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# At the Crossroads of Interdisciplinarity: Mobility and Migration in the Bible and ANE

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***Abstract***

*This article is an editorial response and attempt at interdisciplinary conversation from the perspective of biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies to those studying different cultures of mobility in other fields. Each of the four articles that began this special issue feature a relational approach to the study of migration and mobility and share the themes of correction (in)visibility, scales of movement, and agency. In discussing these shared themes, we aim to continue the ongoing work of articulating and analyzing operative cultures of mobility in the past with humility, hope, and reflexivity.*

***Keywords:*** *mobility, migration, interdisciplinary, relationalism, Hebrew Bible, ancient Near East*

## Introduction

Writing social history(ies) of movement presents scholars with myriad challenges. This is especially true in cases where direct evidence of movement is minimal, whether in textual or archaeological records. The intention of this article is to respond to the articles in this special issue by Catherine Cameron, Megan Daniels, Ipek Demir, and Allison Wolf, three of which speak to questions of theory or method from beyond the fields of biblical and ancient Near Eastern studies. Each essay draws on different datasets, time periods, geographies, and areas of migration studies. Though distinguished by fields of study, territorial, and chronological

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focus, each author provides a responsive framework for cross-temporal studies of movement while also assisting us in the aims of producing more responsible readings and reconstructions of the past. Foregrounding a reflective and reflexive awareness of our standpoints and methodological inheritances, we aim to demonstrate some ways in which each author's work could be useful for studying biblical texts and the ancient Near East. Some of what these authors do is not fully applicable or useful to the ancient world, so we proceed paradoxically with boldness and caution, aiming to identify some points of fruitful methodological intersection.

We are committed to a responsive and responsible reading in our joint analysis. We advocate for the thoughtful integration of methods and insights from other disciplines, while also attempting to articulate ways to expand the interdisciplinary enterprise from unidirectional borrowing to a more conversational and mutually beneficial endeavor.[3] It is not sufficient or state-of-the-art to uncritically apply selective studies of the present on to the past; this analytical misstep is in some regard not analysis at all, but belies the scholar's own assumptions about migration and cultures of mobility.[4] We by no means seek to present our work as the acme of the discussion on interdisciplinarity. Rather, we take a position of heuristic humility, recognizing that "[h]euristics are valuable primarily because we know when they fail."[5] We invite others to join us in committing to engage in opportunities for self-evaluation and the search

[3]Isaac M. Alderman, Shane M. Thompson, and Eric M. Trinka, "Interdisciplinarity as Departure and Return: Methodological Boundary Crossing in the Ancient Near East," *AVAR* 1, no.1 (2022): 1-6, https://doi.org/10.33182/aijls.v1i1.2087.; Eric M. Trinka, "Interdisciplinary Mutuality: Migration, the Bible, and Scholarly Reciprocity," *Religions* 16, no. 8 (2025): https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16050608.

[4] Ida Hartmann, "Migratory Thought: Dialogues Between Biblical Scholarship and Anthropology on Human Mobility," *Religions* 16, no. 5 (2025): 1-14, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel6050540; Eric M. Trinka and Alexiana Fry, "Methodological Inheritances and Interventions: Moving towards Relational Approaches to the Interdisciplinary Study of Mobility, Migration, and Diaspora," *AVAR* 4, no. 1 (2025): 1-10.

[5] Matei Candea, *Comparison and Anthropology: The Impossible Method* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 8; c.f. William C. Wimsatt, *Re-Engineering Philosophy for Limited Beings: Piecewise Approximation to Reality* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

for a greater level of accountability as those who claim to speak on behalf of one or more fields of study.

The core ethos of this response essay is relationalism. Recognizing that movement emerges in the contexts of networks, and that it generates rhizomatic interconnections, we seek to amplify the importance of relational theories and methodologies. This essay offers us a chance to reflect once more on *who* we study when we investigate movers in the ancient world and *how* we attempt to compose histories from the generally fragmentary evidence of their lives. The theme of relationalism appears directly in Daniels' essay, but is also indirectly present across the work of Cameron, Demir, and Wolf. The notion of different registers of relationality applies to both networks of scholars who enrich each other's work and to the cultures of mobility framework that animates our work. While none of the authors employ the terminology of cultures of mobility, we frame the discussion of interdisciplinarity around the social construction of movement and seek to articulate how drawing from diverse mobility and migration studies subfields furthers the cause of studying mobility and migration as social processes in the ancient past. To achieve this aim, we structure the discussion around the following questions: **What cultures of mobility do the authors reveal, critique, and/or suggest should be operative for investigations of movement past or present? What aspects of relationalism in the interdisciplinary study of movement and migration does each author train our attention towards?**

In light of our guiding questions, we have noted specific motifs found across these essays that answer these questions and aid us in mapping potential paths of correction, illumination, and exchange in the work of interdisciplinarity. In what follows, we explore the motifs of (in)visibility, scales of movement, and agency as sign-posts for some proverbial routes forward.

