



Counter moves. Destabilizing the grand narrative of onward migration and secondary movements in Europe

Joris Schapendonk

Geography, Planning, Environment,
Nijmegen Centre for Border Research,
Radboud University, Nijmegen, The
Netherlands

Correspondence

Joris Schapendonk, Geography, Planning,
Environment, Nijmegen Centre for Border
Research, Radboud University, P.O. Box
9108, 6525AJ, Nijmegen, The Netherlands,
Email: j.schapendonk@fm.ru.nl

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Abstract

European migration scholars are increasingly interested in people's onward migrations and secondary movements. This paper takes a critical look at the conceptual underpinnings of this subfield by indicating how the lexicon of onward migration frames migratory processes as a staged process, involving a South–North directionality and hinting at a gradual progress for the migrants in question. This “grand narrative” of onward migration is anchored and reproduced by EU's overarching policy frameworks. Based on an ethnographic project that followed African trajectories inside Europe, I present some dynamic im/mobility trajectories that can be considered counter narratives of onward migration. The detailed outlining of these trajectories show how mobility itself is a shifting ground without one major vector directing the movements. These counter narratives result in a discussion on the migrantization of mobility. More specifically, I plea for research approaches that free migratory movements from prepossessed directions.

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars of migration focusing on the European context are increasingly interested in people's movements just after they have entered the European Union (see e.g. Ahrens et al., 2016; Mas Giral, 2018; Moret, 2017; Zimmermann, 2009). This focus on "onward migration" has enriched migration studies since it moves beyond the bipolar models of migration that involves a country of origin and a destination (e.g. Della Puppa & King, 2019). At the same time, the notion of onward migration – and its related terminology of "secondary movements" – must be taken with caution for some implicit assumptions that I put central in this paper. The lexicon of onward migration seems to frame migratory processes as a staged process (Kuschminder 2018b, involving gradual progress for the migrants in questions as they seem to get closer to preferred destinations. In line with this, discussions on onward migration presuppose a specific linearity and directionality – mainly from South to North with possible stop-overs in between. Such patterns of South–North movements are undoubtedly unfolding, but this paper aims to explore what dynamics are hidden and overshadowed by this "grand narrative" of onward migration and secondary movements. In this regard, this paper primarily approaches "onward migration" and "secondary movements" as policy artefacts instead of productive conceptual points of departure.

Although it is difficult to find a definition of onward migration that is shared by scholars, some define it as a secondary movement between two middle or high-income third countries (e.g. Ortensi & Barbiano di Belgiojoso, 2018; Ramos, 2018). This is a puzzling starting point, not only for its assumption that onward migration is only happening in richer countries, but also for its entanglement with the notion of secondary movements. The European Migration Network (a part of European Commission's Migration and Home Affairs) defines secondary movements of migrants as follows: "the movements of migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers, who for different reasons move from the country in which they first arrived to seek protection or permanent resettlement elsewhere" (EMN Glossary). This rather broad definition thus assumes that migration processes consist of "two big moves" (see Zimmerman, 2009 for an academic example). This notion gets highly politicized when it is put in line with asylum and irregular migration. Onward migration is, for example, seen as a policy threat in the context of "asylum shopping" and the fight against it became a political priority during and after Europe's refugee reception crisis. The objective of a common European Asylum System is, after all, to limit secondary movements by offering a common asylum system (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2017). As Cortovinis and Stefan (2019, p. 5) write in this context: "The EU concept of "secondary movements" lays upon a model presuming a clear-cut differentiation between "primary" and "secondary" movements of asylum seekers inside the Schengen territory. The label of "primary movements" relies on the idea of involuntariness by the individual to look for international protection and safety elsewhere The notion of "secondary", on the other hand, assumes voluntarism and an illegitimate agency by individuals involved." Thus, in the context of asylum, the notion of secondary movements inherently reflects the idea that migrants can have too much of agency when they move to better places (Erdal & Oepfen, 2018).

Starting from this politicization of onward migration terminology (see also MMC, 2021), I ask in this paper why we – as migration scholars – follow the same line of reasoning? Why do we reproduce the notion of secondary movements? Why do we predominantly discuss onward migration in a presumed hierarchy of destinations? Why do we indeed have empirical studies on Ecuadorians moving from Spain to the UK (e.g. Ramos, 2018); Afghans moving from Greece to Sweden (e.g. Kuschminder 2018a,b) and Eritreans moving from Italy to Norway (e.g. Brekke & Brochmann, 2015)? And why do we seldom read about Congolese people moving from Belgium to France or Bangladeshi workers moving from Germany to Spain. Let alone, Spanish people moving from Mexico to Colombia, or Dutch people moving from the UK to South Africa? Is there (only) an empirical reason, in the sense that the latter forms of movement do not happen? Or is it rather the idea that migration scholars tend to follow (intentionally or unintentionally) the policy agendas of particular migration apparatuses (Dahinden, 2016), persisting colonial fault lines (Samaddar, 2020) or indeed societal scripts related to border crises and the need to help (Cabot, 2016)? With these questions in mind, I seek to engage with contemporary conversations about what is included/excluded and visible/invisible through our academic writing (Aparna et al., 2020).

