Migration trajectories and transnational support within and beyond Europe

Erik Snel , Özge Bilgili & Richard Staring

Published online: 02 Sep 2020.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 286

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

Migration trajectories and transnational support within and beyond Europe

Erik Snel [a], Özge Bilgili[b] and Richard Staring[c]

[a]Department of Public Administration and Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam; [b]European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations (ERCOMER), Utrecht University; [c]Erasmus School of Law, Erasmus University Rotterdam

ABSTRACT

The special issue: Migration Trajectories and Transnational Support Within and Beyond Europe brings together a set of papers with fresh empirical analysis from diverse settings documenting the experiences of migrants residing within and beyond the boundaries of Europe. This introductory article has the objective of laying the groundwork for a better understanding of how migration trajectories are shaped and continued in the contexts of transnational (social) networks and migration control. Firstly, we argue that migration journeys are not necessarily linear and unidirectional movements from origin to destination countries, nor are they clearly demarcated events in time and space. On the contrary, we highlight the dynamic and changing nature of migration trajectories. Secondly, we examine different types of relevant actors who provide support for migrants during their journeys. We focus on transnational social networks and transnationally operating institutions and human smugglers, which influence and facilitate or disrupt migration trajectories. Subsequently, based on the premise that migrants' social networks, expectations, motivations and needs change throughout the migration process, we discuss the ways in which transnational support in a context of migration control relates to the lives of migrants on the move.

Introduction: strict border regimes and 'stranded' migrants

The so-called 'European refugee/migration crisis' of 2015 and the stricter border controls which resulted from it made both migration researchers and the wider public more aware that migration is often not a simple, direct journey from a country of origin to a final destination country (Crawley et al. 2018). Stricter border controls or closed borders with fences or erected walls halted migrants on their way, even if only temporarily and led them to have more dangerous migration journeys. Some migrants intended to stay in neighbouring countries to be as physically close as possible to those left behind or were stranded in places which they only wanted to pass through. Others decided to travel further after realising that conditions were too difficult to make a living, and opted for more dangerous migration routes, at times depending on human smugglers (Collyer

---

2010; Andersson 2016; Massey, Durand, and Pren 2016; Staring 2018). Such stories were exacerbated by restrictive immigration policies in Europe. As a result, there was a decline in the number of migrants entering Europe, but at a very high price. The Mediterranean became the 'deadliest border' in the world, with thousands of casualties in the past few years (cf. Last 2018).[1]

Migrants are also affected by other difficult experiences. In November 2017, CNN reports about slave auctions in southern Libya shocked the world. [2] Enslaved African migrants were portrayed as strong workers and were sold to the highest bidder. It was not the first report about how 'stranded' migrants in Libya or elsewhere are deceived, extorted and abused by criminal human smugglers, armed militias or fraudulent customs and police officers. Some earlier humanitarian reports and academic studies already described these practices, including slavery (Mixed Migration Hub 2015; Micallef 2017; Crawley et al. 2018).[3] Several contributions to this special issue also describe the abuse and violence migrants experience while travelling (Crawley and Jones 2020; Kuschminder 2020). Vogt (2018) documents endemic violence against migrants, not only in North Africa and the Middle East, but also in Latin America.

Still, our understanding of the precarious situations of migrants on the move and and how social networks as well as migration control interact and influence the ways in which they cope with their changing conditions remains limited. The aim of this issue is to contribute to this understanding through articles describing the diverse experiences of migrants, their journeys and coping mechanisms in various geographical and social contexts, including but also going beyond the European borders.

Focus of this issue: migration trajectories, transnational support and migration control

The often long, turbulent and dangerous journeys of migrants are an emergent theme in migration and transnationalism studies (Schapendonk 2012; Schapendonk and Steel 2014; Mainwaring and Brigden 2016; Triandafyllidou 2017; Crawley et al. 2018; Vogt 2018). The articles in this special issue contribute to this field of research. A basic idea in this research as well as in the articles in this volume is that migrants are not passive victims, but active agents who, although often within constrained opportunities, develop and execute their own plans and strategies. Migration journeys are not necessarily linear and unidirectional movements from origin to destination countries, nor clearly demarcated events in time and space (Crawley and Jones 2020). Instead of being fixed and planned in advance, migrants often develop their journey step by step as they travel from one place to another in several phases (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker 2019).

When migrants meet large and/or unexpected obstacles *en route* – for instance when they have to cross physical obstacles such as deserts or seas, *or* are confronted with closed borders – they have to improvise, adjust their journey and sometimes their intended destination, and mobilise new sources of support. Migrants also decide to travel further, even after having lived somewhere for prolonged periods of time, due to harsh internal migration control and/or changing economic or political circumstances in their current place of residence. This also implies that the prevailing migration motive may change along the journey. Migrants who originally left their country of origin due to war, violence or political oppression with the intention of staying in a neighbouring country may

ultimately decide to move on due to experienced discrimination, declining economic opportunities or anti-immigrant measures in their current country of residence (Andersson 2014and 2016; Collyer 2010; Schapendonk 2012; Mixed Migration Hub 2015; Mainwaring and Brigden 2016; Crawley et al. 2018; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Staring 2018).

All these phenomena have been described in recent research about migration journeys. Our contribution to this research is that we systematically explore the interactions of three major elements in these stories: migration trajectories, internal and external migration control mechanisms which limit the movements and the opportunities of migrants and finally transnational social support which could help them to cope with these obstacles. These three elements are further introduced in the remainder of this introduction.

Migration trajectories: beyond traditional dichotomies in migration research

Migration trajectories are an emergent research topic in the quest of concepts that correspond theoretical debates with migrant realities. We begin with providing a short description of how we understand migration journeys, trajectories and routes, following the definitions of Schapendonk, Bolay and Dahinden (2020). Migration journeys are the specific cross-border travels of migrants, whereas migration trajectories is a broader concept and may include multiple journeys in various directions over a longer period of time, including possible longer periods of residence in a country before people decide to move on. Migration routes refer to certain pathways migrants customarily follow. For instance, Frontex and the EU refer to the Eastern, Central or Western migration routes in the Mediterranean. Migration routes therefore are the collective outcome of individual migration decisions and behaviour.

