

Cangià, Flavia. 2021. *Liminal moves. Travelling along places, meanings, and times*. London, New York: Berghahn Books. 182 pp. \$120.00/£89.00. ISBN: 9781800730489.

Book Review by

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Flavia Cangià's work on *Liminal Moves* provides a detailed account of the enormous and ever-expanding effects of movement while thoughtfully reflecting on her personal experience, specifically relating to the pandemic exacerbating the impact on travel. She defines liminality in a relevant way pertaining to "the change of position" that can be a person, meaning or event that is "neither-this-nor-that" and where boundaries are blurred and can coexist, but is a "process of becoming" (pp. 2, 4, 35). Her three ethnographic case studies dynamically express liminality in unique ways: monkey-training performers in Japan, migration in Italy, and men relocating to follow their partners. Furthermore, Cangià incorporates mobility, described as the "actual or potential act of physical movement that is profoundly and ambivalently entangled with the experience, aspiration, or refusal of change, and with a person's biography and life world", through the lens of liminality, and of course immobility (p. 3). This significantly enhances her study on liminality, as previous research neglects the spatial, symbolic, and temporal levels that are vital to understanding human experience (p. 5).

The perspective Cangià offers brings deep meaning to the impact of human movement on the individual and group in each of her unique ethnographic accounts. She argues that exploring the "routes and ways in which identities are produced and performed through movement" is significant because these shape meaning to human experience, or what she terms "semantic movement" in mobility (p. 28). Cangià proposes what she calls the "liminal hotspot", which each of her three case studies displays. A liminal hotspot enables Cangià to examine both mobility and immobility during change and "as a

not yet movement” (p. 45). The first ethnographic account demonstrates a liminal hotspot within the monkeys led by the Japanese trainers, known as the “Monkey Dance Company (Saramaiza)” (p. 51). This interpretation comes from the monkey being interpreted as both “being an animal, a child and an artist, between *both/neither* animal (nature) *and/or* human (culture)” because multiple meanings coexist (pp. 52, 73). How Cangia relates this to the minority cultural group of trainers’ tradition and practice and the rest of Japan is thought provoking.

The second ethnographic study expands on the theme and affect of liminality on people’s experiences. Cangia collects essays from Italian youths writing on migration that holds meaning to both physical and symbolic movement. The “liminal hotspot” emerges from the writer reflecting on the migrant’s perspective, imagining a better future, and acknowledging the potential for change that comes with migration (pp. 95, 102, 106). The illustrations in each of Cangia’s strong ethnographic studies are thick descriptions that uniquely provide new thought to discussing symbolic space and its endless influence on culture. Her examples provide great understanding to the “semantic liminal conditions” and helpful terminology to draw value from diverse experiences (p. 106). The nuances of liminal hotspots across cultures are essential to the continued study of symbolic space and travel as it becomes increasingly more common.

The third ethnographic study is Cangia’s strongest case, as it emphasizes the influence of liminality on identity. By interviewing a group of eight men, she focuses on “temporal immobility” as they travel with their female working partners (p. 109). Cangia names relevant terms describing their position and respectfully relates with them personally while maintaining her ethnographic position. I believe this was done well, as establishing greater trust with her male interviewees was helped by sharing her own personal experience. Two aspects of masculinity were explored through the conceptual lens of liminal hotspots, including masculinity from a subjective experience of a transition and toward an unknown future (p. 110). The “both/and” and “neither/nor” in how men define their identity embodied their liminal experience. Cangia certainly provides new insight into how liminality is experienced by gender, and this would be an excellent area of continued research as her informants provide helpful distinctions.

Important perspectives from men’s experiences of liminality and “temporal immobility” are significant in applying meaning to lived experience and making sense of how liminal moves are dynamic in regard to spatial, symbolic, and temporal levels. Men’s understanding of cultural change, including stereotypes of masculinity, was most heavily impacted, which drew the men into “self-reflection and imagination” that proved to be

powerful in their period of waiting (pp. 122, 129). The author beautifully redeems liminal moves, which are often filled with uncertainty, but deep reflection and imagination can be applied to conflicting experiences that demonstrate the resilient human spirit.

Cangià contributes valuable insight to making sense of liminality that normalizes the experience that is becoming more common. She articulates the need to accept and understand ambivalence and advocates that we must “engage with the uncertainty of in-betweenness” (p. 140). It would be beneficial for Cangià to incorporate more reflections from the first case studies as it relates to social progress in community and imagination. For example, the second case study related to future change with migrants in Italy, but sticking with the theme of imagination, it would be helpful to determine whether using imagination could provide deep symbolic meaning to the writer’s experience, leading to positive cultural change. Otherwise, Cangià provides a thoughtful and renewed understanding of liminal moves that reshapes feelings of uncertainty and “stuckness” in human experience than can be positive and formative.