Departing from the above reflections, this paper aims to provide analytical space to discuss African mobilities in Europe that deviate from the conventional notion of “onward migration” from the peripheries of Europe to the self-declared core of Western Europe. Based on a trajectory ethnography (Schapendonk, 2020), this paper presents two in-depth cases of im/mobility that can be seen as counter narratives of onward migration. My methodological approach allowed me to follow African intra-EU trajectories for a longer period of time (2014–2019). Based on my findings, I analyse the directions and motivational dynamics of these trajectories. These two dimensions emphasize how mobility is itself a shifting ground without one major vector directing the movements.

Before we arrive at this analysis, we first further discuss onward migration and secondary movements as a sub-field in migration studies. I provide an overview of the debate and articulate some of its implicit assumptions. From there we delve into the question of how specific notions of onward migration are anchored in, and reproduced by, dominant migration policy frameworks. This step is vitally important in order to realize how mobility is *turned into* migration of some sort (Amelina, 2017; Bolay, 2021; Dahinden, 2016). From there, I present some dynamic im/mobility trajectories of Africans living in Europe. Their zig-zag routes, circulations and shifting horizons function as counter narratives of onward migration. These counter narratives result in a discussion on the migranticization of mobility. More specifically, I plea for research approaches that free migratory movements from prepossessed directions.

A RISING FIELD: ONWARD, TRANSIT, STEPWISE AND SECONDARY MOVEMENTS IN EUROPE, AND BEYOND

While reviewing the literature on onward migration and so-called secondary movements in Europe, it becomes evident that this literature belongs to a wider empirical and conceptual discussion on migratory processes (MMC, 2021). For its analytical focus on a move after a move – or mobility and immobility – there are many parallels between studies on onward migration, on the one hand, and studies on “transit migration” (Collyer, Düvell & de Haas, 2012) or “stepwise migration” (Paul, 2011), on the other (Mas Geraht, 2018). As it is stressed in the literature, transit migration is highly politicized as it mainly concerns migration to the regions just outside the borders of “Western” destinations, and in this case Europe (Stock, 2019).

Stepwise migration is in this sense perceived as a more neutral term, already present in Ravenstein's classical laws of migration. However, when delving into the use of this term, some problems still arise. In her work – which can be seen as an attempt to theorize stepwise migration – Paul (2011) frames the process of stepwise migration as follows: “Moving thus in an iterative fashion up a hierarchy of destination countries, stepwise migrants aim eventually to gain entry into their preferred destination.” This hierarchical element, as she notes, is key to her theoretical model. Migrants then are believed to use specific “stepping stone countries” (Paul, 2011, p. 1844) to move up the geographical ladder. Early versions of this evolutionist stepwise migration approach rely on positivist models that analyse migratory movements from a village, to a nearby town, to a domestic centre and eventually to a better destination abroad (Riddell & Harvey, 1972). Stepwise migration, thus, is the gradual migratory process from “underdeveloped” and “traditional environments” to “modernity” (Conway, 1980). Later versions of this stepwise migration model stress that migrants have “an overarching migration strategy” (Haandrikman & Hassanen, 2014, p.6) and frame migration processes as a career with gradual process in terms of “migration capital” and “migration knowledge” (Ramos, 2018). There are undoubtedly individuals who migrate in stepwise manner, and when researchers speak to migrants, migrant aspirations may indeed reflect this stepwise logic. Nevertheless, the assumptive foundations of such models remain highly problematic for its evolutionist interpretation of migration processes and rather simplistic/colonial worldview regarding peripheries vs. centres and tradition vs. modernity. Moreover, with the notion of an “overarching migration strategy”, there is a risk of over-rationalizing migrant agency in the direction of a *homo economicus* in disguise.

In the following, I first outline a variety of onward migration studies. Although discussions on onward migration are definitely important in other regions of the world (e.g. MMC, 2021; Vogt, 2016), I particularly focus on the

European context to articulate the issue of politicization. The section does not aim for an all-inclusive overview, but it rather indicates some of the different meanings of the onward migration lexicon. Subsequently, I explore how specific interpretations of onward migration are anchored in European migration policymaking.

Onward migration as an academic reproduction

In this outline, I distinguish three different dimensions to discuss this subfield of onward migration and secondary movements in migration studies. These three dimensions are: time, legality and space. Together, they create a first overview of the different ways onward migration is framed and what elements are articulated.

