INTRODUCTION

Keywords of Mobility
What’s in a Name?

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As a concept, mobility captures the common impression that one’s life-world is in flux, with not only people, but also cultures, objects, capital, businesses, services, diseases, media, images, information, and ideas circulating across (and even beyond) the planet. While history tells the story of human mobility, the scholarly literature is replete with metaphors attempting to describe (perceived) altered spatial and temporal movements: de-territorialization, reterritorialization, and scapes; time-space compression, distantiation, or punctuation; the network society and its space of flows; the death of distance and the acceleration of modern life; and nomadology. The academic interest in mobility goes hand in hand with theoretical approaches that reject a “sedentarist metaphysics” (Malkki 1992) in favor of a “nomadic metaphysics” (Cresswell 2006) and empirical studies on the most diverse kinds of mobilities (Adey et al. 2013), questioning earlier taken-for-granted correspondences between peoples, places, and cultures. The way the term is being used, mobility entails, in its coinage, much more than mere physical motion (Marzloff 2005). Rather, it is seen as movement infused with both self-ascribed and attributed meanings (Frello 2008). Put differently, “mobility can do little on its own until it is materialized through people, objects, words, and other embodied forms” (Chu 2010, 15). Importantly, mobility means different things to different people in differing social circumstances (Adey 2010).
Mobilities are central to the structuring of many people’s lives. In many parts of the world, mobility is seen as an important way of belonging to today’s society. We can identify many different types of “movers”: tourists and pilgrims; migrants and refugees; diplomats, businesspeople, and those working for international organizations; missionaries, NGO workers, and people belonging to the most diverse transnational networks; students, teachers, and researchers; athletes and artists; soldiers and journalists; children and partners (and service personnel) accompanying the aforementioned people; and those in the traffic and transport industries who move people (including themselves) across the globe.

Mobility studies call attention to the myriad ways in which people become part, in highly unequal ways, of multiple translocal networks and linkages. Notwithstanding the many kinds of involuntary or forced movements (mostly linked to situations of conflict, persecution, or environmental threat), the currently dominant discourse across the globe links mobility to three positively valued characteristics: (1) the ability to move; (2) the ease or freedom of movement; and (3) the tendency to change easily or quickly (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Salazar 2010b; Salazar and Smart 2011). This translates into three assumptions, partly influenced by capitalist ideologies, which have been widely spread via public discourses and images about globalization: (1) there is (increasing) mobility; (2) mobility is a self-evident phenomenon; and (3) movement generates positive change, often conceived of as an improvement for oneself and one’s kin (e.g., in the case of migrants) or for nonrelated others (e.g., in the case of NGO workers).

Many people link voluntary geographical mobility almost automatically to some kind of symbolic “moving up,” be it economic, social, or cultural. In other words, mobility is believed to be an indicator of the variable access to and accumulation of various types of capital (see Bourdieu 1986). As this edited volume illustrates, it is important to identify not only various forms of boundary-crossing movement but also the (re)production of socially shared meanings through diverse practices of mobility. Distinctions are made, which ultimately feed back into the production of the social through culturally inflected notions of mobility (e.g., the terms “local” versus “migrant”; Salazar 2010b). Transnational mobility, for instance, is often seen as endemic to globalization and as one of the most powerful stratifying factors, leading to a global hierarchy of movements (Bauman 1998). In other words, the movement of people and the various translocal connections may, and often do, create or reinforce difference and inequality, as well as blending or erasing such differences (Salazar 2010a).

Mobility—a complex assemblage of movement, imaginaries, and experience—is not only an object of study but also an analytical lens, promoted by those who talk about a mobility turn in social theory and who have pro-
posed a new mobilities paradigm to reorient the ways in which we think about society. This mobility turn indicates a perceived transformation of the social sciences in response to the increasing importance of various forms of movement (Urry 2000; 2007). The new mobilities paradigm incorporates new ways of theorizing how people, objects, and ideas move around by looking at social phenomena through the lens of movement (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006). It can be seen as a critique of both theories of sedentism and deterritorialization.

