Re-routing migration geographies: Migrants, trajectories and mobility regimes

Joris Schapendonk[a,*], Ilse van Liempt[b], Inga Schwarz[c], Griet Steel[b]

[a] Department of Geography, Planning and Environment, Institute of Management Research, Radboud University, Heyendaalseweg 141, 6525 AJ Nijmegen, The Netherlands
[b] Department of Human Geography and Planning, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University, Princetonlaan 8a, 3584CB Utrecht, The Netherlands
[c] Research Group Cultures of Mobility in Europe (COME), Institute for Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnology, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Maximilianstr. 15, D-79100 Freiburg, Germany

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ABSTRACT

This special issue consists of a collection of papers that aims to gain a better understanding of the experiences, practices and politics of mobility in a geo-political context in which movement is not self-evident. In so doing, it focuses on the mobility trajectories of migrants coming from the global South. These trajectories are characterized by specific spatial dynamics (e.g. detours, transit points, changeable networks) as well as spatial frictions (e.g. borders, waiting, detention), the latter being produced by stringent mobility regimes. This specific empirical focus on trajectories, as we argue, helps us to re-route the geography of migration in two important ways. First, we re-direct the attention of migration related discussions to im/mobility processes and, as such, we move away from dominant discussions on migrant incorporations and state-led integration agendas. Second, as the term re-routing refers to a process of continuous adjustments and constant navigations for the migrants in question, it creates further insight into the geopolitics of transnational mobility, as well as the multiple spatial transgressions involved. This introduction to this special issue outlines the theoretical and methodological starting points of the trajectory approach that serves as the common ground the individual papers begin from.

1. Introduction

Starting from the conceptual and methodological arguments of mobility studies (e.g. Sheller and Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2010; Adey et al., 2013; Kwan and Schwanen, 2016), this themed issue aims to gain a better understanding of the experiences, practices and politics of mobility in a geo-political context in which movement is *not* self-evident. In line with other critical voices (Hyndman, 2012; Gill et al., 2011), we intend to de-romanticize mobility studies as there is a general tendency in this field to focus on privileged forms of movement and borderless spaces. We therefore focus on the mobility trajectories of migrants coming from the global South. Their trajectories towards a better future are often turbulent and include severe hardships and high risks.[1] Many do not reach their destination but end up being stuck in presumed transit places (e.g. Collyer, 2007; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Suter, 2012); others are abruptly removed from their imagined new living places (e.g. Drotbohm and Hasselberg, 2015), and, ultimately, the number of people who do not survive their migration journeys is difficult to count (e.g. Last and Spijkerboer, 2014).

Partly relying on the main ambition of mobility studies to go beyond a sedentarist social science, there is an emerging body of literature addressing the processes of im/mobility along trajectories of diverse groups of migrants (e.g. Mainwarring and Bridgen, 2016; Schapendonk and Steel, 2014; Van Liempt, 2011; Dahinden, 2010; Schwarz, 2016; Vogt, 2013; Schrooten et al., 2016; BenEzer and Zetter, 2015). Some studies point to the similarities of experiences attached to migrant trajectories across different historical settings (Lipphardt, 2015). This themed issue contributes to this sub-field of migrant trajectories by highlighting two interrelated dimensions that produce the complex geographies of contemporary migration in a globalizing, but bordering, world. The first dimension is the spatial dynamics of migration. In this geo-political context of hard borders and unwanted migration, these spatial dynamics include multiple places of transit and transfer (e.g. Collyer, 2007; Innes, 2016), transnational networks (e.g. Gill and Bialski, 2011), flexible networks of migration facilitators (e.g. van Liempt, 2007; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg-Sorensen, 2013; Alpes, 2011) and changeability of migrant aspirations and identities (e.g. Mainwarring and Bridgen, 2016; Schapendonk and Steel, 2014). These aspects are confronted with, and sometimes co-produced by, stringent mobility regimes (Glick-Schiller and Salazar, 2013; Schwarz, 2016)

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* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: j.schapendonk@fm.ru.nl (J. Schapendonk), I.C.vanLiempt@uu.nl (I. van Liempt), inga.schwarz@kaee.uni-freiburg.de (I. Schwarz), g.steel@uu.nl (G. Steel).
[1] See Steinberg (2015) for one of the most detailed illustrations.

creating firm spatial frictions – which is the second dimension of our analysis.

