

INTRODUCTION

Mapping Mobility

We hear much talk of roots Of the roots of our societies and historic communities. Of our deep-rooted traditions in particular geographical areas since the dawn of time...

But Man is not a tree—he has no roots; he has feet, he walks. Since the time of *Homo erectus* he has moved about in search of pastures, more benign climates, or places where he can seek shelter from inclement weather and the brutality of his fellow men.

—Juan Goytisolo, *Metaphors of Migration*

In 2006, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan released the report *International Migration and Development*, in which a “new era of mobility” was identified, characterized by a “back-and-forth pattern” (General Assembly 2006: 7). No matter where you are on this planet—somewhere in the largest metropole or on the most remote island—you encounter people who are “on the move.” The journeys undertaken vary widely in terms of distance, time, and motivation, and point to the diversity of what social scientists have come to call human “mobility.”¹ The way the term is being used in scholarly circles, mobility entails, in its coinage, much more than mere physical motion (Marzloff 2005). Rather, it can be understood as movement infused with both self-ascribed and attributed meanings (Frello 2008). Put differently, “mobility can do little on its own until it is materialized through people, objects, words, and other embodied forms” (Chu 2010: 15). Importantly, mobility means different things to different people in differing social circumstances (Adey 2010).

Practices favoring “flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes” (Ong 1999: 6) seem to have become commonplace. Mobilities including temporary relocation—“any form of territorial movement which does not represent a permanent, or lasting, change of usual residence” (Bell and Ward 2000: 98)—are promoted

widely as being a desirable and even normative path toward “success” in life: educational achievement through studying abroad, career achievement through transnational work experience, and quality-of-life achievement through lifestyle mobilities, pilgrimage, and international tourism. In many parts of the world, such practices have become central to the structuring of people’s lives (Bauman 2007). While definitions and descriptions overlap and contradict each other, a common characteristic is that these types of mobilities are undertaken “for a specific motivation and/or purpose with the intention that, afterwards, there will be a return to country of origin or onward movement” (European Migration Network 2012: 128).

Mobility research in general calls attention to the myriad ways in which people become parts of multiple translocal networks and linkages. Notwithstanding the many kinds of involuntary or forced movements (typically linked to situations of poverty, disaster, conflict, or persecution), most “back-and-forth” travels are positively valued. Many people link “voluntary” geographical mobility automatically to some type of symbolic “climbing,” be it economically (in terms of resources), socially (in terms of status), or culturally (in terms of cosmopolitan disposition). In other words, mobility is used as an indicator of the variable access to and accumulation of these various types of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1986). Of course, there are many underlying assumptions regarding the supposed nexus between spatial and symbolic mobility, while the mechanisms producing mobility as well as immobility are poorly understood (Faist 2013).

As I show throughout this book, it is important to identify various forms of boundary-crossing mobilities. In anthropology, a “boundary” generally refers to the sociospatially constructed differences between cultures or categories (Barth 1969), whereas a “border” generally stands for a line demarcated in space (T. Wilson and Donnan 2012). Travels beyond a familiar “home” base always confront people with the “elsewhere” and the “other.” Importantly, these practices also (re)produce socially shared meanings of (im)mobility.² Group distinctions are made, which feed back into the production of the social through culturally inflected notions of mobility (e.g., the categories “migrant” versus “expat”). Transnational mobility, for instance, is often seen as endemic to globalization and as one of the most powerful stratifying factors, leading to a global hierarchy of movements (Bauman 1998). In other words, the movement of people may, and often does, create or reinforce difference and immobility, as well as blending or erasing such differences (Khan 2016; Salazar 2010a).

Already in the 1980s, geographers Mansell Prothero and Murray Chapman (1985) distinguished between “migration” as permanent displacement (geographic redistribution) and “circulation” as a reciprocal flow of people.³ From this standpoint, “circulation” (which stresses the

importance of returning to the point of departure) appears as one of the dominant forms of contemporary human mobilities. In this book, I do not discuss movement as a brute fact but analyze how travels back and forth, as a sociocultural assemblage, are imagined, experienced, and valued. How are various forms of boundary-crossing movement made meaningful by both those on the move and those who are themselves not engaged in such practices? What are the sociocultural mechanisms that enable or hinder such momentous mobilities? How do people envision their “motility” (potential for mobility)? I explore these questions drawing on empirical data, secondary sources, and personal reflections.

Despite repeated claims about the importance of translocal mobilities as one of the fastest growing phenomena of our time and, increasingly, as an issue of public and political concern, no systematic studies exist on their culturally inflected meanings, values, and impacts. Moving beyond the conventional approach to human movements in clearly delineated subfields (e.g., migration and tourism studies), this book addresses the normalization of boundary-crossing movements and the relations of differential power that are generative of these mobilities, their representations, and their societal significance. I arrive at this by drawing together, in creative ways, insights and approaches from anthropology, sociology, geography, political science, media studies, and history. I aim to assess the role of momentous mobilities as an integral part of the ordinary structuring



Figure 0.1: Mobility and immobility are intertwined in multiple ways. An abandoned train car converted into an “immobile” house, somewhere along the Trans-Gabon Railway, Gabon. (Photographer: Noel B. Salazar)

of human sociability (including for those who do not participate in these practices).