First, by focusing on time, it is noticeable that there is an emerging literature on temporalities and time in relation to so-called transit migration (Bredeloup, 2012; Stock, 2019) but less so with regard to onward migration (but see Fontanari, 2017). Nevertheless, we may roughly distinguish studies that discuss onward migration as part of a journey with stopovers, but of relative length, from those studies that focus more on migration in relation to people's life trajectories. Although boundaries between these two subfields are certainly blurred (Stock, 2019), the former set of studies emphasize the processual character of journeys, including multiple moments of immobility of considerable length (Crawley et al., 2018). They indicate that migratory movements are often fragmented, especially when it concerns irregular migration (Mainwaring and Bridgen 2016), and they unpack the ways mobility pathways are re-routed because of rules, regulations and regimes (Schapendonk et al., 2020; Haugen 2012). The second subfield, with a generally broader timeframe, focuses on the question why migrants move again after having lived relatively settled lives in a specific (European) country (Kelly, 2013; Ramos, 2018; Van Liempt, 2011). This set of studies is more tied to the life cycle approach than to conceptual and empirical discussions on the migrant journey.

Closely related to time is the legal dimension. In this regard, a group of studies explicitly deal with asylum-related or irregular border crossings when they aim for a better understanding of onward migration and secondary movements in Europe (e.g. Brekke & Brochman, 2015; Schwarz, 2018; Zimmerman, 2009; Kuschminder, 2018b). These studies do not only provide insights into the motivation of people's mobility, but also indicate how EU's ambition to create a harmonized asylum system is limited and undermined. Other scholars deal with subsequent movements of people who are not born in Europe, but who obtained residency rights or citizenship in a particular European country (Kelly, 2013; Lindley & Van Hear, 2007; Moret, 2017; Van Liempt, 2011). These studies on the "emigration of immigrants" (Jeffery & Murison, 2011; Nekby, 2006) indicate that citizenship is indeed seen as a form of belonging and settlement from the perspective of the state, while people actually may regard it as the liberty to travel (Della Puppa, 2018). In addition to these two foci, there are studies that explicitly focus on how legal statuses change with the crossing of borders (Borri, 2017; Schuster, 2005).

The third dimension I put central here is space. The specific directionality of onward migration – as a gradual move to "modernity" of the West – is rather evident. Studies on onward migrations are mostly investigating movement and imagined movements to Western Europe (with London as the prototypical magnet for migrants see: Ahrens et al., 2016; Della Puppa & King, 2019; Mas Geralt, 2018; McIlwaine & Bunge, 2019; Ramos, 2018). Several of these studies regard southern Europe as the place from where secondary movements occur. At times, Sweden and the Netherlands are considered stepping stones countries, but mostly for movements to the UK (Ahrens et al., 2016; Kelly, 2013; Van Liempt, 2011). The reproduction of secondary movements from Southern Europe is particularly strong in reports on irregular migration routes. Greece, Italy, and to a lesser extent Spain, are then considered to be "countries of entry" from where people aim to reach their "countries of destination" (e.g. Kuschminder, 2018a). Such notion might indeed reflect the statistical data of Eurodac on Dublin claims. The problem is, however, that data only capture very particular forms of movements and leave out many others. Furthermore, the notion of southern Europe as transit space clearly overshadows other dynamics, such as the fact that Italy received quite

some “secondary movements” from Norway, or the observation that Germany also received a lot of people seeking asylum who previously lived in Sweden (Takle & Seeberg, 2015).

Thus, I am not ignoring the fact that a lot of migratory movements are directed to important economic nodes, such as London (King et al., 2016; Ramos, 2018) and that many people have left Athens after their arrivals in this particular city. My concern is that the knowledges that derive from these fieldwork locations uncritically reproduce the grand narrative of onward migration with its stepwise and hierarchical character. In addition, with regard to studies on migrant decision-making in places like Greece, there is an implicit risk of confusing migrant’s wish to migrate in Europe’s southern region with the actual acts of doing so (Düvell, 2012). In other words, migrants may indeed express a strong wish to move from place X to place Y, but we cannot equate these intentions/wishes/aspirations with the *actual* migratory process, for at least two reasons. First, this analytical jump would fundamentally reduce a turbulent, erratic, complex and uncertain process to a straightforward process of choice and action (see also Tazzioli, 2020). This reduction downplays both the politicized character as well as the complexity of migration (e.g. Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). In a way, as Martina Tazzioli (2018, 2020) notes, the policy term of “secondary movement” is an attempt of mobility regimes to regain control over these complex processes that reflect specific forms of “spatial disobedience”. Second, this analytical jump contributes to a general image that prefixes migrant populations in, for instance, Athens as inherently “uprooted” and migrant populations in, for instance, London as having reached their “final and ultimate destination”. The consequence then is that we end up with a subfield in migration research that seems to criticize bipolar models for its simplicity and inability to explain the variety of migration, while the same subfield fails to escape these logics for its particular geographical imagination regarding where migrants come from, where they pass through, and where they are supposed to settle.

