

Mobilities, Categorization, and Belonging

The Challenge of Reflexivity

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In the fall of 2017, the then Berlin-based artist Ai Weiwei presented his documentary film *Human Flow* at the Venice Film Festival, prompting a wide range of reactions. It was considered just as controversial as the 2016 photograph in which he reenacted the death of Aylan Kurdi, a child whose body had washed up in Bodrum, Turkey, after his family tried to flee Syria in September 2015. Critics argued that Weiwei cared little for refugees and was exploiting them merely to stage himself as an empathetic, politically engaged intellectual.¹ In contrast, other commentators saw *Human Flow* as a humanitarian call for a worldwide refugee policy.² They reasoned that the artist

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1. See, for example, Dietmar Dath, “Eigenwerbung, Schmerz und Abscheu,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 3, 2017, <http://blogs.faz.net/filmfestival/2017/09/03/eigenwerbung-schmerz-und-abscheu-1074/>.

2. Bert Rebhandl, “Wohin kann man überhaupt noch emigrieren?” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 18, 2017, <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/kino/ai-weiwei-im->

had mediated between a broad overview of global refugee movements and a more focused contemplation of individual faces, and that by frequently shifting between aerial and close-up camera shots he had managed to illustrate the monotony and eternal suffering present in countless places across the globe.

The controversies surrounding Weiwei's work are more than a fleeting reaction to an artistic intervention. They reflect a fundamental debate in the Global North that assumed a new intensity with the so-called refugee crisis that began in 2015.³ This debate revolves around two questions: Is it possible and appropriate to represent, whether publicly or politically, human mobility and people in transit? And how can we do so without reproducing dichotomous, often affectively charged notions of “us” and “them”? Weiwei frequently refers in his artwork and interviews to his own position as a political refugee, explaining his move from Berlin to post-Brexit Britain as a reaction to his exclusion as a non-German speaker from political and public debate.⁴ While it is more usual for artists to make use of their own experience, scholars have drawn attention to the many ways of approaching migration and mobility, highlighting how the classification and differentiation of these phenomena can shape analytical perspectives and categories. In so doing, they have located human mobility, or rather *mobilities*, within a plurality of temporalities, situations, and contexts. Like Weiwei, historians, philosophers, geographers, and social anthropologists have emphasized that migration is a *conditio humana*, in an effort to foster solidarity or at least sympathy—if not empathy—for migrants.⁵ Others have sought to highlight the diversity or even heterogeneity of mobile people and the difficulty of distinguishing between different forms, phases, and categories of mobility, such as migration and travel.⁶ Others still have drawn attention to historically variable

kino-wohin-kann-man-ueberhaupt-noch-emigrieren-15297493.html. See also Murielle Joudet, “‘Human Flow’:abri cinématographique pour vies mutilées,” *Le Monde*, February 7, 2018, https://www.lemonde.fr/cinema/article/2018/02/07/human-flow-abri-cinematographique-pour-vies-mutiles_5252877_3476.html.

3. For earlier debates, see Leo Lucassen, *The Immigrant Threat: The Integration of Old and New Migrants in Western Europe since 1850* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

4. Simon Hattenstone, “Ai Weiwei on His New Life in Britain: ‘People Are At Least Polite. In Germany, They Weren’t,’” *The Guardian*, January 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/jan/21/ai-weiwei-on-his-new-life-in-britain-germany-virtual-reality-film>; Johanna Luysen, “Entre Ai Weiwei et l’Allemagne, le divorce est consommé,” *Libération*, February 12, 2020, https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2020/02/12/entre-ai-weiwei-et-l-allemande-le-divorce-est-consomme_1777988/. Weiwei has since settled in Portugal, at least temporarily.

5. Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migrations in the Second Millennium* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2005); Benjamin C. Campbell and Michael H. Crawford, eds., *Causes and Consequences of Human Migration: An Evolutionary Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

6. Excellent historical works include Daniel Roche, *Humeurs vagabondes. De la circulation des hommes et de l’utilité des voyages* (Paris: Fayard, 2003); Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006). On the call for a “mobility turn,” see John Urry, *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2000). See also the journal *Mobilities*, founded in 2006.

political conditions by examining, for example, how the formation and rise of the nation-state and colonialism—and subsequent resistance to them—influenced and often restricted nomadic populations and temporarily mobile people, including soldiers and other traveling professionals.⁷ However, scholars have rarely addressed the ways that the representation of human mobilities has affected constructions of belonging at different scales, nor their own involvement in the categorization and classification of such articulations.

This twofold question, at once historical and epistemological, lies at the heart of the approach proposed in this dossier for the *Annales*. By exploring this topic, we hope to encourage those working on the history of migration and other forms of mobility in different periods and spaces to situate their research within a broader analytical framework—one that would reveal different actors' struggles with the categorizations imposed upon them while also allowing researchers to reflect on their own position regarding these distinctions.⁸ Since the 1990s, research on mobilities has above all concentrated on the relationship between migrations and identity. It is time to expand its scope by turning to the production and transformation of concepts of belonging.⁹

In line with the considerations of Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper on appropriate language in the humanities, we distinguish between two ontological perspectives. The first understands migratory phenomena and their distinctions as something natural, to be captured by essentializing concepts such as identity. The second advocates for the interpretation of mobility as cultural practice,

7. See, for example, Claudia Moatti and Wolfgang Kaiser, eds., *Gens de passage en Méditerranée, de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne. Procédures de contrôle et d'identification* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2007); Claudia Moatti, Wolfgang Kaiser, and Christophe Pébarthe, eds., *Le monde de l'itinérance en Méditerranée de l'Antiquité à l'époque moderne. Procédures de contrôle et d'identification* (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2009); Valeska Huber, *Channelling Mobilities: Migration and Globalisation in the Suez Canal Region and Beyond, 1869–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

8. Among the special issues published in recent years by different academic journals, see Nikolaos Papadogiannis and Detlef Siegfried, eds., “Between Leisure, Work and Study: Tourism and Mobility in Europe from 1945 to 1989,” special issue, *Comparativ* 24, no. 2 (2014); Sarah Panter, ed., “Mobility and Biography,” special issue, *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte* 16 (2015); Jens Olaf Kleist, ed., “History of Refugee Protection,” special issue, *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30, no. 2 (2017); Anne Friedrichs, ed., “Migration, Mobilität und Sesshaftigkeit,” special issue, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 44, no. 2 (2018); Bettina Severin-Barboutie and Nikola Tietze, eds., “Flucht als Handlungszusammenhang in asymmetrischen Machtverhältnissen,” special issue, *Zeithistorische Forschungen/ Studies in Contemporary History* 15, no. 3 (2018); Jessica Richter and Anne Unterwurzacher, eds., “Migrationswege,” special issue, *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 31, no. 1 (2020). See also the dossiers “Migrations,” “Exodes,” and “Diasporas,” in *Annales HSS* 66, no. 2 (2011). For an earlier multi-disciplinary approach, see Caroline B. Brettell and James F. Hollifield, eds., *Migration Theory: Talking across Disciplines*, 3rd ed. (2000; New York: Routledge, 2015).

9. See Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1–47.

calling for a terminology that is mobile, context-sensitive, and self-reflexive.¹⁰ This constructivist approach can reinforce research that deconstructs dominant narratives and generic categories such as “refugee” and “migrant,” revealing the situational and context-dependent nature of these supposedly universal and static concepts of belonging.¹¹ It could also help to reconstruct alternative and often forgotten intellectual and social figures (*Denkfiguren* and *Sozialfiguren*) relating to shifting and ambiguous representations of belonging and sociability. Cases such as the “Forty-Eighters,” the “Ruhr Poles,” the “Emigrati,” or the “Sans-Papiers,” all of whom struggled with dominant categorizations, speak profoundly to ongoing debates on the “identities” of individuals, groups, and larger spatial entities such as Europe.

