

CfP: Agency, Community, Kinship – Representations of Migration Beyond Victimhood

Interdisciplinary Online Symposium, February 23–24, 2022

University of Wuppertal, Germany

Following the work of Michaela Marouf and Hara Kouki (2017, 78), “[m]igration must be understood as a complex social process that is also shaped by the agency of the migrants.” Agency, however, is often neglected in seemingly benevolent discourses that portray migrants primarily as passive and helpless victims. Similarly, researchers often tend to disregard the various “tactics” (cf. de Certeau 1984) that migrants use to navigate and even modify spaces of sovereignty. While it is crucial to expose the ways in which biopolitics and necropolitics frame migrant lives as disposable and thus shape the everyday experiences of migrants around the globe, it is equally important to highlight how migrants assert their agency and thereby challenge the dehumanizing tendencies of hegemonic culture. Engin Isin (2018, 2021), for example, has identified what he calls “transversal movements” as subversive moments that migrants create to disrupt exercises of sovereignty and biopower. Drawing on the works of Ludek Stavinoha, Koen Leurs, and Martina Tazzioli, he argues that it is primarily in the digital sphere that migrants act as (digital) political subjects by performing alternative versions of citizenship outside of traditional borders of the nation state.

It is, however, not only through these digital practices that migrants assert their agency. At the heart of many of these efforts lie kinship formations that can not only be advanced and mediated through different technologies but are frequently established on a personal level and through storytelling and other cultural practices as well. As Francesca Decimo and Alessandra Gribaldo (2017, 9) maintain, “the politics of kinship represents a crucial dimension in shaping identities and a powerful cultural repertoire that intersects with national borders and citizenship requirements.” As such, kinship is inextricably linked to notions of belonging and nonbelonging, familiarity and difference, power and oppression – concepts which continue to inform discourses on migration, citizenship, and (national) identity. While it is partly based on a set of normative rules, we argue that kinship can be more productively understood as a constantly shifting network of relations, a transformative practice, and a powerful tool that migrants can use to assert their agency.

During this interdisciplinary symposium, we want to examine the interplay between agency and kinship in (self-)representations of migrants in both fictional and factual narratives. By discussing migrant identity discourses in different cultural and medial contexts, we seek to explore the ways in which these texts negotiate and challenge the unequal distribution of mobility, resources, and vulnerability that preconfigures many migrant lives. In particular, we want to discuss narrative and representational strategies that migrants employ as well as technologies that they draw upon to lay powerful claims on space and citizenship.

Possible topics for papers may include but are not limited to:

- individual and/or/versus collective assertions of migrant agency
- artistic, literary, and cinematic representations of migrant agency, community, and kinship
- necropolitics and biopolitics as well as their subversion through acts of agency and kinship formation

- technology’s role in furthering or preventing migrant agency and kinship; social media, the Internet, smartphones, technological changes to borders, increasing militarization and privatization of border regimes, etc.
- space, geography, and mobility; transnational communities and connectivities
- representations of migrant families and other forms of kinship among migrants
- the legacies of colonialism versus postcolonial and decolonial perspectives
- migration and kinship and/in the Anthropocene; climate dispossession, climate refugees, ecocritical perspectives
- silences and absences; questions of accessibility
- empirical research and lived experiences
- epistemic perspectives; knowledge production through technology and through kinship
- legal perspectives
- citizenship and (non)belonging, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and their subversion
- politics, governmental agencies, and NGOs, and their influence on migrant agency and kinship
- asserting agency and creating familial bonds *in* and *through* life writing
- Covid-19 and other medical crises and their impact on migrant agency and kinship
- gender, race, class, (dis)ability, sexuality, poverty, etc. as different perspectives on migration, agency, and kinship

If you are interested in presenting a paper (20 mins) at this symposium, please send an **abstract** (max. 300 words) and a **short bio** (max. 100 words) to espinoza@uni-wuppertal.de, gebauer@uni-wuppertal.de, and wewior@uni-wuppertal.de. The **deadline for proposals is December 12, 2021**. Feedback can be expected within two weeks.

While we kindly ask participants to present their findings in English, we are interested in presentations that focus on representations of migration, agency, and kinship outside of the English-speaking world as well. We particularly encourage submissions from researchers from migrant communities, from underrepresented groups or regions, from the Global South, from non-tenured researchers, researchers early in their research career, independent scholars or scholars returning from career breaks.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic but also to allow people with less funding opportunities to participate, this **symposium will be held online**. We aim for an accessible, diverse, and family friendly conference. Please don’t hesitate to contact us anytime if you have any questions.

Organized by: Lea Espinoza Garrido, Carolin Gebauer, Julia Wewior
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