## (In)visibility

Movers operate within matrices of cultural assumptions and physio-social infrastructures that enable and constrain mobility.[6] Different persons, groups, objects, and ideas are subject to varying degrees of permissibility and scrutiny. In any given society, the most visible movers typically represent the extremes of the mobility spectrum; those who are rewarded for being mobile through the infrastructures of power alongside those who are the most severely sanctioned and presented as exemplars of illegitimate movement. The (in)visibility of certain types of movers and movement is often a first clue for identifying investigative or evidential cultures of mobility. The terms used to describe movers indicate not only the mode or duration of their movement, but often what the one describing the mover understands to be the social or ethical associations of their movement. Relational approaches to mobility and migration should, therefore, interrogate terminological categories by which movers are categorized in sources and in scholarship.

Demir models a relational approach to such epistemic categories by illuminating contemporary scholars' embeddedness in the modern nation-state system and in the developmental histories of their respective fields. She calls those who study diaspora(s) to attend to the pervasive problem of methodological nationalism and to work against trajectories of methodological amnesia. For Wolf, both render invisible the transtemporal and transterritorial influences of empires and colonialism on experiences and conceptualizations of diaspora(ization), while making "hypervisible" particular persons that are diasporized.[7] We echo Demir's warning in voicing our own concern that the use of terms derived from the technical glossaries of the United Nations or other state or NGO agencies to describe ancient movers is not merely anachronistic,[8] but

[6] Eric M. Trinka, *Cultures of Mobility, Migration, and Religion in Ancient Israel and Its World* (Routledge, 2022), 15.

[7] Allison B. Wolf, "A Feminist Account of Migrant Justice: An Overview," *AVAR* 4, no. 1 (2025): 84-102.

[8] Ipek Demir, "Diaspora Theorizing and Diasporas of the Middle East," *AVAR* 4, no. 1 (2025): 77-80. For an excellent conversation on this topic, see Matthew Chalmers, "'Anti-Semitism' Before 'Semites': The Risks and Rewards of

leads scholars to "interpret migration primarily from the purview of the state, not from that of migrants themselves. Likewise, the terms artificially demarcate, and even erase, modes of human movement that states cannot or do not want to account for."[9] As Demir argues, overcoming methodological nationalism entails that researchers refrain "from using explanatory categories, concepts, and understandings that are solely locked into the sources, vocabularies, and histories of the nation and the nation-state."[10] More often than not, scholars using these terms are attempting to do justice with their migration-informed readings of ancient evidence.[11] However, they must wrestle with the unintended consequences of copy-paste methodologies by which present cultures of mobility are overlaid on the past. Far from being illuminating, such work often conceals what we aim to uncover in or about the past.[12] Scholars, therefore, perform a disservice for ourselves and our audiences when we

Anachronism," *The Public Medievalist,* July 13, 2017, https://publicmedievalist.com/anti-semitism-before-semites/: "our main historical challenges often come not from anachronism, which we are often rather good at spotting, but from taking for granted that we know exactly what's at stake in the concepts and questions with which we approach history;" Eric Trinka, "Mobility and Migration in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East: In Pursuit of Viable Heuristics for Interdisciplinary Study," *Religion Compass* 18, no. 11-12 (2024): 5, "those hoping to connect modern evidence to ancient experiences of movement must also concede that there are limits to which certain terms or concepts can be applied beyond their original fields of study." We should be clear and strategic in our use of anachronism, not flippant and misinformed.

[9] Trinka, *Cultures of Mobility,* 19.

[10] Demir, "Diaspora Theorizing," 82.

[11] There are many scholars with good intentions who may use the terminology "nation" or "national" in their work, but this can and has created significant problems as the work is used, especially for those with ill-intent, in nationalistic projects. See Sophia R.C. Johnson, "The Trouble with Nations: A Critical Evaluation of Identifying Nationalistic Historiography in Joshua," in *Nation and Narration in Joshua and Judges,* ed. Sarah Schulz and Christoph Berner (SBL Press, 2026). For excellent discussions of the use of "national" analogues in ancient studies, see James Osborne, *The Syro-Anatolian City-States: An Iron Age Culture* (Oxford, 2021); Shane M. Thompson, *Displays of Cultural Hegemony and Counter-Hegemony in the Late Bronze and Iron Age Levant: The Public Presence of Foreign Powers and Local Resistance* (Routledge, 2023).

[12] Scholars tend to either completely disregard modern material to inform their work, or modern material is appropriated irresponsibly, see Trinka, "Mobility and Migration." For other self-serving examples, see Alexiana Fry, "Deporting Deportation from Biblical Studies: Deracination as (a) Solution for Terminological and Theoretical Issues in Hebrew Bible Scholarship," in *Cultures of Mobility and Borders in the Ancient Near East,* ed. Eric M. Trinka and Shane M. Thompson (Zaphon Verlag, Forthcoming); Alexiana Fry, "The Myth of Multiculturalism in MT Esther: Comparing Western and Persian Hegemonic Tolerance," *Religions* 16 (2025).

are not clear about important differences between cultures of mobility or terminological categories for movement and movers.

