

“Finding Home: Migration, Exile, and Diaspora in Our Lives” Introduction

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Migration studies is a complex field that seeks to understand the emotional and social effects on individuals and communities as well as the broader economic, political, and cultural impacts of migration and exile. It studies migrants, countries that the individuals migrate to, and the countries and cultures they come from, creating an incredibly complicated and ever-evolving field. According to Peter Scholten et al., “It is an inherently pluralistic field, bringing often fundamentally different theoretical perspectives on key topics” (4). The methods they use range from “ethnographic fieldwork with specific migrant communities to large-n quantitative analyses of the relation between economics and migration” (4). These different—and often contradictory—perspectives create a field of study that is very diverse and complicated. It has been extensively developed in a variety of disciplines including, but not limited to: sociology, political science, anthropology, geography, and law and economics.

Migration studies developed throughout the 20th century, which is relatively recent in human history, given that human beings have always migrated. There are some reasons for this, though. According to Asya Pisarevskaya, “Various scholars have argued that the growth of migration studies has kept pace not only with the growing prominence of migration itself but also with the growing attention of nation-states in particular towards controlling migration” (456). Before the introduction of centralized governments, people were more free to move and migrate, and these movements were seen as normal—or, at least, were controlled less strictly. But with the increasing emphasis on creating an organized bureaucratic state during the Industrial Revolution, migration came to

be seen in a different light. As wage labor became the dominant form of economic transaction during this time laborers (and, consequently, migrants) became subject to the ebbs and flows of the economy, and their wages largely depended on the surplus of individuals within the available labor pool. Nations, and the people living within them, now saw migration as a threat to their hegemony and, therefore, they felt they needed to control it. Additionally, discrimination and racism play a key role in how migrants perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. Because we have only ever experienced a post-industrial world, it can be difficult to recognize that our perception of migration did not develop in isolation but rather emerged from a combination of factors shaping the world we live in today. Such complex labor histories and cultural encounters established migration studies as an important field of study that even today continues to persist and expand.

In this year's journal, our essayists delve into the field of migration studies by analyzing works of literature, song, and film. Readers gain insight into how our world is cultivated through film, how literature breaks down barriers and creates understanding, and how music is a uniting force that can strengthen and empower marginalized voices. Migration studies can contain a variety of academic subjects, and to reflect that, our essayists examine the impact of exile, multiple identities, counterstories, and the impacts of alienation and racism. Our essays cover a wide variety of topics, but all of them have one common goal: to raise awareness of a subject within this field that the writers are deeply passionate about.

Creating a narrative that stays true to the migrant perspective has been something that has been co-opted and often whitewashed to make these stories palatable for a Western audience. Authenticity, and how to achieve that within these narratives, is something that is expanded upon by Jack Vaught in their essay "Counterstories in Cathy Park Hong's *Minor Feelings*." They analyze *Minor Feelings* with multiple different

essays along with other critical works to create an incredibly thought provoking and effective deconstruction of how to create this authenticity in migrant narratives with counterstories. Counterstories are a reclamation of perspectives by migrants themselves, giving them the agency to tell their narratives in a way that feels authentic to their own experiences and cultures.

Acts of reclamation are particularly frequent in films that contain elements of exile and the rediscovery of lost identities. These themes, however, are difficult to acknowledge when written into movies that are primarily intended for younger audiences. Natalie Byers discusses this in her essay about identity reclamation titled “Birds of a Feather: A Comparative Analysis of *Rio* (2011) and the Migrant Experience,” which dives into *Rio* and its protagonist, Blu, on his journey of understanding who he wants to be and who he is. After being taken from his homeland, Blu struggles to combine his two cultures and learns to be confident in his evolving identity.

Similarly, Kaira Carter’s essay “Post-Migration and Embracing Identity Multiplicity” also engages with themes of identity. In this case, though, Carter analyzes Ibi Zaboï’s novel *American Street* and how the main character, Fabiola, reconciles both her identity as a Haitian migrant and her newfound American identity. It engages with *American Street* by utilizing it as an example of how identity multiplicity can be a complicated but beautiful thing, where one individual is able to foster a welcoming community that accepts them for who they are. Identity is something that is difficult for everyone to navigate, but when someone migrates to another nation, identity can become a lifelong struggle, and this essay illustrates how *American Street* engages with this idea.

