

STAYING PUT IN MOVING SANDS:  
THE STEPWISE MIGRATION PROCESS OF SUB-SAHARAN  
AFRICAN MIGRANTS HEADING NORTH

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*Introduction*

Traditionally migration related research has focused on the ending sides of migration. The general emphasis has been on the decision making process before migrating (the pre-migration phase) as well as on migrant's adaptation and integration at the ending stage of migration. Paradoxically, migration as a process of moving has been understudied. This derives from the conventional understanding of migration being an unproblematic transition of a place of origin to a certain destination. However, a closer look at contemporary sub-Saharan African migration shows that migration processes are often more complex than this simple linear movement. Many migrants undertake lengthy and often dangerous overland journeys which contains periods of temporary settlement and subsequent movements (Collyer 2007). Others fly to relatively unknown areas in hope of reaching their primary destination from there, since they lack the means for reaching it directly.

It is important to note that sub-Saharan African migration, and trans-Saharan migration in particular, is not so European focused as it is often represented. Many sub-Saharan Africans<sup>1</sup> are going to Northern African countries as their primary destination. In fact, there are estimates suggesting that more sub-Saharan Africans live in North Africa than in the European Union (de Haas 2007). The large scale regional migration and the reception of refugees in neighbouring countries prove that, contrary to what is often believed in the North, South-South migration is the dominant form of international migration in Africa (Adepoju 2008; Awumbila and Manuh 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> Although most of my respondents came from West and Central Africa, I have chosen to use the broader geographical indication of sub-Saharan Africa.

Despite the dominance of intra-continental migration in Africa, migration to Europe (and Middle East, Asia and North America) is definitely rising (Baldwin-Edwards 2006). The explanation goes beyond the traditional push factors of political and economic instability of many African countries. The more cultural explanations concerning the opening up of African societies due to modern communication means and the fascination for modern lifestyles in Western areas gain importance in the field of international migration from South to North (Gebrewold 2007; Ros et al. 2007). “Adventurism” is also an important motivating factor in many cases (van Dijk, Foeken and van Til 2001; Kothari 2008). Hence there is a growing aspiration in African societies to emigrate to the North, especially among juveniles in urban spaces. However, these aspirations emerge in times of social and political closure of the European Union. The recent heightening of the fences around the Spanish exclaves Ceuta and Melilla, the numerous sea patrols and the strengthened visa regimes prove that indeed the fundamental human right of free movement is incomplete. Every person has the right to leave any country, including his/her country of birth, while at the same time states have the sovereign right to exclude newcomers in order to protect public interests (Singh Juss 2006).

An important consequence of the growing migration aspirations and the simultaneous closing of Fortress Europe is that many would-be immigrants attempt to enter Europe unauthorized. For the migrant, this requires a considerable sum of money, courage, the right contacts and some organizational capacity. Many individuals do not have the right mix of these ingredients resulting in a growing number of sub-Saharan African migrants waiting in European border regions for their chance to enter their ‘El Dorado’. There are considerable African ‘transit communities’ found in the Maghreb countries, Turkey and more surprisingly in countries such as Ukraine (Uehling 2004). From the European perspective, the accumulation of transit migrants at its borders is the main reason to regain its migration controls. And there we have the (self-)realization of a *cat and mouse game* in the liminal spaces of the Euro-African borderlands with, as we probably all know, serious humanitarian consequences.

Sub-Saharan African transit, or stepwise, migration is changing EU-African borderlands politically, spatially and socially. However, changes do also occur deeper in Africa. Tamanrasset in Algeria (Bredeloup and Pliez 2006; de Haas 2007) as well as Dirkou in Niger (Brachet 2005) have changed from remote desert towns to places of

steadily economic prosperity, mainly because of the structural presence of temporary migrants. Dakar and Saint Louis in Senegal have recently become well-known places of departure for the Canary Island which nowadays includes the presence of European border guards (Schapendonk and van Moppes 2007; Carling 2007a).

This contribution focuses on the stepwise migration process of sub-Saharan African migrants<sup>2</sup> heading North with a strong actor centred approach. The objective of the study is twofold. Firstly, it aims to gain more insights into the migration processes by investigating migrant's flexibility and dependency. Secondly, this study examines the way sub-Saharan African migrants adapt to *and* use 'en-route places' in order to understand better the geographical notion of 'place' and the impact of mobility on places. Altogether migration, and in particular sub-Saharan African migration, is predominantly analyzed in terms of social networks which overlooks the importance and particularities of 'places'. Moreover, theoretically, mobility and 'place' are mostly positioned as 'enemies' of each other; mobility may lead to *placelessness* or *non-places* (Augé 1995; Siddle 2000; Creswell 2004). This contribution emphasizes that places are of vital importance for mobility and vice versa.

Before starting the analysis, some methodological considerations concerning the often used concept of transit migration and subsequently the research settings, are outlined below.

### *Moving from uni-dimensional transit migration*

The stepwise migration process of migrants is predominantly analyzed with the help of the concept transit migration which is generally understood as migration to one country in order to reach another country.

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note here that, in the case of stepwise migration, economic migration and refugee flows are not easy to distinguish. Often reasons to emigrate overlap: political refugees have economic considerations as well (van Hear 2004) and often economic migrants are also moving because of political reasons. Moreover, people change these static policy categories over time (e.g. asylum seekers become 'illegal migrants' if their cases are rejected). However, more important here is the fact that economic migrants and political refugees use the same means, take the same routes and face the same vulnerabilities and problems during their process of moving. Because of this growing migration complexity, more and more academics, policy makers and NGOs are aware of the 'mixed migration' or 'migration-asylum nexus' (Papadopoulou 2005).