For Demir, (in)visibility also relates to the developmental trajectories of scholarly fields. Long histories of colonial and imperial domination have influenced the very cultures of mobility that scholars seek to study and the methods with which they study them. Beyond simple unawareness of the history of their fields,[13] scholars often participate in the erasure and sanitization of colonial and imperial impacts in the development of their fields. Through what she terms "methodological amnesia," many "ignore the temporal dimensions, namely the colonial and imperial axes of the movements of peoples."[14] Scholars of the Bible and ancient Near East recognize the role of hegemonic forces that generated movement and diasporas, but they have not always avoided presentist projections of nation-state structures into the past.

Wolf addresses the problems of (in)visibility through a feminist approach to migration justice. For Wolf, seeking justice for migrants involves attending to gender and gender-based oppression.[15] She argues that migration justice is not simply about public policy, but includes the private, or "intimate sphere."[16] The common assumption that public and private spheres of existence are wholly distinct from each other has long been challenged.[17] Nevertheless, the (in)visibility of hegemonic, "naturalized" discourse on sex and gender identity and its expression in public *and* intimate worlds often compound aspects of oppression. Thus, Wolf notes that while many instances of abuse at bordersites are "chalked

[13] For more resources on what this has looked like in migration studies, see Lucy Mayblin and Joe Turner, *Migration Studies and Colonialism* (Polity Press, 2021); B.S. Chimni, "The Birth of a 'Discipline': From Refugee to Forced Migration Studies," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22, no. 1 (2009): 11-29.

[14] Demir, "Diaspora Theorizing," 77.

[15] Allison B. Wolf, "A Feminist Account of Migrant Justice: An Overview," *AVAR* 4, no. 1 (2025): 88. See also, Amy Reed-Sandoval, *Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

[16] Wolf, "A Feminist Account," 91-92; Shatema Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice: The Black Female Body and the Body Politic* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

[17] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (Sage Publications, 1997), 4.

up to individual misconduct that caused individual human rights violations," such abuses should be seen as outgrowth of border patrol systems and cultures of mobility that enable and normalize violence.[18]

With her survey of captivity, Cameron directs readers to rethink the (in)visibility of certain types of movers in historical small-scale societies, which she defines as "groups that were not states."[19] She argues that there is an element of erasure in research on captives; while they are "almost ubiquitous" in the societies she studies, captives are conspicuously absent from scholarly reconstructions of ancient mobility and typically unaccounted for in discussions of cultural exchange and expression, especially those that are larger in population scale and territorial scope.[20] On one hand, small-scale mobilities tend to be overlooked because they do not typically leave the kind of traces we might expect and because their presence might not affirm the interpretive choices we make at the outset.[21] While Cameron acknowledges the widespread use of "refugee" and "forced migrant" amongst scholars of the Bible and ancient Near East, she also notes these categories do not fully describe the captive's experiences of (im)mobility and can render them invisible in discussions of movement in the past.

Like Wolf, Cameron foregrounds the (in)visibility of gender when she notes that the most common captives were women and children.[22] The same was likely the case in the ancient Near East, as seen in the few accounts in biblical texts that may have more resonance in Cameron's work.[23] What is at stake in such an observation is not merely that women

[18] Wolf, "A Feminist Account," 102.

[19] Catherine Cameron, "Captives Were Migrants Too," *AVAR* 4, no. 1 (2025): 12.

[20] Cameron, "Captives" 18. See also, Elena Isayev, "The In/Visibility of Migration," in *Homo Migrans: Modeling Mobility and Migration in Human History,* ed. Megan Daniels (State University of New York Press, 2022), 141.

[21] Megan Daniels, "Archaeology and Migration: The Journey Towards a Relational World," *AVAR* 4, no. 1 (2025): 69.

[22] Cameron, "Captives," 21.

[23] Thankfully, the movement of the captives mentioned here has not been totally forgotten, as recently redressed by Elisa Uusimäki, "An Intersectional Perspective on Female Mobility in the Hebrew Bible," *Vestus Testamentum* 72 (2022): 745-768.

were often moved as captives, but that their movement was governed primarily by the social negotiations of males who promoted cultures of mobility in which prestige could be gained or maintained by dominating women's bodily domains, and resultantly, the range and types of movement they experienced. As migration scholar Nira Yuval-Davis asserts, "it is not the *exchange* of women but the *control* of them which is so often at the base of the social order."[24] Such an observation illuminates the centrality of (in)visibility of both the person and the cultures of mobility in which they attempt self-determination. In such a context of control, the exchange of women as objects of prestige negotiation renders invisible their personhood while making visible the underlying framework by which that society is organized.

