

The limits of (im)mobility. Rethinking migration in the light of multiple crises

Antía Pérez-Caramés
Belén Fernández-Suárez

University of A Coruña. Faculty of Sociology
Member of the Societies in Motion Research Team (ESOMI, UDC)
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6295-0613>; antia.perez@udc.es
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7702-0662>; belen.fernandez.suarez@udc.es



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Abstract

The introduction presents an analysis of the current state of sociological debates on the main contemporary theories of mobility, immobility and migration. Its starting point is an analysis that takes into account both the “mobility turn” proposed by Mimi Sheller and John Urry and contributions on the transnational perspective in migration studies, in order to place mobility once again at the heart of the social sciences in general, and sociology in particular. This theoretical exercise is carried out against the background of the intersection or explanatory linking of multiple contemporary crises and understanding that the way for sociology to reclaim the study of mobility is based on the understanding that mobility intersects with processes of social stratification.

It also provides a synthesis of the main contributions to the debate on issues of mobility and immobility in the field of sociology of migration. It also includes a reflection on the role of different crises (in particular the economic recession of 2008, Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic) in the understanding of the processes of mobility and immobility and their analysis by both sociology and migration studies. Finally, the contribution of each of the articles included in this monograph to the academic debate on mobility/immobility is reviewed.

Keywords: mobility; immobility; migration; crisis; pandemic; globalisation; inequality

Resumen. *Los límites de la (in)movilidad. Repensar las migraciones a la luz de las múltiples crisis*

En esta introducción se presenta un análisis del estado de la cuestión de los debates sociológicos en torno a las principales teorías contemporáneas sobre la movilidad, la inmovilidad y la migración. Se parte de un análisis que tiene en cuenta tanto el giro a la movilidad propuesto por Mimi Sheller y John Urry, como los aportes de la perspectiva transnacional en los estudios migratorios, para recentrar la movilidad en la disciplina de la sociología y, en particular, en las ciencias sociales. Este ejercicio teórico se realiza con el trasfondo de la intersección o articulación explicativa de las múltiples crisis contemporáneas y entendiendo que la forma de rescatar el estudio de la movilidad para la sociología parte de entender que esta está atravesada por procesos de estratificación social.

Se realiza, además, una síntesis de las principales contribuciones al debate sobre las cuestiones de movilidad e inmovilidad en el ámbito de la sociología de las migraciones. Además, se incorpora una reflexión en torno al papel de las distintas crisis (especialmente, la recesión económica de 2008, el Brexit y la pandemia por covid-19) en la comprensión de los procesos de movilidad e inmovilidad y su análisis por parte tanto de la sociología como de los estudios migratorios. Por último, se revisan las aportaciones de cada uno de los artículos incluidos en este monográfico al debate académico sobre movilidad/inmovilidad.

Palabras clave: movilidad; inmovilidad; migraciones; crisis; pandemia; globalización; desigualdad

Abstract

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1. Introduction

This introduction aims to reflect on the emerging academic debate on (im) mobility and its impact on migration studies, and by extension, on the discipline of sociology. Research into geographical mobility has remained an important element of certain subfields of sociology, including migration studies, the labour market analysis or urban studies. Against the context of the new global regulatory order, sociology has theorised a stratified structure in which access to international mobility is considered to be one of the main axes of inequality (Bauman, 1999). Inequality is therefore an intrinsic part of human movement. Within this inequitable status quo, labour immigration is viewed under the magnifying glass of suspicion, barriers are placed to entry, and demands for integration are increased; meanwhile, at the other extreme, skilled immigration is perceived as desirable, provoking a scramble to attract talent between states (Faist, 2013). In order to understand these processes in a globalised world, new theoretical explanations are emerging that can explain

the rise of mobility: transnationalism and the “mobility turn”. Both theoretical developments are characterised by their critique of methodological nationalism in the field of sociology.

On the one hand, developments in theoretical approaches to transnationalism applied to human mobility put the focus of study on the practices of migrants in establishing economic, social, cultural or any other kinds of links across national borders (Portes, 2003). Contemporary migrants would maintain ties with their society of origin while establishing social relationships with the society of destination (Kivisto, 2016). These practices undermine the concept of the nation-state by fostering transnational citizenships and deterritorialised cultural practices, and can even have macro-social impacts at the political level (such as voting abroad) or at the economic level (such as sending remittances abroad) (Cloquell Lozano & Lacomba Vázquez, 2016). The transnational approach breaks with the tradition of understanding migration as a linear movement between two points (Cresswell, 2006).