However, this concept is highly politicized since it is predominantly used in the framework of potential unwanted migration towards the European Union (Içduygu 2005; Baldwin-Edwards 2006; Düvell 2006). This affects not only the neutrality of the term; it also assumes that this sort of stepwise migration occurs merely in the EU-neighbourhood. This neglects the fact that many migrants who arrive in the European border regions, have often travelled for a longer period of time.

However, the politicised character is not the only problem attached to the concept. As several researchers note, transit migration is defined in various ways and the dividing line between transit migration and multiple migration is rather vague (de Haas 2007; Düvell 2006). Therefore it is proposed in the literature to frame transit migration, methodologically and theoretically. Herewith it is attempted to distinguish the phenomenon from other forms of migration (Düvell 2006, 2008). Transit migration is, according to the latest proposition of Franck Düvell (2008), a stay of more than one week to up to three months in a country which the individual migrant is intended to leave again. There are thus two main aspects that matter: migrant's intentions and the length of stay.

Despite the provision of clarity, this definition is criticized here for several reasons. Firstly, the intention approach underestimates the restrictions migrants face during their process of migrating. By focusing on intentions one creates the assumption that migrants can (easily) fulfil their migration project, while, to the contrary, the situation of transit migrants is often characterized by restrictions; people cannot move forward since they are not authorized to do so or because they lack social/financial capital. The situation of restrictions forces migrants to wait for an indefinite period of time. Many migrants may never reach their desired destination, some return (or are returned) home before they have even attempted to move onward.

Secondly, the intention approach is limited in explaining migrant trajectories since it leaves out the multiplicity of choices migrants have in transit spaces. For instance, sub-Saharan Africans in Morocco may build up economic businesses while they are still 'intending' to go to Europe. In case of some economic success migrants may decide to stay in perceived transit areas, while an eventually subsequent deprivation of the situation may migrants decide to leave again. To summarize, the intention approach is limited since it inherently holds a linear notion of migration (leave—transit—settle) which does not correspond with

the dynamic character of reality. Thereby the definition underestimates somewhat paradoxically the restrictions migrants face as well as the responsive agency of migrants.

Alternatively, so-called transit migration can best be analyzed in terms of opportunities. Firstly, 'the opportunity thinking' reflects on migrant's current living situation as well as future possibilities. Many transit migrants, who have the 'intention' to reach Spain from Morocco, would take the opportunity to go to Italy if the opportunity appears to them. The opportunity approach also includes the possible improvement of daily life in perceived transit areas which helps to clarify the 'stayers as second best option'. As indicated above, some migrants who had the intention to go to Europe beforehand, decide to stay in perceived transit areas because they live there relatively successful lives (de Haas 2006). In addition, the opportunity approach helps to explain cases of pushed transit. Sometimes migrants who did not have any aspiration to go to Europe beforehand decide to go there since the living situation in the current residence place can not meet their expectations. There is sufficient evidence to note that generally European neighbouring countries are very difficult places for sub-Saharan African migrants to live in (e.g. Morocco, Algeria, Turkey and Egypt), partly because of the European induced migration controls which affects behaviour of domestic security agents (Baldwin-Edwards 2006). After all, the opportunity approach holds a multi-dimensional logic which pays attention to restrictions as well as migrant's changing perspectives.

The second element of transit migration is the time dimension. The argument is then that anybody with a temporary stay of longer than three months in a country which he/she 'intends' to leave again, can be analyzed as temporary migrant (Düvell 2008). This temporal categorization creates some difficulties as well. Firstly, there is an empirical consideration which makes this categorization debatable. When you interview a migrant in his/her earliest period in a so-called transit country, he/she is categorized (by the researcher/policy-maker) as transit migrant. However, when you meet him/her four weeks later, he/she might have turned into another category; a temporal migrant. Secondly, to categorize all migrants who have stayed longer than three months in a transit country as a 'temporary migrant', neglects the fact that European policies have been increasingly restrictive and therefore have lengthened the stay of migrants in third countries. In other

words; transit migration is not so transitory for many people going through it (İçduygu and Yüksekler 2008). Again, the restrictive elements of contemporary migration are underestimated.

The analytical value of *being in transit*, is that it helps to explain the changeability, and hence unpredictability of individual migration processes. It is a good starting point to deconstruct the often thick red arrows and lines on migration maps presenting migration as a one-way and almost unstoppable flow from the South to the North. The pinpointing of the concept in terms of time and people's intentions, however, does not help us to understand the realities on the ground. For this reason, transit migration and multiple migration are approached as complementary and overlapping types of migration rather than completely separable phenomena. To avoid conceptual misunderstandings the less sensible term of stepwise migration is preferred. This term emphasizes that migration often involves stepwise undertakings with multiple options and changing opportunities of individuals. However, the term *transit* will still be used in combination with geographical designations (transit places, transit spaces) and to indicate migrants' waiting statuses.