Cameron's critique of the invisibility of captives as migrants is in part possible because of how archaeological data has long been interpreted. As Daniels articulates through her historical survey of archaeologies of mobility during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, migration was often linked to racialized trajectories of social development that were retrojected onto material cultural assemblages from the ancient past. Simplistic equations between people and culture and between culture and place prevented scholars from thinking dynamically about the culture-mobility nexus. While some groups or types of movers were hypervisible, others were unceremoniously written out of history. Underlying these historiographical moves was the assertion that culture was a bounded entity that was transferred intact between tradents. Thus, artifacts, one of the visible datasets of the past, could, in a methodological milieu where

[24] Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (Sage, 1997), 19, italics mine. This language in biblical scholarship comes from Susan Niditch, "'The Traffic in Women': Exchange, Ritual Sacrifice, and War," in *Ritual Violence in the Hebrew Bible: New Perspectives,* ed. Saul M. Olyan (Oxford University Press, 2015), 115-124; adapted from Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," ed. Rayna R. Reiter (Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157-210. Rubin is mainly "exegeting" the two men who theorize this notion, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Sigmund Freud through a Lacanian lens. However, Rubin repeatedly discusses that this "traffic in women" is a relational and social process, with control of women, transforming them into objects, at the center of an "economics." This turns women into something that is movable, like products; but "the exchange of women" can be seen as an "obfuscation" as it simply acknowledges that women "do not have full rights to themselves," 177.

pots=people and migration is thought of largely as invasion, be marshalled as evidence for the continuous visibility of a particular people group, often through the wholesale replacement of other groups.

Daniels demonstrates that migrationist tendencies have not been completely excised from contemporary scholarship; rather, old ways of thinking have taken on new forms. In more recent times, palaeogenomic data have been utilized in essentializing ways to answer the question of who is (in)visible in the archaeological record. Although equipped with archaeo-analytical tools unavailable to earlier generations, such scholarship remains influenced by scientism and by pervasive assumptions of culture as a bounded transtemporal reality strongly linked to ethnicity.[25] Daniels challenges these persistent epistemological foundations and goes one step further by offering a critical analysis of a paradigmatic assumption in studies of ancient mobility that lies at the intersection of (in)visibility and relationality: The notion of Mediterranean connectivity, and whether or not interregional connectivity as it has been traditionally conceptualized is indeed visible in the archaeological record. Daniels' critiques of the connectivity paradigm relate to questions of both (in)visibility and the next motif at hand, scales of movement.

## Scales of Movement

Ask a non-specialist about migration and they will likely tell you that a migrant is someone who has traveled a significant distance from their home. Such ideas of migrants and migration are bolstered by media portrayals of refugees and migrants entering from far-flung reaches of the globe, often captured by photographers in moments of greatest need so as to accentuate their destitution. The trope of the migrant as one from far away often functions to reify conceptions of their otherness and to highlight the dangers they represent to receiving populations. In reality,

[25] Daniels, "Archaeology and Migration," 44-51.

most migration, past and present, has taken place over smaller scales of distance. The majority of migrants today never cross an international boundary. Nevertheless, conditioned by such popular portrayals, many scholars make the mistake of writing present perceptions into their reconstructions of ancient migrants and migrations.

Migration is best understood as a socially patterned process that takes place through networked actors across multiple sites. Regardless of the distance traveled, migration is quantum in nature. Linear movement from point A to point B is rarely the lived experience of movers, even if it is described as such in our evidential records. The differentiation of research on the determinants and patterns of migration from how migrants relate to places is an unhelpful schism that disconnects interconnected realities.[26] Scholars can avoid this problem through relational approaches that account for both place and movement as elements of the same rhizomatic migrational reality, and that work towards "balancing the pendulum"[27] in migration research.

Daniels' essay demonstrates precisely how modern cultures of mobility are readily observable through an overemphasis on Mediterranean connectivity as large-scale migration. Modern perceptions of the Mediterranean as a zone of mass mobility and unrestrained migration can all too easily be assumed as the status quo in the ancient past. While basic social processes of migration and even some migration routes have remained unchanged for millennia, other salient differences between past and present should keep us from assuming that Mediterranean connectivity as it stands today mirrors experiences of mobility and connectivity in the past. The radiogenic isotopic datasets from Leppard et al. that Daniels cites is a reminder of the complexity that characterizes Mediterranean connectivity. In light of the data, which reveals relatively

[26] Russell King, "Geography and Migration Studies: Retrospect and Prospect," *Population, Space and Place* 18, no. 2 (2012): 137.