The research and reflections presented here add to existing scholarship in various ways. First, I stress the complex relationship between mobility and immobility (see figure 0.1). In the 1990s, the “diaspora turn” scholars (Vertovec and Cohen 1999) denounced a categorical binary of (mainly western) civilization, whereby “stayers” are assessed positively and in a position above “movers” (seen as menace, distortion, and problem). Over the course of the last decade, many proponents of the “mobility turn” (see below) seem to claim exactly the opposite (Adey et al. 2013). This book offers empirical evidence as well as novel theoretical arguments to question and go beyond these dichotomous viewpoints. In many contexts, momentous mobilities have become a precondition for socially accepted dwelling and are considered instrumental in accruing “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu 1986). Second, in-depth research on the situated articulations between culturally inflected regimes of movement, mobility representations, and personal ideas about meaningful travels is a fruitful way for analyzing the dynamic tension between ongoing processes of mobility and fixity (Greenblatt 2009), or between the logic of places versus the logic of networks and flows (Castells 2000; 2004). Third, taking the societal implications of momentous mobilities seriously and not as a given, the research presented here helps to determine the analytical purchase of the conceptual perspective of mobility studies to normalize movement within the single category of “mobility.” As such, the book builds on, but considerably expands, the conceptual framework on (im)mobility that I have been developing over the last decade (Salazar 2010b; Salazar and Coates 2017; Salazar and Glick Schiller 2014; Salazar and Jayaram 2016; Salazar and Smart 2011).

Conceptualizing (Im)Mobility

If Enlightenment thought introduced the study of a common human-kind and an anthropology of its diverse states, then it is mobility—as the traversal of boundaries—that implicitly lays the ground of a modern knowledge system.

—Jessica Dubow, *The Mobility of Thought*

Human mobility—a complex assemblage of movement, social imaginaries, and experience (cf. Cresswell 2006)—is not only popular among those who talk about a “mobility turn” in social theory and who have proposed a “new mobilities paradigm” to reorient the ways in which scholars

think about society.⁴ Influential theorists such as Anthony Giddens, Arjun Appadurai, Ulrich Beck, Manuel Castells, Bruno Latour, and Zygmunt Bauman all conceptualize contemporary capitalism and globalization in terms of increasing numbers and varieties of mobility: the fluid, continuous (but not always seamless) movement of people, ideas, and goods through and across space. Mobility can thus be described as a key social process, “a relationship through which the world is lived and understood” (Adey 2010).

It is important to recognize various (historical) forms of mobility, because the ways people move exert strong influences on their culture and society (Casimir and Rao 1992). People across the globe have long been interconnected; populations often have been mobile; and their identities have long been fluid, multiple, and contextualized. However, considering mobility as a natural tendency in society naturalizes it as a fact of life and as a general principle that does not need further justification, making reliance on “mobility capital” the norm (Nowicka and Rovisco 2009). Any discourse used to discuss questions of mobility is inevitably value laden (Bergmann and Sager 2008; Frello 2008). In this book, I seriously question whether mobility is, in actuality, “held up as a normative ideal in popular culture and the media, and in turn mimicked by many other people” (Elliott and Urry 2010: 82). I show that the ideological values attached to human mobility are not limited to the academic or social world but also that people do not necessarily accept the dominant mobility discourse that is imposed upon them (Salazar and Jayaram 2016).

Ideas of mobility have a long history in anthropology (Salazar 2013a). While classical anthropology tended to ignore or regard boundary-crossing journeys as deviations from normative place-bound communities, cultural homogeneity, and social integration, discourses of globalization and cosmopolitanism (that became dominant since the end of the Cold War) shifted the pendulum in the opposite direction. In the 1990s, globalization—theorized in terms of transborder “flows”—was often promoted as normality, and too much place attachment a digression or resistance against globalizing forces. Mobility became a predominant characteristic of the modern globalized world (Rapport and Dawson 1998). This led to a new focus on transnational mobilities that deterritorialize identity. Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) provoking notion of “ethnoscapes,” for instance, privileges mobile transnational groups and individuals, such as migrants, exiles, tourists, and guest workers.⁵ As Aihwa Ong (1999: 4) explains, “*Trans* denotes both moving through space or across lines, as well as changing the nature of something.” While globalization studies grew in popularity, anthropologists were for a long time absent in the interdisciplinary discussion around mobility studies.⁶

The language of mobility, trendy among academics and policy makers alike, has inadvertently distracted attention from how the fluidity of global markets shapes flexibility in regimes of control (Salazar and Glick Schiller 2014). In other words, it is not because one focuses attention on the “fluid” aspects of society that societal structure disappears entirely. Barriers to border-crossing movements, for instance, typically increase after big “crises” (think of 9/11 in the United States or the more recent refugee influx and terrorist attacks in the EU), and are accompanied by the counternarrative of securitization. In fact, critically engaged anthropologists were among the first to point out that contemporary forms of mobility need not at all signify privilege (Amit 2007).

