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# Introduction: mobility across media in the francophone world

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# Introduction

# Mobility Across Media in the Francophone World

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## Abstract

This introduces the special issue on mobility across media in various areas of the Francophone world. Articles treat the notion of mobility as understood in film, literature, visual art and advertising and explore how genres as well as national traditions intersect. They explore a range of representations of mobility, such as the mobility between people, between genres, between languages, between artistic forms and between texts across historical periods. We show that the terminology regarding movement is constantly mobile itself, having undergone significant slippage in recent decades. Overall, this volume does not seek to arrest, but rather add to understanding of the diverse modes of mobility present in the contemporary world.

## Keywords

Mobility, migration, literature, visual art, media, *Francophonie*

The world is currently in the throes of the largest migration of people since the Second World War. Mobility and migration have become the subject of vehement debate in many parts of the world. The most recent elections in France have demonstrated concerns over rising tides of migrants as a threat to national unity and prosperity. François Fillon famously proposed annual quotas of immigrants as a cornerstone of his platform and Marine Le Pen condemned a current 'submersion migratoire'.[1] Many others have recently insisted upon the necessity of mobility in the contemporary world, reconfiguring 'Frenchness' and calling for a decentered understanding of France and the Francophone world.

It therefore seems pressing to interrogate the representation of mobility and migration in contemporary French and Francophone cultures. Such representations are of course not confined to the contemporary period; as Christine McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman argue in *French Global*, French literary and cultural history has traditionally been considered as a pure, monocultural entity but can be more accurately reconceptualised as a process of encounters with different cultures, languages and ethnicities. France has long been a transcontinental nation beyond its hexagonal European contours, after all. At the root of colonial France was the desire to create an imperial culture that could move around the world. Yet, French culture changed as it circulated in spite of the republican tradition of sameness. Now, the process of a centre moving out towards a periphery is replaced by voices from the periphery seeking to destabilise the metropolitan centre and calling for new understandings of 'Frenchness'. Movements such as 'Pour une littérature monde en français' demonstrate the need to mobilise how we conceive of French culture beyond its traditional boundaries and thus provoke scholars to imagine a transnational approach to French studies (Hargreaves, Forsdick and Murphy 2010).

[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMxrdGG-VG4

We thus chose ‘Mobility and Migration/les flux migratoires’ as the topic of the 2016 Australian Society for French Studies conference.[2] The meeting was intended to engage scholars in a dialogue over the representation of mobility in French and Francophone cultures. What transpired was a series of interlinking conversations about the mobility of people, cultures, genres, ideas, languages and identities across time, nations and media. This volume contains a selection of these interventions.

One of the most striking elements of the conference was the attention to a variety of cultural media. An increased fluidity between media has been enabled by technological developments and innovative creative platforms. Artists such as Abd Al Malik and Julien Delmaire represent migration and the situation of second-generation Afropeans through music, literature, film, and slam poetry. Mahriana Rofheart shows how artists cross several boundaries in order to represent migration in the African context, focusing not only on literature and film but also upon social media and popular music. This volume contains a series of articles which treat both the theme of mobility and the mobility of artists between mediums in contemporary Francophone work. Mobility is considered in a wide sense since, as a recent volume on ‘rethinking mobility’ makes clear, the terms surrounding movement remain mobile. If ‘variously defined and contested categories’ have been developed, such as ‘travel writing, migrant writing, expatriate writing and exile writing’ there has indeed been a ‘frequent slippage in terminology’ regarding the categories to which cultural works are attributed (Averis, Hollis-Touré: 3,6). To these many considerations we add examinations of mobility across transcultural mediatic spaces and territories.

[2] The conference received generous funding from the Australian Society for French Studies, the School of Humanities at the University of Adelaide, The University of South Australia’s European Union Centre for Mobilities, Migrations, and Cultural Transformations, and *French Cultural Studies*.

Turning to the articles themselves, one of the most dominant migration trajectories in the Francophone world is that between Algeria and metropolitan France. The historical and contemporary flows of peoples, cultures and artworks across the Mediterranean are essential for understanding the dynamics of Francophone migration and mobility. In her article on the exhibition *Made in Algeria*, held at the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM) in Marseille in 2016, Amy Hubbell, an expert on written representations of Algerian history, focuses on the evolution of images of the Algerian people and landscape by artists who have migrated back and forth between Algeria and France. Hubbell shows how layers of colonial memory remain in such images, making this a transcultural exhibition mixing voices from spaces between these two countries.

Likewise focussing on the Maghreb, Corbin Treacy's article analyses evolutions in race relations in the Maghreb, as trans-African migration intensifies and increasing numbers of Sub-Saharan and other African populations pass through Francophone North Africa on their way to France. Treacy focuses on the growth of intra-African racism, as black Africans are demonized in rhetoric created by their Maghrebi North African counterparts. Treacy analyses racial portrayals across a variety of mediums, from print and online journalism to film, literature and social media. He argues that many Maghrebi activists seek to counter such racism by foregrounding the neo-colonial nature of its rhetoric and call for a mobilization of the boundaries of North African Studies that might celebrate 'overlapping webs of affiliation', recall some of the Panafricanism of yesteryear.