Although migration research by definition studies people on the move, it nevertheless often uses a 'sedentarist' approach by focussing on 'fixed locations', be it the origin countries or communities which trigger questions on why people migrate *or* the receiving countries where the interest is on the incorporation of migrants after arrival (Crawley and Jones 2020; Cresswell 2006; Schapendonk and Steel 2014; Mainwaring and Brigden 2016). Transnationalism studies likewise seem unable to overcome this 'bipolar dominance of migration conceptualizations' (Schapendonk and Steel 2014, 262), since their focus is mainly on '..sending and receiving states as well as the continuing feedbacks going from point of origin to destination and back again' (Waldinger 2017, 5).

We argue that this disregard of migration trajectories and journeys in much of the migration literature is at least partly due to several classical, but still dominant dichotomies in migration research: the dichotomy of countries of origin versus destination, forced versus voluntary migration, and temporary migration versus permanent settlement.

Unpacking some dichotomies in migration studies

Firstly, the dichotomy between sending and receiving countries: by focusing on both ends of migratory trajectories, migration research tends to reduce migration trajectories as such to an insignificant 'time-in-between'; a meaningless intermediate stage between departure and final arrival (Schapendonk and Steel 2014; Crawley and Jones 2020; Mainwaring and Brigden 2016). This tendency is also clear in often used terminology in migration research

such as 'transit countries. This notion implies, as Düvell (2012) argues convincingly, that we tend to see only Europe (or the USA with regard to migration in the Western hemisphere) as a relevant destination for migrants. All other locations and temporary residences of migrants are reduced to 'transit' places: meaningless temporary refuges before migrants reach their final destination.

This Eurocentric notion of 'transit migration' is too simplistic and misleading. It ignores the fact that many migrants stay in such countries 'in-between' for longer periods of time. It also denies the reality that some migrants never intend to move to Europe, but envision their future in a neighbouring country but gradually discover that the changing conditions and/or internal migration control policies in these countries – for instance by denying them access to the labour market – makes it impossible for them to rebuild their futures there. They then also find themselves forced to 'move on' (Collyer 2010; Düvell 2012; Crawley et al. 2018).

Crawley and Jones (2020) and Kuschminder (2020) show that many migrants from Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea and Nigeria they interviewed during the 2015 migration 'crisis' had in fact lived in other non_european countries such Iran, Turkey, Sudan or Libya for long periods of time before coming to EuropeSome Afghan migrants were actually born in Iran or grew up there and were unfamiliar with Afghanistan. Many Syrians lived in Turkey for months or years before harsher conditions in Turkey forced them to 'move on'. Almost2 million sub-Saharan Africans lived as labour migrants in Libya under Gadaffi (Düvell 2012, 422). After the fall of Gadaffi and the uprising violence, they had no other option than to 'move on'. As going back through the desert was considered too dangerous, crossing the Mediterranean to Europe seemed the better option (Crawley and Jones 2020; Kuschminder and Triandafyllidou 2020).

These stories of migrants arriving in Europe also show us the limitations of thinking in terms of temporary and permanent migration. This second dichotomy in migration research is misleading for at least two reasons. On the one hand, many migrants may have perceived Turkey, Iran or Libya as their final destination, but felt compelled to move on as a result of realities on the ground (Staring 2018; Akar and Erdoğdu 2019, 936). On the other hand, migrants may have travelled to these countries with the intention to travel further to Europe, but failed to have the resources to do so. As a result, they had to work in these countries for substantial periods of time to collect the resources necessary for further migration; this strategy is known as 'stepwise migration' (Paul 2011, 1843). However, if they fail to collect the necessary resources to move on, what was supposed to be place of a temporary layover may evolve into a place of permanent residence. In short, intended permanent settlement may become temporary or the other way around and hence these concepts are neither static nor predetermined.

The third familiar dichotomy in migration research *and* in many political and public debates about international migration differentiates between forced and voluntary migration or between 'real' refugees and economic migrants (sometimes labelled as 'fortune seekers'). Previous research already made clear that this distinction is less obvious than often assumed (Castles, De Haas, and Miller 2014; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Erdal and Oeppen 2018), especially in relation to fragmented migration trajectories. For example, there may be a gap between the state definitions of forced and voluntary migration and the perceptions of migrants themselves. Moreover, it is difficult to talk about forced and voluntary migration as distinct categories as they probably exist

rather on a continuum. Finally, the motives for migrating (including further migration) may also change over time for migrants. Are refugees who fled their country of origin due to war, violence or prosecution and settled in a neighbouring country still 'refugees' when they decide to move on because of a lack of economic opportunities or increased discrimination? As Collyer (2010:, 279) observes: 'Fragmented journeys are continually prolonged and migrants may be far removed in both time and space from their experiences of departure so that their reasons for leaving no longer have the relevance that they once did'. Therefore, rather than conforming to static bureaucratic definitions, we should recognise that motives, aims and resources 'can be transformed in the course of journeys into other pursuits' (Amit 2007, 12).

In short, we conclude that the lives and movements of migrants are often too complex and dynamic to be captured by simplistic categories such as forced versus voluntary migrants; permanent and temporary movements and sending and receiving countries. However, this critical view should not negate the fact that these labels have significant consequences for migrants. For example, the labels 'forced' and 'refugee' gives some migrants privileges and the right to protection in Europe[4] whereas others – the 'undeserving' ones – are denied these rights (Erdal and Oeppen 2018, 982). Crawley and Skleparis (2018) warn against what they call 'categorical fetishism' and call for a 'critical awareness of the constructedness of categories' (60). In this special issue, by presenting articles that take this awareness to heart, we aim to provide new insights on migration trajectories from the perspectives of migrants themselves.