In this context, the “mobility turn” (Sheller & Urry, 2006) takes as its starting point the loss of power of national societies, which leads to the emergence of new sociological theories and new rules of method. For Urry, society will cease to be the nerve centre of sociology, giving way to an agenda of mobility traversed by the fluid and the emotional, incorporating virtuality into physical movement; in short, constructing the “social as mobility” (Urry, 2000: 3-5). This paradigm shift revolves around empirical research into multiple different and corporeal experiences of contemporary mobilities. For example: studies of cybermobilities, travelling objects and memory work, among others (Sheller, 2014). This theoretical approach seeks to analyse mobilities per se, as well as the relationship between the mobile and the immobile, and also proposes to connect people with places and experiences of mobility by giving significance to sensory and lived experiences (Ribas-Mateos & Cabezón-Fernández, 2021).

The importance of mobilities in contemporary societies becomes more visible in the light of accelerated social change processes such as economic, political or health crises. Crises in a generic sense are turning points that allow us to rethink the paradigm of mobilities. The successive increase in crisis processes is connected to the process of globalisation, and in turn to the intensification of migratory processes. As Saskia Sassen (2005: 60-61) points out, the economic crisis of 2008 provoked the emergence of new patterns of geographical mobility, with an increase in emigration processes among immigrants settled in Spain – mainly of Latin American origin – but also of Spanish nationals to other Central European countries. In this case, the crises act as mechanisms for activating processes of expulsion/mobility of people from their territories.

The centrality and diversity of the crises – economic, political and health-related – and their impact on processes of (im)mobility are the central reflection that will guide this introduction, as well as the rest of this special issue. Once again, through the lens of these social turning points, the question of spatial mobility and immobility emerges as a structural element to be considered within the field of social sciences, and thus a broad and integrative

conception of mobility is urgently needed for the recovery of social knowledge (Kaufman, 2003, 2014). In this introduction, we attempt to contribute to the debate and to the empirical evidence around a long-standing academic concern that seeks to explain how social mobility is possible as a result of spatial mobility, and we seek to analyse the impact that these processes have on the distribution of class positions (Savage, 1988). The social structures that clearly emerge during these processes of crisis and change – whether they are economic (such as the 2008 financial crisis), political (such as Brexit and the United Kingdom’s departure from the European Union) or health-related (such as the COVID-19 health crisis itself) –also allow us to identify privileged/essential mobilities, while at the same time bringing to light new social vulnerabilities associated with risk.

This first section of this introduction continues with a summary of the main theoretical contributions that have been made so far on the analysis of mobility and immobility in the field of the sociology of migration, as well as the questions that remain unanswered, some of which will be the subject of attention in this special issue. The second section deals with the main debates around crises of various kinds and how they relate to processes of mobility and immobility, and by extension the main academic contributions in the field of migration studies. The third section looks at how each of the articles included in this special issue contribute to the academic debate on mobility/immobility.

2. The challenges of (im)mobility for the sociology of migration

The history of sociology’s approach to mobility issues as an academic discipline can be summarised as a paradoxical mismatch. Thus, the first objects of attention of what we now call “classical” sociology, such as that of the School of Chicago, relate to migrant populations (mainly from the countryside to the city) and with the consequences of these major processes of social and population transformation. In fact, one of the most important works of sociology, “*The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*” by William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki (2004 [1918]), analyses the profound change brought about by the incorporation of European immigration into the United States.

Other mobilities, such as social mobility, have been part of sociology’s academic canon since its origins as a social science. All sociology that is considered classical has had social inequality in its sights. This has led to a constant questioning of how a certain status or social class is attained and how it is maintained, inherited, transmitted or changed. The canon of sociology conceives of social mobility as the individual’s movement up the socio-economic class hierarchy, as well as the collective movement of social groups or classes (Sheller, 2014). While this question remains central to sociological study today, it is also true that some commentators, such as Goldthorpe (2013), lament that sociology, in common with other related fields, has lost ground to economics in its explanatory function.