Evidently, many migration scholars are aware of these risks and create their own conceptual and methodological escape routes, but before we delve into these tactics, I explore how onward migration reflects a particular policy approach.

Onward migration as a policy reproduction

The lexicon of onward migration and secondary movements is closely connected with policy agendas and terminologies. In line with others, I argue here that much of the conceptual underpinnings discussed above actually derive from policy-oriented logics. To put it differently, I follow the reflexive turn in migration studies in its argument that mobile people become migranticized by specific mobility regimes and institutional routines (Amelina, 2017). From this perspective, onward migration and secondary movements are rather policy artefacts, instead of empirical realities (Dahinden, 2016; Schapendonk et al., 2021). In this section, I explore how the notion of onward migration and secondary movements is anchored and reproduced by EU policy frameworks.

In its most basic sketch, as noted by some others (Lavenex, 2011; Parkes, 2017), one could interpret the overarching policy framework of the EU – the European Agenda on Migration – as a policy model based on the principle of concentric circles (see e.g. European Migration Network, 2019). The widest circle relates to migrants’ countries of origin “deep South”. This circle mainly concerns the policy priority of preventing unwanted migration, including development interventions. The second circle is the external border regime, including its outsourcing to EU’s neighbourhood. The final and smallest concentric circle is the intra-European zone of Schengen and Dublin; the zone promotes some mobility while it hinders others. This circle is mainly dealing with the harmonization of migration and asylum policies across different member states.

It follows that the concentric circle model has some striking parallels with World System interpretations of periphery (the Global South) – semi-periphery (EU’s neighbourhood) and core (Europe) and this relates to some of the “dominant cartographic depictions” (Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2020) in which massive red arrows (representing migrant movements) from the outside world point to a tiny centre in the middle. This concentric circles

model is taken by member states as the template for policy design, or at least policy communications (see Figure 1 for an example of the Netherlands).

The Dutch approach to combat irregular migration. 6 “concentric zones”: 1. Preventing irregular migration. 2. Improving protection of displaced people in the region. 3. Common approach to asylum in EU. 4. Less illegality, more return. 5. Promoting legal pathways of migration 6. Stimulating integration and participation. [My translation]. Accessed through: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2018/03/30/migratiebeleid-toekomstbestendig,17-3-2021>.

Such policy templates tend to reproduce the assumption that migration occurs in gradual stages in which migrants move through particular “buffer zones” (Gabrielli, 2011). Although fragmented and buffered, the journey is still considered a straight line. Onward migration and secondary movements form the last part of that line. Unsurprisingly, in the context of asylum and irregular migration, these movements are generally considered a threat to Schengen space, including a link to human trafficking and smuggling, as noted by the European Parliament Research Service:

Irregular secondary movements can also create security and law-enforcement concerns. While such movements feed human smuggling and trafficking networks, countries have more difficulties in managing their asylum systems. Some respond by restrictive or deterrent measures, such as building walls and other barriers, increased border controls, visa requirements, prolonged detention and deportation. They can also lead to tensions between countries who have diverging interests, as “transit” and “destination” countries.

(European Parliament Research Service, 2017, p. 4)