Transnational social support in migrant trajectories

In this issue we focus on the interplay between migration trajectories and transnational social support. Following Vertovec (2009:, 13), we understand transnationalism as ' … a broad category referring to practices and institutions linking migrants, people, organisations in their homelands or elsewhere in a diaspora'. The articles in this issue focus on how transnational social support networks and transnationally operating institutions, including human smuggling networks, influence and facilitate or disrupt migration trajectories. During their journeys, migrants may receive practical information and (financial) support from family and friends in the origin or destination countries, from other migrants or compatriots they meet *en route,* but also from 'institutions' such as recruiting employers or universities, and also human smuggling networks.

The role of social networks in migration processes has been long recognised. On the one hand, social networks inspire potential migrants and stimulate their migration aspirations; on the other hand, they provide relevant information and actual support that reduce the costs and risks of migration, and thus facilitate actual migratory movements (e.g. Boyd 1989; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Staring 2004; Faist 2010; Boyd and Nowak 2012; Castles, De Haas, and Miller 2014). Garip (2016:, 114–117) describes these two roles of social networks as 'normative pressure' and 'social facilitation', respectively. Other studies show how social networks support processes of incorporation in receiving countries, for example by assisting newcomers with finding employment and accommodation or providing socioemotional support (e.g. Boyd 1989; Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Van Tubergen, Maas, and Flap 2004; Chelpi-den Hamer and Mazzucato 2010; Lubbers et al. 2010). However, recent research shows that social networks not only facilitate but

sometimes also impede or undermine migration aspirations or actual migration. For instance, migrants with negative experiences in the destination countries may give 'negative travel advice' to potential newcomers from the sending communities or may refuse to support them because of the high risks and costs for themselves (De Haas 2010; Engbersen, Snel, and Esteves 2016; Snel, Engbersen, and Faber 2016; Van Mol et al. 2018).

This special issue introduces a third pillar of research on how migration relates to social networks by focusing on the role of migrants' transnational networks in shaping migration trajectories. Firstly, we recognise that many migrants are embedded in transnational social fields in today's networked societies (Bilgili 2014). That is to say, their social interpersonal relations are not bound to a single space and their lives span across borders. Although this was always recognised in migration research (since Thomas and Znaniecki's (1922) classic study *The Polish peasant in Europe and America*), the focus has been primarily on how migrants in receiving countries remain connected with friends and families in origin countries. The same goes, as we already saw, for current research on transnationalism.

Here, our focus is on how migrants' journeys shape and are shaped by transnational support. In this issue, Caarls, Bilgili and Fransen look at this through a life course perspective among Senegalese, Congolese and Ghanaian migrants in Europe. Other contributions in the issue investigate this association in different localities, going beyond the origin and destination country dichotomy. Moreover, we put emphasis on how migrants use their social networks instrumentally by mobilising support or resources from these networks. Unsurprisingly, this goes back to the notion of 'social capital' of Bourdieu (1986), defined as 'the sum of resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'. In line with the critique of Schapendonk (2014), we consider social capital not as a social given as the definition implies, but as something that needs to be acquired and maintained. That is to say, social networks require active network*ing* to be maintained, to expand. This is particularly relevant for migrants while travelling. Migrants can obtain new social contacts during their journeys and mobilise new resources from them (Schapendonk 2014; Wissink and Mazzucato 2018).

Who are the actors that support migrants in their journeys, what kind of support do they provide and against what 'costs'? One way of looking at linkages within social networks is in terms of durability. Some linkages go back way long and may be life-lasting as between family members or close friends, others are made on the spot and do not last or get activated only when necessary. Another focus on social networks differentiates between roles as (close) family members, (intimate) friends, professionals, country fellowmen or institutional actors such as NGO representatives or human smugglers in the context of this special issue. Garip (2016:, 118) speaks of the latter as 'network externalities': generalised resources available in established migration flows such as smuggling networks or recruiting employers in destination communities. Depending on the type of roles and its multiplexity (possible different roles within one relationship) as well as its durability, linkages come along with different norms, obligations and expectations in the realm of support. It is within this 'reservoir of social relations' and their characteristics where people mobilise support to attain their goals.

Durable relations and new social contacts

The general idea is that intimate and durable relationships as kinship come with more support and less (exploitative) 'costs' compared to the potential support one from for instance a fellow countryman or a human smuggler. Kuschminder (2020) shows that family ties can also be crucial for migrants while travelling. Families not only often finance migration, they can still support or even save migrants when they get in trouble during their journeys. Other studies contain heart-rending stories of migrants who were kidnapped and held for ransom in countries like Sudan, Libya or Egypt. In all these cases, the families back home or elsewhere are often requested to send money to save the migrants (Human Rights Watch 2014; Mixed Migration Hub 2015; Crawley et al. 2018; Vogt 2018).

Other studies (Collyer 2005; Koser Akcapar 2010; Schapendonk 2014) point to the limitations of roles as family, friends or the proverbial 'friends of friends' for migrants while travelling. These studies point out the significance of *new* social contacts; people they meet while travelling that can become important sources of information and support. These new encounters give migrants advice and information about travelling routes or trustworthy human smugglers, help them to find temporary jobs to finance new or unforeseen expenses, and sometimes even accommodate them or finance a part of their further travels (Staring 2004; Collyer 2007; Schapendonk 2014; Crawley et al. 2018). New contacts are not only found through physical encounters, migrants increasingly use the internet and social media to contact people, groups or institutions who can provide them with relevant advice, information and support (Dekker and Engbersen 2014; Godin and Donà 2020).