However, with the evolution of the discipline of sociology, the concept of mobility in its various meanings (social, spatial...) has been restricted, thus accompanying the progressive specialisation and fragmentation of the discipline. The implications of this have been a certain neglect of the connection between the different forms of mobility in contemporary sociology.

In this context, there are those who claim that mobility is central to sociological studies. Thus, the work of urban sociologist Vincent Kaufmann (2003; 2014) highlights the heuristic potential of mobility for the discipline, as well as the need to recover a broad and integrative conception of mobility for sociological knowledge.

Kaufmann revives an old academic concern over how to explain processes in which social mobility is made possible by geographical mobility, and what consequences this has for class position (Savage, 1988). The explanatory power of this question has, for some time, led some works based on the analysis of social stratification to look at processes of social change in terms of patterns of mobility and immobility (see, among others, the pioneering contribution of Standing, 1981; but also Nutley and Thomas, 1995, and, in a more recent review of this dilemma, the article by Cass, Shove and Urry, 2005).

One might think that, in the field of migration studies, which is interdisciplinary by nature, the issue of mobility enjoys more consideration. Yet this is not the case, or at least has not been the case until recently. To paraphrase Torpey (2009), we could say that, since the invention of the passport, migration studies has been sheltered under the umbrella of the nation-state, which has obscured the understanding of mobility beyond the crossing of state borders.

That is, the methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002) that blurs the lens of migration studies has prevented the so-called “mobility turn” (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007) from making inroads in this field of research. In this sense, the emergence of the transnational paradigm has allowed for a stronger alliance with a broad concept of mobility which at last, recently, has ended up addressing and overflowing the discipline.

Thus, we are faced with two disagreements. On the one hand, that of sociology with respect to what has been one of its traditional fields of study: mobility in a broad sense. On the other, that of migration studies, which has not yet fully turned its attention to mobility. And this despite calls to raise the banner of a possible sociology of mobility (Urry, 2010; Kaufmann, 2010; Sheller, 2014). And also in the face of initiatives to build bridges, such as the argument by Thomas Faist (2013) in favour of critically interrogating the nexus between social and spatial mobility; or the work of Favell and Recchi (2011), who propose quantitative and qualitative strategies for bringing together both perspectives on mobility, one more focused on the analysis of social stratification, and the other coming from the interdisciplinary field of migration studies (a space which López-Roldán, Molina and Martín Artilles (2011) also address). In a later work, Recchi and Flipo (2019) call for mobility studies to be separated from the strict analysis of migratory processes, in order to subject them to a more in-depth reflection, within sociology, on the spatial

dimension of human life; something that Bourdin (2005) had already pointed to in his list of tasks for a new sociology agenda in relation to mobility and the consideration of space. In the same vein, an alliance between migration studies and critical theory has been proposed, to put mobility back on the agenda of sociological concerns (Diken, 2018).

In this regard, we can mention the work of Oso, Sáiz López and Cortés (2017) and Oso (2020), who propose the notion of “crossed mobilities” to analyse the joint spatial and social mobility trajectories of individuals and households; or more recently, the work of Boese, Moran and Mallman (2021), which analyses the intertwining of the social, relational, temporal and spatial trajectories of migrants.

Even though the “mobility turn” has not yet been established, a new twist has occurred. Here, the concept of immobility, which affects, in general, the social sciences, but has a particular affinity, once again, with migration studies. For much of its history as a field of research, migration studies have been concerned with the reasons that lead people to move, but they have rarely tried to explain the majority behaviour: staying in the territory. This constitutes, in Schewel’s opinion (2020), a bias that stems from the existence of a sedentarising paradigm in the social sciences that considers permanence as “normal” and migration or movement as an “aberration”. With the rise of more ephemeral, shorter-term, temporary or even circular migration processes, the need to examine migration, mobility and immobility together becomes more pressing (Skeldon, 2016).

Within this context, one of the perspectives of analysis that has emerged is that which combines enquiry into mobility with questions of power and political regulation of the right to mobility (Cresswell, 2010). Here we find interesting and far-reaching conceptual propositions, such as the concept of “mobility regimes” (Glick Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Salazar & Glick Schiller, 2014), which lead us to shift our gaze towards the existing disparities and inequalities that explain patterns of mobility and immobility. Their work fits into a broader perspective of analysis around what has become known as “mobility justice” (Sheller, 2018), which directly links this issue to the “right to the city” and, more broadly, to critical urban sociology.