### *Research settings and methodology*

This study on sub-Saharan African stepwise migration and its spatial outcomes is based on three periods of fieldwork with slight different characters. During the first period of fieldwork several places in three different countries are visited: Spain (Barcelona, Madrid, Granada, Almeria, Roquetas del Mar,) Morocco (Rabat and Oujda) and Senegal (Dakar and Saint Louis). In these places sub-Saharan African migrants with a stepwise journey were interviewed. Additionally, migration experts, local NGOs and representatives of international institutions (Red Cross/Red Crescent, IOM, UNHCR etc.) were interviewed in order to better understand the (local) context. A second period of fieldwork took place in Morocco and had a more in-depth character. There interviews with sub-Saharan Africans were conducted in two important migrant places; Rabat and Oujda. Istanbul is the third research locus. There sub-Saharan Africans with different migration routes from the well-known trans-Saharan routes to the Maghreb countries were interviewed. In total there were 77 respondents, highly

Table 1: Overview of interviews

Country of Respondent	Location of Interview				Total
	Spain	Morocco	Turkey	Others	
Nigeria	1	12	11	–	25
Congo (DRC)	–	11	2	–	13
Senegal	3	2	5	–	10
Cameroun	1	3	1	1 (Netherlands)	6
Ivory Coast	–	1	2	–	3
Mali	1	2	–	–	3
Ghana	2	1	–	–	3
Comoros	–	–	2	–	2
Somalia	–	–	2	–	2
Guinea Bissau	1	1	–	–	2
Guinea Conakry	–	1	–	–	1
Liberia	–	1	–	–	1
Gabon	1	–	–	–	1
Togo	–	–	–	1 (Senegal)	1
Gambia	–	–	–	1 (Netherlands)	1
Rwanda	–	–	1	–	1
Sudan	–	–	1	–	1
Burundi	–	–	1	–	1
Total	10	35	28	3	77

heterogeneous in terms of countries of origin (see table 1), social-economic background and reasons for migrating.<sup>3</sup>

Altogether, this research contains a multi-local *place* perspective by investigating migrant's adaptation to and usages of places. However, the place perspective contains a risk of merely gathering migration 'snap-shots' and thereby underexposing the migration process as a whole. Therefore some extrapolation is needed to fulfil the first objective of the study; gaining more insights into the stepwise migration

<sup>3</sup> Among these 77 respondents there were 14 women (18%). This seems not to coincide with the global trend of the feminization of migration (Castles and Miller 2003). However, similar qualitative research on sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco (CIMADE 2004; Collyer 2006; AMERM and CISP 2007; Lahlou 2007) and Istanbul (Brewer and Yükeseker 2006) have comparable percentages of female respondents varying from 9% to 41%. One explanation is that women are migrating in different ways since stepwise migration processes, and particularly overland journeys, are extremely exhausting and dangerous.

process. The solution is found in a *flow* perspective. To overcome the problem of migration snap-shots migrant's presence are contextualized with the help of migration histories. More prominently, it is chosen to 'follow' migrants in order to understand the unforeseeable and dynamic aspects of migrant's trajectories. In times of writing 9 migrants (all men), are 'followed' over a longer period of time. Of these 9 migrants, 6 are interviewed in Morocco for the first time and 3 in Turkey. In the course of some months 1 migrant returned home, 4 have reached Europe (2 Greece, 1 the Netherlands, 1 Italy) while 4 migrants are still outside Europe in times of writing.<sup>4</sup>

This following of migrants does not mean the physical accompanying of migrants during their voyage, but implies, methodologically, experimental aspects such as interviewing people by telephone and internet (messenger chats and email conversations). Herewith it is attempted to grasp the dynamics of stepwise migration. After all, as Ralph Grillo (2007) states, migrants become rather "sojourners" instead of only "settlers", meaning they change places regularly. In addition, the longitudinal element is important since time is a crucial factor in migration, as Cwerner states: "times migrate with people" (Cwerner 2001). Time shapes the context of migrant's stay in a particular country. For instance, migrants may shift statuses over time and migration controls may differ in intensity. Particularly, time is a key element for people in transit since they have mostly the aspiration/expectation of staying only temporarily in a transit place. When this temporary residence involuntarily turns into semi-permanent or permanent settlement this may lead to frustration.

### *Migrant's precarious situations and research agendas*

It is stated earlier that transit countries near the European borders are generally difficult places for sub-Saharan Africans to live in. Many sub-Saharan Africans have no legal status and hence lack any form of institutional protection in the European neighbourhood. Moreover, many migrants experience a hostile environment with expressions of discrimination, economic exploitation and police harassments. This has serious consequences for many individuals living there. How-

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<sup>4</sup> During coming years, efforts will be made to follow more individual migrants.



ever, it also creates complex research settings in which suspicion is omnipresent (see also Suter 2008). The context of vulnerability and suspicion does not automatically mean that migrants were reluctant to participate in this research project. To the contrary, most of the respondents seem to have their own agenda to participate. Some were asking for money after the interview (economic agenda), others participated because of political reasons. Among these respondents the general reason to participate was that 'it is very important that people in Europe know what is happening in their backyard.'

The notion that (irregular) migrants in precarious situations may have their reasons to participate in scientific research has several implications for qualitative research. Most of all there is the issue of attachment/detachment. In anthropological literature, for instance, there is ambivalence between researchers and the people they study. The collecting of data is predominantly based on a position of closeness. At the same time it is acknowledged that the total immersion in the research context can never be attained; researchers will always be 'outsiders' (Horst 2008). Here it is argued however that being an outsider has not only disadvantages. During my fieldwork I experienced that a lot of people were willing to talk to me *because* I was an outsider. They asked me questions about life in Europe, about migration strategies and European politics. Consequently, this fieldwork was not a one-way flow of information from respondent to researcher. It was clearly an interchange of information in which migrant's agendas were present as much as my research agenda. Once more this made clear that 'research on social relations is made out of social relations which develop within and between the multiple sites of researchers' expanded fields' (Crang and Cook 2007: 9).