Spatial frictions emerge when mobilities are controlled, monitored, differentiated and blocked by means of visa regulations (e.g. Satzewich, 2015), border controls (e.g. Anderson, 2014) and asylum and deportation systems (e.g. Darling, 2011; Kalir and Wissink, 2016). As such, so-called mobility regimes actively produce ordering/othering processes (e.g. Van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002; Schwarz, 2016), societal marginalisation (e.g. Schuster, 2005; Lucht, 2012), experiences of (involuntary) immobility, detention and waiting (e.g. Conlon, 2011; Hodge, 2015), as well as risks and fear related to involuntary return movements of migrants (Drotbohm and Hasselberg, 2015). Friction, or what Cresswell and Martin (2012) call turbulence, can be contrasted with "the supposedly orderly movement of laminar flows" (Cresswell and Martin, 2012, p. 519). While this special issue highlights the ways frictions result in high risks for individual travellers, we also are sensitive to the ways they are actually created by the tactical acts of individuals and groups of migrants. In this light, frictions may ultimately lead to "new arrangements of culture and power" (Tsing, 2005, p. 19). It follows that friction is used in this themed issue as a conceptual methphor that helps us to be sensitive to the heterogeneous and unequal encounters in the context of cross-border mobility.

To understand how the above dimensions – spatial dynamics and spatial frictions – constantly bleed into each other, this themed issue puts forward a trajectory approach that follows the twists and turns of migration processes (Schapendonk and Steel, 2014). The compiled studies move from 'trait geographies' of migrant settlement and spatial fixity towards 'process geographies' of im/mobility, evolvement and (re-)routing (Appadurai, 2001, p.7). It follows that the term re-routing, that appears in the title of this themed issue, implies two different notions. First, re-routing means that we re-direct the attention of migration related discussions to the im/mobility processes involved and, as such, we move away from dominant discussion on migrant incorporations and state-led integration agendas. Second, re-routing implicates for the migrants in question a process of continuous adjustments and navigations (e.g. Vigh, 2009; Treiber, 2012; Schapendonk, 2018). By analyzing in detail where, when and how (often) migrants encounter (multiple) mobility regimes, and how many of them eventually overcome the barriers to their movement, the selected studies create further insight into the geopolitics of transnational mobility and the human agency involved (Ashutosh and Mountz, 2012). In so doing, this selection of papers consists of a dialogue between geographers and anthropologist. All authors maintain a subject-oriented approach that takes the migrants' perspective and their embodied experiences and feelings of movement and stasis as starting points of analysis. As such, the collected papers provide a thought-provoking ground to discuss the puzzling separation of migration studies, mobility studies and border studies (Collyer, 2016; King, 2015; Gill et al., 2011). In fact, all contributions to this themed issue indicate that the issues of borders and crossing borders are inherent aspects of the im/mobility trajectories of migrants who are heading towards their aspired-to destinations.

2. Conceptualizing migration trajectories

Migration trajectories can be best understood as open spatio-temporal processes with a strong transformative dimension. They may consist of multiple journeys going in various directions. As such, they question the linear logics of migration, having its foundation in push-pull models of migration theory. From this bi-polar and sedentarist viewpoint migration is seen as a mechanical result of differences between two locations (see also Cresswell, 2010). It follows that from these starting points migration processes are generally reduced to a single relocation that is based on a decision making process in the country of origin leading automatically to settlement in the destination (Zhang, 2018). In other words, the notion of migration trajectory emphasizes that the exact moments of departure and arrival are often ambiguous. A migrant trajectory may involve multiple attempts to reach a certain place, and the moment of arrival becomes highly diffuse when people live in precarious conditions lacking any form of institutional inclusion (Mainwarring and Bridgen, 2016; Schapendonk and Steel, 2014). Other migrants decide to leave behind preferred destinations since these places do not meet their expectations (Moret, 2018). The literature on transit migration is to some extent useful in this regard (e.g. Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Collyer et al., 2012; Phillips and Missbach, 2017) as it refers to the general observation that migrants increasingly make stop-overs to reach their final destination. However, the transit migration debate seems to reproduce a form of linear thinking by adding only a single in-between phase to the migration process (see also Collyer et al., 2012).

