Introduction

In September 2015, I entered a relatively empty apartment in the heart of the Bijlmer area of Amsterdam. I brought some cookies with me as a ridiculously Dutch sign of appreciation that I was welcomed in somebody's home. George, an intelligent 34-year-old Ghanaian man, was the one who welcomed me. I got to know him through my informant Cedric, a Nigerian man living in Nijmegen (the Netherlands). While George made tea, I looked around in the living room and saw some piled boxes, a large TV screen, a couch, a small coffee table and a family photo on the wall. 'Is this your family?' was the – what I thought to be – simple question I raised when I saw the photo. The answer, however, was more complicated than I expected, as George responded: 'Well actually I am renting this house from someone who is now in Africa. That is this man and his wife [pointing at the woman on the photo]. So, he is all the time in Africa, and once in a while he comes back. But until that time I can rent this house from him. But I think it won't take long for him to return, so I move again soon'. The temporary sojourn of George explained that the house reflected a kind of preparedness for movement.

Some five months earlier (April 2015), I visited Pape, a good friend of George. He lives in Lleida – a Catalan city not far from Barcelona. Pape is a Gambian man who emphasized that he was among the first Africans who reached Spain through Ceuta in the mid 1990s. At the time of my visit, Pape shared the apartment with two fellow Gambians: Moustapha and Babacar. Their living space had some strikingly similar characteristics to the apartment in the Bijlmer. The large TV screen and a comfortable couch were among the few furnishings in the living room. This place was, as I learned later, also full of mobility as the three inhabitants had all left the building by September 2015. Moustapha moved to a small village in the neighbouring Huesca region to work in the *frutta* (fruit) sector, Babacar

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moved back to the Gambia to spend some months with his family and Pape himself made a 'European tour' and travelled to the Netherlands (to also meet up with George) and Germany, respectively. After his tour, which lasted a few weeks, he returned to Spain, and from there he left for the Gambia as well.

This book is about migrants, but it is not about migration. It discusses transnational movements, asylum, belonging and borders, but it is not about migration. There are two interrelated arguments to abandon the term migration in the context of the African movements that are central to this book. First, a migration perspective creates significant analytical discomforts as the terminology related to it is so closely intertwined with the normative logics of the nation state (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Dahinden 2016). As we will see, the 'African movers' that I aim to portray can actually be best approached as 'experts' in transcending the norms and expectations deriving from the same political entity, especially when we take into account their lifeworlds from the time they have entered Europe. That is not to say that my informants destabilize societal structures through their mobility and informal practices. Certainly, many of them are pushed to the margins of 'Eurospace' due to severe politics of exclusion and discriminatory structures of European labour markets. Consequently, many of them manoeuvre in informal circuits and a few even end up being involved in illicit economic activities. In fact, George and Pape first met in a French prison. That is where they became friends, and from that point on they kept each other up to date about their whereabouts. Despite the fact that I acknowledge these dynamics related to the marginalized socio-economic position of migrants in Europe today, the arguments made in this book rather hint at a different logic. That is to say that the African movers transgress the norms and values of the nation state because they do not necessarily reground in a national space after they have left their places of origin.

Like the 'Eurostars' who are so vividly portrayed by Favell (2008) as the pioneers of an integrated Europe, the African movers in this study position themselves in a postnational Europe. They are not bound to national belongings, and they navigate Europe as a truly integrated socio-economic space. Moreover, like the mobility of the Eurostars, the diverse mobility processes of the African movers connect different places, within and beyond Europe. Through these practices, they actively contribute to a further 'integration' of European spaces as well as to a further 'worlding' of Europe (Simone 2001; Loftsdóttir 2018). Through their movements, formal and informal businesses, religious networks, money transfers, communications and, above all, their imaginations (e.g. Salazar 2011), they connect Milan with Barcelona, Barcelona with El Ejido, El Ejido with Serekunda, Serekunda

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with Nijmegen, Nijmegen with Athens, and Athens with Istanbul. Likewise, this book does not only add to the lively academic debate on African mobility and the social, economic and political dynamics that are produced by these movements,[1] it is equally about Europe – and ultimately it is about re-viewing Europe's place in the world through the lens of African mobility. As Giglioli, Hawthorne and Tiberio (2017: 338) write: we need to reframe migrants not as 'external bearers of "difference" but as active creators of European-ness'.