### *Aspirations, routes and destinations*

Sub-Saharan African migration is, in the tradition of the new economic of labour migration, mainly explained by collective decision making processes. Not individuals decide whether to migrate or not, whole households, or even communities do (Stark and Bloom 1985; Lambert 2002; Wagbou 2006; de Haas 2007). Once the decision is made to leave, sub-Saharan African migration is predominantly explained further by social networks. People migrate to places where some family members, friends or acquaintances are living (Bretell 2000). Consequently the

assumption is that migrants know where they are going, who they will meet and where they end up. This depends on (transnational) social networks, hence the remark: people are not migrating, networks do (Wabgou 2006).

What is striking here is the omission of the actual process of moving, as if migrants always a) have chosen a specific destination and b) reach that desired destination c) by means of an unproblematic journey. Indeed stepwise migration contains a different picture.

Remarkably, this study found that many 'stepwise migrants' have not a clear destination in their head where they are going to; they have rather abstract migration goals (see also Collyer 2007; Papadopoulou 2008). 'Europe', 'Schengen', 'The West', are often given as desired destinations, instead of Paris, Brescia, or my family in Madrid. In many cases no geographical indication is given at all. Their aspirations are described as: 'finding a safe place to live in', 'anywhere', 'a place where I can live a normal life'. Hence, migration destinations are often moving targets; if a place/country of residence does not meet the expectations/aspirations of a specific migrant, he/she will do their best effort to leave again. The abstract migration goals make migrants rather flexible.<sup>5</sup> This explains the fact that the majority of respondents stated that the aspired destination has changed at a specific time. One illustrative example is presented below. A Liberian migrant in Morocco said the following regarding his decision making process:

R<sup>6</sup>: When I left my country I went first to Nigeria. I stayed there for around three years. First I had some small jobs, but life was not much better than in my own country. One day I met some Nigerian friends and they decided one day to go to Europe and I just decided to join them. That is how I came here.

I: But, when you left your country, did you, at that point in your life, want to reach Europe?

R: I wasn't thinking of Europe at all! I just left my country to go out and look for work and the destination was Nigeria. Europe is far away, you know, I didn't think of that.

This section describes that new plans may emerge unexpectedly. The meeting of new people inspired this person to go to Europe. After this decision, he explained, he had a travelling period to Rabat, with interim immobile periods for almost a year. From Morocco he unsus-

<sup>5</sup> This is in line with the "sojourners" argument of Grillo (2007).

<sup>6</sup> R = Respondent. I = Interviewer.

cessfully attempted three times to reach Europe by boat. This example not only indicates that migration dreams may emerge rather spontaneously, but also that these dreams are often not easily reached.

At the same time it is important to note that Europe, as a destination, may not only come up as a 'new dream' but also as a response to a deteriorating and sometimes emergent situation in the present country of residence. Several Congolese migrants in Morocco, mainly recognized refugees, stated they have been "pushed in transit" since the humanitarian situation for black Africans deteriorated rapidly in that country. Some Nigerians in Istanbul stated they fled from the war in Lebanon to Istanbul, from where they now attempt to reach Europe.<sup>7</sup> Again, perspectives have changed and hence migration aspirations change. Surprisingly, for many sub-Saharan African migrants residing just outside the European borders and waiting for their chance to enter the EU, Europe was *not* the primary destination. The abstractness, and hence changeability, of migration aspiration is a first indication that migration is often not a linear process from A to B.

However, migrant's aspirations are not the only explaining factors of the dynamics of stepwise migration. During the study more insights is gained into the zig-zag routes of migrants. In a geographical sense, many migration routes are illogical since proximity is only a marginal explaining factor. The most important factors of the non-linearity of stepwise migration are further outlined here.

Firstly, as the Senegalese geographer Dr. Papa Demba Fall<sup>8</sup> stated, many Africans have rather different geographical conceptions compared to European knowledge of geography. The far majority of African migrants do not use maps, partly because they lack the education to do so. More importantly, migrants, at least those moving for a period of time through Africa, move mainly within ethnic boundaries which transcend state borders. They move with the logics of social/ethnic networks instead of merely geographical logics (for two case-studies on non-linear internal migration see de Bruijn, van Dijk and van Dijk 2001). In a way, the importance of social networks is acknowledged here. However, since the stepwise migration processes contain extreme environmental difficulties (crossing the Sahara Desert) or some irregular

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<sup>7</sup> Both cases indicate that indeed refugee flows and economic migration are not always easy to distinguish.

<sup>8</sup> Interview 16-4-2007 at INFAN institute, Cheikh Ante Diop University Dakar.

aspects (the crossing of borders without authorisation), migrants need assistance from third persons. Thus, although migrants were described above as highly flexible, they notwithstanding are dependent on third persons for at least a specific part of the journey. Hence social networks are not sufficient to explain migration processes and their routes; migrants need hybrid networks that include all types of brokers. Moreover, migrants create collectives because of the often hostile environment and *en route* dangers (see also Collyer 2006a, 2007). These networks and social contacts are often locally based instead of transnational and exist for a specific period of time rather than they are permanent linkages.

As a consequence of the hybrid networks, the involvement of brokers and smugglers is a second explanatory factor for the non-linearity of migration. More than once, migrants find themselves in places they do not want to be at all; they are all too often misled by their smugglers or transporters (see also van Liempt 2007). Surprisingly, a considerable number of sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul stated to be football players being promised to receive full contracts at a European football club; apparently, after an unpaid trial period at a Turkish club, they ended up as irregular migrants without any club to play for. They are misled (see also Brewer and Yüksekler 2006). Another illustrative example is that of three Nigerian sisters in Rabat. They stated that they should have been brought to Europe; that is what they paid for. At the end, they find themselves 'stranded' in Morocco, a country they never had in mind. These migrants have to re-organize their journeys in order to reach their desired destination.

