

# Editorial Note

This double issue of *The Journal of Transcultural Studies* combines a themed section on “Transcultural Mobility: Cosmopolitan Artefacts, Artists, and Intellectuals across the Global Muslim World” with a stand-alone article on modern African Philosophy, an area into which we had not before ventured. All contributions address the often unacknowledged tensions between more or less visible connections and the ways in which social and historical actors experience, conceptualize, and thrive on, but sometimes also twist, hide, or deny these linkages.

The essays in our themed section highlight the significance of mobility studies for transcultural inquiry. Driven by the increases in global migration and gaining traction since the spatial turn in scholarship more than half a century ago, mobility studies has become an integral part of diverse disciplinary agendas. Geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and economists have productively explored mobility as a crucial dimension in explaining how terrains, societies, polities, communities, and economies are shaped and reconfigured, leading many to celebrate a not always precisely defined “new mobilities paradigm.”<sup>1</sup> In historical, literary, and cultural studies, too, mobility has attracted growing attention, culminating in a “Mobility Studies Manifesto” that identified mobility as the “enabling condition” of culture *tout court*.<sup>2</sup> Hyperbole and self-serving rhetoric aside, much is to be said for considering mobility as a central facet of human existence and cultural interaction. Studying mobilities in transcultural perspective requires, as many proponents of the mobilities paradigm would agree, more than simply documenting movement. Instead, it demands that we understand acts of spatial dislocation of people, objects, and ideas as the results of socially and politically embedded practices operating on different scales. These acts acquire meanings through representation in narrative, arts, media, and memory that motivate or inhibit the urgency and speed with which movements are initiated or suppressed. At the same time, the meanings attributed alter not only the self-understanding of mobile actors, but the places and people touched by their journeys, and the objects and ideas they carry with them.

It is against this background that our themed section tackles the significance of “transcultural mobility” for our understanding of Muslim cosmopolitanism.

---

1 See, for instance, Mimi Sheller and John Urry, “The New Mobilities Paradigm,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 38, no. 2 (2006): 207–226; and Mimi Sheller and John Urry, “Mobilizing the New Mobilities Paradigm,” *Applied Mobilities* 1, no. 1 (2016): 10–25.

2 Stephen Greenblatt, “A Mobility Studies Manifesto,” in *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Ines Županov, Reinhard Meyer-Kalkus, Heike Paul, Pál Nyíri, and Friederike Pannewick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 250–253; 252.

In her introductory essay as guest editor, Yuka Kadoi outlines how the articles aim to question the assumption of a transhistorical religious and stylistic homogeneity of Muslim material culture. The four contributions offer exemplary case studies that reconstruct the routes and trajectories of Muslim painters and architects from the medieval period to the twentieth century, and trace the journeys of a range of objects, artworks, images, and ideas identified as Muslim that made their way across cultural, linguistic, and religious boundaries within the same period. Carefully interpreting the meanings that Muslim and non-Muslim actors attached to all these forms of mobility, each essay in its own way recreates the cosmopolitan dimension of a global Muslim world. Viewed in this light, this themed issue joins the ongoing discussion on the notion of cosmopolitanism, in a move to unsettle the presentism of most approaches to the subject, which read it as an exclusive attribute of enlightenment modernity. The transcultural perspective of the articles in this issue helps to break down the Manichean opposition often set up between the so-called West and its “others.” The authors implicitly urge the reader to grasp one of the central issues of cosmopolitanism—that is, the negotiation of cultural difference in a syncretic spirit—as profoundly transcultured on all sides, and as following worldly exchanges long before the advent of global capital and communication technology. Following the tracks of actors, objects, and practices, the articles uncover different dimensions of cosmopolitan experiences—mobile materiality, literary, and artistic projects, and religious emotion.

Spanning a wide period from the twelfth through the twentieth centuries, Nikolaos Vryzidis traces how perceptions of “Persian” art changed from later Byzantium to modern Greece. A crucial dimension of his richly documented analysis is the tension between mobile artworks and the representations of objects and their producers in texts discussing their origins and identity and evaluating their qualities. While the appreciation of Seljuk, Ilkhanid, and Timurid (“Persian”) art and individuals in late Byzantine texts could be considered as potentially dangerous fraternization with Islamic others, material evidence points to wide-spread openness toward, and even desire for, exotic “foreign” artifacts and stylistic forms. Citing examples from mural paintings, ceramics, and textiles, the author shows that these negotiations between otherness and exoticism often relied on the activation of cultural memory as a filter for present concerns. Following the Ottoman conquest of Asia minor and the Balkans, Safavid (Persian) textiles, carpets, and illuminated manuscripts circulated on a much more modest scale in the Greek Orthodox realm, as attested by scattered traces in Greek literature from the period. Although Persian rugs and textiles continued to be appreciated by Ottoman notables and Christian monasteries, interest in and memory of Persia waned during the Ottoman period. Only in Modern Greece were certain objects of Persian