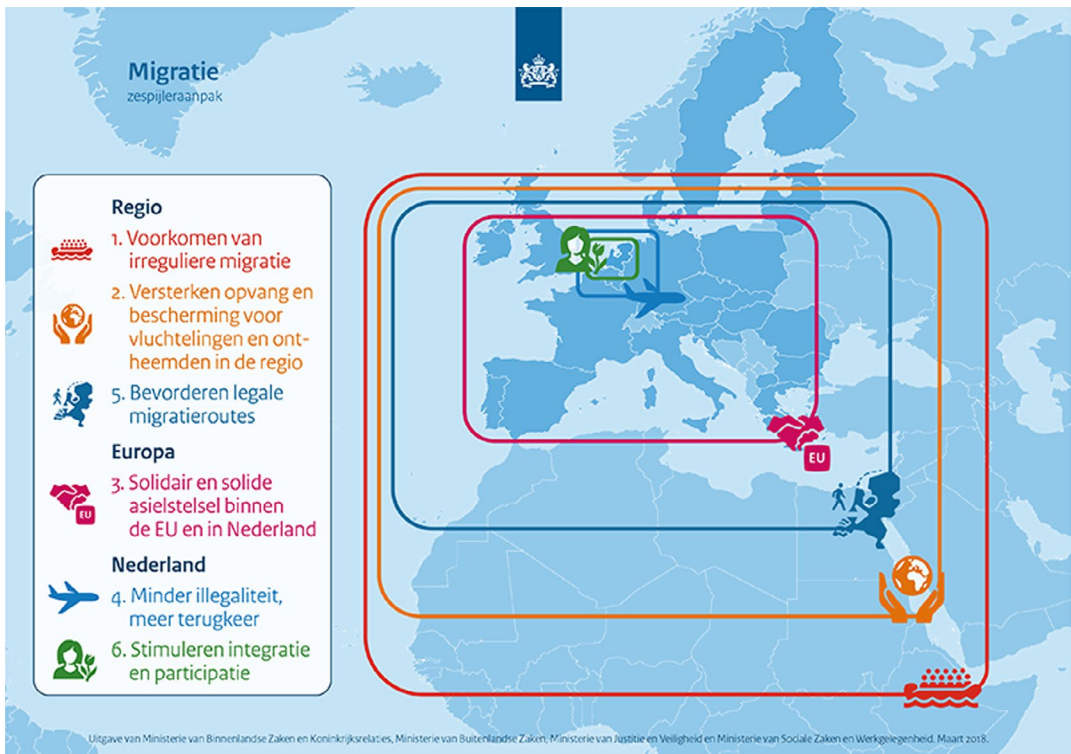


FIGURE 1 Concentric interpretations of irregular migration

What is at stake here is the way mobility regimes differentiate mobilities (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Loftsdóttir, 2018). Europe, and the European Union in particular, is on the one hand defined by mobility of some kind, including the Eurostar mobility discussed by Favell (2008), student mobility through Erasmus programmes, and EU cross border labour mobility. From the perspective of the European Commission, these mobilities make an integrated Europe work. On the other, we have mobility that is bordered and Othered (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002). This is the mobility of “third country nationals”, people from the South, “asylum seekers” and refugees. They are criminalized and framed as unwanted (Khosravi, 2011). My point here is that the patterns of Euro-mobility and Other-mobility, as well as the motivations attached to them, might be rather similar (see Schapendonk, 2020), yet they are separated by discursive frameworks, Western imagination of difference (Loftsdóttir, 2018), regulations *and also* research terminology. This separation feeds the notion that “mobility” is something that Europeans do, and “onward migration” and “secondary movements” is something that “Others” do. This separation might be indeed a goal of migration policy-makers, but in line with the reflexive turn in migration studies (Amelina, 2017; Dahinden, 2016), I argue that migration scholars should not blindly follow the same logics in their research designs and questions.

COUNTER NARRATIVES OF ONWARD MIGRATION AND SECONDARY MOVEMENTS

As noted above, many studies related to onward migration and secondary movements have created their own tactics to put in perspective the evolutionist and linear interpretations that I criticized. Some studies deal with complex and disrupted circulations between two places (Borri, 2017), others are not focusing on onward migration only, but put it in a wider range of migratory options (Zufferey et al., 2020). More fundamentally, some scholars stress the open-ended character of migratory processes. Ahrens (2017), for example, defines onward migration as: “a migration trajectory that spans multiple places, remains open-ended and continuously evolves over time.” In line with this, Mas Geralt (2018) argues to approach onward migration as a contingent approach creating room for multiple trajectories. Others move beyond straightforward movements by relating onward migration to notions of “ambivalence” (Della Puppa, 2018) and unexpected turns (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). These conceptual refinements are important since they still stress involvement and dynamics, but without translating it to specific “stages” or “gradual progress”. In other words, when we articulate open-endedness and contingency, we become sensitive to a multiplicity of mobilities, including temporary returns, trial and error movements, unplanned sojourns, circulations, zig-zag movements, and, not the least important, unexpected disruptions and blockage. Trajectories of migration are indeed often multiple (Grillo, 2007), incoherent (Massa, 2020) or turbulent (Papastergiadis, 2000), diffusing points of arrival, transit, return and destinations (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013), as well as notions of success and failure (Schapendonk, 2020).

To be sensitive to these processes, I developed a trajectory ethnography that followed West African im/mobility for several years. Some of the interlocutors I first met in my pre-selected entry points in Lombardy (Italy), Catalunya (Spain) or Randstad (the Netherlands). Other research relations last for over ten years, since I know some of the people I worked with already from previous fieldwork periods in- and outside Europe. The overall findings are based on over 70 interviews (mainly with African men, and somewhat biased to people who have only resided in Europe for a couple of years). Even more so I relied on the many hours I spent with a selection of informants, the informal conversations I had with them, and my revisits to them in the different places they ended up in. The research approach indeed had an itinerant character (see Schapendonk, 2020 for more methodological details). I studied these im/mobility processes from a de-migranticized approach (Dahinden, 2016) that helped me to move beyond the narratives of secondary movements and onward migration. The following of im/mobility made me particularly sensitive to the ways migratory projects and flexible mobilities relate to each other; how these processes are characterized by both harsh border regimes as well as people's autonomy and counter tactics (see also Samaddar, 2020).