The ability to move freely is spread very unevenly within countries and across the planet.⁷ For the very processes that produce movement and global linkages also promote stasis, exclusion, and disconnection (Cunningham and Heyman 2004; Salazar and Smart 2011; Söderström et al. 2013). This presents a serious criticism to the overgeneralized discourse that assumes “without any research to support it that the whole world is on the move, or at least that never have so many people, things and so on been moving across international borders” (Friedman 2002: 33).⁸ Transnational traveling remains the exception rather than the norm. The boundaries people are faced with are not only related to a lack of resources (mostly economic) but can also be linked to social class, gender, age, lifestyle, ethnicity, nationality, and disability—all of which have been addressed by anthropological research in some way or other.

Meaningful Movements

By describing the desire to have roots in one place as fundamental human need, projecting mobility as the cause of moral disorder, and equating the places of mobility with non-places, social scientists have not only entrenched a kinetophobic [fear of mobility] view towards migrants, but also underestimated the social value of mobility.

—Nikos Papastergiadis, *Wars of Mobility*

Mobility, understood in the context of this book as temporary translocal travel or relocation, is almost never an end (in itself).⁹ The original intention is mostly to return, “enriched,” to the point of departure. As opposed to other types of mobilities (e.g., the daily home-to-work commute), the travels described here become “momentous,” of great importance or significance, because of the value that people attach to them. Transnational mobilities in particular are a way in which mostly the middle classes

participate in a dynamic process of reworking both their own subjectivity and the meanings of place (Amit 2007; Benson and O'Reilly 2009). Some contemporary momentous mobilities are strikingly similar to the "Grand Tour," a prescribed trip through Europe for young, educated, wealthy men in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, symbolizing the end of their upbringing and giving them the required social and cultural capital for a future as political leaders (Hibbert 1969; also see chapter 4 of this volume). Boundary-crossing journeys have become one of the most salient grounds for delineating middle-class standing, which itself is an important demarcation of belonging within the "mainstream" of society. This association has been further heightened by policy discourses that trumpet the importance of "international experience" within a globalizing economy (while the same practices carried out "at home" would be construed as mundane drudgery).

The importance of mobility as an indicator of social status becomes intensified during periods of life-cycle transition in which other sources of symbolic capital may be jeopardized (Amit 2007). Translocal travels are prevalent among youngsters who are "coming of age" and for whom such practices have substituted older rites of passage as a socially sanctioned strategy toward adulthood. "Traveling to gain experience" is found in student exchange and study abroad programs, the gap year after finishing studies, volunteering, and those forms of tourism that stress learning about other places and people. More surprisingly, perhaps, is that remarkably similar mobilities reappear around the time of retirement (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). In other words, boundary-crossing experiences seem to be "a vehicle for engaging with a significant life-cycle transition" (Amit 2007: 6). All these forms of mobility are believed to be "transformative" in one way or the other, offering both an escape from situations of potentially jeopardized status while providing their own source of symbolic capital.

This book, then, investigates whether momentous mobilities can be seen as expressions of a wider "traveling culture" (Clifford 1997; Rojek and Urry 1997) or a "culture of mobility" (Tarrius 2000). Culturally-inflected boundary-crossing movements, as a fundamental social and historical aspect of society, have been analyzed across the globe: in the Americas (J. Cohen 2004), Africa (de Bruijn, van Dijk, and Foeken 2001; Hahn and Klute 2007), Asia (Syed 2007), the Pacific (Connell 2008), and Europe (Fumerton 2006). In their classic analysis of studies of migration among indigenous populations in Africa and the Pacific, Chapman and Prothero (1985; also Prothero and Chapman 1985) provided evidence of the "constant ebb and flow" that constitutes a major part of life. Circular migration, as they called it, "far from being transitional or ephemeral, is a time-honored and enduring mode of behavior, deeply rooted in a great variety of

cultures and found at all stages of socioeconomic change” (Chapman and Prothero 1985: 6).