One of the richest and most diverse areas of French and Francophone cultural production to explore mobilities and migration is cinema. Not only is the representation of migrant journeys and experiences a dominant sub-category of contemporary French and Francophone film, but many such films are evidence of border-crossing and transnational mobility in themselves. Contemporary cinema has seen a rise in transnational Francophone

filmmaking practises and coproductions which result in border-crossing films like *La Pirogue*, *Dheepan* and *Welcome*. In his article on *La Pirogue* (Moussa Touré 2012), Christopher Hogarth not only examines the text's transfer from literary source text to cinematic adaptation, but *La Pirogue*'s portrayal of a migratory journey, filmed for the most part within the claustrophobic surrounds of a makeshift boat used to transport a number of Francophone African migrants from North Africa to the Spanish-administered Canary Islands. Focussing on how Touré's films raises more concerns over divisions within Africa than the text from which it is adapted (Abasse Ndione's novella *Mbëkë mi*) Hogarth echoes Treacy's references to an increased mobilizing of borders as a way back to a Panafricanist dream. Hogarth argues that Touré uses the cinematic medium to portray national and linguistic diversity, mobility and divisions within Africa, before proposing solutions that involve greater inclusivity regarding gender, generations, and languages, though discouraging the clandestine migration by boat which many Senegalese feel compelled to attempt to flee their country in hope for a better life in Europe.

Migration is indeed a process of not only physical movement, but of linguistic mobility and transformation. In her analysis of the French, English, Kurdish, Turkish and Tamil-language films *Dheepan* (Jacques Audiard 2015) and *Welcome* (Philippe Lioret 2009), Gemma King follows on from Hogarth's investigation of linguistic mobility in more depth as she explores the shifting place of language in contemporary cinematic representations of transcontinental migration. Examining the ways in which migrants may learn, use and discard languages as they move across borders and between different national and linguistic territories, King proposes a new term for understanding the relationship between moving subjects and non-native languages: the *langue de passage*. This concept denotes a nebulous, non-assimilationist experience of the French language, for *Dheepan*'s Tamil asylum seekers and *Welcome*'s Kurdish migrant learn the minimum amount of French required as they pass

through France on the way to their ultimate destination of the UK. This dispersed picture of language relations decentres the Hexagon from destination to pit stop, resituating it in a complex web of linguistic, geographic and national spaces that comprise the migration patterns of the non-Francophone characters in these films.

Thus this volume explores various representations of migrants and their experience of movement towards, across and beyond metropolitan France. Yet we are not only concerned with migration *within* texts, but also the migration *of* them. In her study of 'the Paris-Tokyo-Shanghai triangle' by which French literature historically travelled from the Hexagon to Japan and China, Mathilde Kang explores the impact of translation and cultural transfer on French literature in non-Francophone Asia. Kang's article traces a history of the migration of French literary texts, beginning in the 16th century and flourishing in the 19th, when translation became a major industry. Through the cases of novels like *Madame Chrysanthème* (Pierre Loti 1887) and *La Dame aux camélias* (Alexandre Dumas 1848), Kang explores the cultural and linguistic filtering of French-language novels which arrived in China via Japan, troubling traditional conceptions of linear migrations or binary translations from source to target language. The article shows how the role of an intermediary culture (in this case Japan, which Kang describes as a 'cultural springboard' for French literature in China) can influence texts in translation, engendering cultural mixity and *métissage*.

In Kang's article, the text itself migrates and transforms while doing so. In complementary ways, Ben McCann's article examines the *creator* as migrant, and the ways in which the act of creation is altered by the experience of migration. In his article on the prolific French filmmaker Julien Duvivier, McCann reveals how artists themselves migrate and are influenced in turn by this migration. Examining an underrepresented period in Duvivier's career, during which he travelled from France to make films in 1930s and 1940s Hollywood, McCann shows how the very different industries of 20th-century France and

America influenced Duvivier's films, and vice versa. Unlike other French directors who failed to make an impact on Golden Age Hollywood, McCann proposes that Duvivier's temporary migration to America was an unusually successful one. As films such as *The Great Waltz* (1938) show, Duvivier not only drew inspiration from his new surrounds, but was also more able than his contemporaries to infuse his American films with his own filmmaking style, informed by his French origins. Ultimately, McCann argues that Duvivier's trans-Atlantic migration enriched and revitalised his filmmaking practise.

The interrogation of mobility as a motor of artistic creation is echoed in Natalie Edwards' article. This analysis moves the volume into another genre, as Edwards examines the work of contemporary photographer and installation artist Sophie Calle. Studying two of Calle's recent exhibitions, Edwards highlights how the mobility of objects into unfamiliar spaces creates a productive contamination of media, sound and text. Calle's exhibitions move objects or artefacts into ostensibly inappropriate spaces to produce multimedia works that draw attention to the process of artistic creation. In so doing, they question the role of the artist, the spectator and the relationship between art and the public in contemporary culture.

Focussing on another form of cultural production which blurs generic and contextual boundaries, Julie Robert's article examines the dominance of travel narratives in contemporary French alcohol advertisements. In the wake of the 1991 Loi Evin, which aimed to limit the content of French advertisements for alcohol in the name of public health, Robert argues that the linkage of drinking with luxurious travel destinations in many advertising campaigns in France succeeds in challenging 'the spirit but not the letter' of the Loi Evin. In connecting the enjoyment of travel and the exoticisation of locations from tropical beaches to Parisian terraces with the consumption of alcohol, Robert reveals the centrality of movement, border-crossing and the exoticisation of the 'foreign' to the commercial promotion of alcohol in contemporary France.

Despite the diversity of disciplines, time periods and texts examined in this volume, each article is centred on the dynamics of movement, mobility and migratory flows within and beyond the French-speaking world. Through these explorations of migrations across media, from literature and film to advertising and photography, we seek to understand not only the patterns of migration that take place between metropolitan France and its others, but the complex web of movements which trouble the binary distinction between the two.

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