As a more dynamic alternative, the geographer Angels Pascual-de-Sans positions the migratory process as "a sequence of movements that are linked to each other by periods of settlement in spaces of relationships, in socially constructed places" (Pascual-de-Sans, 2004, p.350). Migrant trajectories, as such, emphasize evolvement and process even in times of immobility or settlement. Like so many other forms of travel (Leed, 1991), migrant trajectories have a transformative logic as a move in time and space influences personal identities, aspirations and perspectives (BenEzer and Zetter, 2015). Although individual decision making and experiences are vitally important in this context, we take a more relational lens by starting from the notion that individual decisions and experiences are deeply imbricated with, and affected by, migration facilitating actors, social networks, policy interventions and mobility regimes (see also Cranston et al., 2018).

Acknowledging the dynamics, frictions and failures that are often involved in migration processes is central to this special issue. The migrant trajectories under study in this themed issue include various geographical detours (Winters, 2018), onward movements (Schwarz, 2018; Wilson, 2018; Moret, 2018; Aparna and Schapendonk, 2018), contested transit situations (Wissink et al., 2018) as well as in/voluntary return mobilities (Kleist, 2018; Massa, 2018). These contributions challenge us to re-think the dominant binary categorization of departure/arrival, but also of refugee/migrant, legal/illegal migration and even of migrant and other types of movers (Collyer and Haas, 2012; Schapendonk et al., 2015; Dahinden, 2016).

3. Mobility regimes and migrant's interactions with these regimes

In 2005, Shamir used the term global mobility regime to highlight that processes of globalization produce "their own … principles of closure" (Shamir, 2005, p.199; see also Turner, 2007; Van Houtum, 2010; Koslowski, 2011). In this light, it is argued that mobility regimes are designed to smoothen the mobility of some, while stigmatising and hindering the mobility of others (Glick Schiller and Salazar, 2013). These regimes are often strongly related to networked apparatuses of migration management that produce and normalize their own policy object (Anderson, 2014; Feldmann, 2011). In his work on EU's migration apparatus, Feldman writes:

> It is through their work that migrants (and border-crossers in general) emerge as objects in the state's systematic efforts to regulate global circulations. Policy officials abstract an ideal "migrant" out of these flows and then codify it in policy writing, establish it as normal, and reassess its value in relation to changes in the processes to be managed.

In the literature, there are many regionally bounded studies on the interplay between migrants and mobility regimes. Several studies from the United States, like Singer and Massey (1998), have pointed to the border game that is played by migrants and border agents on a day to day basis. This 'ritualized border game' (Heyman, 1995) is a phenomenon that is still prominently present in contemporary border crossings (Anderson, 2014). In line with this, critical studies analyse the ways European and American border regimes manifest themselves in border

regions, as well as in other parts of the world through outsourced border controls. It is often highlighted how these border regimes are related to unjust and violent political acts (Van Houtum, 2010; Hess and Kasparek, 2010; Hess et al., 2016; Jones, 2016). Other studies point to the routines in European and American asylum court rooms (Berger et al., 2015) in which migrants are usually confronted with the "bureaucratic surrealism" (Hepner, 2015, pp. 234–235) of making their story of social and political suffering meaningful, credible and above all, legally effective. Similar dynamic interplays are observed by the ethnographies of Vic Satzewich (2015) and Alison Mountz (2010) on Canadian immigration offices. However, so far little attention is paid to the shifting contexts migrants pass through and the uncertain political geographies involved (see Aparna and Schapendonk, 2018). Migrants often have to learn the rules of 'various border games', they might need to shift scenarios quickly and improvise at sudden moments.

