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Guest Editor's Introduction for Special Dossier on Uncertain Mobilities

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Uncertain Mobilities as a special issue originates from the workshop with the same name I organized at the Department of Sociology, University of Siegen in October 2022. The second day of the workshop witnessed participation from early career scholars including doctoral and postdoctoral researchers who presented their ongoing research outcomes based on fieldworks conducted across continents. The day-long discussion paved the way for several subsequent discussions that some of us also pushed further in individual academic publications. As a group of scholars invested in uncertainties and risks in migration research we observed growing interest among academic peers to engage further in this discourse. This special issue is a long-drawn outcome of this collective interest where early career migration scholars presenting at the workshop and outside have contributed.

Debates on the relation among uncertainty, risk and mobility has witnessed a resurrection since the Coronavirus pandemic about four years ago. What happens when the migrant is immobilized due to global lockdown, is a question migration and mobility scholars have been grappling with for sometime now. However, what still needs attention is how a multi-faceted crisis like a pandemic paves the way for understanding the consequences of uncertain times coupled with risks and precarity from newer standpoints.

Preoccupation with risk and uncertainty in migration research is not new. With reference to mobility, there are three kinds of sites and actors involved. First is the emigration country or the home country. It is argued that uncertainties in the home country provoke people to migrate. Second site of uncertainties is the immigrant society and its general perception of migrants. Often such broad perceptions are compounded by specific stereotypes emerging from the collective imagination of migrants that are essentially pathological. Uncertainties arising from migrant perception gathered momentum especially during the Coronavirus pandemic e.g. Sinophobia across the world as the common perception was Covid-19 broke out in China. Coronavirus pandemic could be considered as a watershed in the history of mobility studies. Debates on the relation among uncertainty, risk and mobility has witnessed a resurrection since the pandemic broke out about four years ago.

As Jens O. Zinn puts it, the focus is gradually shifting from risk and uncertainty to uncertainty and risk meaning that with increasing globality and fast expansion of the multi-scalar

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networks, echoing Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Caglar, uncertain times are creating new risks for the subject of migration to consider. Evidently, in the last three years, the world has witnessed a pandemic incapacitating mobility at most level, and facilitating the urgency of migration at certain others. As a result, the location of uncertainty in migration studies deserves a reconsideration. Even approached from the discourse of polycrisis, mobility-related uncertainties are fast shifting their characters and the migrants are at crossroads with the unknown unknowns. Similarly, located in the debates on shock mobilities, uncertainty as temporary symptoms of larger structural challenges also inform the all-encompassing uncertain paradigms that need regular intervention and analyses.

While finding novelty is one of the primary goals of any scholarship, this special issue is not only interested in Covid-induced uncertainties and risks, but also in how traditional challenges continue to reproduce existing uncertainties, how these challenges also create new uncertainties and how newer perspectives could help mitigate and analyse these challenges. From that standpoint, this special issue is not just about the pandemic and its consequences. Here, the authors are interested in acknowledging and analyzing the shifting character of migration that is eternally shaped by uncertainties of various sorts at large, and how those uncertainties in turn shape the motivations, urgencies and outcomes of migration for different profiles of people on the move. Consequently, in this issue we invite discussions on how uncertain times produce risky spaces that impact the way we explore the subject of migration today. We ask – what are the latest variables in migration research we must consider? Do we need to rethink the contours of uncertainty and risk while understanding migration now? How do the shifting global order and global scenario impact the different profiles of people moving from one place to another? Is privilege and stigma a fixed binary for examining the uncertainty-risk subtext in migration research?

Uncertain Mobilities has five articles documenting the larger goals of this special issue i.e. mobility's relation with uncertainties and risks. Authors have engaged with various subjects bringing forms of mobility, uncertainties and newer risks at a migration social field where general social categories invite us to reconfigure their relations and mutual impacts set in the frameworks of class and status, gender, environment, precarity and invisibility. Migrants fragmented into each of these social categories experience varying degrees of uncertainty in mobility. For example, au pair Chinese migrants in Germany experience and exhibit mobility-induced uncertainties and mobility precarities visibly different from women temporary migrants from Morocco to Spain moved during the Covid-19 pandemic. Gender as a social location again emerges during the discussion on climate mobility that must disengage from gender blindness. Similarly, authors grappling with questions of status in internal migration within India on the one hand and Zimbabwean missing migrants in South Africa on the other, are addressing broader themes of class, colour and migrants' agency.

While referring to polycrisis and uncertainties in mobility and migration research, I would like to draw our attention to the underlying debate of how migrants fight multi-scalar uncertainties, risks and challenges that each of the articles in this special issue addresses. Autonomy, decision-making, practices, agency and experiences – all these interconnected themes of migration link the discussion back to the subject of migrants' ability to agentize their visibility, their anonymity, their vulnerability and their decision-making capacity. All the articles are based on field work and primary data. This methodological approach is consistent



with the ultimate goal of the special issue that intends to document empirical work documenting the experiences of uncertainties by migrants in contemporary times.

Together, the articles could be considered as an anthology of mobility-related uncertainties exacerbated by the broader, systemic and policy shifts in societies. Individually, each article is a work-in-progress based on empirical cases, migrants' stories and planned observations. As the editor of the special issue, I hope the readers (also our academic peers) find the articles useful, thought-provoking and insightful.

Best wishes.

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