When I take a bird's eye view on all the intra-European trajectories I came across, I might distinguish three main patterns: relocations (as a move whereby the place of residence shifts to a new place), circulations (as a form of continuity between multiple places of residence) and explorations (as a flexible type of move in which possible places to live are screened). These patterns can be identified for specific episodes of people's trajectories, but in a wider spatio-temporal framework they are characterized by vague boundaries and intersections (Bolay, 2021). For example, after a typical relocation, people may involve in new explorations, or vice versa, multiple explorations may feed a residential relocation. By being sensitive to these intersections, the staged, linear journey of "onward migration" (let alone the secondary movement) is difficult to recognize from my findings (Schapendonk, 2020). Instead, I learned how people commuted between Germany and the Netherlands, how they moved on a regular basis between Switzerland and Italy, Italy and Spain, the UK and the Netherlands, Africa and Europe. I heard how some of them moved from Norway to Spain and ended up in Germany, and I listened to stories of movement between the Netherlands and Spain. I was confronted by the diverse ways people's mobile lives got disrupted by detention and asylum regulations. I witnessed how some people got lost and stuck in Europe, ending up living lives full of waiting (Jacobsen et al., 2020) and fatigue (Wajsberg, 2020). I was confused by the way some of the interlocutors visited countries in order to explore their opportunities without knowing if they would stay there. I saw people making "European tours", or following agricultural rhythms. To understand how Africans position themselves in a post-national Europe, we need to do justice to these meaningful im/mobilities. In other words, we should prevent ourselves from analysing migrant mobility in the exceptionalized form of a "spectacular" journey (Boas et al., 2020).

Below, I reconstruct the trajectories of Adama and Mamadou. I selected the stories of Adama and Mamadou because they illustrate the intersections of the mobility patterns I outlined above. To produce space for the spatial and motivational dynamics involved, I prefer to outline two stories in detail, instead of broadening our empirical view. While both Adama and Mamadou originate from the Senegambian region (West Africa), their trajectories have very different starting points in Europe. Mamadou only recently arrived in Europe and entered Italy's asylum system, while Adama had spent more than ten years in Europe and regularized his stay through Spanish labour regulations.

Adama's mobile Europe

If one visits the city of Lleida in Catalonia in the months April or May, one is able to notice how mobility trajectories are affected by specific agricultural rhythms in this particular context. Everybody seems to come from somewhere at the beginning of the *frutta* season, and everybody seems to be on their way to somewhere else when the *frutta* season closes (Schapendonk et al., 2021). The dynamics of these mobility processes are hard to reconcile with the conventional notion of migration as a residential relocation. It is not a hub of migration, but of mobility. In this hub the rules of the flexible labour markets rule, being expressed in short-term labour contracts, precarious housing conditions and underpayment. African workers ground there for specific periods of time to work in the fields, alongside Polish, Romanian and Chinese workers. The infrastructure of the city is more or less prepared for mobility (Egbe, 2016). There are many labour offices that function as brokers between workers and patrons, there is a shelter for those people who did not find temporary housing. More importantly, there is an informally organized flexible housing system that grounds people, while at the same allowing for movement (Schapendonk, 2020).

During my first visit to this particular place (April 2015), I met Adama. He has the Senegalese nationality, but his family lives in neighbouring the Gambia. He found his way to Spain via Morocco, some ten years ago. Through a labour contract he got a legal residence permit of Spain. In the first years, he worked in the fields of Almería and Roquetas del Mar. Later, in 2011 he also started to work in Lleida. But from there he started to live in other places. He went to Switzerland, where he stayed with some friend he met *en route* in Morocco. The travel connections

people create produce a floating topography (Simone, 2019) or alternative migration infrastructure (Wajsberg and Schapendonk, 2021) that facilitates peoples movements within (or rather beyond) stringent mobility regimes. Some “try their luck” elsewhere in terms of labour opportunities or institutional protection, others try to fulfil a social script of seeing places.

Adama just tried for six months in Switzerland, but he did not find work outside the informal sector. After his Swiss episode, he crossed Italy and stayed there for a month or so, just to check how life would be over there. His conclusion was that the situation was not substantially different from Spain. But he told himself: “if you don't move, you don't know”. Adama considered himself not a person who can “sit” in one place. When I asked him in 2015, what his plans were for the next few months, he told me how he wished to travel to Africa to spend some time there. He imagined a temporary return to Lleida after that, from where he would explore different opportunities *somewhere*.