Thirdly, a related factor to the smuggling practices is the increase of migration controls forcing migrants to take laborious routes since they need to depart from places where European border controls can be avoided. Briefly stated, border controls make some departure areas less popular than others. It is often stated that the increase of border controls has shifted departure areas southwards making maritime migration journeys even more risky (Carling 2007b; de Haas 2007). There are at least two market mechanisms concerning these smuggling practices. Firstly, a growing demand for border crossings increases smuggling prices. Secondly, the intensification of border controls increases the risk for smugglers (and migrants) to be caught which also makes prices go up. Consequently, migrants may decide to go to other departure places, more or less unexpectedly, while they already reached a

European borderland. This is illustrated by a telephone conversation with a Nigerian respondent recently arrived in Italy.<sup>9</sup>

- I: So you have reached Firenze...I still can't believe it! How did you manage it, by boat?
- R: Yes by boat...but first I had to go all the way to Libya! It was very difficult, it was a very long journey! And from there I took a boat to Italy.
- I: You first went to Libya? That is indeed a very long road...but why did you go there!? You were already very close to Europe, in Morocco.
- R: In Morocco the money they ask is too big! They ask too much money for everything. That is why a lot of people leave Morocco to Libya.

This respondent changed his plans for economic reasons, the smuggling process in Morocco were just too expensive. Another illustrative example of migrant's laborious routes because of migration controls is that of a Togolese respondent who has travelled all the way to Morocco (a journey of approximately 3,500 kms). In Morocco, he noticed that it was very difficult to reach Spain. For this reason he decided to go to Senegal (a country relatively close to his country of origin) in order to reach the Canary Islands. Finally, he did not dare to cross the ocean because of the physical danger and intensified migration controls. Instead he decided to go to Nigeria to look for work there. This indicates that what has started as South-North migration may also turn into South-South migration.

### *Flexible arrivals in Europe*

For those migrants actually reaching Europe, their stepwise migration often continues meaning that places of arrival are seldom places where migrants stay. In the case of the Canary Islands, Lampedusa and several Greek Islands migrants get replaced to the mainland by the authorities after a period of time.<sup>10</sup> There a whole new process of orientation starts. As a migrant from Cameroon said in Madrid: 'Once you are inside, the real migration begins.' Thereby he refers

<sup>9</sup> I have met this migrant for the first time in Rabat.

<sup>10</sup> It must be noted here that a considerable number of migrants are returned with the help of readmission agreements to the country of origin, or sometimes even to the country of departure. For instance Greece and Turkey formally have a readmission agreement regarding irregular migrants.

to the completely different perspective of opportunities that emerges once European mainland is reached; for migrants there is a whole new range of possible destinations inside the European Schengen-zone.

In the case of Spain, many sub-Saharan Africans find work in the agriculture in Andalusia. These harvests are often seasonal and migrants therefore move synchronically with the harvests. From February till June, they help out with picking strawberries in Huelva and from December till February with the olive harvest in Jaén, Cordoba, Granada, Malaga and Seville. Besides this seasonal mobility in the more rural areas, sub-Saharan Africans may also move between urban places inside Spain. For instance, many Senegalese street vendors in Granada have also lived for a while in Barcelona or Madrid.<sup>11</sup> Other African migrants, however, cross national borders again. A representative of a Senegalese migrant organisation in Catalonia stated that there is a “Barcelona-Milano connection” meaning that many Senegalese move regularly between those two cities. This is underlined by recent studies indicating that onward mobility of African migrants is not only related to ‘asylum-hopping’; also non-asylum seekers of non-European origins change places regularly (Schuster 2005; Grillo 2007; Schapendonk and van Moppes 2007; Kothari 2008). In case of irregular migration, this is in line with the broader analysis of Jordan and Düvell (2002). They argue that the deregulations of labour markets create conditions in which migrants could make their way as flexible workers, with fewer rights and obligations towards housing and employers. This makes them more mobile than indigenous populations.

### *Stranded migration outside Europe*

Although many sub-Saharan Africans manage to enter Europe, it is important to note that many others, with the same aspirations and dreams get stuck in perceived transit areas, at least for a considerable period of time. At the times of the interviews, the average ‘waiting period’ for the 35 respondents in Morocco was 30 months, with some exceptional cases of migrants staying there (involuntarily) for more

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<sup>11</sup> This information is gained with the help of numerous brief social talks which are not included in table 1.

than seven years. Due to social pressures<sup>12</sup> the majority does not return home. This status of immobility may lead to frustrating situations as a Congolese migrant explained:

We are stuck between the desert and the sea. We cannot go home, and we cannot move forward... And here [in Morocco] we live in a hostile environment, they treat us like prisoners.

Over time this frustration may turn into acceptance and hence, as outlined before, some migrants build up their lives in perceived transit areas leading to a long-term stay. This is indicated by an interview section with a Nigerian migrant who is living in Morocco for nine years, he said:

R: In my mind I still want to go to Europe, that is my project. If I have enough money I will try it again but I never risk my life for that. And I am serious when I tell you that I have a good life here at the moment, it is my home now. You know, home is home, wherever you are... If somebody told me 6 years ago that Morocco is becoming like this, I would have laughed. But now, the security has improved, there are some job opportunities and we are free to move.