The three articles in this dossier reflect on different practices of representing human mobility, exploring the varying significance of social constructions of belonging over the *longue durée*.¹² Each uses the lens of human mobilities to analyze the processes through which individual and official actors, including mobile persons themselves, create and reinterpret belonging in different temporal, social, and spatial contexts. Nora Berend deconstructs the enduring narrative of Hungary as a “defender of Christian Europe” by highlighting the difference between medieval and modern tales of migration within the Hungarian space. Berend argues that myths about migration in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary were tied not to a

10. We prefer to speak of “mobile concepts” rather than use the metaphor of traveling, which implies that concepts act like human beings. See Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

11. For early efforts in the field of refugee and forced migration studies, see, for example, Jérôme Elie, “Histories of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Quasmiyeh et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 23–35. See also Karen Akoka, *L’asile et l’exil. Une histoire de la distinction réfugiés/migrants* (Paris: La Découverte, 2020).

12. The approach advocated here draws on Roger Chartier’s concept of “representation.” Particularly suited to the study of human mobilities, this notion offers a way to group and identify different actions and practices of representation: Roger Chartier, “Le monde comme représentation,” *Annales ESC* 44, no. 6 (1989): 1505–20; Chartier, “Pouvoirs et limites de la représentation. Sur l’œuvre de Louis Marin,” *Annales HSS* 49, no. 2 (1994): 407–18. We nevertheless expand the concept by integrating the evolutions in scholarship since Chartier first introduced it in the late 1980s. Postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ella Shohat, along with more empirically focused scholars such as Clare Anderson and B. S. Chimni, have encouraged reflection on the self-representation of “subalterns” contending with overarching power structures, and in this context have notably drawn attention to the power of scholars to categorize and classify phenomena such as mobilities. See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313; Ella Shohat, “The Struggle over Representation: Casting, Coalitions and the Politics of Identification,” in *Late Imperial Culture*, ed. Román de la Campa, E. Ann Kaplan, and Michael Sprinker (London: Verso, 1995), 166–78; Clare Anderson, *Subaltern Lives: Biographies of Colonialism in the Indian Ocean World, 1790–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); B. S. Chimni, “The Geopolitics of Refugee Studies: A View from the South,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 11, no. 4 (1998): 350–74.

coherent ethnic group, as claimed in nineteenth-century historiography, but to the rise of the nobility in the thirteenth century. She also points out that these narratives relied on a dichotomic representation of immigration by medieval scholars, with the valorization of “old migration,” on the one hand, and the demonization of “new immigration,” on the other. The former was invoked to describe the arrival of one’s own people (*gens*) in Hungary and legitimized the reigning political power. The latter, meanwhile, labeled and devalued the more recent movements of individual noble families, while simultaneously excluding those who were not Turkic Huns as “nomadic” and “barbaric.”

Complementing Berend’s analysis of historical shifts in mythmaking around Hungarian Hunnic origins, Anne Friedrichs draws attention to changes in our understanding of society by focusing on workers from the Polish- and German-speaking borderlands of Prussia, Austria-Hungary, and the Russian Empire who moved to the Ruhr Valley in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Friedrichs argues that it is not sufficient to analyze the much-debated historical semantics of the concept as it developed in Central Europe from the French Revolution onwards; to move beyond a model of society as a closed container, we should pay attention to the social practices and testimonies of people on the move, as well as their historically variable opportunities to impact societies through their actions, practices, and even their simple presence. It is also vital to examine how administrative actors transform those mobilities into political arguments, for instance through the expansion of bureaucratic procedures for observing and controlling populations at the regional, state, or even international level. Combined with an analytical framework that goes beyond these discursive strategies, a multi-perspective analysis that takes both administrative categorizations and alternative notions of belonging into account allows scholars to render visible the many conflicting conceptions of society and diversity.

In the third contribution to the dossier, Delphine Diaz explores the changing representations of female and gendered mobility in different fields, particularly the rich historiography of circulations in the Mediterranean, by commenting on Camille Schmoll’s interdisciplinary work *Les damnées de la mer* (The Wretched Women of the Sea).¹³ Published in 2020, the book focuses on the experiences of women from East, West, and North Africa traveling across the Mediterranean to Europe since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Schmoll’s insights into this migration and its meaning for women—as a move, it often extends the autonomy of those who undertake it—make an important contribution to the ongoing and essential deconstruction of gendered stereotypes such as the mobile man and the immobile woman. Diaz observes, however, that Schmoll’s work gives more space to women’s agency than to relations between the genders, overlooking, for example, the role played by gender-based violence in women’s movement since the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention recognized their right to international protection.