manufacture—which reached the country as a result of forced migrations from Turkey—rediscovered as cultural heirlooms and integrated into museum collections. Their subsequent heritagization reveals the dynamic negotiations of their identities, highlighting either their Christian uses or their Oriental origins. From a transcultural point of view, Vryzidis’s empirically saturated reconstructions are of particular interest because they show how closely the frequent re-evaluations of mobile texts and objects are aligned with shifting attitudes toward their alleged producers.

Pictorial negotiations with mobile images, emulating the widespread, early-modern practice of a dialogue between ostensibly opposing cultural and religious traditions, is also the subject of Alberto Saviello’s essay in this collection. The interaction with Christian images brought by Catholic missionaries in the service of religious conversion unfolded in the workshops of court artists of the Mughal empire, which controlled large regions of South Asia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Frequently cited as a locus of cosmopolitan encounters par excellence, the Mughal court has been the subject of numerous studies, each investigating the use of cosmopolitanism as an ideology, a technique of governance, or a quotidian practice. Saviello brings a fresh dimension of reflection to art historical enterprises that have frequently interpreted the engagement of Mughal artists and their patrons with Christian images as a means of buttressing ideologies of universal kingship while showing little interest in the religious substance of these representations. Instead, Saviello’s careful analysis of Mughal painterly productions that draw on iconic Christian works points to an intellectual response to the latter that was, he argues, inseparable from the pictorial reconfigurations of their visual languages; indeed, the two can be usefully read as mutually constitutive. The transcultural encounter analyzed here directs our attention away from studying images solely as a final product. Instead, we are invited to take a closer look at the processes of formation that involve re-historicizing and re-semanticizing a representation to underline a shared truth, even as cultural distance can be upheld by introducing seemingly innocuous pictorial codes; though these codes were of course easily readable by the theologically informed community of viewers to whom the works were addressed. Following the call of transcultural theory to query the underlying values transported by disciplines in the course of their relocation to sites beyond their places of origin, Saviello’s analysis of the prolific Mughal practice of “copying” migrant images casts a fresh light on the shifts in meaning effected in the course of replicating an “original,” thereby upsetting the canonical value art history continues to ascribe to distinctions between originals and copies. The author cautions us against reading the outcome of such engagements as examples of “misinterpretation” or “imperfections” resulting from cultural unfamiliarity or inadequate skills, to argue instead

for a mode of self-reflection induced in the course of negotiating the tension between contending religio-cultural forces.

Yuka Kadoi's contribution is devoted to another understudied facet of Muslim cosmopolitanism, the integration of Islam into the global imaginary of Meiji era Japan. Her essay adds to a growing body of scholarship on modern Japanese views of Islam and its place in the shifting cultural and political geography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century world. It focuses on Okakura Kakuzō 岡倉覚三 (Tenshin 天心, 1863–1913), an art critic and scholar best known outside of Japan as a defender of traditional Japanese arts and customs. Tracing Okakura's extensive travels in Europe and North America, the author argues that Okakura's encounter with Islam was mediated and shaped by Western Orientalist portrayals of Islam as an iconoclastic heresy. In a second step, Kadoi shows that Okakura's denial of Islam's reach and significance beyond the Middle East aided his construction of an "Asian" cultural identity centered on Buddhism and, to a far lesser extent, on Hinduism, Confucianism, and Daoism, which also resonated with Euro-American stereotypes. Couched in terms of a specifically Japanese vision of East Asia (*tōyō* 東洋), Okakura's failed embrace of Islam replicated the essence of Western Orientalism in a non-Western idiom. His Orientalist vision of the "East" excised Islam to secure the unity of "Asia" and Japan's preeminence within it. In her conclusion, the author raises the hypothetical question of whether Okakura may have been able to overcome his limited understanding of Islam had he lived longer. A no less intriguing extension of her study, which would also be of considerable interest from a transcultural point of view, might lie in exploring the ways in which Okakura's ruminations—not only those published in English—contributed to the global coproduction of the competing Orientalisms that continue to be mobilized in culturalist discourses to this day.