Migration industry and human smugglers

Migrants also seek support from institutional actors in their social networks. Researchers speak of the 'migration industry': the whole range of actors, operating both legally and illegally, who have an interest in migration, are dealing with migration control or earn money by organising migration movements (Samers 2010, 87). The migration industry includes employers and sub-contracting employment agencies looking for foreign workers and universities recruiting foreign students, but also human smugglers, NGOs that search and rescue migrants in the Mediterranean and even migration researchers – in short, all actors that somehow profit from migration and migrants (Andersson 2014; Vogt 2018).

Human smuggling also provides transnational support for migrants, although sometimes at a very high price. Various studies show that current policies such as the militarisation of borders and stricter border control displace migrants towards riskier border crossings and drive them into the hands of human smugglers (Andersson 2014and Van der Leun and Staring 2013; 2016; Last 2018). Human smuggling can be defined as any practice of transporting people unauthorised across international borders (on foot, by truck, boat, etc.) in order to obtain financial or other material benefit (Samers 2010, 88; Baird 2017, 1; Crawley et al. 2018, 75).

Although this general definition may relate to various practices, with varying degrees of altruism or exploitation, the European Union and other policy circles currently frame human smuggling one-sidedly as ' … ruthless criminal networks (that) organise the

journeys of large numbers of migrants desperate to reach the EU. They make substantial gains while putting the migrants' lives at risk. To maximise their profits, smugglers often squeeze hundreds of migrants onto unseaworthy boats – including small inflatable boats or end-of-life cargo ships – or into trucks' (European Commission 2015, 1). Next to such criminalisation of human smuggling, there is also the 'criminalisation of solidarity'. Increasingly individuals and NGOs that support migrants to and across Europe as for instance search-and-rescue NGOs operating in the Mediterranean, run the risk of serious charges and prosecutions that once were restricted to organised human smuggling syndicates (Webber 2019).

Research shows that this dominant framing of human smuggling as a criminal act comes along with two fallacies. Firstly, this view criminalises smugglers 'as villains' (Andersson 2016, 1061) and victimises migrants as powerless victims. This may be true in some instances, but not necessarily so. Smugglers can also be supportive individuals, businesses, or travel agencies that assist migrants, as Crawley et al. (2018, 75) put it, to 'get out' and 'get through' dangerous places, transport, accommodate and feed migrants, and ultimately give them opportunities to significantly improve their living conditions (cf. Van Liempt and Doomernik 2006; Içduygu 2018; 2020). Secondly, the dominant view of smugglers as ruthless criminals wrongly assumes that they are alien to migrants. Human smugglers as well as their customers – the smuggled migrants – are generally embedded in local communities and economies. Migrants, directly or indirectly, know who is involved in the human smuggling business and human smugglers in many cases have knowledge of the relatives of the people they smuggle (Staring 2008; Achilli 2018; Crawley et al. 2018; Içduygu 2018; Mengiste 2018; Zhang, Sanchez and Achilli, 2018).

Transnational social support and reciprocity

As migratory journeys often develop and are financed step by step, migration costs escalate during the journey, for instance when they need human smugglers or the latter raise the prices. The costs for the support that migrants are able to mobilize within their personal networks can vary considerably. This downside of social capital, as Portes and Landolt (1996) coined it, is that received support often results in expectations about reciprocity, which can be characterised in terms of generalized, balanced, and negative reciprocity relating to what is exchanged (Sahlins 1974). Much of the migration support within families could be defined as generalized reciprocity where support is given without the expectation of an immediate and equal return.

Some migrants receive support in a balanced way by paying a reasonable amount of money to a travel agency or smuggler who organises the trip abroad. Other migrants however are either forced to work to earn additional funds or to ask the family back home for money, particularly when migrants are confronted with practices of kidnapping and extortion as described above. These examples of negative reciprocity where there is an exploitative disbalance between the support given and the highly unequal return of the migrants involved are in sharp contrast with the much more balanced or altruistic motivated support exchanged between close friends or kin that also facilitate the journeys of migrants. These diverse reciprocal exchange norms may have a direct impact on how migrants navigate their migration decisions, their trajectories and ultimately their well-being in the long run.

Internal and external migration control mechanisms

The trajectories of contemporary migrants are shaped by the opportunities of the social capital that lies within their social networks. Whether migrants employ their previously existing social network, acquire new contacts or utilise digitalised social media resources, in all cases they have to appropriate and mobilize the social capital that comes along with these contacts for their own benefits. We also stressed the transnational character of the migrants' social networks that link countries as well as continents and potentially can facilitate migrants in their travelling towards their planned destinations. However, these transnational social networks are embedded within various geographical and changing local contexts. In this special issue, we particularly focus on legal contexts with corresponding opportunities, restrictions and policies that have their impact on the support that can be derived from these networks.

We differentiate between internal and external migration control as intersecting factors to the interplay between migration trajectories and transnational social support. The concept of 'internal control', used in the context of preventing irregular migration and residence in the EU or other Western countries, refers to all policies, laws and control mechanisms within countries to identify 'illegal' immigrants and make 'illegal' residence less attractive. These policies also increase deterrence through tough deportation and repatriation policies and by criminalising irregular migrants and those supporting them (Albrecht 2002, 14). These internal control mechanisms are not restricted to EU countries; many other countries have also developed specific policies and laws to control the entrance and residence of refugees and irregular immigrants.

Physical borders and different forms of (electronic) surveillance are among the most important barriers that migrants have to deal with on their journeys. External migration control refers to classic border control that is from a European perspective increasingly externalised from the borders of the nation state to the outside borders of the European Union and even beyond the direct borders of the European Union. It is embodied in the bilateral agreements between the EU or individual EU countries with other countries such as Morocco, Turkey (Van Liempt et al. 2017), and Libya (De Haas 2008; Kuschminder and Triandafyllidou 2020). These agreements contain both settlements with these countries to prevent migration to Europe and financial support for accommodating refugees and for economic development in general, with the explicit goal of encouraging potential migrants to 'stay put' in what the EU considers to be 'the region' (Crawley and Jones 2020).