With its focus on interactions, this themed issue does not approach mobility regime as a determining structure. Migrants often find ways to (temporarily) escape, circumvent or invert the logics of a particular system to their own likings. It follows that this collection of papers tries to understand how migratory practices interact with regulatory settings during different phases of migration processes. By analysing where, when and how (often) migrants encounter mobility regimes, and how they eventually overcome the barriers to their movement, we create further insights into the politics of mobility and transgressive powers involved in migrants' trajectories. Transgression might derive from individual acts of migrants, but they may also be imbricated with, and dependent on, a lively migration industry that is specialized in the facilitation of migration (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg-Sorenson, 2013; Anderson, 2014; Cranston et al., 2018). This migration industry includes, among many other actors, NGOs (Anderson, 2014), smugglers (Liempt and Doomernik, 2006; Van Liempt, 2007; Bilger et al., 2006; Belloni, 2016), visa offices (Alpes, 2011), border guards and border people (Khosravi, 2011) and asylum lawyers (Berger et al., 2015). As a consequence, and in line with Glick Schiller and Salazar (2013), we argue for a need to place the concepts of mobility and immobility within a theory of unequal globe-spanning relationships of power.

4. The trajectory approach

Recent studies in the field of migration has started to think about how to translate this dynamic perspective on migration processes into concrete methodology. The 'trajectory approach' offers a productive way forward as this approach proposes a broad view that covers (1) different phases that migration may involve (2) different forms of facilitation at (3) different moments of time (e.g. Schapendonk and Steel, 2014; Mainwarring and Bridgen, 2016; Schwarz, 2016; Vogt, 2013; Spaan and Hillmann, 2013; Jinnah, 2015; Schrooten, Salazar and Dias, 2016; Paul, 2015; Belloni, 2016).

The trajectory approach implies a methodological shift from investigating migrants' position *in* places towards the following of migrants *through* places. It is predominantly built on the idea that we can understand trajectories better at times they are actually unfolding (BenEzer and Zetter, 2015). This invites researchers to follow the movers through time and space (Schapendonk and Steel, 2014). This qualitative research approach takes us at least back to George Marcus (1995) plea for an ethnography of world systems, that is resonating in a re-fashioned manner in mobility studies (e.g. Büscher and Urry, 2009; Merriman, 2014; see also Schwarz, 2018). However, it also deviates from multi-sited research designs that are based on a pre-selection of research locations. Following migrant trajectories might imply that the researcher ends up in unexpected research locations. By also taking the time dimension of the migrant trajectory into consideration, this approach counterbalances the rather place deterministic account of multi-sited ethnography. It makes it possible to analyse migration processes at various moments in time. In so doing, it goes beyond mere ex-post reconstructions of mobility, which conceal much of the uncertainty and

changeability that are inherent aspects of migrant experiences. Having the opportunity to talk to migrants at different moments in time, and across different socio-political settings, makes it more likely to get a more in-depth image of the experiences of im/mobility migrants are going through by including doubt, uncertainty, multiple options and vital conjunctures (Johnson-Hanks, 2002). This provides a strong starting point to understand the expected and unexpected emergence of break-through moments and the appearance of blockage and border events (Wissink et al., 2018). In addition, following migrants through various places along the trajectory articulates the spatial dimension of migration. Specific places along the route can easily be related and contrasted with previous settings. This of course might also result in constraints for the researcher as there might be limited time and/or budget available to follow all respondents anywhere, all the time.