Translocal mobilities are generally perceived as markers of “free” movement (Abram et al. 2017). It is a widespread idea that much of what is experienced as freedom is linked to mobility (Dean 2016; Sager 2006). It has even been suggested that this idea springs from human nature, as studies of the behavior of great apes conclude that they prefer freedom and mobility over close social ties (Maryanski and Turner 1992). Historically, mobility appeared, in romantic literature in particular, as an element of personal realization and freedom from the capitalist universe, especially from stability and from the rules imposed by the bourgeois industrial order (Gherardi 2011). Some argue that “capitalism transformed the force of the freedom of mobility into competitively organized upward social mobility” (Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos 2008: 204).¹⁰ People are required to take responsibility for their mobilities in a manner that confirms they are freely choosing individuals while, in fact, they act within clearly defined fields of opportunities (cf. Bourdieu 1984). Because valorizations of mobility are distributed socially, these can contribute to the classification of individuals according to their different social positions. However, there is very little research on why and how these values differ (apart from obvious differences in travel opportunities and resources).

Many contemporary theorists valorize, if not romanticize, ideas of travel and mobility (Bude and Dürschmidt 2010). As mentioned before, this way of thinking destabilizes the fixed and ethnocentric categories of mainstream traditional anthropology and locate culture and identity in “radical” movement, both material and imagined, rather than in place (Latour 2005; Ong 1999). The idea of “becoming through mobility” (*moveo ergo sum*) is part and parcel of the perceived shift from inherited or acquired identities to a focus on identification, a change from relatively stable (place-based) identities to hybrid (achieved) identities characterized by flux (Easthope 2009). This “recasting of identity in terms of flexibility, adaptability and instant transformation” (Elliott and Urry 2010: 7) poses important challenges to issues of social belonging and cultural rootedness (Geschiere 2009; Hannerz 2002; Lien and Melhuus 2007).

General rationales for boundary-crossing mobilities must be distinguished from personal reasons: the former are formulated by external observers; the latter are given by people themselves (and even the motivations reported by “movers” do not necessarily reflect their actual behavior). From an etic perspective, the imperative to be mobile is interpreted as the individual’s need for mobility to accomplish personal plans and projects (Canzler, Kaufmann, and Kesselring 2008). I argue, however, that ideas concerning perceived “benefits” of mobility are part of a wider value

system that is socially shared. Mobility is believed to play an increasingly important role in the construction of people's social position (Canzler, Kaufmann, and Kesselring 2008). The more society valorizes mobility (or, at least, specific types of mobility), the greater the significance of "mobility capital"—the resources, knowledge, or abilities gained by having lived "elsewhere" among "others" (Jayaram 2016).

Mobilities become momentous because the accumulated symbolic capital can be deployed over the subsequent life course for personal, social, or career enhancement in two major ways. First, it can facilitate future boundary-crossing moves by enhancing people's differential capacity and potential for mobility (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004). Alternatively, it can be exchanged "back home" for other forms of capital, as described by Pierre Bourdieu (1986): economic (material resources), social (relational networks), and cultural (embodied dispositions and competencies of cosmopolitanism) capital. Thus, mobility capital is turning momentous mobilities into a new index of prestige, power, and symbolic status, a new marker of distinction (cf. Bourdieu 1984).

The meaning of mobilities goes further than their endpoints, and the corresponding social and cultural embedding of movement is highly contested and stratified (Ohnmacht, Maksim, and Bergman 2009). Mobility is not just good because it "equals open-mindedness, discovery, and experience" (Kaufmann 2002: 37). It is the sum total of a seemingly infinite set of promised and assumed opportunities arising from movement that counts most (Elliott and Urry 2010). A whole set of sociocultural values has developed around voluntary translocal mobilities. In contrast to traditional emigration ideology, people engaging in boundary-crossing travels are described as having a more positive attitude toward mobility, leading "cosmopolitan lives," and not seeing themselves as victims with a "myth of return" (cf. Reed-Danahay and Brettell 2008). These "cultural sojourners" are believed to be driven by highly individualized attitudes, market orientated values, consumerism, and a sense of the power of their own agency.¹¹ For them, it is a continuation of their individual biographies, educational opportunity, and a rite of passage into adult life or retirement.

The sociocultural valorization of boundary-crossing mobilities makes the "movers" responsible for their "becoming." This mobility ideology equates geographical movement with social fluidity, without any critical questioning. It negates the fact that social structures also contribute to mobility behavior, that mobilities are subject to social constraint, and that opportunities of upward socioeconomic movement to which the individual responds by being physically mobile are as much "freely" wanted and realized opportunities as choices by default (with the legal structures regulating who can and cannot move being crucial). Many

scholars argue that transnational mobility is a highly differentiated and differentiating activity (Bauman 1998; Beck 2000; Castells 2000), no longer the realm of the exceptional and exotic but, rather, a normal and sometimes necessary part of life, particularly for the middle classes (e.g., Larsen, Urry, and Axhausen 2006).

Additionally, I want to stress in this book the contingencies of significance: the various economic, discursive, and institutional processes that are involved in the normalization, prioritization, or insidious valorization of translocal mobilities. In other words, “mobility must have social meanings by which the effects of physical movements can be cast on others” (Liu 1997: 99). Neither “stayers” nor “movers” consume the innate significance of translocal mobilities; instead, they co-construct it in dynamic relations of exchange and interaction (Salazar and Glick Schiller 2014).