[27] Megan Daniels, "Archaeology and Migration: The Journey Towards a Relational World," *AVAR* 4, no. 1 (2025): 74.

lower levels of non-local populations in several regions around the Sea than typically thought, Daniels rightly asks what percentage of the population around the Mediterranean scholars expected to have been migrants.[28] To properly highlight the importance of Daniels' question, we should note that the scale of modern migration is often thought to be significantly higher than it actually is. This misunderstanding is present among both academics and laypersons. If one's primary exposure to migration information is popular media, one gets the sense that huge portions of the global population are constantly uprooted and on the move to new homes. In reality, only between 3-4% of the global population migrates.[29] This is noteworthy for three reasons. First, it shows that many of the sites in Leppard et al.'s study indicate a relatively "normal" level of migration, as judged by comparison with modern rates of movement. Second, we variation across the datasets that indicates some sites and time periods experienced levels of migration that are higher than a normative baseline. Daniels' call for precision is thus a reminder that, while there are many unique aspects of Mediterranean history on which scholars might focus their attention, reconstructions of the Mediterranean as an exceptional context of migrational activity is not necessarily one of them. Third, Daniels provides a framework to think about mobility, migration, and culture in more relational ways, where we see connectivity not simply as a static conduit of cultural exchange, but as a constituent element in the multidirectional, multidimensional, and plastic processes of cultural production. Daniels' essay, therefore, also primes us to consider how we distinguish migration from other patterns of mobility that might have contributed to connectivity. Her emphasis on small ties that movement at micro and meso scales could have fostered

[28] Daniels, "Archaeology and Migration," 70.

[29] "In 2024, just 3.7% of people globally were international migrants," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "International Migrant Stock 2024: Key Facts and Figures," *United Nations* (2025): 2, https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2025_intlmigstock_2024_key_facts_and_figures_advance-unedited.pdf.

the kinds of informational and cultural exchange that are often explained through appeals to macro-scale migration.[30]

In many ways, the persistent problems of understanding the past and its peoples have much to do with scholars' assumptions of who *belongs* where. How do we demarcate where someone is from?[31] Who is the arbiter of "foreignness?" Simply because someone's genetic material is found in one place, and not where we expected it to be, does not necessarily mean they were a migrant—it may only mean they died there. Cameron thus notes that, "archaeologists document migration in the past by looking for material culture "out of place." In essence, they have to make the dubious assumption that for human groups, "genes and (material) culture are linked."[32] Cameron's datasets highlight that sizable portions of small-scale societies were made up of captives and/or slaves, which did not seem to make any noticeable effect on the material boundaries so often equated with marking distinctive ethnic groups. How we describe the identities of those in the past, especially in relation to place, matters. Wolf's work is in tune with how migration policies, which are the domain of hegemonic entities, dictate the relationship of bodies to place. Many beliefs about proper relation to place are retrofitted onto diasporic texts in the Hebrew Bible. Limiting associations of "fromness" often serve state(s) power, ascribing a "natural" relationship to one's perceived, or actual, origins, even articulating problematics that "those belonging to but living outside their country of citizenship are prone, even obliged, to feel a sense of loyalty towards it."[33] Although these texts depict a multivalent reckoning

[30] Daniels, "Archaeology and Migration," 73-75.

[31] "The assumption is that fromness is unshifting," Paul Magee, Elena Isayev, Aref Hussaini, "'The Sky is Hidden': On the Opening Up of Language and National Borders," *GeoHumanities* 5, no. 1 (2019): 308.

[32] Cameron, "Captives," 15.

[33] Robin Cohen and Carolin Fischer, "Diaspora Studies: an Introduction," in *The Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies,* ed. Robin Cohen and Carolin Fischer (London, 2019), 2-3.

with hegemonic powers that these Jewish characters must negotiate with, the terms we use to describe those subject to such power do things.[34]

Dealing constructively with persons in/and place raises another question: How does one describe the dynamics of minoritization in relation to cultures of mobility? Demir argues that for indigenous Kurds the label of minority, is one that is "understood and conceived of within a state," and that this label "is read back into the region's history when, in fact, such an organization or self-identification did not necessarily occur, at least in this format."[35] Demir highlights that the use of "minority," communicates a particular political *relationship to place* that undermines Kurds and bolsters the colonial power, even reinforcing minoritization.[36] However, concerns relating to the terminology and its impact have remained consistent throughout these essays, especially their import into the past which includes our repeated concerns in the fields of biblical and ancient Near East studies.[37]

Nevertheless, as Daniels' concludes her work, she warns against the pendulum swinging so far away from *any* fixity in the other direction: at what point does hybridity actually become an ideal type?[38] It is deeply important that we move beyond ideal types and flattened categorizations, but not to the point that we erase people of the past and present into nothingness. We must be clear about the "power relations that shape and structure the mixing."[39] Demir's monograph is in part a response to the question of what hybridity does for *conceptualizing* diaspora other than

[34] Although interestingly, R.S. Sugirtharajah has argued that the "colonial backdrop" of these stories are often neglected in analysis of the stories *as* diasporic (*Postcolonial Criticism and Biblical Interpretation* [Oxford, 2002], 188-9.).
[35] Demir, "Diaspora Theorizing," 79.
[36] Minority is more about numbers, whereas minoritization is about power.
[37] Floya Anthias, *Translocational Belongings: Intersectional Dilemmas and Social Inequalities* (Routledge, 2021), 177: "concepts are necessary heuristic tools and...they are always politically inflected. Concepts with all their political inflections cannot be ditched in favor of a phantasmagorical neutral description, since description itself requires using often unconscious theoretical assumptions about the nature of our object of study."
[38] Paul Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Hutchinson, 1987).
[39] Floya Anthias, "Evaluating 'Diaspora': Beyond Ethnicity?," *Sociology* 32, no. 3 (1998): 575.

correcting essentialism in identity discussions more generally.[40] Demir's answer to this question coincides with the last motif to be discussed in this article, that of agency.