The majority of the papers of this special issue starts from this idea of following migrants along their pathways (see Schwarz, 2018; Moret, 2018; Wissink et al., 2018; Aparna and Schapendonk, 2018; Wilson, 2018). However, in line with Merriman's (2014) claim for methodological diversification in mobility studies, it is important to note that the emphasis of following does not automatically mean that a place-based perspective has become redundant for a better understanding of migration trajectories. Starting from a relational geography approach, we may in fact conceptualise places as the meeting place of intersecting trajectories (Amin, 2002, p. 392; Massey, 2005). With regard to this, three contributions in this themed issue (Winters, 2018; Kleist, 2018; Massa, 2018), clearly illustrate that a place-based perspective enables us to understand how various trajectories (of return or intended onward movement) intertwine in places and intersect with mobility regimes. In so doing, we are able to observe how trajectories make and change places. Thus, the inclusion of place-based research reminds us that it is worthwhile to stay put at times in order to see the world moving around us (see Gielis, 2009 for a similar argument in the light of transnational migration). Some of the contributors combine this place lens with a narrative approach to reconstruct the trajectory dynamics at play.

From an ethical point of view the trajectory approach has some important limitations, which are also reflected upon in the Afterword (Khosravi, 2018). When it concerns the actual following of migrants it is important to know that people might not want to be followed at all times, and they might want to withdraw from the research at a certain moment in time. Thus, the researcher needs to check regularly whether the migrant still wants to be involved in the project. In the same context, the researcher might become an integral part of migration journeys because of personal involvement. This is not necessarily unethical, but it creates mutual expectations which the researcher needs to reflect upon. In addition, it is of crucial importance that the researcher is aware of the sensitivity of the information that s/he collects. It can be problematic to document people's trajectories across (highly surveilled) borders. In the European Union, for example, the Dublin regulation enforces the deportation of migrants to the country where they have entered the European space. Mapping migrants onward movements in this context might put them at risk, and can even result in deportation. In this light, changing real names into pseudonyms might be insufficient to guarantee respondents' anonymity: the outline of a specific trajectory in combination with some personal characteristics may actually reveal the identity of the respondent. Furthermore, providing indepth details about migrant's tactics on how to overcome certain obstacles within migration regimes might also put migrants' under study at risk. These specific dilemmas imply a need for a very accurate and ethically sound approach from the researchers' side (Bilger and van Liempt, 2009). On a more positive note, many respondents appreciated the long talks and re-visits of the researchers in different places. The fact that these social relations lasted for longer periods of time contributed positively to a trustworthy social environment that stimulate mutual exchanges and solidarities between the researcher and the migrant. These social connections allow researchers to take into account the needs and political agendas of migrants – that might ultimately lead

to the co-production of knowledge and co-authorship of research papers (e.g. Kramsch, Aparna and Degu, 2015).

5. Contributions to the special issue

This special issue consists of three interrelated parts. The first part outlines how a trajectory approach results in new methodological tools (Schwarz, 2018), perspectives (Aparna and Schapendonk, 2018) and concepts (Moret, 2018) that potentially enhance our understanding of migration. Inga Schwarz' paper discusses the methodological foundation of the trajectory approach, and positions this approach in the light of a wider critique regarding methodological nationalism, pointing to the tendency in migration studies to start from the nation-state as its main container of social processes (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). Based on fieldwork in the tri-state area of France, Germany and Switzerland, she illustrates how migrants encounter multiple hindrances while they at the same time find ways to claim their right to mobility. She thereby underlines that the intersecting mobility regimes that affect migrant trajectories are difficult to understand from conventional notions of scales, regions and nation-states. Hence, she urges researchers to unbound geographical perspectives on migration. In line with the latter, the paper of Aparna and Schapendonk (2018) provides a critical perspective on the concept of hospitality in the light of migration trajectories. Two major limitations are identified of empirical studies focusing on hospitality. The first is that empirical studies tend to overlook the changing roles of social relations (guests can, for example, become hosts, and vice versa). The second is that, although critical researchers have emphasized a relational sense of place in their studies on hospitality and migration, observations are mostly place-based and focus on how different cities or organisations provide hospitality to migrants. As an alternative, this paper uses the notion of process geography and argues for the need to actively follow guest-host relations instead of freezing them in space and time. By arguing that migrant trajectories continue when people are anchored (again) in a specific place, Joëlle Moret (2018) challenges the view that post-migration life is sedentary. On the basis of two concrete cases she vividly shows how migrants accumulate technical and cognitive skills along the trajectory and as such keep on using their, what she calls 'mobility capital', for future movements and border crossings. This concept of mobility capital sheds an innovative light on social differentiation and the selectivity of mobility regimes targeting only a specific type of migrant. It also emphasizes that migrant's opportunities to move do not only depend on legal documentation, but also on the skills that people develop through the practicing of mobility.