Imaginarities of Migrancy

While the reasons and motivations to cross borders and boundaries are usually multiple, they are linked to the ability of those traveling (and their social networks) to imagine the “elsewhere.” In other words, “movement is not just the experience of shifting from place to place, it is also linked to our ability to imagine an alternative” (Papastergiadis 2000: 11). People seldom travel to *terrae incognitae* these days, but instead journey to places they already “know” through the imaginaries that circulate about them (Salazar 2013b). While traveling “elsewhere” may mean different things to different people, the meaning and valuation of mobility is constantly (re)negotiated on the basis of social imaginaries and cultural values (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013a).

People’s mobility “choices” are normalized within the dominant ideologies with which they engage. Julie Chu (2010: 13) calls this the “normative sense of mobility at the heart of contemporary social imaginations and embodiments.” It is hard to decode these normative visions because “mobility itself is coded sometimes as adventure, an initiatory journey intended to shape the self, a dys-placement (moving in/out of place); it builds on a commitment to change ... Leaving, moving, going ‘away’ means following a dream, a desire, the design of a better or new life” (Teampau and Van Assche 2009: 150). Imaginaries, as socially shared patterns of meaning rather than as private cognition, can both endorse the normality or historicity of stasis or of mobility. This points to the controlling role of mobility imaginaries (cf. Castoriadis 1987; Taylor 2004). The imaginary has been conceptualized as a culture’s ethos or a society’s shared, unifying core conceptions, a fantasy or illusion created in

response to a psychological need, and a cultural model or widely shared implicit cognitive schema (Strauss 2006).¹² I conceptualize imaginaries as socially shared and transmitted representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings and are used as meaning-making and world-shaping devices (Salazar 2011a).

Empowered by mass-mediated images and discourses, imaginaries circulate globally and change the way in which people collectively envision the world and their place and mobility within it. Imaginaries travel through a multitude of channels, including people, and provide the cultural material to be drawn upon and used for the creation of translocal connections (Römhild 2003). Even when a person is place-bound, his or her imagination can be in motion, traveling to other places and other times (Rapport and Dawson 1998). By extension, it could be argued that even when one is in movement, one's imagination can be focused on a singular place (e.g., diasporic people recreating their imagined "homeland") and that these imaginaries of fixity can influence one's experience of mobility (Easthope 2009). Previous research on mobility tended to separate the imagination as being an impact external to local practice. Yet, imagination is a practice of transcending physical and sociocultural distance (Appadurai 1996). John Urry (2007: 41) called it "imaginative travel" because "much movement involves experiencing or anticipating in one's imagination the 'authentic atmosphere' of another place or places."

The various chapters of this book serve to illustrate how the meanings attached to mobility imaginaries are materialized in a variety of sociocultural practices. The imaginary (thoughts, fantasies, and desires) is a fertile source of different types of mobility that can prefigure, albeit incoherently, different discourses, power relations, social relations, institutional structures, and material practices. Studying and questioning these imaginaries of (im)mobility offers a novel way in which to grasp the ongoing global transformations of the human condition. The focus on imaginaries as a major source of relating people across territorial boundaries also productively challenges basic assumptions of, and the divisions between, previously separated fields such as tourism and migration studies.¹³

The concept of imaginaries has been particularly popular among scholars studying Chinese mobility patterns. Xin Liu (1997: 110) writes, "From the point of view of ordinary people, travel and its associated imaginings are becoming an important condition of everyday life." In a similar vein, Aihwa Ong (1999: 19) notes in her research among transnational Chinese how "flexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced or resisted, have become practices to strive for rather than stability." Pál Nyíri (2010) also describes how mobility has become one of the most important means in China through which to produce symbolic capital. Julie Chu

(2010: 10) ethnographically details how mobility in post-Mao China functions as a “condition of everyday life” and as “practices to strive for.” The analysis of Xin Liu (1997: 110) has a broader resonance:

Even though people experience differential mobility, a conceptual shift in Leaving, moving, going ‘away’ means following a dream Social differentiation is increasingly produced or reproduced by differential access to mobility Travel and movement have reordered the power relations between different groups of people, and their identities are reworked according to the shifting images of various kinds of selves and others.

The Way of the Method

This monograph is the result of an eclectic process of data collection, analysis of secondary sources, and personal experience and reflection. It draws on a multisited and multimethod research design, which involved strategically combining various research methods. The methodology follows a current in social research that emphasizes “constructing the object of research” as a key empirical step, and never taking the empirical object as “given” or immediately “readable” from given preconceptions (cf. Favell and Recchi 2011). The transdisciplinary design was inspired by a wide body of scholarship and is theoretically informed by the previously outlined ideas on (im)mobility.¹⁴ Since the study is deeply grounded in anthropology, the discipline in which I have been trained academically, it was guided by the dialectic between the deductive and the inductive, between the concept and the concrete, between the objectives and the subjects.

