

Foreword:

Mobility, Migration and Identity

Human migration began transitioning from an itinerant and nomadic lifestyle to agrarian settlement around 12,500–10,000 years ago (de Haas, Castles, and Miller, 2020). In contrast, the 21st century is witnessing “the routinization of geographically distant movement” (Shin and Lee, 2022, 1), driven primarily by political, economic, social, cultural, and climatic factors. As such, the present era may be characterized as the age of high mobility—when mobility technologies have become integral to social life, mobility itself is embedded within epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic practices, and human beings increasingly understand not only our existence but also their very nature as mobile (Lee 1). In short, it is a time when “every major domain of human activity has become increasingly defined by motion” (Nail, 2018, 1). Encompassing all types of human, nonhuman, or more-than-human movements across both local and global scales, mobility has emerged as a fundamental condition of human history and a defining characteristic of the contemporary world.

As one of the most prevalent forms of human mobility, migration profoundly affects the structure and composition of both migrant-sending and migrant-receiving societies, often generating cultural and political tensions while simultaneously revitalizing communities that might otherwise appear monotonous or stagnant. In this sense, the young retired, international students, terrorists, diaspora, holidaymakers, businesspeople, slaves, sports stars, asylum seekers, refugees, backpackers, commuters, young mobile professionals, and sex workers may be understood as representative figures of the highly mobile society of the 21st century (Urry, 2007). At the same time, people’s voluntary or involuntary movement across borders frequently reshapes and hybridizes their identities through encounters with the new environments they traverse or settle within. As a significant milestone in an individual’s life course, migration disrupts established modes of identity formation, requiring migrants to negotiate between their heritage cultures and unfamiliar social settings. In doing so, they must continuously reconstruct their identities amid emerging social tensions, cultural negotiations, and cultural animation.

The three articles included in this special issue address, respectively: the aestheticization and legitimization of migration literature and cultural difference through literary institutions in Germany and Taiwan (Chang); the construction of agency among Taiwanese women who migrated to Japan in the late 1980s to study language, and subsequently married and settled there (Nakamura); and Thai country music (*luk thung*) as a sonic archive of the rural-urban divide, as well as the gendered and classed precarities experienced by domestic migrant subjects in Thailand, particularly from the 1960s to the 1980s (Valyamedhi). Taken together, these contributions examine the personal and social entanglements of migration and identity (de)formation as mediated through mobility. Understanding the interplay between mobility, migration, and identity is therefore essential not only for interpreting literary and cultural works produced by highly mobile societies, but also for understanding those societies themselves—shaped by racialized, classed, gendered, and sexual processes materialized through regimes of mobility governance. In this sense, such inquiry ultimately gestures toward a more equitable and just mobility future (Sheller, 2018).

Special Issue Guest Editors,
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