The second reason to abandon a migration framework is because of its reductionist and sedentarist understanding of migrants' mobility. That is to say that migration studies usually take mobility into account as an in-between phase between a place of origin and a place of destination (Cresswell 2006). If at all, when studies with a migration lens do notice that people do not stay in their places of (previous) arrival, they tend to frame the emerging dynamics as 'transit migration', 'onward migration' (e.g. Lindley and Van Hear 2007; Ahrens, Kelly and Van Liempt 2016; Ortensi and Barbiano di Belgiojoso 2018; Ramos 2018) or – in the case of EU policymaking – 'secondary movements' of 'third-country nationals' (EMN 2013). The use of this rather specific terminology reveals that the authors somehow acknowledge that migration processes can be lengthy, fragmented and flexible, but it also shows the persistent practice of analysing these movements from the classical notion of a residential relocation: a move from one home place to the next. An emerging body of critical literature on migrant journeys and trajectories attempts to move further away from this linear relocation logic of departure – movement – arrival by highlighting that the beginning and end points of migratory journeys are often very hard to pinpoint (e.g. Collyer 2007; Mainwaring and Brigden 2016; Schapendonk and Steel 2014; Kleist 2018; Moret 2017; Zhang 2018). With this observation, however, we reach the boundaries of what migration studies as an academic field can bring us in our understanding of mobility. As Allison Hui (2016: 75) tellingly outlines: 'But if migration does not stop after moving to another country, when does it stop? Or more precisely, when do "migrant" practices give way to other types of practices, making migration no longer of primary relevance when orienting research?'

Hui challenges us to interrogate the basis on which we differentiate migrant journeys from pre-migration and post-migration mobility. What makes a migration process really different from other mobility processes? The self-evident response of 'migration involves a change of residence' is unconvincing since we know from transnational migration studies that people may have multiple belongings, and may be present in two or more 'homes' at the same time. We also know that a considerable number of people maintain highly mobile lifestyles,[2] and we are aware that processes

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of inclusion are often accompanied with new forms of mobility and circulations (Moret 2017). In this context, even return migration as a permanent form of resettlement is considered a myth since it involves circulations as well as new attempts to reach previous destinations (Sinatti 2011; King and Christou 2011; Kleist 2018). Thus, instead of being about a single destination-oriented movement towards a destination – migration – this book is rather about mobilities in the plural form (e.g. Adey 2010; Cresswell 2010).

With these dynamics in mind, this book aims to put forward a de-migranticized view on African mobility within Europe. In other words, and in line with Dahinden (2016), I consider 'migration' and its related ontological foundations of stasis not necessarily the best analytical starting point to understand the lifeworlds of African movers in Europe today. Rather than seeing 'migrancy' as the primary marker of my informants' lives, I aim to understand how flexible mobilities relate to migratory projects, and how relations and notions of belonging change along pathways of movements.[3] Instead of seeing the term 'migrant' as an existential category of life, I seek to understand how my informants got 'migranticized' through state-led bureaucracies as well as the expectations that circulate through their affective circuits (Cole and Groes 2016a). At the same time, the chapters show how mobility remains central to their being in Europe, *despite* the existence of harsh mobility regimes that aim to hamper, stop or control their mobilities (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). This book dives into the ways African movers navigate Eurospace – defined as an imagined geography of Europe that, in potential, facilitates cross-border mobility.[4] It discusses how they encounter migration bureaucracies, and how they invert the logics of the rules and regulations of these bureaucracies; how they are confronted with borders, but also how they manage to transgress and circumvent them. It attempts to unpack the ways they incorporate the common labels of migration, such as asylum seeker, refugee and illegal migrant, but also the ways they keep away from them or actively reinvent them. It discusses how they feel lost and have lost in Europe as well as the ways they 'just manage' or 'get by' in Europe. Such a de-migranticized view on the im/mobility of people who are generally viewed as migrants sounds like a contradiction in terms, but I argue that it is highly needed to move from the 'master narrative of migration', as Favell (2008: 101) outlines:

> Above all, it is important not to see these aspects of spatial and temporal volatility in a negative light, as is often the case when they are looked at from the classical nation-state centred perspective of 'integration'. This is the master narrative of immigration, wielded by receiving societies, which assumes that all legally welcome 'immigrants' must be

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on some kind of track to full integration: to inclusion, incorporation, permanent settlement, and one day becoming a citizen among others.