13. Camille Schmoll, *Les damnées de la mer. Femmes et frontières en Méditerranée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2020).

Similarly, some of the interpretations proposed, notably concerning the places, islands, and channels through which these women travel, might have been different had the author considered the long history of crossings and migration in the Mediterranean.

Approaching the construction of social worlds through different and overlapping representations of human mobilities can help historians avoid two common pitfalls: either reproducing older narratives framed by the “nation” and its structures, or simply adding to the proliferation of stories of globalization. Since the late 1990s, historians and other scholars have repeatedly criticized the discourse of increased mobility by pointing, for example, to the indiscriminate and value-laden use of terms such as “circulation” to describe various types of movement.¹⁴ We propose a different but complementary approach, which seeks to reconstruct the contingent, and at times contradictory and clashing, processes through which people on the move or in transit have been designated “mobile” or “immobile” and have represented themselves as such. By distinguishing and juxtaposing social practices that either foreground or neglect human mobilities, we hope not only to critically reconsider historical narratives but also to offer fresh insights into how social constructions of belonging can shift depending on the temporal and spatial scales of analysis.¹⁵ In so doing, our work may also offer a way to reinvigorate the long collaboration between historians and other social scientists. Sociologists have recently called for increased attention to temporality when considering overlapping affiliations, distinguishing forms such as emotional attachments, social localizations, and political projects.¹⁶ As Diaz shows in her article, studies that focus on current situations, where individuals navigate between several dimensions of belonging in a relatively short timeframe, could benefit from a historical perspective tracing the emergence of different notions of belonging and their interconnections.¹⁷ For instance, Berend demonstrates that in the Hungarian context, reference to the

14. See Stefanie Gänger, “Circulation: Reflections on Circularity, Entity, and Liquidity in the Language of Global History,” *Journal of Global History* 12, no. 3 (2017): 303–18; Antonella Romano, “Des sciences et des savoirs en mouvement: réflexions historiographiques et enjeux méthodologiques,” *Diasporas. Circulations, migrations, histoire* 23/24 (2014): 66–79. See also Nina Glick Schiller and Noel B. Salazar, “Regimes of Mobility across the Globe,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39, no. 2 (2013): 183–200.

15. For a systematic overview of the interplay of citizenship and belonging, see, for instance, Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship, Inequality, and Difference: Historical Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018). On the context-bound variants of cosmopolitanism and their superimpositions, see Thomas Nail, “Migrant Cosmopolitanism,” *Public Affairs Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (2015): 187–99.

16. See Stefan Hirschauer, “Un/doing Differences. Die Kontingenz sozialer Zugehörigkeiten,” *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 43, no. 3 (2014): 170–91. On the advantages of the concept of belonging compared to the older and still popular one of identity, see Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, *Zugehörigkeit in der mobilen Welt. Politiken der Verortung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012). See also Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity’.”

17. See, for example, Anne Friedrichs, “Multiperspektivität als Schlüssel zur Kontingenz von Zugehörigkeit. Der Umzug von polnisch-deutschen Arbeitern und ihren Familien aus dem Ruhrgebiet nach Frankreich,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 313, no. 3 (2021): 645–85.

Huns has served to legitimize the rulership of different groups over the centuries, from the noble families of the Middle Ages to today's national-conservative elites. These constructions have not only been normalized via legally stabilized frameworks—empire, nation-state, churches, the international community—but have also been embedded in social practices, life-worlds, and norms built around notions of origin, religious and political convictions, achievements, cosmopolitanism, and other ethics of care.