Research to date has recognised the impact of contextual legal, economic, social and political factors on migrants' decision to leave, their integration processes as well as their future mobility intentions. With a focus on migration trajectories, in this special issue, for migrants on the road we argue that internal and external control mechanisms become particularly important. As indicated by Godin and Dona (2020), borders are not solely 'sites of crossing', they are also 'sites of immobility, where people on the move are stuck in temporal, geographical and socio-political transit' (p2). In a way, internal and external control mechanisms create places of 'in-between' where actually migrants end up living, sometimes briefly and other times considerably long periods of time. As Schapendonk, Dahinden, and Bolay (2020) explain, many individuals 'are made into migrants when they come into contact with 'state actors' and get confronted

with migration control mechanisms. It is under these conditions that transnational social networks of migrants evolve and are activated and influence the development of their migration trajectories. Caarls, Bilgili, and Fransen (2020) also illustrate how there is a variation in the development of these transnational social networks and migration trajectories over the life course of migrants. It is this triad of migration trajectories, transnational social networks and migration control mechanisms that bring into light a multi-layered perspective into the lives of migrants. As summarised below, the articles in this special issue all contribute to the better understanding of this triadic dynamic.

Summary of contents

Most papers in this Special Issue are revised versions of papers presented at the symposium on 'Migration routes and transnational networks and institutions', held at Erasmus University Rotterdam in November 2017. The symposium was organized by the 'Standing Committee on Migrant Transnationalism' (MITRA) from the IMISCOE network. The last three papers were later included in this collection.

The paper 'Beyond here and there: (re)conceptualising migrant journeys and the 'in-between'' by *Crawley and Jones* goes to the heart of what this Special Issue is about. The authors argue that both migration research and policies generally focus primarily on either the places of departure of migrants or their destinations. Everything 'in-between' is seen as an insignificant 'stepping stone' or 'transit'. This conceptualisation presupposes that migrants have a specific destination in mind and that their residence in so-called 'transit countries' is just a temporary 'stop over' en route to Europe. Interviews with Syrian, Nigerian and Afghan refugees in Turkey, Greece, Italy and Malta show that many interviewees lived in these countries for longer periods of time. They lived, worked and found friendships and love in these countries. Many interviewees never intended to come to Europe, but decided to 'move on' because the situation in their (temporary) country of residence deteriorated. Acknowledging the indeterminate character of migrant journeys, the authors draw attention to the ways in which migrants find ways to exert agency and control over their lives, even in conditions of hardship and insecurity.

The contribution by **Schapendonk, Bolay and Dahinden** further theorises the nature of migration trajectories and journeys. The authors argue that migration journeys should not be seen as an 'in-between phase' between departure and arrival, followed by settlement and incorporation into the new context. Instead, we should see migratory movements from a mobility perspective. The article includes two cases of the im/mobility trajectories of West Africans (West African miners within the region and other West Africans in Europe). Both cases highlight the continuity of mobility practices: multiple journeys across various places that do not necessarily show a linear direction; continuous circulation and multi-local mobile lives; and a sense of belonging that transcends national borders. The case studies also show how changing social networks and active network*ing* ('network work') enable these mobility practices. These mobilities are also embedded in 'cultures of mobility'. Interviewees frame their mobility in a positive light, including a cultural script of adventure and of responsibility for the family 'at home'.

In her analysis of the experiences of Eritrean and Nigerian migrants en route to and inside Libya, **Kuschminder** further reflects on migrants' agency. Migrants are often portrayed as either 'passive victims' or 'active agents' ('smart refugees') who are in control of

the situation. Kuschminder sees migrants as 'active navigators' who try to find their way in the often complex and dangerous situations they are confronted with. The notion of active navigators de-victimises migrants, while simultaneously acknowledging the heavily constrained choices they face within their movements and decisions. The future is an unknown imaginary for many migrants. Some migrants are aware of the dangers en route, others are less aware, but they all expect a safe future elsewhere. Information awareness, gathering and processing are essential for migrants. Transnational social networks, but also people met while travelling, are important sources of information and travel advice, and sometimes of the financial capital required for further mobility. The paper finally shows how migrants actively find their way within conditions of constrained choice, and sometimes encounter violence and abuse.

Godin and Donà deal with another focus of this special issue: the interaction between migration control and how migrants employ new mobile technologies to navigate borderlands. The authors introduce the term 'techno-borderscapes' to indicate that borders have become sites of online and offline social interactions between migrants and many other social actors (fellow travellers, activists, smugglers, humanitarians and border guards) who all use (mobile) technologies. States also increasingly use technological devices (motion sensors, infra-red equipment, surveillance cameras, drones) to securitise borders. Humanitarian organisations alert coastguards when receiving emergence phones from migrants in danger. Fieldwork in the 'Calais Jungle', where migrants found themselves 'stranded' on their way to Britain, makes clear how important new mobile technologies are for them. Smartphones are lifeline tools that enable migrants to follow fellow migrants' journeys step-by-step, to communicate with family and friends, to remain up-to-date with news, culture and sports in their countries of origin and the diaspora, and they serve as recreational devices. Mobile technologies can also function as technological counter-practice against the European border regime, for instance to alert migrants of imminent police raids.

Içduygu highlights the support migrants obtain from transnational social networks and institutions, in particular from human smuggling. He argues for 'decentring' migrant smuggling: acknowledging that different actors (fellow migrants, friends, relatives or smugglers who facilitate migrant journeys, the authorities) have different interpretations of human smuggling. By doing so, he overcomes the conventional state-centric, criminality-based focus on human smuggling which emphasises the 'brutality' of smugglers and the 'vulnerability' of their 'victims'. Içduygu argues that smuggling became more important when the mixed migration flows through the Eastern Mediterranean route increased and Europe reacted with new visa requirements and stricter border controls. Migrant smuggling flourishes when migrants are unable to conform to 'legal' border crossing channels. Migrant smuggling is primarily (although not exclusively) demand driven: migrants and refugees are active agents and not passive victims in the hands of smugglers. Rather they make calculated choices to facilitate their journeys, often informed by family members or friends. Migrants see smugglers more as 'saviours' than as the 'ruthless, untrustworthy criminals' as they are portrayed in the media and policy documents.

