

Keywords of Mobility: Critical Engagements



Edited by Noel B. Salazar and Kiran Jayaram
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K*eywords of Mobility*, edited by Noel Salazar and Kiran Jayaram, offers an important methodological and analytical contribution to the literature on studies of human mobilities. The framework for the volume is inspired by Raymond Williams's seminal *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), which explored the changing meanings and historical constructions of important terms used in studies of culture and society. As such, the volume presents ethnographically informed discussions of eight key terms related to mobility: capital, cosmopolitanism, freedom, gender, immobility, infrastructure, motility, and regime. Grounded in anthropology and informed by trans-disciplinary mobility studies, the authors rely on ethnographic analyses from a refreshing combination of both American and European perspectives. Each chapter interrogates the genealogies of a keyword and its (often) contradictory meanings and provides ethnographic examples. Together they offer penetrating critical perspectives on mobility that are at once method and theory, a formidable praxis on the study of mobility.

The introduction by Noel B. Salazar is perhaps one of the strongest sections of the book. He outlines the approach the book takes and deftly summarizes the scholarship on *mobility*, which he defines as an assemblage of movement, social meanings, and the trans-local connections made by people as they experience geographic and other movement. In chapter 1, Kiran Jayaram provides a decidedly Marxian analysis of the keyword *capital*. In particular, he critiques the term *mobility capital* as it is frequently used in mobility studies, suggesting instead that we consider capital as a process. This, he offers, allows scholars greater opportunities to interrogate the "capital-mobility nexus," as he calls it, to fill in the incomplete scholarship on these topics. In chapter 2, Malasree Neepa Acharya traces the multiple meanings as well as the genealogy of the term *cosmopolitan*. She discusses the ways it has been used as to indicate mobility and the potential for mobility but also addresses the pitfalls of its elitist connotations and uses. She suggests, instead, that cosmopolitanism holds the possibility for reflexivity and de-centring its normative power. Her conclusion points to the subversive potential of plural definitions of cosmopolitanism by recognizing the "plurality of othernesses universally rather than finding patterns of a universal culture of sameness" (47).

In chapter 3, Bartholomew Dean examines the keyword of freedom, a particularly central term in mobility studies.

Drawing on Georges Bataille's work, Dean examines the nexus between the freedom of mobility and the mobility of freedom. He uses ethnographic examples from his work among indigenous societies in Amazonia to underscore the ways that freedom foregrounds sovereignty as a vital force shaping humanity. Following freedom, the keyword *gender* is carefully analyzed by Alice Elliot in chapter 4. Elliot eloquently unpacks the ways that gender has been framed theoretically in relationship to mobility. In doing so, she distinguishes two ways gender has been used in mobility studies: gender as classification and as process. This she cleverly refers to as the "master difference." She concludes with a critical summary of ways that the study of gender can contribute to the study of mobility, and vice-a-versa. In another particularly strong entry, Nichola Khan explores the keyword *immobility* in chapter 5. The term, she claims, is an especially relevant one to the late-modern era and addresses the contemporary dilemmas of those in liminal situations, permanent transition, or politically enforced immobilities. Treating mobility and immobility as two poles on a continuum, she focuses her attention on the indeterminate space between.

In chapter 6, Mari Korpela uses ethnographic examples to illustrate the hard, soft, and critical dimensions of *infrastructure*. As she describes it, in the context of mobility, the essential infrastructures are those related to border-crossing contexts. She outlines the increasing importance of soft infrastructure, such as passports, documents, and permits in crossing the hard infrastructure of the physical boundary itself. And she describes how the new biometric infrastructures that encompass both hard and soft infrastructure underscore the fact that mobility today is infrastructure-dependent and that these infrastructures have edges or borders that, in turn, require more infrastructure to manage.

The last two chapters are dedicated to exploring the keywords *motility* and *regime*. Motility, Hege Høyer Leivestad states, captures the potential to move and "situations and locations of temporality in which mobility appears as yet-to-be-realised, yet-to-be-completed, or never-to-be" (147). Her analysis points to the incompleteness of mobility. Likewise, Beth Baker-Cristales's discussion of regime points to the incompleteness of mobility in itself, as mobility becomes possible only in relation to immobility. She explores the interrelated nature of the abundance of, yet startling lack of, institutions and norms that provide for the orderly and

rational governance of the movement of people throughout the world. She references her work with undocumented youth as examples of the discursive power of global (im) mobility regimes to reproduce different forms of inequality and immobility.

Taken as a whole, *Keywords of Mobility* is an innovative approach to exploring key concepts in the scholarship of mobility. It is careful in its selection of topics, and contributors are up-to-date in their scholarship and rigorous in the construction of their analyses. Yet as comprehensive as the text is, it by no means represents the end of the discussion. Dedicated attention to keywords such as *citizenship*, *belonging*, *exclusion*, and *place* are left to be explored in depth. In

addition, treatments of these topics founded in richer ethnographic detail will help make future explorations of keywords of mobility more accessible to non-specialists. Nevertheless, as a methodological and theoretical approach to the topic, *Keywords of Mobility* is unparalleled. It represents an important contribution to the literature on studies of forced migration, and human mobilities more generally, by working toward a common, robust vocabulary.

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