Influential theorists such as Anthony Giddens, Arjun Appadurai, Ulrich Beck, Manuel Castells, Bruno Latour, David Harvey, Zygmunt Bauman, and John Urry all conceive contemporary capitalism and globalization in terms of increasing numbers and varieties of mobility: the fluid, continuous (and often seamless) movement of people, ideas, and goods through and across space (but see Trouillot 2003 for a critique). Mobility appears self-evidently central to modernity as a key social process, “a relationship through which the world is lived and understood” (Adey 2010). People have come to “imagine that mobility is border crossing, as though borders came first, and mobility, second. The truth is more the other way around” (Ludden 2003, 1062). Considering mobility as a natural tendency in society naturalizes it as a fact of life and as a general principle that rarely needs further justification, making cosmopolitanism and reliance on mobility capital the norm (Nowicka and Rovisco 2009). However, any discourse used to discuss questions of mobility is inevitably value-laden (Bergmann and Sager 2008; Frello 2008).

Critical analyses of mobility focus attention on the political-economic processes by which people are bounded, emplaced, allowed, or forced to move (Cunningham and Heyman 2004; De Genova and Peutz 2010). Such studies show how mobility is materially grounded. The physical movement of people entails not only a measure of economic, social, and cultural mobility, but also a corresponding evolution of institutions and well-determined “circuits of human mobility” (Lindquist 2009, 7). Importantly, the substance of such circuits is “the movement of people (and money, goods, and news, but primarily people) as well as the relative immobility of people who do not travel the circuit” (Rockefeller 2010, 222). To assess the extent or nature of movement, or, indeed, even “observe” it sometimes, one needs to spend a lot of time studying things that stand still (or change at a much slower pace).

Despite all of the attention given to it over recent decades, some are of the opinion that “there is still a general failure, especially in the social sciences, to reflect on the meaning of mobility” (Papastergiadis 2010, 347). Recognizing that the mobilities the world witnesses today are not entirely new processes, what are we really talking about when we look at the current
human condition through an analytical mobility lens? Deeply grounded in anthropology’s long-term engagement with issues of mobility (Salazar 2013a), this book offers an in-depth conceptual reflection by analyzing some of the most influential keywords surrounding ideas of mobility.

Keywords as an Analytical Approach

The origin of the notion keyword is sometimes traced to Michel Bréal’s Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning (1964). This French philologist set out to determine the laws that govern changes in the meaning of words. It was only later that scholars began to turn their attention to the synchronic study of meaning too. In his seminal work Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (1976), Raymond Williams explored the changing meanings and contexts of the pivotal terms used in discussions of culture (beginning with the notion of culture itself). In his introduction, he identified keywords “in two connected senses. They are significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation; they are significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought. Certain uses bound together certain ways of seeing culture and society” (15). The legacy of the groundbreaking work of Williams on the meaning construction of keywords lives on in the “Keywords Project,” a collaborative research initiative of Jesus College, University of Cambridge, and the University of Pittsburgh (see http://keywords.pitt.edu/) and in the publication Keywords: Journal of the Raymond Williams Society.

Importantly, keywords are “essentially contested concepts” (Gallie 1956); that is, they never acquire a closed or final meaning (not even within one domain or discipline). The meaning of a keyword is never settled until it truly disappears from common use or its scholarly paradigm goes into decline. As keywords acquire new meanings, they do not shed old ones. Historically, keywords accumulate meanings, sometimes contradictory ones, and even when one is dominant, others remain available and can be reaffirmed. Moreover, keywords rarely shift their meaning in isolation but rather in conjunction with others. Revising Keywords himself for a second edition, which included twenty-one additional concepts, Williams (1985, 27) reaffirmed his “sense of the work as necessarily unfinished and incomplete.” The sharing of a word across differing domains of thought and experience was often imperfect, he noted, but this very roughness and partiality indicated that the word brought something significant to discussions of “the central processes of our common life” (1985, 27).