Caarls, Bilgili and Fransen add a quantitative analysis of evolving migration trajectories and the role of transnational social networks before, during and after migration. Their respondents were Sub-Saharan African migrants (from Ghana, Senegal and the Democratic Republic Congo) in Europe. They find five different clusters of migration

trajectories and transnational networks over the life course of migrants considering their strong (parents, children and siblings) and weak (extended family, friends and other network members) social ties: 1) 'younger migrants with strong ties in Europe' (30.0%), predominantly females who mostly migrated for family reasons; 2) 'non-migrants with no transnational network' (27.4%) (migrated after the age of 35), who were often older, lower educated and unemployed in Europe; 3) 'younger migrants with no transnational network' (21.0%); 4) 'older migrants with weak ties in Europe' (11.1%), often males in search of better life opportunities in Europa; and 5) 'younger migrants with weak and strong ties in Europe' (10.5%). These outcomes challenge some of the stereotypical views of Sub-Saharan migrants as 'adventurers': young, male migrants with no prior connection to Europe. Many respondents were older when first migrating and had either strong or weak ties in Europe. The outcomes confirm previous findings that not only strong, but also weak ties are important for migration. Finally, the findings correct the idea that most African migration to Europe is step-wise migration. Most migrants migrated directly from their origin country to the present destination in Europe, without 'stop-overs' in other African or European countries.

Conclusion

This special issue brings together a set of papers with fresh empirical analyses from diverse settings documenting the experiences of migrants situated within and beyond the boundaries of Europe. What all contributions have in common is a focus on the migrant perspective, their lived experiences and active agency. They outline their abilities to navigate within challenging situations, to mobilise support through transnational social and institutional networks, and to overcome obstacles on their way, including obstacles that result from internal or external migration control. This empowering view on migrants is certainly worth highlighting, as migrants have resources and are able to adapt and to react to situations.

However, as indicated at the start of this introduction, many migrants are vulnerable to negative experiences. Not all of them are (always) able to cope with difficult situations. Therefore, recognising their agency should not be at the expense of being indifferent to the challenges, the violence and the exploitation they face. There is certainly a great variation in the experiences of migrants and we posit that researchers need to think carefully about how micro, meso and macro level factors relate to these experiences. Among other things, we believe that future research should focus more on the migration industry and its actors. The contributions in this issue highlight how, for example, human smugglers are flexible and adaptable to changing conditions induced by policy responses at the national and EU level. But there is still more to understand in terms of how these actors operate and sustain their positioning in relation to migrants and macro-level factors.

The papers in this special issue also raise conceptual issues. The focus on migration trajectories challenges several classical dichotomies in migration research: between sending and receiving countries, between temporary and permanent migration, and between forced and voluntary migration. We also question the conceptualisation of 'transit' and how the so-called 'transit' zones are not insignificant places 'in between' en route to

Europe. Furthermore, we highlight that the current notion of 'mixed migration' does not simply mean that forced and voluntary migrants follow the same migration routes, but that the difference between the two 'categories' is often blurred.

Another point of reflection relates to what some authors refer to as the sedentarist perspective in migration and transnationalism research. Migration research often focuses exclusively on why migrants leave their home country *or* how they incorporate in the countries of destination. By doing so, existing research tends to neglect and undertheorize the significance of the experiences of migrants during the 'time in between' as Crawley and Jones (2020) call it. The papers in this issue all show the significance of these migration trajectories and all the places migrants went through, sometimes living, working and loving there or finding themselves in danger for shorter or longer periods of time. Experiences collected during these journeys do have an impact on how these migrants integrate in subsequent countries of settlement. Moreover, as Schapendonk, Dahinden, and Bolay (2020) argue, this sedentarist perspective results from the ingrained tendency, even in migration research, to see immobility as the norm and mobility as the exception which needs explanation.

Similarly, transnationalism research often focuses exclusively on cross-border contacts and other practices between origin and destination countries, and on the consequences of these transnational practices for either of the two countries. The articles in this collection extend the scope of transnationalism research by focusing on the consequences (support, but also dangers) of the interference of transnational social networks and institutions for migrants while travelling and situate them with internal and external control mechanisms that have been to a large extent ignored in transnationalism research.

All in all, against the backdrop of empirically rich and conceptually thought provoking articles, this special issue raises compelling questions in this emergent field of inquiry concerned with the understanding of migration trajectories. We encourage scholars to contribute to these fascinating research questions and to stimulate a broader debate on the roles of different actors involved in promoting the decent and rightful migration experiences of individuals within and at the boundaries of Europe.

Notes

1. https://www.iom.int/news/new-study-concludes-europes-mediterranean-border-remains-worlds-deadliest (seen 6 March 2019). Number of deaths in the Mediterranean: 3,538 (2014), 3,771 (2015), 5,096 (2016), 3,139 (2017), 2,277 (2018)(total almost 18,000). Source: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean (seen 6 March 2019).
2. https://edition.cnn.com/specials/africa/libya-slave-auctions (seen 8-6-2020).
3. See also https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Migration/StudyMigrants/OHCHR_2016_Report-migrants-transit_EN.pdf.
4. Although with the growing externalisation of EU migration control even those labelled as 'refugees' are denied these rights as they are not allowed to enter Europe.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Erik Snel 🔗 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3808-9541

References

Achilli, L. 2018. "The "Good" Smuggler: The Ethics and Morals of Human Smuggling among Syrians." *Annals of the Academy of Social and Political Science* 676 (1): 77–96.

Akar, Sevda, and M. Erdoğdu. 2019. "Syrian Refugees in Turkey and Integration Problem Ahead." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 20 (3): 925–940.