In this field of macro studies on the link between mobility and immobility, a recent special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (Bélangier & Silvey, 2020) that incorporates care regimes into the equation is also noteworthy.

Another interesting line of analysis addresses the question of the relationship between mobility and immobility from meso- and micro-perspectives, for example, looking at the (im)mobility strategies of households and individuals from a perspective that clearly emphasises the agency of individuals in their mobility decisions. In this respect, the work of Carling (2001, 2002) and the recent revival of the analysis of aspiration and capacity mobility in Carling and Schewel (2017) are pioneering, although others have made important contributions with a similar approach (Mata-Codesal, 2015, 2017; Chan, 2017).

However, it has mainly been recent major transformations in European migration, and the impact of crises of varying severity and origin, that have spurred the analysis of spatial mobility (and, to some extent, its link with social mobility) from a sociological perspective. In the next section we will consider the implications of crises on the phenomenon of migration, both in terms of the trends and dynamics observed, and also in terms of their role as a impetus to theoretical reflection and paradigm change. We will focus in particular on the diverse crises of in the last five years, due to the economic recession that began in 2008 and continues to have consequences; the political crisis caused by the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union; or the health emergency resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. The articulation of multiple crises

The recent chain of processes of various kinds, all of which have nevertheless been considered "crises", have spurred the analysis of social mobility from a sociological perspective. Thus, in a period of less than fifteen years we have seen crises that are economic (such as the recession that began in 2008 and whose consequences are still lingering); political (exemplified by the process of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union); or health-related (such as the COVID-19 pandemic). All of them have had profound social implications, particularly for the phenomenon of migration; not to mention those crises that have been specifically migratory crises, such as the refugee crisis of 2015. All of them have led turning points in the trends observed, but they have also spurred theoretical reflection and a change of paradigms.

The economic crisis that began in 2008 is credited with triggering a change in the migration cycle (Reher, Requena & Sanz, 2011; Arango, 2009), which brought to a close almost a decade of uninterrupted growth in immigration flows. Numerous contributions have been made around this idea of a change of cycle (among many others: Domínguez-Mujica, Guerra-Talavera & Parreño-Castellano, 2012; López de Lera & Pérez-Caramés, 2015; Domingo & Ortega-Rivera, 2015; Capote & Fernández-Suárez, 2021; Pérez-Caramés, 2021), identifying the main trends of change around an increase in emigration and return flows and a significant contraction of international immigrant arrivals to Spain (López-Sala & Oso, 2015), as well as the emergence of successive (Miyar-Busto & Muñoz-Comet, 2018; Pérez-Caramés, Domínguez-Mujica & Ortega-Rivera, 2021) and circular migration (Gualda Caballero, 2011). This summary of some of the main publications is a good illustration of the shock of the crisis on the patterns of mobility observed until then, but also of the academic fertility of these critical moments.

On the effect of Brexit on cross-migration between Spain and the UK, various recent publications have addressed both the implications for retirement migration to the sunniest regions of Spain (Giner-Monfort & Huete, 2021) and for Spanish emigration to the UK (McCarthy, 2018; Aragón & Bretones, 2020). However, given the recent nature of the process, there are still many

contributions to be made in this area in order to reveal the full nature of the Brexit effect on mobilities.

Finally, the crisis unleashed by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant rethinking of the relationship between mobility and immobility (Martin & Bergmann, 2021; Ribas-Mateos & Cabezón-Fernández, 2021). Some of the most prestigious specialist journals have already begun to publish special issues in which they address the implications of COVID-19, and responses to it, on the various forms of human mobility and immobility. Notable among these is the 2021 issue of the journal *Mobilities*, entitled “Pandemic (Im)mobilities”, coordinated by Peter Adey, Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller and David Tyfield; so too is the 2021 issue of *Two Homelands*, “The Coronavirus Crisis and Migration” by Francesco Della Puppa and Fabio Perocco. Obviously, research is still being carried out that will shed more light on the impact of the pandemic on population movements at different scales.