I: What do you mean by free to move?

R: Well, I am an illegal immigrant you know, I don't have the right papers to be here. Five years ago they controlled me all the time, I got arrested and so on. We even didn't go out of our houses, the street was too dangerous because of the police controls. Now, the situation has changed. Do you see my barber shop? I am sitting here the whole day, 6 days a week. The police knows that, they know me. But they just let me do my job. That is what I meant with the situation has improved, not a bit, but very much!

This interview section underpins the earlier notion that migrants living in transit have multilayered opportunities. While going to Europe is still an option, it is quite unlikely that this respondent will undertake this journey since he is socially and economically embedded in his perceived transit area. This indicates that, similar to 'the myth of return' emphasizing that migrants have always the idea of returning 'home' one day but are unlikely to take this step, there is also a 'myth

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<sup>12</sup> Many migrants start migrating 'as pioneers' of the family or community (because of the collective decision making process in the pre-migration phase). Consequently, migrants are expected to send money back home as soon as possible. This creates a tense situation in which migrants face their sense of responsibility and the limited economic possibilities at the same time. Return migration is generally perceived as social failure.

of transit': The longer people remain in transit, the more they become immigrants.

*Conclusions from a mobility perspective*

Although stepwise migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe is rather specific; it concerns migrants often lacking the possibility of going directly to Europe, it illustrates that migration is not always a simple matter of leaving one country and going to another. It shows that there often is not one rational plan; aspirations change affecting routes and contemplated destinations. This makes migration often open ended, or in Skeldon's (1997) words: migration never becomes permanent. Because migration projects are rather formulated in abstract ways, the related goals are moving targets. This may not only turn migrants from settlers into sojourners, it also places different migrations in a continuum. Different migrations (rural-urban, regional and inter-continental) are often described as separate phenomena. This study indicates that these phenomena are often linked. What once has started as internal migration may turn into inter-continental migration in the near future, changing the social and political perspective completely.

It is also suggested here that we should go beyond the analytical focus of collective decisions as decisive for migration. During the process of moving numerous decisions are made by migrants without any family consultancy. These social linkages with families and communities 'at home' are highly important for migrants in terms of financing and mental support, but migrants need also the help of third persons in order to overcome difficulties during their journeys. This turns social networks into hybrid networks. Although there is a general bias in migration research on the importance of transnational networks, locally based networks are also important, in particular for migrants seeking some kind of protection in transit places.

What is also clear from the above analysis is the fact that migration does not merely contain mobility. The majority of migrants in this research would be labelled as 'unwanted' by European policy makers. As a result, these migrants increasingly get immobilized since legal channels to enter Europe are scarce and border controls are intensified. The selective bordering practices seem to result in a mobility gap (comparable with the digital divide) between the global North and the South (Turner 2007). Hence mobility becomes indeed one of the most



important stratifying factors of the globalized world (Bauman 1998). At the ground this indeed means that many migrants are forced to wait in Euro-African borderlands for an indefinite period of time.

Finally, the combination of stranded migration with the earlier outlined onward mobility, suggests that altogether traditional dichotomies of migration (temporary vs. permanent, movement vs. settlement) can no longer be taken for granted in contemporary research on African migration. Indeed, there is much to win in migration studies when the analytical focus is not only on the beginning and ending stages of migration, but also on the in between, the movement. In fact, recent authors, such as John Urry, extend this issue to social science in general. In his attempt to establish a mobility paradigm he argues that a 'movement-driven social science in which movement, potential movement and blocked movement are all conceptualized as constitutive of economic, social and political relations' will bring "to the fore theories, methods and exemplars of research that so far have been mostly out of sight' (Urry 2006: 43). It is time for migration studies to be a discipline to acknowledge that mobility is an integral part of human, at least migrant, lives with important dynamics and specific spatialities.

### *Places of mobility and mobile places*

Having elaborated on the non-linear character of migration, here the spatial outcome of stepwise migration is discussed. The importance of *en route places* is analyzed on three different levels: the city level (migration hubs), neighbourhood level (within migration hubs) and migrants' informal camps outside the urban context.

Migration hubs can be described as places where migrants go to in order to finance and organize their next step of their journeys. One of the most important migration hubs deeper in Africa are, Kano (Nigeria), Gao (Mali) Agadez (Niger) Tamanrasset (Algeria) and Sabha (Libya). Closer to Europe, Laayoune (Western Sahara), Rabat, Oujda (Morocco), Maghnia (Algeria) and Tripoli (Libya) are places where a lot of sub-Saharan African transit migrants go to. Traditionally, Istanbul is such an important 'hub' for people coming from the Middle East, the former Soviet Union and Asia. Nowadays, sub-Saharan African migrants can be added to this list.