Albrecht, H. 2002. "Fortress Europe? – Controlling Illegal Migration." *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice* 10 (1): 1–22.

Amit, V. 2007. "Structures and Dispositions of Travel and Movement." In *Going First Class? New Approaches to Privileged Travel and Movement*, edited by V. Amit, 1–14. New York: Berghahn Books.

Andersson, R. 2014. *Illegality, Inc. Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Andersson, R. 2016. "Europe's Failed 'Fight' Against Irregular Migration: Ethnographic Notes on a Counterproductive Industry." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42 (7): 1055–1075.

Baird, T. 2017. *Human Smuggling in the Eastern Mediterranean*. London: Routledge.

Bilgili, Ö. 2014. "Migrants' Multi-Sited Social Lives." *Comparative Migration Studies* 2 (3): 283–304.

Bourdieu, P. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. G. Richardson, 241–258. New York: Greenwood.

Boyd, M. 1989. "Family and Personal Networks in International Migration: Recent Developments and new Agenda." *International Migration Review* 23 (3): 638–670.

Boyd, M., and J. Nowak. 2012. "Social Networks and International Migration." In *An Introduction to International Migration Studies. European Perspectives*, edited by M. Martinello, and J. Rath, 79–105. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Caarls, K., Ö. Bilgili, and S. Fransen. 2020. "Evolution of Migration Trajectories and Transnational Social Networks Over Time: A Study among Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Europe." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2020.1804195.

Castles, S., H. De Haas, and M. Miller. 2014. *The Age of Migration. International Population Movements in the Modern World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Chelpi-den Hamer, M., and V. Mazzucato. 2010. "The Role of Support Networks in the Initial Stages of Integration: The Case of West African Newcomers in the Netherlands." *International Migration* 48 (2): 31–57.

Collyer, M. 2005. "When Do Social Networks Fail to Explain Migration? Accounting for the Movements of Algerian Asylum-Seekers to the UK." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 31 (4): 699–718.

Collyer, M. 2007. "In-between Places: Trans-Saharan Transit Migrants in Morocco and the Fragmented Journey to Europe." *Antipode* 39 (4): 620–635.

Collyer, M. 2010. "Stranded Migrants and Fragmentary Journeys." *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23 (3): 273–293.

Crawley, H., F. Düvell, K. Jones, S. McMahon, and N. Sigonda. 2018. *Unravelling Europe's 'Migration Crisis'. Journeys Over Land and sea*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Crawley, H., and J. Hagen-Zanker. 2019. "Deciding Where to go: Policies, People and Perceptions Shaping Destination Preferences." *International Migration* 57 (1): 20–35.

Crawley, H., and K. Jones. 2020. "Beyond Here and There: (re)Conceptualising Migrant Journeys and the 'In-Between'." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2020.1804190.

Crawley, H., and D. Skleparis. 2018. "'Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both: Categorical Fetishism and the Politics of Bounding in Europe's 'Migration Crisis''." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44 (1): 48–64.

Cresswell, T. 2006. *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*. New York: Taylor and Francis.

De Haas, H. 2008. "The Myth of Invasion: The Inconvenient Realities of Migration From Africa to the European Union." *Third World Quarterly* 29 (7): 1305–1322.

De Haas, H. 2010. "The Internal Dynamics of Migration Processes: A Theoretical Inquiry." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36 (10): 1587–1617.

Dekker, R., and G. Engbersen. 2014. "How Social Media Transform Migrant Networks and Facilitate Migration." *Global Networks* 14 (4): 401–418.

Düvell, F. 2012. "Transit Migration: A Blurred and Politicised Concept." *Population, Space and Place* 18 (4): 415–427.

Engbersen, G., E. Snel, and A. Esteves. 2016. "Migration Mechanisms of the Middle Range: On the Concept of Reverse Cumulative Causation." In *Beyond Networks. Feedback in International Migration*, edited by O. Bakewell, G. Engbersen, M. L. Fonseca, and C. Horst, 205–230. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Erdal, M. B., and C. Oeppen. 2018. "Forced to Leave? The Discursive and Analytical Significance of Describing Migration as Forced and Voluntary." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44 (6): 981–998. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2017.1384149.

European Commission. 2015. *EU Action Plan Against Migrant Smuggling*. Brussels: EU.

Faist, T. 2010. "'The Crucial Meso-Level'." In *Selected Studies in International Migration and Immigrant Incorporation*, edited by M. Martiniello, and J. Rath, 59–90. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Garip, F. 2016. *On the Move, Changing Mechanisms of Mexico-U.S. Migration*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Godin, M., and G. Donà. 2020. "Rethinking Transit Zones: Migrant Trajectories and Transnational Networks in Techno-Borderscapes." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2020.1804193.

Human Rights Watch. 2014. *"I Wanted to Lie Down and Die" Trafficking and Torture of Eritreans in Sudan and Egypt*. Human Rights Watch.

Içduygu, A. 2018. "Middle East." In *Migrant Smuggling Data and Research: A Global Review of the Emerging Evidence Base (Volume 2)*, edited by M. McAuliffe and A. Triandafyllidou, 19–44. Geneva: IOM.

İçduygu, A. 2020. "Decentring Migrant Smuggling: Reflections on the Eastern Mediterranean Route to Europe." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2020.1804194.

Koser Akcapar, S. 2010. "'Re-Thinking Migrants' Networks and Social Capital: A Case Study of Iranians in Turkey'." *International Migration* 48 (2): 161–196.

Kuschminder, K., and A. Triandafyllidou. 2020. "Smuggling, Trafficking, and Extortion: New Conceptual and Policy Challenges on the Libyan Route to Europe." *Antipode* 52 (1): 206–226.

Kuschminder, K. 2020. "Before Disembarkation: Eritrean and Nigerian Migrants Journeys Within Africa." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2020.1804192.

Last, T. K. 2018. *Deaths Along Southern EU Borders*. Free University: Amsterdam.