In sum, the analytical contribution of this book lies at the multiple crossroads of movement *and* stability, everyday mobility *and* migration, European policy *and* so-called 'African cultures of mobility', borders *and* transgressions and ultimately – as it is so cleverly addressed by Kleist and Thorsen (2017) – hopes *and* despairs. Although I highly appreciate the work of critical scholars who emphasize the precarious positions of migrants in Europe, and their analyses of the ways this precarity is actively produced by mobility regimes and their related industries (e.g. Verstraete 2001; De Genova and Peutz 2010), I am deliberately not focusing merely on situations that reinforce the image of the African migrant as homo sacer (e.g. Rajaram and Grundy-Warr 2004). I actually seek ways to link the multiple restrictions and barriers they face in Europe with their creativity and improvisation skills that help them to navigate these uncertain terrains (e.g. Vigh 2009). It follows that I – in line with Kothari's (2008) work on street vendors in Barcelona and Riccio's (2001, 2004) work on Senegalese transnational Mouride networks – refute the notion that cosmopolitan imaginations and mobile lifestyles are reserved for a selected few – as if these only matter in the lifeworlds of white and elitist voyageurs.

Following Im/mobility Trajectories: A Methodological Entry

As a foundation for this book I use a research that aimed to capture the dynamics of African im/mobility in an integrated Europe by means of a trajectory ethnography (e.g. Schapendonk et al. 2018). In methodological sense, this trajectory approach is closely linked to Marcus's (1995) seminal work, which can be understood as a pioneering attempt to make the methods of social science more sensitive to relationalities and mobilities (see, for instance, Büscher and Urry 2009; Salazar and Smart 2011; Merriman 2014). Marcus (1995: 96) encourages researchers to move away from 'single site designs' in order to 'examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time–space'. My research started with three broadly defined access points from where I attempted to follow im/mobility trajectories: Lombardy (Italy), Catalonia (Spain) and Randstad (the Netherlands). In these regions, I met many, but certainly not all, of my informants for the first time. In places like Bergamo, Lleida, Barcelona and Rotterdam I managed – however oftentimes did not manage – to build social relations with people who gradually granted me access to their lifewords. However, even more so, this research relied on my previously built

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social connections. Some of these relations have been established more than ten years ago in Morocco and Turkey, which have constituted the EU's external borderlands or 'transit spaces' for about two decades now. Others have grown over the years in my hometown, the city of Nijmegen in the eastern part of the Netherlands.

The stories in this book are based on my fieldwork notes, recorded interviews, reconstructed travel stories and countless informal conversations (face-to-face as well as by telephone or through social media). I primarily approach these stories as products of relations and hence they are not so much phenomenological representations of *their* worlds. The ethnographic details of this book are based on my encounters and engagements with the lifeworlds of my interlocutors. Only through these relations was I able to construct an alternative worldview regarding mobility in contemporary Europe. En passant, these relations served mobility, both for me and my interlocutors. They gave us insights about possible travel destinations and led to new connections. At the same time, our encounters included many situations and confrontations where any ground for relatedness between me and my interlocutors was difficult to find because – as the typical white male EU citizen/scholar – I am not confronted with Europe's racialized mobility regime and its politics of exclusion in my daily life (Cabot 2016; Khosravi 2018; see also Chapter 5).

The book mainly discusses the trajectories of Gambian men, but it also includes stories of people (including a few women) from other African countries, including Senegal, Nigeria and Cameroon. While the central arguments are somewhat biased to the ways Eurospaces expand for those who have recently arrived in Europe through unauthorized channels, it also includes the im/mobility of individuals who have lived in the same space for over twenty years.