In short, mobility and crisis have become two notions that critically interrogate the predominance of sedentariness in the discipline of sociology, since both phenomena are often seen as exceptional, disruptive and threatening (Lindley, 2014), and, as Lindley points out (p. 10), they demand to be considered no longer as isolated or anomalous events but embedded in broader patterns of social transformation. In fact, some commentators suggest that the ubiquity of discourses and analyses that place migration and crisis on the same plane is not naïve, but rather responds to a strategy to tighten migration policies (Arriola Vega & Coraza de los Santos, 2022), or even to overshadow other structural processes that operate in parallel to crises (Carastathis, Spathopoulou & Tsilimpounidi, 2018). Paraphrasing Castles’ (1998) now classic book, Guizardi (2018) takes the argument further by indicating that migration has actually been a regulatory crisis for contemporary nation-states unable to find the touchstone that correctly addresses the phenomenon from the point of view of migration policies. Along the same line of thought, Dines, Montagna and Vacchelli (2018) argue that the crisis has become a powerful narrative artefact that structures not only the field of migration policy production, but also the production of knowledge on migration.

In general, there is a trend in the sociological literature, which inspires migration studies, that questions the explanatory omnipresence of crises (Freedon, 2017; Boletsi, Houwen & Minnaard, 2020; Harris, 2023) and enquires into broader social processes (Graham, 2020; Clarke, 2022).

Indeed, the most recent contributions on the relationship between crises and migration and mobility processes move towards an analysis that encompasses the linking or intersection of various crises. Thus, the article by Bermudez and Roca (2024) on Spanish migration in the UK and Germany provides elements to interweave the three crises operating in the period of analysis (recession, Brexit and pandemic) in the explanation of the migration process.

This type of analysis is favoured by the global scale of some of the crisis processes on which they focus, as well as by the expansion of the intersectional perspective in social sciences in general and in migration studies in particular,

which allows for the joint analysis of various processes and structures that generate inequality (Williams, 2021; Jayasuriya, 2023; Lawrence et al., 2024). The interdisciplinary approach to the implications of the various crises, as proposed, among others, by Bergman-Rosamond et al. (2022), is the paradigm that seems to be established in the interpretation of the role of crises in social phenomena, including migration, and is the focus of this special issue.

4. Contributions to a dialogue between new approaches to (im)mobility and the multiplicity of crises

This special issue presents the current state of the sociological debates surrounding contemporary theories on (im)mobility and migration studies. Most, but not all, of the articles are contributions that stem from two R+D+I research projects financed under the National Plan of the Ministry of Science and Research. The projects are entitled: “Integration and return of the ‘new Spanish Emigration’: A comparative analysis of Spanish communities in the United Kingdom and France” (PID2019-105041RA-I00) (led by Belén Fernández-Suárez) and “Crises, migratory dynamics and living conditions of the migrant population in Spain. A comparative analysis of the effects of the Great Recession and the Great Pandemic” (PID2020-118716RB-I00) (led by Antía Pérez-Caramés).

The issue opens with an article by Natalia Ribas-Mateos (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona/DIIS Denmark), Angels Escrivà (University of Huelva) and Deirdre Robins (Geneva Graduate Institute) entitled “Transnational guest workers in the 21st century: Gender and the agro-industry in southern Europe”. The article discusses the challenges faced by Moroccan migrant women workers in the agricultural sectors in Morocco and Spain (Ribas-Mateos, Escrivà & Robins, 2024). It highlights their mobility needs, the dynamics of circular migration and the vulnerabilities they experience due to language barriers, low levels of education and isolation in the workplace. It also addresses the rise of grassroots activism advocating for labour and health rights, especially in response to the poor working conditions and discrimination these women face. The article offers a perspective on the consequences of a globalised economy, and how this leads to the transnational status of women’s work, especially the agricultural work performed by immigrant women in the so-called “Huelva model” specialising in berries production. The article also addresses the consequences of the COVID-19 health crisis for the processes of (im)mobility of immigrant women working in this agricultural sector. This also connects with the second theme of this special issue. The study analyses circular mobilities that in turn lead transnational lives, and whose evolution is directly related to the international division of labour and globalised agricultural production.