Various scholars have played with the concept of keywords to clarify their theoretical framework. Jean Baudrillard’s Passwords (2003) and Gilles
Deleuze’s 1988–1989 televised *Abécédaire* (2011) are but two known examples. In August 2011, the Wenner-Gren journal, *Current Anthropology*, presented a set of articles about keywords in anthropology, namely neoliberal agency, consumption, identity, and flow. In the editorial introduction to the theme, Mark Aldenderfer (2011) reminded the reader that keywords are often multilayered. While some are “commonly encountered in everyday language,” others have “special, more restricted meanings, such as is often the case in their scholarly use” (Aldenderfer 2011, 487). From an academic perspective, it is important “to identify the meanings the term has taken and to show how these meanings are transformed when new intellectual perspectives and paradigms make their appearance” (Aldenderfer 2011, 487). In the reply to his own contribution in *Current Anthropology*, David Graeber (2011) sketches the history that led to the special section. According to him, it was Lauren Leve’s idea “to study those theoretical terms that were not, really, being debated—or often, really, defined—and why” (Graeber 2011, 508).

A related methodology was also used by Joshua Barker and Johan Lindquist (2009) in their multi-authored essay “Figures of Indonesian Modernity,” published in the Cornell-based journal *Indonesia*. Inspired by the work of Williams, they propose “key figures” as “particular sites that allow access to ideological formations and their contestations” (Barker and Lindquist 2009, 36). Such an approach offers an analytical perspective rather than a decisive theory. Interestingly, many of the figures covered in their article are directly related to mobility: the TKW (Tenaga Kerja Wanita), or overseas female labor migrant, who embodies the contradictions of class and gender mobility; the petugas lapangan, or field agent, who functions as an informal labor recruiter for transnational migrants; and *Pak Haji*, or Mr. Hajj, who wears the white cap that proclaims he has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Inspired by these approaches, we focus in this volume on the keywords that mark our understanding of mobility, broadly defined. In other words, although grounded in anthropology, our collaborative project is not specific to a discipline (Burgett and Hendler 2007), key thinker (Baudrillard 2003; Deleuze 2011), or tradition (Safri and Ruccio 2013). Instead, it grapples with common and scholarly ideas concerning mobility. Like Williams, we trace the evolution of our keywords, adopting a genealogical approach that not only explains the meaning of a concept today, but the contestation and points of rupture in which the clusters of meaning shifted in a historical perspective (Salazar 2013b). As the various contributions taken together illustrate, there is much to be gained analytically from using keywords to examine human experiences of mobility.
Mobility as Keyword

Is mobility itself an important keyword? Williams did not think so. However, it does appear in the *New Keywords* volume, published thirty years after the original version (Berland 2005). There, it is described as expressing “different, sometimes contradictory meanings underlying our most fundamental beliefs about progress, freedom, individuation, and power” (Berland 2005, 217). Mobility is acknowledged as a key concept in globalization studies, where it is seen as “an overarching consideration rather than any particular theory” (Mooney and Evans 2007, 166). It also appears in the 2013 edition of *Theory in Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Salazar 2013c). The journal *Cultural Studies* showcased an interesting project, entitled “New Keywords: Migration and Borders” (De Genova, Mezzadra, and Pickles 2015). The idea behind this collaborative writing endeavor is to call critical attention to the ever-increasing prominence of migration and borders as key notions for apprehending culture and society in our contemporary (global) present. The stress on “the multifarious and heterogeneous practices of mobility within a field dominated by the state, empire, and capital” (De Genova, Mezzadra, and Pickles 2015, 61) certainly inspired the editors of this volume.

Our own project starts from the premise that people have always been on the move, but that human mobilities have been variously valued and interpreted through time and within as well as across cultures and societies. In addition, the sociocultural meanings attached to (im)mobility are very often gendered (Uteng and Cresswell 2008). Even though many translocal mobilities have evolved from voluntary opportunities to almost an economic necessity, it is still a widespread idea that much of what is experienced as “freedom” lies in mobility (Bergmann and Sager 2008). Partly influenced by market-based ideologies, translocal mobilities have become a new stratifying factor, producing a global hierarchy of movements. As more people cross physical and social boundaries, authorities and institutions resort to various infrastructures and regimes of mobility to maintain control (Salazar and Glick Schiller 2014). This causes multiple frictions with people’s motility, their agency to be mobile and to choose whether to move or to stay put (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004). Mobility studies, with its emphasis on agency, capital, regimes, and stratification, enriches current understandings of globalization, transnationalism, political economy, the role of cities, and circulation. Certain key concepts have been used, often by scholars from various disciplines, but as of yet, a working vocabulary of these has not been fully developed.