Historical work on the representation of human mobilities can also nurture a better understanding of the transmission of concepts of belonging by moving beyond a focus on written cultures and narratives of European colonization. In the nineteenth century, European historians played a crucial part in the construction of belonging, developing a national and imperial history that supported and even advanced the ambitions of emerging nation-states. With the flourishing of area studies in the 1950s and 1960s, scholars working on the past in Europe and beyond began to reflect on how to overcome cultural colonization and give so-called peoples without history—or subalterns—a voice.¹⁸ Building on these efforts, today's historians face a twofold challenge: to recover oral traditions and other relics of a rapidly vanishing past, but also to evaluate their significance without relying on Western norms and temporality—an issue that has preoccupied postmodern, postcolonial, and other critics since the 1980s and has recently been the subject of intense discussion in the extra-European world.¹⁹ One way of meeting this challenge is to reconstruct the shifting and sometimes hidden meanings of objects by following their itineraries.²⁰ Even at the height of European colonialism, much more could have been said about non-European history had sources beyond written records been taken into account. In central Sudan in the second half of the nineteenth century, for instance, maps produced by European scientists were based on knowledge provided by travelers and trans-Saharan traders who traced the routes of their journeys in the sand, a practice that “intimately mingled speech,

18. See Henri Moniot, “L’histoire des peuples sans histoire,” in *Faire de l’histoire*, vol. 1, *Nouveaux problèmes*, ed. Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 149–71. See also Lisa Regazzoni, ed., *Schriftlose Vergangenheiten. Geschichtsschreibung an ihrer Grenze – von der Frühen Neuzeit bis in die Gegenwart* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).

19. On temporalizing difference, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, 4th ed. (1983; New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); and Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). For an introduction to the postmodern debate, see Christoph Conrad and Martina Kessel, eds., *Geschichte schreiben in der Postmoderne. Beiträge zur aktuellen Diskussion* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994). For an introduction to the postcolonial discussion, see Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995).

20. For a discussion of concepts such as the “life of objects,” “traveling objects,” and “itineraries,” see Hans Peter Hahn and Hadas Weiss, “Introduction: Biographies, Travels and Itineraries of Things,” in *Mobility, Meaning and the Transformations of Things: Shifting Contexts of Material Culture through Time and Space*, ed. Hans Peter Hahn and Hadas Weiss (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013), 1–14.

gesture, and writing.”²¹ As Camille Lefebvre has shown, these drawings reveal the nuanced relationships between West African and European actors, but also the intricacy of relations to scripture, gestures, and spoken language in the trans-Saharan region. Other scholars, working in the fields of archaeology, paleontology, and cultural heritage studies, have studied material traces that bear witness to the many forms of human mobility, using methods drawn from both history and the natural sciences.²²

The varying accessibility of these remains, together with their necessary contextualization, pose a challenge to historians who deal with the trans- and intra-European zones that have been shaped by multiple mobilities and many other processes. Since the establishment of their discipline in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sociologists studying migration have endeavored to consider and record the often-ephemeral testimonies of people on the move.²³ Over the years, they and other scholars have enlarged their perspective on the material suitable for such analysis and refined their methodology. Yet these considerations could be extended even further, especially in view of the growing interest in material culture²⁴ and current debates on identity politics. Since the 1980s, early modern historians such as Natalie Zemon Davis and Linda Colley have shown that a close focus on the testimonies of individuals on the move can bring to light unexpected lives, interpretations, and practices.²⁵ By adopting and adapting this microhistorical approach, historians can make significant contributions to the international and interdisciplinary debates on “global,” “imperial,” “mobile,” “subaltern,” and “connected” lives—and thus to the fundamental question of the different, not always voluntary, relationships of individuals to the worlds they traverse.²⁶

21. Camille Lefebvre, “Itinéraires de sable. Parole, geste et écrit au Soudan central au XIX^e siècle,” in “Cultures écrites en Afrique,” ed. Éloi Fiquet and Aïssatou Mbodj-Pouye, special issue, *Annales HSS* 64, no. 4 (2009): 797–824, here p. 808. On the “lives of objects,” see Stefanie Gänger, *Relics of the Past: The Collecting and Study of Pre-Columbian Antiquities in Peru and Chile, 1837–1911* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

22. See, for example, Étienne Anheim, Mathieu Thoury, and Loïc Bertrand, “Micro-imagerie de matériaux anciens complexes (I),” *Revue de synthèse* 136, no. 3/4 (2015): 329–54; Mischa Meier and Steffen Patzold, *Gene und Geschichte. Was die Archäogenetik zur Geschichtsforschung beitragen kann* (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann, 2021).