Some two months after this conversation, he indeed left Lleida, and he indeed moved some 2,500 kms southwards, but not to Africa as he had imagined, but to the Canary Islands. There I revisited him some four months later. One of the reasons he moved to Canary Islands was work, but the second reason was the fact that he started a relationship with a Spanish woman from Tenerife. She visited Lleida for holidays, and during her brief stay their relationship started. This, however, did not pin Adama down. In the next two years, he went to Senegal for a couple of months, returned to Canary Islands and from there he returned to Lleida.

Mamadou's explorations

During the intense period of political turmoil in his home country – the Gambia – Mamadou found ways to escape and took the “backway” through West Africa and Libya. Reaching Libya included multiple stop-overs, waiting periods and disruptions. After the life-threatening boat trip, he ended up in Sicilia (Italy) from where he was transferred to a small city in Liguria. There I first met him in 2015. While some of my interlocutors did not wait for an answer of the authorities to their asylum applications before they moved to other places, Mamadou was patient with “the system”. When I revisited him roughly one year later (in the same place), he told me how he gradually climbed the asylum ladder. He did not receive any residence permit, but the Caritas centre at least arranged work for him in a nearby town. He told me how he had not decided yet what to do or where to go at the moment he would obtain his papers. “I can go to different places”, he said while he referred to his “connections” in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Some weeks after this conversation, he sent me a message with the good news that he received his *soggiorno* (residence permit). From there, his mobility horizon expanded.

Like most of my Gambian interlocutors, Mamadou followed the news regarding the regime change in the Gambia closely. Especially at the end of 2016, at the time the ruling dictator Jammeh lost the general elections, he kept me up to date about the latest developments with messages and phone calls. In the same period, Mamadou started to move. He never considered a typical asylum move to Germany, as some of his friends in the Caritas centre did. He did not want to sit in an asylum centre, he rather wanted to be “free”, which means outside the daily control of asylum systems. Subsequently, he went to Spain. He explored job opportunities in the area of Valencia, and used some of his savings to find proper accommodation. At the moment I wanted to visit him there (one month later), however, he already left that place. Apparently, the several weeks he spent there was sufficient to have a quick scan of his chances. His restrictions on the labour market was the main reason to move out.¹ He moved to Germany where he could live for a while in his sister's place. In Germany, he found an informal job, and he spent there some four months before he left to southern France. He again used his social connections to adapt to this new environment, and he again managed to find some income-generating activities by working for a moving company. From there, he spent some more time in Germany.

In September 2018, I revisited the Ligurian place where I first met Mamadou. After his wanderings in Europe, he decided to return to the place he once left. He showed me some traces of his travels, pictures taken in Germany,

Spain and France. He told me about what he liked and what he learned and how he met new people. However, we also discussed the dark side of this European life, the impossibility for him to work legally in different labour markets, the institutional restrictions and social barriers he encountered. Now, after roughly one and half years of being elsewhere in Europe, he was happy to be back in the Ligurian city. As he stated: "It is my town, I am here, I am home." From this home place, he continued to move: to Southern Italy and back, and more importantly, to the Gambia and back.

SYNTHESIS: MOVING GROUNDS

The stories of Adama and Mamadou are just two of the dynamic mobility trajectories I outline in my book *Finding Ways through Eurcospace* (2020). They are certainly not exceptional in the context of my research. If a researcher had met Adama just after his move from Spain to Switzerland, or Mamadou during his stay in Germany, those two men would have fit the onward migration framework. But all their subsequent movements deviate from that same framework. The trajectories of Adama and Mamadou illustrate that the different patterns (relocation, circulation, exploration), as well as forms of internal and international mobilities (King & Skeldon, 2010), blend into each other in individual storylines. In this sense, their trajectories – and the trajectories of others in my study – can hardly be reduced to the unidirectional arrows shown on migration maps (Van Houtum & Bueno Lacy, 2020). There is no one major vector directing their movements. Consequently, their mobilities are not easy to pin down in the analytical as well as political sense, and they indeed reflect certain levels of autonomy (Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013; Samaddar, 2020).