Given this context, and inspired in part by Raymond Williams’*s Keywords* (1976), this volume presents ethnographically informed conceptual contributions that critically analyze the following mobility-related keywords: capi-
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Keywords of Mobility: "tal, cosmopolitanism, freedom, gender, immobility, infrastructure, motility, and regime. Of course, this is not an all-encompassing list, and we could have included many other keywords, such as typologies, routes, time, velocity, boundaries, transnationalism, or imaginaries. However, the set we present here, more general keywords, offers a coherent critical perspective on mobility, in a constructive dialogue between empirical data and transdisciplinary mobility studies. Moreover, the various contributors illustrate how the use of these concepts in our conceptualizations of mobility may change their more general place in our intellectual universe.

The volume you have in front of you took substantial time and energy to materialize. The editors were not after a traditional review of the literature (such as in the Annual Reviews publications). Instead, we pushed contributors, revision after revision, to reflect on how the use of certain keywords relates to mobility, conceived both as an analytical lens and as an observable practice. As our team involved anthropologists from both sides of the North Atlantic Ocean, we soon were confronted with the fact that mobility studies seem to have very different genealogies in North America and in Europe (where we could rely on the expertise of the Anthropology and Mobility Network (AnthroMob) of the European Association of Social Anthropologists, the group of scholars behind the Worlds in Motion book series in which this volume is being published). This collaborative project was thus a challenging but fruitful exercise in broadening our own understanding of mobility and the keywords that shape the discourses surrounding it.

In his formative work, Williams recognized that due to certain social forces, “in certain words, tones and rhythms, meanings [were] offered, felt for, tested, confirmed, asserted, qualified, changed” (1976, 12). He sought meanings to formerly understood words through examination of general discussions and separated disciplines, a process which “posed new questions and suggested new kinds of connection” (Williams 1976, 14). By design, the book chapters on each of our mobility-related keywords form the foundation of an intellectual conversation about the complex interrelationship between empirical realities, these concepts, and their analytical value for knowledge production in the social sciences and humanities at large.

Book Outline

This volume provides an accessible and readable introduction to some of the central terms and debates that shape the study of mobility today, insisting that those debates can be enhanced by an increased understanding of the genealogies of their structuring terms and the conflicts and disagreements embedded in differing and even contradictory uses of those con-
cepts. While we have given the authors enough academic freedom to push their contributions in various directions, every chapter contains the same basic elements: a brief review of the genealogy of the term, an in-depth conceptual reflection on how the term is used in relation to mobility, and ethnographic examples that illustrate the issues at hand. Wherever possible and relevant, the authors also cross-reference to other keywords.

Kiran Jayaram discusses the definitions, dynamics, and deployments of the keyword *capital*. He draws on the work of Karl Marx to critique the use of the term within mobility studies, with particular attention to conceptual weaknesses and pitfalls inherent in the term *mobility capital*. For him, seeing capital as a process opens up new avenues by demanding ethnographic acuity across time and space. Jayaram asks us to specify the nature of capital and whether it is a prerequisite or consequence for flow or stasis, or for reproduction or profit.

Malasree Neepa Acharya tackles the concept of *cosmopolitanism*. After tracing the term’s genealogy, she investigates the historical shifts as an experiential theoretical object, practice, and orientation as it relates to the ways in which people, objects, and capital move. Cosmopolitanism has been used as a form, means, and indicator of mobility. Translocal movement has thus engaged researchers to create multiple cosmopolitanisms. Acharya challenges the dangers of normative and elitist aspects of the term’s usage in the scholarly literature by showing its potential for self-reflexivity and reclamation of power in its use in discourses surrounding mobility.