As stated in the introduction, migrants have a considerable economic and social impact on these places, especially on the places along trans-Saharan routes. At the same time, these places are of great importance

for migrant's journeys as well; usually there is some work available and, more importantly there is often a 'migration facilitating industry'. In these hubs, businesses have emerged facilitating the accommodation and journeys of migrants heading North. Moreover, communication facilitations have been set up, such as money transfer agencies, telephone shops and internet cafes, giving migrants the opportunity to seek for support or to contact their relatives and brokers (see also Lahlou 2007; van Moppes and Schapendonk 2007). It is important to emphasize here that most of the migration facilitating activities are *not* crime-related activities. Migration creates businesses which contribute to local economic developments. The internet cafes around the University of Oujda are day-in day-out filled with sub-Saharan Africans. The telephone shops in Aksaray and Tarlabasi (quarters in Istanbul) make advertisements with flags of many East *and* West African countries. Moreover, in the case of African overland routes, the transportation of undocumented migrants across borders is often viewed by the local population as a normal and informal economic activity rather than a serious criminal act. There has been trans-Saharan mobility for ages. In fact some local governments and authority agents even profit economically from the transportation of these (undocumented) migrants through a system of 'transit taxes' (Bensaad 2007). Thus, certain places attract migrants because of the favourable infrastructure and, at the same time, local actors benefit from the presence of temporary migrants. However, the migration industry is rather fragmented and locally based consisting predominantly of small entrepreneurs. This coincides with former researches emphasizing that the organization of migration in Africa, in contrary to what is often believed by policy-makers, lacks any form of international coordination (Brachet 2005; Collyer 2006b; Hamood 2006; de Haas 2007). Due to the step-wise character, it is mainly the African migrant who is linking up different migration actors.

Where certain cities attract migrants on migration routes, certain neighbourhoods within the boundaries of the city are important places for migrants to go to. These places are, most of the time, already inhabited by 'mobile populations'. In Tamanrasset, sub-Saharan Africans live with the Tuaregs (Bensaad 2007), in Istanbul they find places where Kurds and people from the former Soviet Union reside, and in Rabat black Africans live in places where traditionally Moroccan internal migrants go to (Alioua 2003). Interestingly, different black African

communities have different neighbourhoods to go to; the neighbourhoods are segregated along national and/or ethnic lines. In Istanbul, for instance, Taksim and Tarlebasi<sup>13</sup> are mainly inhabited by Nigerians while most people from Sudan and Somalia reside in Kumkapi and many Senegalese live in Aksaray.<sup>14</sup> In Rabat a similar process of segregation occurs; generally Ghanaians and Nigerians live in Taqadoum (a traditional *biddonville* south of the city), Congolese go to Hay Nahda I and Souissi (neighbouring Taqadoum) where also many Malians live. The communities in these quarters are highly dynamic since people come and go on almost a daily basis; these are the *places of mobility*. In these places of mobility rooms/apartments are shared by a number of migrants. Moreover the rooms are often merely equipped by a simple mattress and a gas burner. As a Nigerian migrant in Istanbul commented while I visited his apartment: “*This room is designed to move again*”. Migrants find these rooms/apartments/places not only by transnational social networks but they often learn *en route* where compatriots are residing, which places they should avoid and where some jobs are available. This information is mainly spread by the spontaneous social and locally-based networks described above.

Although social networks are highly important for explaining the creation of migration hubs and migrant places, the particularities of specific places are of similar importance. Besides the presence of migration facilitating businesses, mentioned above, local informal labour markets and (inter)national protection mechanisms are also place-bounded factors. For instance, many migrants stated to prefer staying in Rabat instead of other major cities in Morocco (Casablanca, Marrakech, Fez etc.) since in Rabat (inter)national media, NGOs and diplomatic institutions were present (see also Alioua 2003). This provides at least some sort of institutional protection. Some respondents in Turkey stated to prefer residing in Istanbul because of the cosmopolitan character of the city, as one Burundian migrant stated:

I have been to Ankara ... pfff... Ankara, there they are not used to strangers. You cannot find one single African person in the streets there. It is impossible! There are no tourists, no immigrants, nothing! So I left that place. The people are just looking at you! They think that you are less or

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<sup>13</sup> Two quarters near the city centre (Taksim Square).

<sup>14</sup> Kumkapi and Aksaray are relatively far located from Taksim Square.

something, I don't know. That is why I came here, Istanbul is open to the world... I know that many Africans have problems with the police, but I still think that this is the best city to live in, we have good churches here, some organizations that help us and most people here, they have open minds.

Thus, some places have characteristics in favour of (undocumented) sub-Saharan African migrants. A specific example is the University campus of Oujda providing particular protection mechanisms for African migrants. On this campus there is an informal migrant camp with approximately 200–300 inhabitants from sub-Saharan Africa. Migrants have 'settled' there since this campus is a traditional no-go-area for the police (due to student protest in the past). Nowadays, the camp is highly organized by an informal political system of chairmen. Each 'national community' has its own spokesmen for general issues, e.g. security and economic business (Schapendonk 2008).

Urban locations, however, are not the only places of protection. One of migrants' strategies in order to avoid confrontations with security agents is to hide from them. Numerous informal camps of sub-Saharan Africa emerged in Morocco, Algeria and Libya (CIMADE 2004), mostly in forests. These are what the American phenomenologist Edward Casey would call "antiresidential" spaces with "implacable landscape logic" (Casey 1993: 193). Many migrants, however, do reside there; emplace them with their improvised tents, cooking places, churches and mosques. These *mobile tranquilos*<sup>15</sup> are also strictly organized along ethnic lines. In the Moroccan-Algerian border area (near Oujda), for instance, there are several camps generally consisting of a group of between 10 to 35 people. These camps are located from each other with a considerable distance and move to other locations regularly; the people remain the same (although with high in- and out-flows), the structure of tents remain the same, the possessions remain the same, only the location changes; these are the *mobile places* so-called transit migrants live in.

