

# MOBILITY

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**MOVEMENT OF HUMANS**, non-humans, technologies, objects, capital, information, images, ideas, identities, labor, pollution, diseases, and so on across the world is a challenge to territorially defined research. Not just physical movement, but also movement in cyberspace shapes subjectivity and the communication between people, leading to a restructuring of the relationship between the global and the local, as well as between public and private space. Because the experience of time and space is rearranged as a result of complex mobility systems, some talk about the “mobility turn” (Hannam et al. 2006) or “new mobilities paradigm” (Sheller and Urry 2006) in cultural studies and social sciences, describing mobility as a concept and paradigm for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Critical Perspectives on Mobility and Questions of Methodology

Critical scholars of mobility propose that contemporary questions of mobility must be placed in the context of the neoliberal world order, where the promise of wealth and free movement, resulting from a free and borderless market, is a broken promise reserved for a privileged group. Magnus Dahlstedt and Mekonnen Tesfahuney (2004, 61) introduce the phrase “the paradox of mobility” to describe how the free flow of goods and capital combines with increased regulations of people’s movements, where power over mobility and access to places is structured by race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Another useful approach is Manuel

Castells' (1999) identification of what he calls "the space of flows" and the "space of places." Whereas the space of flows connects people in diverse geographical contexts in interactive networks, the space of places organizes experiences and activities around the boundaries of locality. Some remain physically more immobile in the space of places, compared to others who have access to more privileges of the space of flows.

Furthermore, movement can be voluntary or coerced. Moving physically can cause upward or downward *social mobility* within layers of social stratification. Movement can have emotional costs, can generate deprivation for migrants and refugees, or can happen through forced re-settlement schemes for tribal populations to make space for tourism (Hannam et al. 2006, 10–1). Because centuries of imperialism, colonialism, and racialisation have resulted in interrelated networks of unequal power, mobility and immobility define each other. The interrelatedness of mobility and immobility in the contemporary world has been described as "relationships between the privileged movements of some and the co-dependent but stigmatised movement of others" (Glick-Schiller and Salazar 2013, 188).

Accounting for diverse and differential mobilities requires objects of inquiry and methodologies that on the one hand can move beyond treating social processes as geographically fixed, and on the other hand can problematize new "grand narratives" of mobility as a pervasive condition for postmodernity or globalization (Hannam et al. 2006, 5). For example, "multi-sited" ethnography (Marcus 1995) can involve participation in movement by traveling *with* people or objects, paying attention to specific manifestations of mobility, as well as how mobility affects individuals and places differently, depending on geographic and social positioning.

## **Queer and Transgender Matters**

Feminism has long maintained that mobility is more available to men than to women, and transnational feminism emphasizes differentiated politics of mobility, combining attention to race, ethnicity, and class with a gendered perspective. Critical mobility studies have been

informed by feminism from the outset. However, mainly addressing how heterosexuality structures (“cis”) women and (“cis”) men’s mobility, transnational feminism habitually reiterates binary gender arrangements (see also, Desai and Rinaldo 2016, 2). Queer and transgender research exposes additional, crucial aspects of how sexuality and gender shape mobility, as well as being acted upon and transformed by mobility.

In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, queer and transgender studies have become increasingly transnational (Stryker and Aizura 2013; Oswin 2014). Postcolonial, decolonial, and de-centring critiques have countered developmental narratives about a global queer or transgender discourse originating in Anglo-American or wider Western contexts. A growing body of work localizes research outside the West, provincializes Western contexts, and pays attention to transnational relationships of power (e.g. Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 2002; Kulpa and Mizieleńska 2011; Camminga 2019). This has also led to new perspectives on mobility (Oswin 2014, 87). Critical engagements with mobility attend to the complexities of how queer and transgender terminologies and practices traverse space transnationally, manifest and change locally, move and migrate with bodies, move and (re)position bodies, and are regulated, policed and defined by borders, surveillance, and hetero/cisnormativity, in the past and contemporarily. Related discourses also travel, for example both homo- and transphobia and homonationalism (Puar 2007).

Both rural-urban and transnational migrations are significant for queer and transgender mobility studies, since migration has a central place in numerous “coming-out” narratives, and often shapes LGBTQ-people’s lives. Many flee, hoping for protection needed because of their sexuality or gender, many move to get to the envisioned “queer city,” and some counter the imaginary directions of the LGBTQ-trajectory, disrupting notions of forward and backward places. Furthermore, queer and transgender should not be overlooked when other motivations are studied, such as economic opportunities. Migration to live a queer and transgender life might also result in economic loss (Binnie 2004; Cotten 2012; Hodžić 2017; Camminga 2019; Liu 2019).

Limits to the movement of gender-nonconforming people and sexual dissidents make transgender and queer perspectives on surveillance relevant. For instance, while LGBTQ-people have historically often been denied the right to migrate across borders, from the 1990s some countries began to recognize sexual or gender-based persecution as grounds for asylum claims. However, getting asylum depends on narratives that are believable by migration authorities. LGBTQ-exclusion and inclusion are part of broader control regimes, which additionally reproduce white racialized privilege and exploit the poor (Luibhéid 2002; Shakhsari 2013; Beauchamp 2019; Camminga 2019).

Not everyone has the capital to participate in all forms of LGBTQ-practices. For example, within the niche market of gay and lesbian tourism, affluent gays and lesbians are invited to take part in the neo-colonialist and neoliberal economy of global tourism (Puar 2002). Some areas where queer and transgender mobility are shaped by privatized and transnational bio-economies are transnational travels for gender affirming surgery (Aizura 2018; Nord 2018), and travels for assisted reproductive technology (Mamo 2018). Further areas for inquiry are, for example, queer and transgender mobility online (Szulc 2015; Raun 2016), transnational activist networks, and understandings of home and belonging (Prosser 1998; Aizura 2018; Camminga 2019).

Here I have argued for queer and transgender perspectives on mobility in order to propose that we need to consider how sexuality and gender beyond binary gender arrangements shape mobility, as well as being acted upon and transformed by mobility. To that end, I have moved between different registers of mobility, such as the restrictions of material realities, literal movements, and the movement of discourses and identities. Instead of proposing an exact definition of mobility, queer, or transgender, I have sought to inspire further inquiry at the junction of these fields. Critically engaging with mobility is crucial for understanding *the way in which* people, things, and ideas are on the move. Categories such as “gay and lesbian tourists,” “LGBTQ\_migrants,” and “LGBTQ\_refugees” speaks to the importance of defining mobility as a key concept for queer and transgender studies when we enter the 2020s.

The concept is crucial – firstly because queer and transgender terminologies increasingly travel transnationally, and form transnational practices, identities, and assemblages – and secondly because queer and transgender practices (like other practices) are formed within globe-spanning relationships of power and unequal regimes of mobility.

Finally, it is worth noting that *metaphors* of movement have been used to describe and produce queer and transgender theory itself. Queer critiques of sexual difference have mobilized terms such as fluidity and hybridity, while gender transition is often explained using metaphors such as migration or border crossing. However, the use of such metaphors has also been criticized when it has not involved examination of mobility within broader constellations of power (Halberstam 1998, 164; Camminga 2019, 11). I argue that looking at differential mobility is an important response to the lack of material, economic, or post- and decolonial critique in much of previous research. Yet, the relationship between different registers of mobility is also an area for exploration. Moving critically between different registers might contribute to an analysis that looks beyond a dichotomous understanding of stasis/mobility and agency/subjugation.

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