The characteristics of (momentous) mobilities, namely their duration, frequency, and seasonality, present many methodological challenges (Elliot, Norum, and Salazar 2017). How to select and delineate a workable field of study and how to identify and approach appropriate informants? I dealt with these issues by initially relying on the least structured data collection techniques and then moving to include more structured data. Relying on “serendipity,” the primary data (of sufficient quantity and depth) were reinterpreted from a theoretical perspective different from the one that produced them, leading to a revisit of the original research questions and design (Salazar and Rivoal 2013). Throughout the iterative process of data gathering and analysis, I used analytic memos to focus on emergent themes, initial interpretations, and inductively derived explanatory theories.

As Charles Briggs (2013: 228) rightly notes, “Scholars have no privileged or disinterested position here; when we construct cartographies of

circulation and mobility, we are just as caught up in these processes as anyone else, just as much at the mercy of our own models of mobility and techniques of (im)mobilization.” My own positionality as a young, privileged, European male (see preface) certainly affected the way I experience and attribute meaning to the mobilities I describe in this book, and the way the people I encountered and questioned on the topic positioned themselves vis-à-vis me as a researcher. Being aware of the role of gender in travel and mobility (Benhabib and Resnik 2009; Elliot 2016; Uteng and Cresswell 2008), I chose to collaborate with female local research assistants whenever possible.

The “sites” chosen for the case studies partially drew on earlier research (Indonesia and Tanzania) or on a personal affinity and familiarity (Chile and the EU). Although some readers familiar with anthropological writings undoubtedly would have preferred it, this book is not an “ethnography” (understood as the written outcome of extended ethnographic fieldwork). Because not all the studies presented here were, or could be, properly planned beforehand, short periods of fieldwork were enriched with autoethnographic elements, including my own experiences as a foreign student, mobile academic, international volunteer, pilgrim, and avid tourist. In this way, I could fill some of the gaps caused by situations where research ethics prevented me from conducting standard ethnographic fieldwork with long-term participant observation. This happened, for instance, when I met people while being “on the road” but did not have enough time to explain to them about the research and to ask them whether they would like to participate. Asking for informed consent was not always possible, and, in some instances, it would have been out of place. In such cases, I decided to focus more on my own observations and experiences. This also explains why the voices of research participants are not always as present in this book as I would have wished they were.

Autoethnography is a well-known method in anthropology, as a form of self-narrative that “places the self within a social context” (Reed-Danahay 1997: 9). It is particularly useful in contexts where traditional ethnographic methods are more difficult to implement. In *“Illegal” Traveller* (2010), for example, Shahram Khosravi interjects personal experiences about his journey from Iran to Europe as an “illegal” refugee into ethnographic writing about difficult border crossings. His work provides an important contrast to the types of momentous mobilities presented in this book. Autoethnography in general blurs the distinction between researcher and “informants.” This is also the case here. Many of the meaningful travels discussed in this book are ones that I have experienced or am closely familiar with. Moreover, I extensively draw on research by other scholars to corroborate my own findings and interpretations. No matter which kinds

of data were gathered and analyzed, the anthropological focus is always on how the various movements under study are made meaningful and how those meanings are circulated.

I decided to leave out so-called involuntary forms of mobility, which are driven by necessity rather than “free” choice, including the ones I was confronted with (but did not experience myself) as a refugee aid worker. This is not to deny the crucial importance of “forced” forms of mobility in coming to a general understanding of what it means to be (im)mobile. Involuntary or forced mobilities are also momentous for those experiencing them. However, they do not receive the same sociocultural recognition as the mobility forms described in this book. Elaborating on why this is the case would have required much more additional research. While this may be a topic for future research, I have paid attention to existing inequalities in mobility regimes elsewhere (Salazar and Glick Schiller 2014; Salazar and Smart 2011).¹⁵

Generous research funding from the EU and the Research Foundation Flanders, together with my position as an executive board member of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (2010–14), the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (2013–18), and the Young Academy of Belgium (2013–15), facilitated my “moves” across borders and boundaries. This led to many small side projects that are directly relevant to the core of the research presented here. I made sure to observe and, wherever possible, to experience as many types of momentous mobilities and temporary relocation as possible. In terms of my own transport and accommodation, I chose low-budget options (e.g., Eurolines buses, Ryanair flights, youth hostels, campgrounds, and guest families) as well as the high end of the market (e.g., staying at five-star hotels or traveling by Thalys and Eurostar trains). Becoming a frequent flyer of Star Alliance gave me access to the world of lounges and, occasionally, to traveling in business class. The mobile part of the fieldwork was complemented by substantial “immobility” (particularly when I was analyzing data and writing up the findings).

En Route ...

Why do you go away? So that you can come back. So that you can see the place you came from with new eyes and extra colors. And the people there see you differently, too. Coming back to where you started is not the same as never leaving.