This is followed by the article entitled “Being an au pair in London: Young Spanish women’s employment trajectories and strategies in regimes of gender and precariousness” by Almudena Cortés (Complutense University of Madrid) and Fernando Barbosa (Complutense University of Madrid). The

article is based on ethnographic work with young Spanish au pairs in London, with the aim of analysing the labour trajectories and strategies of these women who, faced with a context of job insecurity in Spain, decided to emigrate temporarily to do care work. These young women benefitted from the freedom provided by the Schengen Area, before the United Kingdom left the European Union. The contribution of this work is to present the economic crisis of 2008 and the global care crisis – in addition to the lack of a public response to this problem – as the common theme of intra-European mobility. The article highlights how neoliberalism has strong implications at the intersection of gender, class and mobility, and how these mobilities are experienced by their protagonists, giving value to the lived experience of the protagonists. On the other hand, the work of Cortés and Barbosa (2024) underlines the importance of gender analysis as a structural element of the different mobilities, and highlights how domestic work is often framed as a non-professional and altruistic activity, despite the heavy burden of responsibility that falls on those who carry out these functions and its character as essential work.

The emerging phenomenon of onward migration is the subject of the article “Onward migration from Spain to other European countries in a context of crises. The intensification of mobility as a strategy” by Antía Pérez-Caramés (University of A Coruña). The article provides a detailed perspective on how onward migration from Spain to other European countries has intensified as a strategy to cope with economic crises, particularly since the recession of 2008 (Pérez-Caramés, 2024). This phenomenon is part of a broader context of change in the migration cycle in Spain and an increase in intra-European mobility. It also highlights the strategic role of access to Spanish nationality by immigrants from third countries (mainly Latin American), which facilitates movement to a second country within European borders, and how this strategy may be affected by other political crises, such as Brexit. The study also highlights the importance of transnational networks and the possession of an EU passport as key resources for onward migration. These elements allow migrants to develop and expand their migration projects, although the evidence is inconclusive on the impact of accessing the nationality of member states on improving the living conditions of this migrant group. In sum, the article contributes to the debate on mobility and immobility by showing how the intensification of mobility through onward migration becomes a strategy to overcome economic crises, and how this mobility is conditioned by factors such as nationality and transnational networks.

Next, Belén Fernández Suárez (University of A Coruña), Alberto Capote Lama (University of Granada) and Iria Vázquez Silva (University of Vigo) contribute to the debate on liquid migrations versus anchored lives by analysing the case of Spanish emigration to the United Kingdom and France. The article “From liquid migrations to rootedness: Plans to make the move permanent among recent Spanish emigrants to other European countries” highlights how the recent emigration of Spaniards to other European countries, initially conceived as a temporary process, in some cases becomes a more immobile

project or one that is more anchored to the destination society (Fernández-Suárez, Capote Lama & Vázquez Silva, 2024). Using a qualitative methodology, different migration profiles are presented and the factors that influence their rootedness are discussed, including relevant issues such as job stability, the creation of emotional ties, and living conditions in the new countries. In short, the article explores the motivations and processes of rootedness in this recent Spanish emigration. The publication contributes to the debate between mobility and immobility by highlighting the need to integrate both approaches in order to better understand contemporary migration and avoid a “mobility bias”. It proposes that immobility should be understood in a broad sense, including both people who are unable to migrate and migrants who choose to remain in their destinations. It also helps fill the deficit of studies on the rootedness or anchoring of internal migration in Europe, an aspect that has been less explored due to the perception that European migrants are “at home” within the continent; that is, they are subjects of rights who are even recognised as having the right to reside and work within the European space.

One of the main political crises in Europe in the last decade has been the United Kingdom’s exit from the European Union (2020). The impact of this move erased the privilege of mobility that many European residents had had in the UK, converting them into third-country immigrants. This is the topic of the next article, “Spaniards in the United Kingdom. The impact of Brexit: flows, consequences and narratives” by Luca Chao, Antonio Alejo and Jordi Giner-Monfort (2024). The article analyses the impact of Brexit on Spanish emigration in the UK, highlighting how the UK’s exit from the European Union has affected the status and living conditions of Spanish emigrants. Brexit has undoubtedly complicated the situation of Spaniards in the UK – where it is estimated that there are around 176,000 Spanish citizens – especially those who have been resident for the shortest period of time. Among the findings of the article are: the complication of the migration process for Europeans who want to emigrate to the United Kingdom following Brexit; the shocking and confusing experience of the results of the referendum, which affects their perception of the political situation of the destination society, increases the feeling of isolation and discrimination among Spanish residents in the United Kingdom, and also negatively affects the integration process; and finally, beyond Brexit, how the pandemic has encouraged nationalist positions, affecting migration projects and the integration of immigrants. The article also notes that there may be regional differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK, highlighting how local context and policy decisions can significantly influence experiences of discrimination. In short, the publication contributes to the debate on mobility and immobility by analysing how Brexit has complicated the migration process and increased discrimination towards Spanish migrants in the UK. The article highlights economic uncertainty and new migration policies such as the points system, which have negatively affected integration and have increased the sense of isolation among migrants. In addition, regional differences in perceptions of discrimination are observed, with

Scotland showing a more welcoming approach. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated barriers to mobility, encouraging nationalist positions and affecting migration decisions.