In the United States, nativism is an ideology that has sprung up countless times throughout its history. Nativist ideologies “see the relations between nations and nation-states as a zero-sum game. They privilege erecting borders, both territorial and symbolic,

against minorities, migrants or refugees, other nation-states and supranational political formations” (Anna Triandafyllidou 207). Nativism is almost always combined with racism and other forms of xenophobia, and these ideas create a culture of conformity, where anything outside of total assimilation is outside the norm. While it has always had deadly consequences for those it affects, its impact has rarely been as far-reaching as it is today under the current administration, where mass deportations are dislocating families, instilling fear, and fueling hatred.

Continuing from this theme, some of our essayists seek to fight back against the hatred and xenophobia we see espoused, including Anna Grile’s “The Power of Language: Strengthening Chicano Voices Through Song.” This essay discusses a famous band known as Chicano Batman and their role in creating a welcoming community through spreading messages that can be loved and appreciated by all. The band also seeks to raise awareness of key issues faced by Mexican Americans, such as in their cover of “This land is your land” (2017) where they seek to question and undermine the nativist ideology espoused by many politicians in our world today.

Alienation and othering are two concepts that are heavily misunderstood and nearly impossible to fathom for those that have never experienced it. In order to best understand the effects and impacts of othering, reading firsthand accounts of people that experience it can provide an invaluable perspective. Victoria Mayeaux does exactly that in her essay “The Enduring Alienation of Black Bodies and Migrants: A Comparative Analysis of James Baldwin’s ‘Stranger in the Village’ and Teju Cole’s ‘Black Body’.” This essay compares the writings and experiences of James Baldwin and Teju Cole in a Swiss village decades apart to highlight how racism is a deadly reality, especially for migrants. This essay brings in contemporary examples and analyzes media portrayals of migration to show how these things are still present in our culture and in our institutions.

The representation of exile in film is also discussed by Emily King in “Stitch: The Creation, The Model Citizen, and The Reality Discovered Through Exile.” This essay highlights how we can look at the character Stitch and see parallels of our own world. While not trying to conflate the experiences of a fictional character with real people and real emotions, King argues that the struggles Stitch experiences in trying to fit in can be seen all throughout our world. She argues that this struggle to fit in can persist for a long time—and, in many cases, last forever. She also claims that most adults react to Stitch with fear, awe, and confusion except for the main character, a young girl who has not yet been influenced by the older generation’s harmful beliefs. This interesting analysis shows that prejudice is something that is perpetuated by the old and passed on through generations.

The Digital Literature Review is an undergraduate student-run journal which means that the process of selecting essays, designing the journal, and promoting it is done independently by the student teams in the course. As such, all seven essays published here were selected, reviewed, and edited by the Editorial team, the illustrations and formatting were done by the Design team, and all promotions on social media and otherwise were created and distributed by the Publicity team. This caters to Ball State’s investment in high impact practices by supporting undergraduate research and professional experience as part of the senior seminar course.

Migration will always be an important reality within our world, and the struggle of grappling with one’s identity will persist. Hatred and prejudice remain a thriving problem within our society, but by continuing to participate in conversations regarding the migrant experience—through open dialogue as well as literature—ideally those sentiments will fade away. Our hope is that the essays featured in this year’s edition of *The Digital Literature Review* contribute to this on-going conversation, and that you enjoy reading them as much as we did.

Works Cited

Pisarevskaya, Asya, et al. "Mapping migration studies: An empirical analysis of the coming of age of a research field." *Migration Studies*, Volume 8, Issue 3, September 2020, Pages 455-481.

Scholten, Peter et al. "An Introduction to Migration Studies: The Rise and Coming of Age of a Research Field." *Introduction to Migration Studies*, Springer Nature Switzerland AG, 2022.