—Terry Pratchett, *A Hat Full of Sky*

The first part of this monograph, titled “Imagining Mobility,” focuses specifically on how societies and cultures other than my own imagine boundary-crossing travels “elsewhere.” Chapter 1, for example, describes how Chile’s geographical remoteness has defined the imaginaries people share about the mobilities to and from this Latin American country. Despite its historical image as *finis terrae* (the end of the world), people from all corners found their way to these isolated peripheral lands. Based on a combination of archival research and (auto)ethnographic fieldwork, the chapter traces how old (and originally foreign) imaginaries about Chile as an inaccessible island continue to influence how contemporary Chileans, including political exiles, participate in, and frame their perceived exclusion from, a plethora of contemporary transnational mobilities, whether or not they have the means and freedom to cross imaginary boundaries and physical borders. Interestingly, the value of (relative) immobility, which is increasingly under external pressure, remains at the core of the Chilean social imaginary, geopolitics, and cultural as well as family life.

In chapter 2, I turn my attention to the widespread occurrence of various forms of mobilities in and around the Indonesian archipelago. It is important to place these movements in the context of a long tradition of exchange, facilitated by network-creating and network-dependent relationships. While migration studies scholars have paid considerable attention to internal movements within Indonesia, as well as to international (labor) migration flows from Indonesia, they have rarely considered the intersections between these two processes, which are mutually constitutive. Modern mobility practices are not simply understood through the lens of the relatively young Indonesian nation-state, administrative borders, or other categories, but as described, imagined, and experienced by those “on the move” or those personally affected by others moving. Boundary-crossing movements among people with limited mobility resources appear to be highly mediated, not only by regulations and brokers but also by “modern” technologies. I discuss how translocal travels are not generally undertaken by Indonesians with the express intention of uprooting people but are increasingly becoming one-way journeys of (more permanent) migration.

Chapter 3 narrates the mobility story of the Maasai, a widely-dispersed group of seminomadic pastoralists and small-scale subsistence agriculturists who occupy semiarid rangelands in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. Through stereotyped (mis)representations since the colonial era, they have become icons of African traditionalism and unwitting symbols of resistance to modernist values. The sight of virile Maasai warriors, dressed in colorful red blankets and beaded jewelry, evokes the romantic image of a modern “nomad”—a priceless tourism attraction. Ironically, it

is the creation of tourism activities that have pushed many Maasai to lead a more sedentary life. Based on long-term research in and on Tanzania, this chapter contrasts the stereotypical way in which Maasai (im)mobilities have been imagined with contemporary mobility practices among Maasai. I describe how mobile Maasai culture is simultaneously both reproduced and subtly contested. Maasai are “on the move” in ways that diverge widely from their image as obstinate semipastoralists.

The second part of the book, “Enacting Mobility,” revisits many of the themes encountered in the first part, but situates them in the lifeworld that I know best: my own. The autoethnographic elements are more present here, because I focus on boundary-crossing mobilities by Europeans (including myself) in the fields of education, labor, and “quality of life.” Chapter 4 zooms in on transnational educational mobility, the transitory movement of students in higher education to institutions outside their own country. These temporary and mostly circular movements, variously called “mobility,” “exchange,” or “study abroad,” are widely praised, sometimes even fetishized, by policymakers, corporate culture, and the academic world alike. I take issue with many misrepresentations by discussing the EU Lifelong Learning Program (including Erasmus), the most extensive academic mobility program to date. While the numbers are rising, most students are, and will remain, extremely geographically “immobile” during their studies or careers. I reflect on the discrepancy between the political rhetoric of student mobility and the reality on the ground.

In chapter 5, I zoom in on specific types of labor mobilities. There is relatively little research on the mobility of highly skilled expatriates, mainly because it is often assumed that this social phenomenon is problem-free. I offer a critical reflection on contemporary “expat” practices. Life and work abroad, even under privileged expat conditions, is often less rosy than imagined. Highly skilled knowledge workers and managers do not necessarily enjoy more “freedom” in their transborder lives and mobilities than their lower-skilled migrant counterparts do. These days, the expected accumulation of economic and symbolic capital is less obvious than it used to be. I discuss how, with some nuances, the processes at work are remarkably similar to those usually attributed to lower-skilled migrants.

Chapter 6 reminds us that people cross boundaries not only in search for knowledge or job opportunities; spiritual quests and the search for a better quality of life have also brought people to the most remote corners of the world. Based on my personal experience and observations of pilgrimage and various types of “enlightening” tourism, I disentangle in this chapter how these forms of boundary-crossing are “transformative,” offering both an escape from situations of potentially jeopardized status (e.g., around retirement) and providing their own source of symbolic capital

(e.g., cosmopolitanism). Such rites of passage are a means through which people can sustain meaning and values, and (re)create themselves. This raises further ontological questions about our understanding of “identity,” “home,” and “belonging.” I compare traditional examples of spiritual pilgrimage with contemporary practices.