## Agency

Each essay in this special issue wrestles with movers' spectrums of agency, and expectations for movers' agency in the respective cultures of mobility they address. As referenced in the introduction, the term *motility,* which highlights the varying ways an individual or community has capacity for movement, includes aspects of agency but should not be reduced to it.[41] In our discussion of agency here, we focus on one's personal abilities to make choices and take action, and even one's ability to influence their surroundings through their decisions and actions. While choice and the ability to move are part of being an agent, other contingencies are involved in movement that may not be captured in the choice—or not—to move.

Wolf's article is most directly related to questions of agency in movement, as it addresses injustice for migrants and those perceived as migrants.[42] Part of agency, for Wolf, begins with how she conceives of theories on oppression. In using a "bottom-up" approach, she theorizes *with* the oppressed.[43] The article opens with ethnographic accounts of migrants and their experiences, which Wolf uses in order to first, identify, and finally, resist, oppression. She employs Iris Marion Young's work on the faces of oppression (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence), and adds an additional face (derivatization) as a methodology that assists in evaluating both justice

[40] Ipek Demir, *Diaspora as Translation and Decolonisation* (Manchester University Press, 2022), 22.
[41] Trinka and Fry, "Methodological Inheritances and Interventions," 9; Trinka, *Cultures,* 16.
[42] Amy Reed-Sandoval, *Socially Undocumented: Identity and Immigration Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2020).
[43] Wolf, "A Feminist Account," 89, 94.

and injustice amongst migrant populations.[44] While these faces of oppression might be seen as something that one can copy-and-paste to analyze (in)justice for migrants in the ancient world, we want to highlight two particular intertwined epistemological stances that undergird this work that deserve attention and reflection for the study of ancient mobilities.

First, a repeated concern in this article on the work of interdisciplinarity more broadly is the gap between the intent and the impact in our choice of words. Young's argument for why a bottom-up approach to (in)justice is important is that "politics is partly a struggle over the language people use to describe social political experience."[45] In other words, "how we frame in/justice matters."[46] This leads us to ask whether a bottom-up approach is possible when many of our sources are top-down articulations of experience? This requires us to understand the culture of mobility of the ancient world, examining who or what is (in)visible and why. We also need to examine our own assumptions about the cultures of mobility active in past and present as they shape what we ourselves are looking for in these sources. If how we frame (in)justice matters, we ask yet again, whether the use of migration terminology from post-Westphalian nation-state systems of citizenship actually disrupts or resists oppression for both past and present movers?[47]

Second, we draw attention to the ways in which Wolf's use of ethnographic accounts of contemporary movers for modern migration justice work differs from the ways in which ANE scholars' use of ethnographic accounts of current movers for interdisciplinary work. Not

[44] See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton University Press, 1990); Iris Marion Young, "The Five Faces of Oppression," *The Philosophy Forum* XIX, no. 4 (Summer 1988): 270-90; Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

[45] Young, "Five Faces," 270.

[46] H.L.T. Quan, *Become Ungovernable: An Abolition Feminist Ethic for Democratic Living* (Pluto Press, 2024), 13.

[47] The use of these terms in present accounts is done so with the understanding that they are *temporally limited statuses* instead of eternal or ontological categories so that one might advocate for and claim certain afforded protections and obligations within and from nation-states.

many scholars of the ancient past have reckoned with the consequences of using the experiences of present migrants. There are some who explicitly make clear that they are attempting to counter current injustice by pointing out past injustice, which is at the very least attempting to identify and resist injustice. Yet, there are still many who simply utilize the situations of present migrants for thought experiments that *illuminates*, or makes *fresh* the past. A different enterprise, one that takes Wolf's methodology seriously, would be to evaluate the ethics of our comparative and interdisciplinary endeavors. Using the faces of oppression is helpful for guiding reflexive questions: Does this comparison *exploit* migrants in any way? Is there a way in which the work at hand perpetuates *marginalization* and *powerlessness* of movers—or, even contributes to a normalization of *cultural imperialism,* or *systemic violence?* Have I reduced ancient or current movers by failing to recognize their subjectivity from each other as distinct ontological subjects? Or, in connecting ancient and contemporary migrants as extensions of one another, have I *derivatized* them as persons?[48]