Although these camps are located outside the usual public spaces of society, they are not completely isolated. Due to technological developments migrants in the most remote areas may also be connected to networks often transcending national borders. Therefore migrants in

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<sup>15</sup> It is meaningful that migrants use a Spanish word to indicate their camps. *Tranquilo* refers to a 'resting-place.'

the forests stay in contact with other migrants in cities and different countries, (inter)national NGOs and media (see also Collyer 2007). In case of deportations or other security threats,<sup>16</sup> many of these actors are contacted and activated by migrants in order to find forms of protection.

### Non-places *and* places-to-be

The described migrant places are increasingly labeled as *non-places* according to Augé's indication of places of supermodernity (Augé 1995). The argument is that migrants and refugees, as unwelcome newcomers, are determinedly placed outside the normal societal geographies and therefore live in *non-places* (Davidson 2003) or *nowhere-places* (Bauman 2004). Here the labeling of migrant places as *non-places*, including migrant places created by authorities (detention centers, refugee camps), is rejected for several reasons.

Firstly, the denial of places is a direct denial of the people living in these places and consequently the denial of interactions, friendships, songs, writings, work and stories occurring in these places. In the case of refugee camps, the denial of people's places is inappropriate and extra sensitive since all asylum seekers and (potential) refugees are seeking political protection of which recognition is the first step. The denial of their temporary places is therefore one step backwards. The label *non-place* for detention camps is also ethically objectionable since these places are completely closed for the outside world. Exactly for this reason we need, from a humanitarian point of view, to emphasize the presence of these camps and therefore erase the '*non*' connected to the detention centers.

Secondly, in the case of camps informally set up by migrants themselves, the indication *non-place* undermines the agency of migrants. The place-making and territoriality of migrants in so-called transit spaces require a form of self-determination; people need agency to make themselves invisible for the authorities. These places are based on a collective territoriality mixing the identity of adventurers with fear and otherness (Brachet 2005). It is a general misconception that 'migrants

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<sup>16</sup> Moroccan authorities execute large scale control operations on a regular basis. It is reported that migrants are sometimes deported to Algeria, from where they often enter Morocco again, usually by feet.

in transit' located in forests live there because they are excluded; it is often the case that they exclude themselves. As a migrant from Cameroon who has lived several months in the forest, answered to the question why he was not living in a city like Rabat:

I have been in Rabat for four days. But you know, the situation is good there, I know; you can have a house, there are some jobs and you have a nice bed to sleep in. But there is one important thing I hate about that place. People forget where they are going to. They forget about Europe, they forget about their dreams and they lose their spirit. I prefer to stay here. Why? Because everyday when I wake up I realize that I have to go. Look around you this is not a place to stay! And that is why I am here.

Altogether, migrant's places in transit areas, be it in forests or in major cities, are of vital importance for migrants to 1) find protection, 2) buildup social contacts and 3) organize eventually the next step of their journey. They are therefore rather *places-to-be* with broader impacts, than excised *non-places*. These broader impacts of migrant presence and the creation of new migrant places change cities, quarters, border areas, political relations and social spaces. The heightening of the fences around Ceuta and Melilla after migrants' attempts to enter the European exclaves is a political example with morphological consequences. In a cultural sense, there is a noticeable revival of Christianity in Morocco (see also Bensaad 2007); churches in major cities are predominantly filled with migrants, notably black African communities seeking spiritual and social protection. In Istanbul the first mixed marriages are visible between mainly black African men and modern Turkish women and the presence of sub-Saharan Africans brings along interesting interactions with Turkish and Kurdish populations.

All these factors described here, indicate that indeed the specificity of places is not constructed out of "a long introverted history" but 'out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus' (Massey 1994: 154). Migrants give meaning to places, and places function as coordinates for migrants in the process of migration (see also de Bruijn, van Dijk and van Dijk 2001). Thus places and mobility are bounded by reciprocity; places direct mobilities and mobilities shape places. Or in the words of Casey (1993: 289): 'If being on a journey is to be in or among places, to be in a place is to be capable of journeying.' This reciprocity has broader impacts; it re-shapes Africa, as it is described in the concluding section below.

*Changing mobilities, shaping Africa*

As we have seen, many sub-Saharan African migrants have stepwise migration journeys affecting thereby several places with their presence. These migrations occur in the context of growing migration aspirations, but closing borders. Consequently, there is an accumulation of sub-Saharan would-be immigrants in transit areas (mainly in the Mediterranean region). Nowadays, this accumulation of potential 'unwanted immigrants' is a highly debated topic providing transit states favorable negotiation position with regard to lucrative migration deals with European partners (Adepoju et al. 2007). Thus migrations shape international politics. One step further, sub-Saharan African states are also increasingly involved in migration and development deals. European states offer African 'partners' development aid in exchange for cooperation on migration control. This has changed the aim of migration regimes from the prevention of migrants *entering* a particular state, to the attempt of keeping people from *exiting* a specific country of origin. The fact that European border guards are involved in the surveillance of the Senegalese coastline strengthens the notion of an 'enclave society' in which globalization for many people means social closure instead of social openness (Turner 2007).

However, contemporary stepwise migration towards Europe brings along not only political changes, it also changes African transnational spaces and relations. Migrants are going to relatively unfamiliar places hoping they are able to enter Europe from there. Sub-Saharan Africans are increasingly found in Istanbul (Brewer and Yüксеker 2006) Ukraine (Uehling 2004) and other Eastern European countries. This re-directs transnational inter- and transactions and facilitates new transnational relations. In Istanbul for instance, many African (transit) migrants act as 'guides' for African businessmen directing them to import-export markets, arrange accommodations and interpreters. This shows that migration is often embedded in and a forerunner for larger international developments. This may create bottom-up forces reducing again the same notion of an enclave society.

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