The second part of this themed issue emphasizes the way mobility regimes affect the im/mobility experiences, aspirations and identities of migrants. The cases include embodied border-crossings of Nicaraguan female migrants to Spain (Winters, 2018) and the hopes and fears of Central African refugees/students in Congo Kinshasa (Wilson, 2018). The paper by Nanneke Winters (2018) is based on ethnographic fieldwork with Nicaraguan female migrants in Spain and she adopts an embodied approach. Her main argument is that bodies cannot be reduced to being mere sites of gendered and racialized marginalisation, not even in precarious work situations such as global care work. By looking at migrant's bodies as key sites of struggles (both at the border as well as at the workspace), we can further unravel the differentiations that shape trajectories across time and space. The relevance of bodies should thus be acknowledged in other interconnected stages and places of migrant trajectories as well, including those of decision making on departures, routes and future plans. Catherina Wilson's (2018) paper dives into the dynamics of south-south mobility and focuses on the trajectories of refugees-students from Central African Republic to Congo-Kinshasa. By following the ways these young men navigate physical and social space, she highlights the importance of performed identities. She argues that the presence and absence of certain mobility regimes, in this case the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) in Kinshasa,

triggers specific performativity. In this light, Wilson stresses plurality and indicates that movers jump over specific discursive and policy categories simply by embodying different identities at different places and moments in time.

The third part centers around the tactics of migrants to navigate the mobility regimes they encounter. Starting her analysis in one particular locality – the Ethiopian city of Mekelle being located close to the Eritrean border – Massa (2018) clearly illustrates how Eritrean refugees and Ethiopian returnees 'play' with legal categories in order to give shape and direction to their migration trajectories. She adds an extra dimension to the mobility capital discussed in Moret's paper by arguing that the symbolic and institutional boundaries – created by an agglomeration of different mobility regimes – not only constrain trajectories but also give migrants opportunities to find new solutions to their transit conditions. As such, the paper particularly pays attention to the time dimension of migrants' endeavours to cross borders. The paper by Marieke Wissink, Franck Düvell and Valentina Mazzucato (2018) centers around the question of how migrants mediate their networks along their trajectories. By taking into account the changing social connections during transit situations, this contribution goes beyond common conceptualisations of migrants' social networks referring to linkages between people in sending and receiving countries (see also Schapendonk, 2015). This paper is based on ethnographic fieldwork among fourty sub-Saharan migrants in Istanbul and Athens. By following migrants over time, it is argued that social network dynamics explain how migrants act upon critical events (being defined as potential turning points in the light of migration) and how these events shape migration trajectories. This contribution particularly helps us to understand deviations from linear evolvements of migration processes. Nauja Kleist (2018) adds yet another important facet of migratory trajectories by concentrating on involuntary return migration. Her study on returnees in Ghana includes three periods of migratory experience, namely (a) migration from Ghana to Libya and beyond, (b) involuntary return to Ghana as well as (c) post-return life in Ghana or re-migration. Kleist demonstrates that place-based longitudinal fieldwork on migratory trajectories is suitable to cover highly diverse phases of migration and the unexpected twists and turns involved. In line with Massa and Wissink, Düvell and Mazzucato, she stresses the tactics of migrants to navigate the mobility regimes they encounter. She concludes that involuntary return procedures may disrupt, slow and hamper migration projects, but they do not necessarily end mobile livelihoods.

Finally, this themed issue ends with a brief commentary on the promises and pitfalls of a trajectory approach by Shahram Khosravi (2018) – a distinguished scholar in the field of critical migration and border studies.

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