Cameron's work corrects narratives pertaining to captives' agency. She first highlights how the categories used to understand migration do not apply without difficulty to captives, because even those labeled "forced migrants" are assumed to have some level of choice in their movement. Captives, however, "were uninformed, unable to acquiesce to their impending movement, and had no ability to select their destination."[49] Nevertheless, Cameron also points out that there are a variety of outcomes that occurred to captives, in that there is a range of captives' movement "across social boundaries and their incorporation into a variety of different statuses in the society of their captors."[50] Enslavement and exclusion was most definitely on one end of this spectrum, but

[48] Allison B. Wolf, *Just Immigration in the Americas: A Feminist Account* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020), 52-54.
[49] Cameron, "Captives," 17.
[50] Cameron, "Captives," 15.

inclusion could potentially occur through marriage or adoption.[51] Lest one thinks inclusion means something on the opposite end of the spectrum understood here, Cameron reminds readers that "few captives, even those adopted or incorporated through marriage, ever achieved full group membership but remained liminal members of the society."[52]

It is important to remember that their agency had an impact on their captors. Although they had no choice in how their capture bolsters the power and status of the male captors as well as the boundaries of their captors' culture, there is another spectrum of agency to consider in relation to their captors' cultural practices. Cameron points out that some likely were coerced by threat of violence or death to replicate these practices, but they may have also intentionally adhered to said practices for a range of reasons. Many captors wanted to gain information from captives that might impact their own cultures. Captives may also provide links of connection between people groups instead of complete disconnection. Cameron highlights these factors because their invisibility to scholars also takes away their agency, and the many ways that that agency might be expressed.[53] The binary between assimilation and

[51] Cameron, "Captives," 28.

[52] Cameron, "Captives," 29. When we read about the girls and women captured in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in Judges 21 and Numbers 31, the distinctions between these two groups and their status may have everything to do with their ethnic and kinship ties. As the rules of engagement for captive-wife-taking are outlined in Deuteronomy 21, it should be noted that although the term is "wife," *because* of the different ethnic identity of the girl/woman she is "actually marginalized under one of the most oppressive marriage regulations," see M.I. Rey, "Reexamination of the Foreign Female Captive: Deuteronomy 21:10-14 as a Case of Genocidal Rape," *Journal for Feminist Studies in Religion* 32 (2016): 53; Alexiana Fry, "The Ellipsis: A Tool to Mind the Gaps of Pain in Numbers 31," in *Unheard Voices: Cultural Anthropological Approaches to Physical Suffering,* ed. Regine Hunziker-Rodewald, Andrei C. Aioanei, and Alexiana Fry, Ancient Orient and Old Testament (Ugarit Verlag, Forthcoming). Thus, one wonders, especially in light of the difference in kin relations between the girls in Numbers 31 and Judges 21, between those newly orphaned and ethnically distinct and those who still have kin and are ethnically related but tribally distinct, how we might re-read these passages in light of this information. This note from Rosanne Liebermann is pertinent here as well, *Exile Incorporated: The Body in the Book of Ezekiel* (Oxford, 2024), 96: "Evidence from Neo-Babylonian marriage contracts, including those involving Judean women, suggests that this vulnerability [of being a woman in ANE marital relationships] was exacerbated for women with fewer economic means and family connections." See also Tero Alstola, *Judeans in Babylonia: A Study of Deportees in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE* (Brill, 2020), 89, 265.

[53] For one example of those rendered invisible in Judges 21, as well as the attempt to not take away more agency of these captives, see Alexiana Fry, "*Women Talking* and Women Not Talking: Speaking *for* (?) in Fiction and Judges 21,"

resistance misses the creativity and complexity of not just ancient migrants, but migrants of today.[54]

The creativity and complexity of movers is how Demir adds to the conversation on conceptualizing diaspora. Her work is less concerned with the ontology of diaspora, and more interested in epistemology, "on how and what diasporas *translate* and *decolonise*, and why this matters."[55] Her conceptualization of diaspora intentionally excludes other mobilities—her conceptualization names diaspora as diaspora when it *mobilizes*, adding a temporal limit to demonstrate the critical potential of diaspora.[56] Translation, for Demir, is "a suitable metaphor for explaining the asymmetry, frictions, retelling and relationships inherent in the diasporic condition."[57] And just like any translation and translator, there are a myriad of elements at play, such as power, creativity, and discernment. Translations in diaspora are not just places of hybridity and transformation, but they can also "erase, domesticate, and rewrite." Decolonizing is when translations are "foreignizing," when diasporas remember and reorder the hegemonic stories and speak back to the metropole.[58] With her conception of diaspora, one can easily allow for heterogeneity within the diasporic group(s), because "those who originate from the same country—even those with the same ethnicity—might have different trajectories and relationships with power, coloniality and globalisation."[59] There is no singular "dimension to any identity or struggle."[60] Instead of attempting to measure who is

in *Narrating Rape: Shifting Perspectives in Biblical LIterature and Popular Culture,* ed. L. Juliana M. Claassens, Rhiannon Graybill, and Christl M. Maier (SCM Press, 2024), 63-82.