Bartholomew Dean covers *freedom*, an essential theoretical construct in mobility studies. Through reference to Georges Bataille’s insights, he proposes rearticulating the multifarious articulations of freedom of mobilities in ways that foreground sovereignty as a vital force shaping humanity. He illustrates this with ethnographic examples from his own research on the dynamics and consequences of mobility, especially in contemporary Amazonia. Dean concludes by considering Étienne Balibar’s notion of *equa-liberty*, accompanied by a call for continued ethnographic engagement oriented to comprehending the multiplex processes underlying the freedom of mobility.

Alice Elliot illustrates how there exists an intimate relationship between different forms of movement and the appearance and strengthening, or questioning and shattering, of *gender*. She unpacks some of the ways in which gender has been used when speaking of mobility and, in the process, begins to unpack the concept of gender itself in light of the constitutive relation to mobility it has been differentially accorded in the literature. Elliot differentiates two main ways in which gender is understood and used in mobility studies, what she calls the “master difference” between gender as classification and gender and process. In sum, she maps out the ways in
which the relationship between gender and mobility has been framed, and some of the questions that have been asked of this relationship, critically extricating what gender can do for the study of mobility, and vice versa.

Nichola Khan reviews some uses of the keyword *immobility* pertaining to the key areas of migration, modernity, affect, and the market. Anthropology’s specific contribution to immobility, she proposes, is one that offers ethnographically grounded theorizations that can draw on classic disciplinary concepts and concerns. At the same time, anthropologists should query the ethics the exercise of immobility delivers in different contexts. In her conclusion, Khan explores the question of “what lies between,” or beyond (im)mobility. She emphasizes the ways immobility encompasses mobility, but is also surpassed by the existential intensities of the departures, arrivals, attachments, detachments, dead ends, impasses, and destinations that humans encounter and imagine.

Mari Korpela discusses *infrastructure* from three different angles: the moment of becoming mobile, the time of being mobile, and the moment of stopping to be mobile, that is, becoming immobile again. Different kinds of mobilities, whether forced or voluntary, short-term or long-term, are formed and regulated differently, but they always exist within current social, political, and economic structures, and within infrastructures. The emphasis is on transnational mobility, on people crossing state borders, although Korpela also questions whether there are infrastructures of mobility that function beyond the control of the current system of nation-states.

Hege Høyer Leivestad disentangles *motility*, a keyword referring to the potential to move. Motility’s relative unfamiliarity makes room for a more general exploration of the concept’s transdisciplinary borrowing and its analytical value for studies of mobility. Tracing motility’s trajectories, her chapter critically engages with how notions of freedom and individual agency have assumed key roles in its conceptualization. Leivestad suggests that motility can be approached as a particular methodological position directed toward situations and locations of temporality in which mobility appears as yet-to-be-realized, yet-to-be-completed, or might-never-happen.

Beth Baker focuses on *regimes* of (im)mobility. She distinguishes two main tendencies in framing the concept. Functionalist approaches seek to identify the ways that systems for the regulation of mobility work in order to design more efficient and comprehensive regimes. Discursive approaches, on the other hand, parse out the ways institutions, technologies, ideas, and identities are constructed in relation to mobility, and how this might produce, shape, and prevent different kinds of mobilities. Examples are taken primarily from her own ethnographic work with undocumented youth, which point to the importance of listening to the (im)mobilized rather than fetishizing mobility.
Finally, Brenda Chalfin and Ellen Judd offer their take on the various contributions to this volume in two engaging afterwords. According to Chalfin, one of the strengths of this volume is not only its firm grounding in ethnography (as opposed to literature and text) but also the fact that each chapter charts a course for further exploration, “tracing potential paths for sustained comparative inquiry as well as theory building.” Judd notes that the choice of keywords as an organizing heuristic has proven exceptionally productive. As the chapters indicate, questions about the meaning of keywords extend beyond language, narrowly construed, and require connecting with a world that is arguably outside text. This volume confirms that the creative combination of empirical data with conceptual reflection provides a unique contribution to the scholarly investigation of keywords, whether it is applied to a particular domain (such as mobility) or in general.

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