Just as political decisions affect migration projects and migration policies in the case of Brexit, we also wanted to analyse how policies can cross borders and can be a driver of return migration flows. This is the subject of the case study by Erika Masanet-Ripoll and Anna Giulia Ingellis (2024), “The Valencian government’s migrant return policies in the context of recovery from the Great Recession”. This article addresses the return policies aimed at migrants in the Valencian Community, and highlights the Valencian Return Strategy and the GenT Plan. These initiatives seek to facilitate the reintegration of Valencians abroad, promoting inclusion and eliminating administrative barriers. The strategy focuses on information, training and employability, and social inclusion, while the GenT Plan focuses on attracting research talent. The authors highlight the importance of a transnational approach and the involvement of diverse actors in the design of these policies. The research provides a deeper understanding of the complexity of return migration and its potential for future re-emigration, which enriches studies on mobility and immobility. By integrating transnational approaches and the participation of diverse actors in policy design, it highlights how family, ethnic and social network dynamics influence both outward and return movements. Furthermore, the publication underlines that returns are not necessarily definitive, but may be one stage of a broader migration cycle, contributing to a more dynamic and multifaceted view of mobility.

This special issue closes with an article by Juana Moreno (2024) on the topic of agricultural work in France by Latin American onward migrants from Spain. The article reinforces the reflection on mobilities and gender in the articles in this issue by Ribas-Mateos, Escrivà and Robins (2024) and Cortés and Barbosa (2024). The article examines the experiences of Latin American women workers who migrate to France to work in the agricultural sector after having worked in the service sector in Spain. These women face various difficulties, such as hard work in the fields, labour exploitation and the language barrier, which places them in situations of vulnerability. Although agriculture can offer some economic security, many consider this work to be inferior and aspire to return to jobs in services or industry. The reason for re-emigration from Spain is linked to the fact that the economic crisis of 2008 and the health crisis of COVID-19 worsened their working conditions in Spain, forcing them to seek an alternative in the French agricultural sector. The article contributes to the debate on mobility and immobility by highlighting how Latin American women workers experience significant geographical mobility, especially in response to economic crises and changes in the labour market. Despite restrictions and border closures such as those observed during the COVID-19 pandemic, these workers continue to migrate in search of better job opportunities, demonstrating a dynamic of constant mobility. Furthermore, the study highlights how mobility does not always result in improved working conditions and can lead to downward social mobility. The article also

underlines the importance of migration networks and individual strategies in mobility, showing how these networks facilitate mobility despite structural barriers. It also highlights the intersection between paid work and reproductive work responsibilities – caring for children – which adds a layer of complexity to the mobility trajectories of these workers. In sum, the article contributes to the debate on mobility and immobility by showing how women migrant workers navigate between different socio-economic and employment contexts, facing both opportunities and barriers in their migration trajectories.

Taken together, the articles in this special issue make a significant contribution to mobility and immobility studies, providing a comprehensive and detailed overview of the complex dynamics affecting women migrant workers in different socio-economic and labour contexts. Through the analysis of cases such as Moroccan women workers in Spanish agribusiness, young Spanish au pairs in London, and Latin American women workers in the French agricultural sector, the multiple facets of mobility are highlighted, including the effects on migrant women's quality of life and job stability. In addition, the studies underline the crucial role of transnational networks and of migration policies, as shown in research on post-crisis Spanish emigration and return strategies in the Valencian Community. This special issue also highlights how economic and health crises, such as the recession of 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic, intensify and transform mobility patterns. By addressing the intersection of gender, class and nationality, and by exploring both upward and downward mobility and the phenomena of rootedness, this collection of articles offers a valuable and multifaceted contribution to the field of migration studies and the sociology of mobility.

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