[54] Jacqueline Hidalgo, "The Bible as a Homing Device: Two U.S. Latine Case Studies," in *Religions* (2025); Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation,* 59-60.

[55] Demir, *Diaspora,* 29. Italics added for emphasis.

[56] Demir, *Diaspora,* 31-32: "A temporal dimension to understanding diaspora also allows for the recognition that diaspora is not the same as ethnicity or migrancy." This is extremely important for us in attempting to not recreate essentialist categories.

[57] Demir, *Diaspora,* 37.

[58] Demir, *Diaspora,* 57-67.

[59] Demir, *Diaspora,* 32.

[60] Demir, *Diaspora,* 97.

authentically diasporic, we might instead analyze *what* mobilizes people groups in diaspora, *how* they translate, and *to whom* they translate, and *why.*[61] Might the Bible itself even be understood as a migration-informed/diaspora-responsive textual corpus?

## Conclusions

The authors of this essay focus much of our intellectual efforts on understanding the exilic and diasporic contours of biblical literature and have learned a great deal from the methodological caution voiced by Cameron, Daniels, Demir, and Wolf. We need to be sure "our own ideological assumptions about mobility are explicitly accounted for as hermeneutical factors."[62] We must also recognize that the historical persons, material artifacts, and texts we attempt to analyze are situated in their own "ideological codings of mobility"[63] which we do not have to leave unquestioned or without critique.[64]

In many ways, each of these essays is a direct address to our own agency as people who live in current cultures of mobility and research past cultures of mobility. Each of these essays call us to action in similar and different ways. Both Cameron and Demir point to a gap, to the need to create new categories and concepts. Could we not enter into this conversation to be part of the interdisciplinary endeavor of alchemizing new terms, even new theories? These developments could benefit from ancient social perspectives, adding and extending the analysis of the *longue durée.* Are there new patterns of relationality that have been missed because we remain siloed and insular, taking but never giving?

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[61] Demir, "Diaspora Theorizing," 82.

[62] Trinka, *Cultures,* 2.

[63] Timothy Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (Routledge, 2006), 9.

[64] Texts themselves are constructs. Fernando F. Segovia, "Reading-Across: Intercultural Criticism and Textual Posture," in *Interpreting Beyond Borders,* ed. Fernando F. Segovia, The Bible and Postcolonialism 3 (Bloomsbury, 2000), 66.

Daniels asks us to acknowledge "the bewildering coexistence of flux and fixity," the ability to hold what might seem like paradox in "how things endure when they constantly change" as we study migration and mobility.[65] This paradox is excellent news for a piece that desires to embody heuristic humility. *How* we approach the study of migration dramatically shapes our interpretation, but we as researchers, alongside the movers we study, are also not static entities.

Interdisciplinarity is difficult. It is not easy to familiarize oneself with another discipline and stay current in multiple fields of study. Not only this, it is painstaking to consider that "the way we have always done it" might be capitalizing on others' movement—often, in particular, their suffering. We do not have to stay desensitized as we may have been trained.

Our call for heuristic humility adapts what Daniels called for amongst fellow archaeologists, which she herself borrows from anthropologist Michael Herzfeld: Biblical studies can either self-reflexively arise to the moment in which transformation is possible, or it can remain invisible—or worse yet, be used for exclusionary, regressive purposes.[66] There is no doubt we already know plenty of examples where the Bible has been used in this way, and unfortunately, "there remains the more pragmatic problem that, despite our best political intentions, our work is sometimes, even often, willfully misread, misinterpreted, and misused."[67] But we must not leave the field of expertise to scholars who are committed to these exclusionary, even genocidal, projects.[68] We get the opportunity to

[65] Daniels, "Archaeology and Migration," 74.

[66] Megan Daniels, "Movement as Constant? Envisioning a Migration-Centered Worldview of Human History," in *Homo Migrans: Modeling Mobility and Migration in Human History,* edited by Megan Daniels (State University of New York Press, 2022), 18-19; Michael Herzfeld, "Small-Mindedness Writ Large: On the Migrations and Manners of Prejudice," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 2: 255-274.

[67] Mayanthi Fernando, *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism* (Duke University Press, 2014), 27.

[68] Mónica Isabel Rey, "Intersectionality in Biblical Studies: A Tool Toward Social Justice Activism?" in *Activist Hermeneutics of Liberation and the Bible: A Global Intersectional Perspective,* ed. Jin Young Choi and Gregory L. Cuellar (Routledge, 2023): "While the Bible is a political artifact seemingly always and everywhere being deployed through

contribute in meaningful ways, as Wolf asks us to, in taking concrete steps forward instead of staying in the comfortable abstract. This work must start by being clear about what it is we are doing and why. Who knows where it might end?

its Western colonialist history, biblical scholars often abdicate their role as educators by never critically engaging this aspect of the Bible's enduring relevance in their scholarship, pedagogy, or challenge of the status quo in their scholarship," 72.