In the conclusion, I summarize the most important ideas that this monograph offers while pointing out directions for future studies. Mobility research addresses new questions toward traditional social science topics. People are moving all the time, but not all movements are equally meaningful and life-shaping (both for those who move and those who stay put). Mobility becomes momentous through its embeddedness within societies, culture, politics, and histories (which are themselves, to a certain extent, mobile). As the chapters in this book illustrate, translocal mobility may have become the key difference- and otherness-producing machine of our age, involving significant inequalities of speed, risk, rights, and status, with both “movers” and “stayers” being engaged in the construction of complex politics of belonging and becoming, location, and movement.

NOTES

1. People in movement have, for a long time, been used as one of the preferred concept-metaphors for social descriptions of both self and other in the social sciences and the humanities (J. Peters 2006). Many of the concepts commonly used are marked by gender, class, ethnicity, and culture (Benhabib and Resnik 2009; Braidotti 1994; Kaplan 1996). Popular examples from social theory include Walter Benjamin’s “flaneur,” Michel de Certeau’s “pedestrian,” Edward Said’s “(forced) migrant,” and Gilles Deleuze’s “nomad” (Salazar and Coates 2017).
2. In the words of Anna Tsing (2004: 6), various “kinds of ‘friction’ inflect motion, offering it different meanings. Coercion and frustration join freedom as motion is socially informed.” Nikos Papastergiadis (2000: 4) uses a similar metaphor when talking about “turbulence” as “the best formulation for the mobile processes of complex self-organization that are now occurring.”
3. Despite some attention to actual migratory movement, however, most research on migration has privileged the study of issues related to settlement in place (Hui 2016).
4. The term “mobility turn” has been used to indicate a perceived transformation of the social sciences in response to the increasing importance of various forms of movement (Urry 2000; 2007). The “new mobilities paradigm,” then, incorporates new ways of theorizing how people, objects, and ideas move around by looking at social phenomena through the lens of movement (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006). It is a critique of both theories of sedent(ar)ism and deterritorialization. In general, mobility has become a widely used perspective that takes many forms. In

other words, not everybody studying mobility necessarily agrees with the mobility turn or the new mobilities paradigm.

5. Relevant in this context is that Appadurai (1996) proposes that globalization fundamentally alters the “movement” of individuals, technology, money, media, and ideas.
6. As a reaction to this perceived gap, I founded, in 2009, the Cultural Mobilities Research (CuMoRe) cluster at the University of Leuven. This coincided with the start of the Open Anthropology Cooperative Anthropology and Mobility group, which was institutionalized in 2010 as the EASA Anthropology and Mobility Network (known as “AnthroMob”).
7. Geographers such as Doreen Massey (1993: 62) have long pointed to the “politics of mobility and access” and how “the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people.”
8. The argument of a general increase in human mobility across time is contested. At the same time, it is undeniable that patterns of mobility are changing, whereby some types of movement may lose ground to others.
9. It is doubtful, for instance, whether there are many “existential migrants” (Madison 2010), people who freely move, not in search of a better life or to expand their options, but only for the sake of moving. Importantly, people’s “intentions often change after living for a time in a new location, so that what begins as a temporary sojourn becomes a permanent stay or what begins as a permanent move turns into a temporary one” (Hamilton 1985: 405).
10. The link between geographical and social mobility is one that was made in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century by the influential Chicago School of urbanism (Gallez and Kaufmann 2015). Think of the idea of the “American Dream,” whereby mobility, or the willingness to move (with each move being a source of freedom and opportunity), is inextricably related to this dream. Such imaginaries persist today, even though very few U.S. citizens undergo (upward) status changes in their lifetimes.
11. Uriely (1994) identified a continuum of migrants from sojourners (temporary migrants) to settlers (permanent migrants), with “permanent sojourners” taking the middle ground between the two. Permanent sojourners are those who maintain a general wish to return to their homeland, and their orientation toward their new place of residence represents a compromise between the sojourner and the settler.
12. For an overview of the intellectual history and contemporary uses of the imaginary in anthropology, see Claudia Strauss (2006). Despite their frequent references to the imaginary, contemporary anthropologists have been less concerned with imaginative processes than with the products of the imagination (e.g., Appadurai 1996).
13. See Benson and O’Reilly 2009; Coles and Timothy 2004; and Hall and Williams 2002.
14. I was methodologically inspired by a wide range of sources (see Bernard 2006; Burawoy 2000; Büscher, Urry, and Witchger 2011; Elliot, Norum, and Salazar 2017; Gingrich and Fox 2002; Marcus 1998).

15. For those interested, there is increasing ethnographic research on refugee and (forced) migration journeys. See, among others, the work of Andersson (2014), Khosravi (2010), and Schapendonk (2011).