrants are accepted and *enacted* in concrete, local contexts, paying attention to the way contradictory principles and emotions are negotiated through vernacular understandings of ethical duty. Following a critique of dominant debates in immigration ethics in the first section, and an unpacking of what is meant by 'everyday ethics' in the second, I explored what this has meant in the context of an understudied mass migration: the 2.5 million Venezuelans who have moved to Colombia. What we see in this context is an expansion of what is ethically possible in a world increasingly hostile to immigration. The results have been deeply problematic, producing a gendered and ambivalent welcome, understood in vernacular terms through the ideas of fraternity and reciprocity. The empirical description of Colombia's response to Venezuelan immigration is messy, often contradictory and far from ideal. But this is precisely the kind of complex, conflicted context in which we find ourselves, every day, confronted with the need to accept, reject or deflect a responsibility for others. It is what makes an everyday ethics approach, as summarised in the second section of the article, so vital.

For those that seek more openness in specific immigration contexts, there is a great deal to take from everyday approaches and the Colombian context more broadly. What emerges is a creative, profoundly imperfect response to cross-border movement. This response is not something that can be abstracted and universalised. The argument of this article has not been that 'fraternity' and 'reciprocity' should be used as a basis for all states and societies to reorient their policies and performances. As research from the Migration Policy Institute has shown, vernacular narratives of immigration ethics are *not* generalisable – they are highly specific to a particular context and are unlikely to work for a different country or even for future arrivals or other immigrant groups (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2022, p. 2). Rather, what we can

take from this is the need to start *from* those local contexts. Instead of looking to generate new, better, more universal moral principles, we can start from concrete, vernacular perceptions of responsibility for immigration in particular locales. More abstract principles – such as human dignity and gender equality – remain important, but as points of critique and improvement, rather than non-negotiable absolutes. Starting from the everyday could mean, for example, looking to *Buen Vivir* in Bolivia (Bauder et al., 2023), *Ubuntu* in southern Africa (Sebola, 2019), *ujamaa* in Tanzania (Bulley, 2023b), hospitality in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Qasmiyeh, 2018; Bulley, 2017, 2023a) and welcome in parts of Europe (Gill, 2018), without trying to force these ideas into a universal frame. Perhaps by building from the ground, but staying close to the ground, a stronger case can emerge for specific societies to accept responsibility for particular individuals and groups.

Notes

1. For the sake of brevity, this section concentrates on Carens and Miller.
2. Miller separates this 'political philosophy' of immigration from an 'ethics' of immigration, because it is about institutions and policies rather than 'trying to tell individual people how they ought to behave' (2016, p. 17). The firm separation of politics/institutions from ethics/individual behaviour is not fully explained. Like most critical feminists, I see it as a false and dated binary – the personal is political and the political is ethical (Jaggar, 2013, pp. 436–7).
3. It is important to stress that Walker is not summarising Sidgwick's own approach here, but the way his ideas and methods came to form the later field. This model depicts the 'idea of moral theory that organized the field of twentieth-century academic ethics', rather than Sidgwick's work (2007, p. 43). As one anonymous reviewer helpfully pointed out, Sidgwick himself is more concerned with social context than this allows. He describes himself as 'occupied from first to last in considering how conclusions are to be rationally reached in the familiar matter of our common daily life and actual practice' (1981, p. viii), and considers differences in political, legal and social matters between societies (e.g. Book I, Chapters II and III). However, Sidgwick's examples throughout *The Methods* are all hypothetical, broad and impersonal. And the quotation from Sidgwick above continues: 'still, my immediate object – to invert Aristotle's phrase – is not Practice but Knowledge', before outlining the importance of 'disinterested curiosity' to the latter. He goes on to stress the difference between the philosopher, who 'seeks unity of principle and consistency of method' and the 'unphilosophic man', who is 'apt to hold different principles at once, and to apply different methods in more or less confused combination' (Sidgwick, 1981, p. 6). The messy approach of the 'unphilosophic man' is closer to what I term 'everyday ethics' in this article.
4. However, everyday concepts of 'home' and 'belonging' nonetheless play a crucial, if undertheorised, role when Carens and Miller apply their abstractions to concrete situations (see Bulley, 2023a, pp. 32–33).
5. This also raises two important limitations to my research. First, alongside journalism and academic articles, the empirical evidence is largely drawn

from 'grey' literature: reports from International Organisations (e.g. UNHCR, UNDP and IOM), NGOs (Oxfam, the International Crisis Group, Human Rights Watch, and the Washington Office on Latin America), social enterprises and advocacy groups (Sayara International and the International Republican Institute) and policy think tanks (the Migration Policy Institute, the Center for International Governance Innovation, the Center on International Cooperation at NYU, and JUSTRAC). As with all 'grey' literature, its reliability is open to question and I have therefore operated a triangulation strategy (Flick, 2002, p. 226), using data that is supported by a range of different sources and times, from institutions with very different aims (e.g. Oxfam and the IRI). Second, a full investigation of everyday ethics ideally requires in-depth, local knowledge and ethnographic research methods. In the terms of an emerging Grounded Normative Theory, it lacks some comprehensiveness and epistemological inclusion (Ackerly et al., 2021), as well as a stronger 'ethnographic sensibility' (Herzog & Zacka, 2017). These were beyond the scope of my own investigation, and I have therefore sought to rely as much as possible on a triangulation of sources with such grounded, local knowledge. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that this limits the depth and scope of my empirical claims about a Colombian everyday immigration ethics. For more on this methodological limitation, see Bulley, 2023a, pp. 9–13.

6. 'En el momento más duro de l a migración, cuando existe xenofobia, persecución y rechazo, Colombia optó por la fraternidad con el #EstatutoDeProtección Temporal para venezolanos y demostramos al mundo que aunque no somos un país rico, sí somos solidarios. #JóvenesALaCancillería'. Translated by Twitter. Available at: https://twitter.com/IvanDuque/status/1359266992344231936.

7. As in Colombia, European states maintain important restrictions on birthright citizenship.

8. This research conducted by the Migration Policy Institute, Metropolitan Group, the RAND Corporation and National Immigration Forum included public opinion and how politicians, the private sector, NGOs, service providers, media and community leaders described migration to their country (Banulescu-Bogdan et al., 2021, pp. 6–7).

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

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