The use of the three access points in Europe indicates that a trajectory ethnography is not placeless. Although I find the idea from Feldman (2012) of a nonlocal ethnographer very appealing and convincing in the light of migration apparatuses, there is still a local component to my research activities. In the same way mobilities ground in place (e.g. Favell 2008; Dahinden 2010a), the research activities that aim to study mobility may start from specific 'anchor points' in the field. For example, my fieldwork in Barcelona usually started in a laundry in the middle of the bustling, and centrally located, Raval neighbourhood. In this laundry, I always met the Gambian man called Ebou, doing his daily job – washing, drying, ironing and folding clothes, mattress covers, tablecloths and other textiles coming from individuals, families or neighbouring restaurants. It is from this place that I saw the world moving around us (see for a methodological argument Gielis 2009). The world was in motion through Ebou's stories about his

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life in the Gambia and the lively illustrations of his journey to Europe that brought him all the way to Syria and Turkey from where he reached Greece and later Italy – the country where he spent some seven years of his life, be it in a highly mobile way. When we 'chopped food' in his workplace, we intermingled discussions on his ongoing struggle of getting regularized through his labour contract with everyday chitchats about football, development, tourists and politics. While I helped him fold some of the clothes that were still warm from the dryer, we informed each other about the whereabouts of some of our contacts and we discussed life in the nearby city of Lleida. Ebou considered Lleida (or Lerida in Spanish) 'his place' since that is the place where he received his 'paper'. Not only Ebou's dynamic storylines hinted at lives in motion. So too did the informal conversations I had with the many Senegalese and Gambian 'brothers'[5] of Ebou who came to visit him. So too did the way his Nigerian ex-girlfriend, who worked as a sex worker close by and who ran into the laundry now and then, usually when there were police interventions. From this specific place, I saw 'the stuff' Ebou was buying from waste collectors who wander through the streets of Barcelona day in, day out, to look for some value in the things that people throw away. Underneath the dinner table (which was also the table to fold clothes), Ebou stored, among other things, bicycle lights, shoes, heads, music boxes, shavers and belts. Many of these materials – or 'stuff' as Simone (2014) would call it – waited underneath his table to be repaired, if necessary, in order to trade them soon again in the urban environment of Barcelona. Other 'stuff' was gathered by Ebou to be put in a container in order to be shipped to the harbour of Banjul, the capital of his country of origin. Next to this laundry, other anchor points from where I started my research were a public square in Bergamo, a shared apartment and an African grocery shop in Lleida, an asylum centre in the Italian region of Liguria and a house of a Ghanaian pastor in the Bijlmer area of Amsterdam.

These places are insightful access points to study mobility; however, they tell us little about the ways mobility trajectories evolve in expected and unexpected ways. For this reason, the trajectory approach I put forward here is not meant to stick to places. In other words, to capture the navigation of Eurospace by African movers, the researcher is challenged to be flexible, to be prepared to switch gears and also to change places. The researcher is asked to develop mobility capital (Moret 2017) and to find ways to connect with informants through the use of mobile devices and social media[6] (which raises new questions regarding ethics and the researcher's positionality). Over the years, I have remained in contact with many of my informants, and this allowed me to keep track of people's changing, and sometimes remarkably *un*changing, situations. More fundamentally, this trajectory approach enabled me to revisit my informants in the places they

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grounded for different periods of time, including Athens, Naples, Tenerife, Leiden, Vevey, Bern, Bremen and smaller places in Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland and Spain. I also visited places and people in the Gambia that were most meaningful to some of my Gambian interlocutors. This mobile and translocal design runs the risk of being a 'shallow jet-set ethnography' (Olwig 2007: 22, cited by Khosravi 2018) as less knowledge is produced on local sites (see also Elliot, Norum and Salazar 2017). I indeed have been hopping places, meaning that I spent only limited time in each of them. Consequently, I have collected only limited information regarding place histories, local regulatory frameworks and migrants' engagements with local communities. Some 'thick descriptions' of localities are thus sacrificed for the sake of grasping how my informants move through, within and across places.