This continuous mobility does not mean, however, that we could easily frame Adama and Mamadou as uprooted drifters or "free movers" (as somehow Mamadou hinted at). First of all, these trajectories are not drifter-like placeless undertakings. Adama was a legal resident in Spain, and Mamadou had his humanitarian protection status in Italy. Both African men felt attached to particular places, where work and friendships were concentrated. Both men returned to these meaningful places at different periods in time. At the same time, their mobility is not "free" from structural inequalities. As underlined by Tazzioli (2020), keeping migrants on the move can be considered a political technology in the Foucauldian sense. This technology is related to administrative, political and legal measures. The two illustrations above indicate that there are multiple episodes where the lack of stability, the lack of jobs and the lack of citizenship rights, force people to reroute their trajectories. We have seen a political economy of labour regimes that keeps populations mobile and, in so doing, creates an "ideal" flexible labour reserve. This labour reserve is easily made redundant when their work is not needed, and consequently, people start to move. It is important to note that precarious labour rights and temporary contracts go beyond the agricultural sector (McIlwaine & Bunge, 2019). Some of my interlocutors returned to Italy in the summer months in order to work in the tourism and hospitality sector. The political economy and systematic structures producing this unequal landscape is certainly part of the counter narrative here. Many interlocutors (if not all) have been confronted with uncertainty and instability, which fed mobility. This instability particularly leads to new explorations, as many of my interlocutors "tried their luck" somewhere else. My interlocutors also recognized how some restrictions were only made for them. This concerns marginalization of their position at the labour market *as well as* mobility restrictions. Regarding the latter, several interlocutors complained about their "incomplete papers" that did not allow them to work in other places of Europe. Some articulated that this is the reason that they can "never be part of Europe".

Although I totally agree that we need to articulate these governing techniques, I also feel that we should not downplay other reasons to move in a post-national Europe. In other words, we could indeed position Adama's and Mamadou's trajectories in a wider social script of mobility that articulates autonomy and resistant agency. Adama stressed this by portraying himself as a person who cannot sit or stand still. Mamadou, on his turn, emphasized how his mobility included a connotation of freedom after his asylum period in Italy. The point is that the politicized

notion of mobility as governing techniques, as an outcome of structural inequality, is not opposed to the more positive scripts I suggest here. These trajectories reflect hopes *and* despairs, dwelling *and* moving, disruptions *and* autonomy, subjectification by policy labels *and* the refusal to be pinned down. In this sense, these trajectories are unfolding in, and shaped by, a Eurospace that is both defined by the potential of cross-border mobility (Schengen) as well as the fight against it (Dublin).

CONCLUSION

This paper followed the reflexive turn in migration studies by questioning the knowledge migration scholars (re) produce with the emerging debate of onward migration and secondary movements. As such, it indicated the politicization of onward migration and secondary movements, and it approached this terminology as being anchored in policymaking. Following Dahinden (2016), onward migration and secondary movements could then be framed as common-sense terms, or worse, as part of a policy strategy to regain control over migrant's mobility processes (Tazzioli, 2020). Hence, we must be cautious and sceptical when these terms and concepts are taken as analytical starting points of migration studies. Or, in other words, we could take the terminology (Amelina, 2017) or our related academic practices (Aparna, 2020) as our study object. Whereas some scholars argue that the term mobility washes away most of the political and social controversies around particular population movements (Samaddar, 2020), I argue that a mobility lens can actually help to trace relations of power as well as moments of transgression.

The two illustrations of African mobility are used to further destabilize the dominant underpinnings of the sub-debate of onward migration and secondary movements. It underlines that – like the arrows of migration maps (Bueno Lacy & Van Houtum, 2020) – the grand narrative of onward migration and secondary movements hide other vital dynamics that tell us a lot about how people position themselves in post-national Europe. The stories of Adama and Mamadou counter the dominant narratives of onward migration for the mobility dynamics involved, including the multiple returns to the places they grounded in previously. Their mobility clearly transcends the straightjacket of secondary movements. These trajectories also destabilize the hierarchy of destinations that derive from stepwise migration models (Paul, 2011), and they indicate that these trajectories are more diffuse than the notion of migratory careers (Ramos, 2018). In fact, it is quite hard, if not impossible, to depict the beginnings and endings of onward movements since they are embedded in continuously unfolding mobility/immobility relations. It shows that migratory movements and flexible mobilities indeed create a continuum (Heil et al., 2017), and studies on onward migration provide an excellent avenue to explore this further, in the empirical and conceptual sense (see also Ahrens, 2017; Della Puppa, 2018). In that sense, it is a missed opportunity when research projects seek to investigate onward migrations in already prefixed directions.

However, emphasizing mobility is not necessarily the only way, nor the most effective way, to question the implicit assumptions of migration processes in general, and onward migration and secondary movements in particular. Studying permanence and immobility in a context of mobility can be a powerful instrument to achieve the same, as shown by Gaibazzi (2015) in a West African context. This could then invert some of our questions. For instance: Why do so many people stay in – or return to – places like Athens, Genova and Valencia? Can anyone ever settle in London with its changing national political climate and shifting global crises?

PEER REVIEW

The peer review history for this article is available at <https://publons.com/publon/10.1111/imig.12923>.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ENDNOTE

1. His residence permit was based on humanitarian protection, which does not allow him to work in a different EU member state. These, and other restrictions to people who are not born in the EU, are discussed by Strik (2017)

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