23. William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: Monograph of an Immigrant Group*, 5 vols. (Boston: Richard G. Badger/Gorham Press, 1918–1920).

24. See, for example, Hans Peter Hahn, *Materielle Kultur. Eine Einführung*, 2nd ed. (2005; Berlin: D. Reimer, 2014).

25. See, for example, Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Linda Colley, *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh: A Woman in World History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007).

26. For an overview of this debate, see Nils Riecken, ed., “Relational Lives: Historical Subjectivities in Global Perspective,” special issue, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 45, no. 3 (2019). For the period before 1800, see Miles Ogborn, *Global Lives: Britain and the World, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008). For related efforts in the field of global microhistory, see Romain Bertrand and Guillaume Calafat “La microhistoire globale : affaire(s) à suivre,” *Annales HSS* 73, no. 1 (2018): 1–18.

By extension, working on the history of human mobilities can help uncover enduring and evolving ways of conceiving and mediating between self-representations and external categorizations. The Middle Eastern scholar Nils Riecken recently criticized the tendency of those interested in such issues to focus on one single dimension of the lives they study.²⁷ Scholars' dominant research interests thus lead them to reinforce politically shaped discourses on globality, for instance, and obscure unconventional life stories. With this in mind, it is essential to analyze the testimonies of people on the move from two angles. The first involves the "marketing strategies" that authors, publishers, and archivists use to represent specific aspects of the lives in question, from the title of an autobiography to the way that a particular scribe reorders a genealogy on a manuscript page. This lays open the strategies and tactics that actors use to conceal contradictory articulations of belonging in different political, geographical, or linguistic contexts. The second entails efforts by historians to both generalize *and* distinguish the lives of men, women, and children in multilingual contexts by examining their subjectivities in relation to overarching historical processes—revolutions, the economic developments of the nineteenth century, decolonization—and other logics of action. Friedrich's article offers a striking example in relation to the "Ruhr Poles," considered both from an external perspective (that of regional authorities, employers, and bilingual intermediaries) and via the autobiographical writings that reveal the complexity of mobile trajectories, determined not only by shifting international borders and the increasing importance of the nation-state as a political model but also by industrialization and older economic and moral criteria. Research on human mobilities is thus a delicate balancing act. While its subject matter necessarily involves multilingual contexts and different historical and semantic categories, it is often necessary to condense this variety into an analytical concept that can be meaningfully applied to different situations.

In light of recurring debates about "identity" and the policies that stem from them, we would like to encourage a relational, reflexive, and constructivist approach to social worlds through the lens of human mobilities and their representation. Examining the myriad ways in which people on the move and travelers have been categorized, not least how they have staged or represented themselves (often in multiple languages at once), allows us to identify and pluralize the multi-layered constructions and concepts of belonging mobilized in such contexts. It can also raise awareness about the historicity and stability of categories (as well as alternative notions of ambiguity and sociability) by uncovering how they are transformed by different actors and media in various power constellations. In so doing, it has the potential to reveal much about the varying forms in which modes of difference and belonging have been transmitted across boundaries of time, space, and human experience, and to bring to light forgotten figures and concepts that capture

27. Riecken, introduction to "Relational Lives," 325–40.

ambiguous forms of belonging and sociability. The resulting polyphony may offer insights into the multifaceted interplay of human mobility and belonging, into past and present contexts of transmission, and above all into the reflexive potential of a historiography that transcends the boundaries of research fields, disciplines, and languages.²⁸

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28. For self-reflexive approaches in the humanities, see Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory* 45 (2006): 30–50; and Doris Bachmann-Medick, “The Reflexive Turn/Literary Turn,” in *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture* [2015], trans. Adam Blauhut (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 103–30. For self-reflexive approaches in the social science migration research, see Boris Nieswand and Heike Drotbohm, eds., *Kultur, Gesellschaft, Migration. Die Reflexive Wende in der Migrationsforschung* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2014).