The method of following trajectories adds empirical and analytical value to our understanding of im/mobility processes since it goes beyond ex post reconstructions of movement.[7] It is predominantly built on the idea that we can understand im/mobility processes better at times they are actually unfolding (BenEzer and Zetter 2015; Schapendonk et al. 2018). The value added not only lies in the fact that it puts emphasis on the evolvement of a certain pathway and the experiences attached to this. A trajectory approach is particularly insightful since it is able to unpack some of the inherent aspects of mobility that tend to be left out, or which become 'rationalized', by ex-post reconstructions of travel stories. This includes the multiple aspirations people have in mind, the shifting of destinations and renavigations, the multiple moments of breakthrough, the eventual failed attempts and inconsistencies as well as the unforeseen and unexpected ruptures of mobility. That is not to say that everything should be told. As Shahram Khosravi (2018) so powerfully argues in his reflection on the trajectory approach, movers, migrants and asylum seekers have a fundamental right to opacity.[8] This particularly applies in the framework of the tactics attached to unauthorized border crossings and the skills and techniques of my informants to circumvent state control. The ethnographer, then, constantly needs to balance his or her search for the specific, the detailed, the untold – in sum the 'thickness' of mobility illustrations – with the informants' fundamental right to opacity. In the chapters to come, I do not provide a separate section with my methodological and ethical reflections. Instead, I discuss some of the dilemmas, failures, awkward situations and ethical boundaries when I actually encountered these during my research practices.

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A Guide For the Reader

As with the trajectories of African movers, the storyline of this book is also fragmented, dynamic and nonlinear. It emphasizes process and movement, but at times it stands still. The stories of my most important interlocutors are spread over the book and are deliberately interwoven with the pathways of other people. In each chapter, we meet new movers who lead us to new places. Although the entire book is based on ethnographic insights, I use vignettes to further zoom in on specific details that deepen our understanding of the im/mobility involved. These vignettes appear at the beginning of the two parts of the book.

The first part, 'Navigations', focuses on the wayfinding practices of the African movers. It consists of four chapters. Chapter 1, 'Worlding Departures', starts from the notion of 'worlding', a concept coined by the urban theorist AbdouMaliq Simone (2001, 2004) in order to understand the multiple ways African movers link up with processes of globalization and how these processes result in multiple departures. Chapter 2, entitled 'Moving through Affective Circuits', dives into the complex relation between mobility and affective relations. It starts from Vigh's (2006, 2009) notion of 'social navigation'. Whereas most migration studies frame social connectivity as automatically beneficial to mobility processes, I actually approach it as an uncertain terrain that requires careful navigation by the movers in question. Instead of the 'strong and weak ties' thesis of social networks, I start from the notion of 'affective circuits', being constructed by the myriad exchanges of goods, people, money, emotions and ideas across borders (Cole and Groes 2016b). By navigating these circuits, movers negotiate individual aspirations and social expectations synchronically. The same circuits help them to create new openings and new directions in their mobility processes. However, these circuits are regulated, performed and kept under surveillance, leading to considerable financial, social and emotional losses. The subsequent chapter, 'Navigating Webs of Facilitation/Control' (Chapter 3), focuses on a second uncertain terrain that is navigated by my informants: the complex web of mobility facilitators and mobility controllers. While realms of mobility facilitation and realms of mobility control are usually separated from each other in discussions on migration industries (e.g. Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg Sørenson 2013; Cranston, Schapendonk and Spaan 2018), I actually start from the opaque boundaries between, and shifting roles of, actors that are present in this relational force field. This discussion continues in Chapter 4 in which I elaborate on 'The System' – an expression that my interlocutors used not only to articulate the migration apparatus with which they are confronted, but

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also to indicate their confrontation with othering, ordering and bordering processes in Eurospace (Van Houtum and Van Naerssen 2002). Although the system is omnipresent and powerful, it is seldom seen as a determining force. This chapter thus shows how movers escape the system, find ways to live with it, or invert its logics. This final chapter of Part I ends with some concluding notes on the ways people find ways.

The title of the second part, 'Re-viewing Europe', holds a double connotation. First, it points to the processes and moments whereby my interlocutors seem to reconsider their position in Eurospace. Chapter 5, entitled 'In Place/Out of Place', therefore focuses on the mobility/locality configurations that are inherent parts of the trajectories under research. From a relational politics of im/mobility (e.g. Adey 2006; Cresswell 2010; Schapendonk and Steel 2014; Bolay 2017), it discusses how the African movers relate and belong to specific places in Eurospace as well as the ways they at times feel excluded and isolated from the very same places (Lems 2018). Being a human geographer, I feel less equipped to write about people's shifting identities and social becoming in these processes (e.g. Wilson Janssens 2018) and instead focus more on the various attachments to place involved. The second connotation attached to the title of 'Re-viewing Europe' points to the way the African movers help us to rethink the role of cross-border mobility in processes of European integration. Hence, Chapter 6, entitled 'The Multiple', sheds a more positive and diffuse light on the margins of Eurospace by pointing to mundane processes of circulation, informality and flexibility, especially in economic circuits. This helps us to destabilize dualities of core/periphery, success/failure, vulnerability/resourcefulness, here/there and inside/outside. Through their mobility and related circuits, African movers redefine the ways presumed margins relate to self-defined centres and, in doing so, they coproduce a worlding and multiple Europe.