Lubbers, M. J., J. L. Molina, J. Lerner, U. Brandes, J. Ávila, and C. McCarty. 2010. "Longitudinal Analysis of Personal Networks. The Case of Argentinean Migrants in Spain." *Social Networks* 32 (1): 91–104.

Mainwaring, C., and N. Brigden. 2016. "Beyond the Border: Clandestine Migration Journeys." *Geopolitics* 21 (2): 243–262.

Massey, D. S., J. Durand, and K. A. Pren. 2016. "Why Border Enforcement Backfired?" *American Journal of Sociology* 121 (5): 1557–1600.

Massey, D., and K. Espinosa. 1997. "What is Driving Mexico-US Migration? A Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Analysis." *American Journal of Sociology* 102 (4): 939–999.

Mengiste, T. A. 2018. "Refugee Protections From Below: Smuggling in the Eritrea-Ethiopia Context." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 676 (1): 57–76.

Micallef, M. 2017. *The Human Conveyer Belt: Trends in Human Trafficking and Smuggling in Post-Revolution Libya*. Geneva: The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime.

Mixed Migration Hub. 2015. *Conditions and Risks of Mixed Migration in North East Africa*. Mixed Migration Hub.

Paul, A. M. 2011. "Stepwise International Migration: A Multistage Migration Pattern for the Aspiring Migrant." *American Journal of Sociology* 116 (6): 1842–1886.

Portes, A., and P. Landolt. 1996. "The Downside of Social Capital." *The American Prospect* 26: 18–22.

Portes, A., and R. Rumbaut. 1996. *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. 2nd ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Sahlins, M. 1974. *Stone Age Economics*. London: Tavistock Publications.

Samers, M. 2010. *Migration*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

Schapendonk, J. 2012. "Migrants' Im/Mobilities on Their Way to the EU: Lost in Transit?" *Tijdschrift Voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 103 (5): 577–583.

Schapendonk, J. 2014. "What if Networks Move? Dynamic Social Networking in the Context of African Migration to Europe." *Population, Space and Place* 21 (8): 809–819.

Schapendonk, J., M. Bolay, and J. Dahinden. 2020. "The Conceptual Limits of the 'Migration Journey'. De-exceptionalising Mobility in the Context of West African Trajectories." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2020.1804191.

Schapendonk, J., and G. Steel. 2014. "Following Migrant Trajectories: The Im/Mobility of Sub-Saharan Africans en Route to the European Union." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 104 (2): 262–270.

Snel, E., G. Engbersen, and M. Faber. 2016. "From Bridgeheads to Gate Closers. How Migration Networks Contribute to Declining Migration From Morocco to the Netherlands." In *Beyond Networks. Feedback in International Migration*, edited by O. Bakewell, G. Engbersen, M. L. Fonseca, and C. Horst, 133–155. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Staring, R. 2004. "Facilitating the Arrival of Illegal Immigrants in the Netherlands: Irregular Chain Migration Versus Smuggling Chains." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 5 (3): 273–294.

Staring, R. 2008. "'Controlling Human Smuggling in the Netherlands: How the Smuggling of Human Beings Was Transformed Into a Serious Criminal Offence.'." In *Organized Crime: Culture, Markets and Policies. (Studies in Organized Crime, vol 7)*, edited by D. Siegel, and H. Nelen, 165–181. New York, NY: Springer.

Staring, R. 2018. "Willen alle migranten naar Europa? Observaties vanuit Aksaray." In *Standplaats Istanbul. Lange Lijnen in de Cultuurgeschiedenis van Turkije*, edited by F. Gerritsen, and H. van der Heijden, 182–191. Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Jurgen Maas.

Thomas, W. I., and F. Znaniecki. 1996; orig. 1922. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Triandafyllidou, A. 2017. "Beyond Irregular Migration Governance. Zooming in on Migrants' Agency." *European Journal of Migration and Law* 19 (1): 1–11.

Van der Leun, J. P., and R. H. J. M. Staring. 2013. "'Human Smuggling'." In *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*, edited by G. J. N. Bruinsma, and D. L. Weisburd, 2382–2389. New York: Springer Science and Business Media.

Van Liempt, I. van, M. J. Alpes, S. Hassan, S. Tunaboylu, O. Ulusoy, and A. Zoomers. 2017. *Evidence-based Assessment of Migration Deals the Case of the EU-Turkey Statement*. Utrecht: Utrecht University.

Van Liempt, I., and J. Doomernik. 2006. "Migrant's Agency in the Smuggling Process: The Perspectives of Smuggled Migrants in the Netherlands." *International Migration* 44 (4): 165–190.

Van Mol, C., E. Snel, K. Hemmerechts, and C. Timmerman. 2018. "Migration Aspirations and Migration Cultures: A Case Study of Ukrainian Migration Towards the European Union." *Population, Space and Place* 24 (5): e2131.

Van Tubergen, F., I. Maas, and H. Flap. 2004. "The Economic Incorporation of Immigrants in 18 Western Societies: Origin, Destination, and Community Effects." *American Sociological Review* 69 (5): 704–727.

Vertovec, S. 2009. *Transnationalism*. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

Vogt, W. A. 2018. *Lives in Transit. Violence and Intimacy on the Migrant Journey*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Waldinger, R. 2017. "A Cross-Border Perspective on Migration: Beyond the Assimilation/ Transnationalism Debate." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 43 (1): 3–17.

Webber, F. 2019. Solidarity Crimes. Accessed May 28, 2020. https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2019/07/solidarity-crimes.

Wissink, M., and V. Mazzucato. 2018. "In Transit: Changing Social Networks of sub-Saharan African Migrants in Turkey and Greece." *Social Networks* 53: 30–41.

Zhang, S. X., G. E. Sanchez, and L. Achilli. 2018. "Crimes of Solidarity in Mobility: Alternative Views on Migrant Smuggling." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 676 (1): 6–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716217746908.