Mobility is a key concept that informs Simone Wille's analysis of the work of one of Pakistan's leading modernist artists, Zahoor ul Akhlaq (1941–1999), whose aesthetic practice took shape over the course of his travels across West and Central Asia, as well as during his sojourns in diverse places such as London, Ankara, and New Haven. Wille's study participates in the ongoing revisionist historiography of modernism that rejects a diffusionist explanatory model of reading modernist art as a linear movement from Euro-American centers to outlying peripheries. Responding to the clarion call to investigate the "enabling" potential of mobility,<sup>3</sup> the essay uncovers the processual formation of a formalist language of modernism, nurtured through interactions with multiple centers across the world and transcending the colonizer-colony binary, which has frequently shaped understandings of

---

3 Greenblatt, "A Mobility Studies Manifesto," 252.

modernist practices in regions of Asia and Africa. As Wille's analysis shows, Akhlaq's works, both paintings and prints, drew their inspiration equally from local and regional idioms, such as Mughal album paintings, which the young nation state of Pakistan valorized as its unique cultural heritage. In particular, the artist harnessed selected pictorial techniques deployed by Mughal artists, such as a background grid and multiple frames, whose particular syntax, in Wille's view, made them especially amenable to transculturation and adaptation within modernist art practice. Akhlaq's experiments with form and space, carried out in Lahore, where he was active as an artist and teacher, and across the world, worked to disconnect style from a fixed location. They were effective in creating a community of practitioners across scales—the local, regional, national, and international. While Lahore and Pakistan continued to stand for an emotional anchor, the nation in the artist's imagination was equated less with a territorial or political formation, that is, the nation-state; rather, it served as a space from which a dialogical modernism enabled by travel could take shape. The act of retrieving a nation's heritage and exploring its yet untapped possibilities by establishing worldly connections implied that no contradiction was felt in creating an art that was simultaneously "one's own" and cosmopolitan. By uncovering the tracks of yet another micro-story of modernism as a global and relational process, of an art that travels the way people and things did, Wille describes a process that is not linear or seamless. As we follow the logic of an individual artist's life-story, we encounter traces of barely acknowledged networks, of places of interaction, of journals and universities that—once again—force open the binaries positioning the West against the rest.

The issue is completed by our non-thematic essay, which shifts the focus from transculturation in the realm of material culture to philosophical attempts to restore what the contemporary Nigerian thinker Innocent I. Asouzu, the main protagonist of Anthony Ojimba's contribution, calls "the broken unity in human consciousness."<sup>4</sup> Departing from an inclusivist worldview creatively adapted from traditional Igbo thought, which treats the contribution of every member of the community as indispensable to generating the ideas and values sustaining human culture, Asouzu proposes a "complementary ontology" that highlights mutual interdependency as a fundamental feature of human existence and our thinking about it. Ojimba's article makes the case that this project is fundamentally transcultural in both its aims and mode of reflection. It rejects ethnocentric exclusions, insists on the permeability of all boundaries, and treats everything that exists as a "missing link" that is an integral part of reality. To underline the global significance of this vision, Ojimba brings

---

4 Innocent I. Asouzu, "'Ibuanyidanda' (Complementary Reflection), Communalism and Theory Formulation in African Philosophy," *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya* 3, no. 2 (December 2011): 9–34; 19, <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/tp/article/view/74871>.

Asouzu's communal philosophy into conversation with Martin Heidegger's ontology of *Dasein*, which defines being-in-the-world as being-with-others (*Mitsein*). His goal in identifying resonances between the two thinkers is not to postulate an inevitably questionable identity but rather to reveal the potential both approaches hold by providing a common basis of exchange for developing a complementary mode of thinking and being. Exploring such shared foundations exemplifies a form of transcultural philosophical inquiry that goes beyond comparative studies by delineating a common space of discourse in which differences and mutual learning are seen not as threats to formulating visions of a more authentic existence, but an indispensable precondition. Skeptical readers may well question whether Heidegger, whose decidedly exclusivist views of the German *Volksgemeinschaft* are notorious, is the best possible interlocutor for a thinker like Asouzu. Yet, Ojimba could retort to this objection that the strength of his proposal lies precisely in enabling us to include ideas from even such a controversial figure as Heidegger into the transcultural philosophical dialogue he envisions. Inclusivity as he envisions it exhorts us not to condone views we cannot share, but to engage them communally.

Leaving the disruptions in the aftermath of the global Covid-19 pandemic behind us, we are happy to publish this issue in the certainty that we will be able to return to our regular schedule, with the next issue approaching publication even as we write this short note. We hope that readers will enjoy the thought-provoking essays in this volume as much as we enjoyed editing them.

Monica Juneja and Joachim Kurtz