In the Conclusion, I reflect on the position of im/mobility in migration studies and herewith offer new openings for framing and studying trajectories.

NOTES

1. There is a very rich field of literature that discusses the diverse cultures of mobility in various settings across West Africa. The *Mobile Africa* book, edited by De Bruijn, Van Dijk and Foeken (2001), is an important point of reference in this respect. Other compelling ethnographies include: Prothmann (2018) for a Senegalese case, Piot (2010) for a Togolese case, Gaibazzi (2015) for a Gambian countercase on sedentary lives, Alpes (2011) for a Cameroonian case and Bolay (2017) for a case on

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itinerant miners. Next to this anglophone field of literature, there is an equally rich francophone field of literature on mobility (Choplin and Lombard 2010; Bredeloup 2008), transmigration and circulation (Alioua 2008; Carnet et al. 2012).

2. These mobile groups include privileged movers like Favell's (2008) Eurostars, Ong's (1999) astronauts, elitist travellers (e.g. Camenisch and Müller 2017) as well as less privileged movers (see Tarrius 1995 on Maghrebi commercants in Europe, Engbersen et al. 2013 on Polish workers in the EU, Bolay 2017 on itinerant miners, Meeus 2012 on Romanian workers in the EU, Dahinden 2010a on cabaret dancers in Switzerland and beyond and Kalir 2013 on Chinese workers in Israel).
3. In that sense, I indeed follow an Ingoldian approach to mobility and consider my informants as *wayfarers* (Ingold 2007, 2011). In all his essays, Ingold prioritizes dynamics over statics, process over product and entanglement over classification. See Schapendonk (2018b) for an elaborative discussion on Ingold's conceptual distinction of wayfaring versus transporting and how this relates to the field of migrant trajectories.
4. The notion of Eurospace overlaps to a large extent with Europe's Schengen zone, but as we will see throughout the book, there are many 'internal externalities' (Schapendonk 2017b) in this Eurospace. It can best be considered a borderless zone with borders (see Chapter 4). At the same time, through people's movements and imaginations Eurospace might expand to other places outside the Schengen zone. It is a travelling entity in itself.
5. The terms 'brother' and 'sister' – as well as the French terms *frère* and *soeur* – are commonly used by my informants to indicate a relatively strong social bonding with somebody. It often does not refer to a family relation (see also Andrikopoulos 2017).
6. These research practices partly rely on the methods and reflections of other scholars aiming to understand mobile populations, including Meeus (2012) and Elliot, Norum and Salazar (2017).
7. Ex-post reconstructions can still lead to highly informative contributions, which unsurprisingly come from gifted anthropologists like Michael Jackson (2013), Annika Lems (2018), Shahram Khosravi (2011) Hans Lucht (2012) and Jonny Steinberg (2015). Despite their different writing and research techniques, all these authors nonetheless manage to construct a multilayered portrayal of what it means to be on the move in a world full of political, social and racial borders. In my view, the work of Steinberg deserves special attention for its deeply touching description of the journey across Africa of a Somali man called Asad. The writings of these anthropologists go naturally beyond the analytical points of departure of mainstream migration studies that start from binary thinking such as departure versus arrival, legal versus illegal and push versus pull (King 2002). At the same time, these books cannot easily be subsumed under the interdisciplinary field of mobility studies (Sheller and Urry 2006; Cresswell 2010) since they hardly fit the framing of 'new mobilities' that hint at technology-driven mobilities and elitist and borderless movements of global nomads (see also Cresswell 2011).
8. Khosravi relates his argument to the work of the postcolonial scholar Édouard Glissant.

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