I

SPECIAL SECTION
African-European Trajectories of Im/mobility
Exploring Entanglements of Experiences, Legacies, and Regimes of Contemporary Migration

Introduction

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ABSTRACT: This contribution introduces the collection of texts in this special section of *Migration and Society* exploring contemporary patterns of im/mobility between Africa and Europe. It proposes an ontological-epistemological framework for investigating present-day movements via three core dimensions: (1) a focus on im/mobility explores the intertwinement of mobility and stasis in the context of biographical and migratory pathways and thus goes beyond a binary approach to migration; (2) an existential and dialogical-ethnographic approach zooms in on individual experiences of im/mobility and shows that the personal-experiential is not apolitical, but represents a realm of everyday struggles and quests for a good life; and (3) a genealogical-historical dimension explores present-day migratory quests through their embeddedness within legacies of (post)colonial power relations and interconnections and thus counteracts the hegemonic image of immigration from Africa as having no history and legitimacy.

KEYWORDS: existential anthropology, experience, genealogy, history crisis, im/mobility, migration, (post)colonial

In this special section of *Migration and Society* we shed light on different patterns of im/mobility in, from, and between Europe and Africa. By focusing on migrants' perspectives on their struggles to reach European shores and cross borders, including their experience of being stuck in transit, their dreams and experiences of Europe as well as their decision to leave it behind, we explore the long-standing and unequal interconnectedness of Europe and Africa. We suggest that rather than fortifying divisions, migratory movements are a testimony to the strong social, historical, and political connections between the two continents and that current patterns of im/mobility cannot be understood outside of these long (postcolonial) histories of interrelationship.

Embedding migratory trajectories between Africa and Europe in their historical and experiential contexts is of particular importance in the current political climate in Europe, where the

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figure of the African migrant has turned into a signifier of crisis. In the aftermath of the momentary breakdown of Europe's rigid border regime in the summer of 2015, the unusually high number of migrants and refugees making their way to European Union member states quickly came to be framed as a "crisis." The "crisis," invoked by journalists, politicians, and concerned citizens, did not refer to the chronic uncertainty, violence, and lack of perspectives marking the lives of the people making their way to Europe on leaky boats or across deserts and mountain ranges. Rather, the idea of crisis permeating the public discursive arena in Europe in the aftermath of 2015 reversed the focus from crisis as the *cause* of migratory movements to crisis as an *effect* of human mobility (Carasthathis et al. 2018: 5; Strasser 2015).

The dominance of discourses of a migration "crisis" threatening the social and cultural order of things in Europe justified the installment of deeply exclusionary practices toward African migrants in or on their way to Europe (Crawley and Skleparis 2018; De Genova 2017; Tazzioli 2017). The criminalization of rescue operations in the Mediterranean, the rapid installment of migration "hot spots," the rush for deportation agreements, and the increased externalization of border controls to countries such as Morocco, Niger, or Libya testify to the perverted ways in which the logic of "crisis" came to enter African-European relationships. This logic did not stop short at policy relations. It also entered popular imaginaries, where the figure of the "deserving," pitiful refugee—a crisis figure, devoid of agency, history, or political will (see also Malkki 1996)—increasingly came to be pitted against the figure of the "bogus," economically driven migrant undermining European cultural values (Crawley and Skelapris 2018; Holmes and Castañeda 2016). These hierarchies of deservingness and undeservingness have created clear-cut moral delineations between the legitimacy of the mobility of some and the illegitimacy of others. The narrative figures accompanying the discourses of crisis are not unfamiliar. They carry eerie resemblances to figures from the (colonial) past, such as the "good"/deserving assimilated native, or the "bad"/undeserving African troublemakers. As Ann Stoler (2016: 242) aptly points out, the patterns of contemporary European narratives about race never appear from a void. They are based on "flattened, thinned-out histories of what racism once looked like."

In this special section we aim to move beyond the frameworks of crisis dominating contemporary European engagements with African trajectories of im/mobility. We argue that the logic of crisis does not just deprive migrants of their complex experiences and political biographies in exchange for simplistic narratives and metaphorical figures. It also places their mobility trajectories in a timeless void, disconnected from the histories of displacement, inequality, and colonial exploitation propelling them. Miriam Ticktin (2016: 261) argues that events labeled as crises follow their own temporal rules: they are exclusively focused on the present. "Crises" call for immediate action, with no time to reflect on their larger historical contexts. Crisis thinking thus operates within a logic of time that is based on unpredictability and suddenness. We agree with Ticktin's (2016: 263) suggestion that we need to move beyond these panicked frameworks of crisis by developing alternative temporalities. It is only if we read the movements between African and European countries against the backdrop of their particular histories that we can come to a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics propelling the movements and halts. Such a framework of "anti-crisis" (Roitman 2014) makes us search out the troubling genealogies of exclusion as well as the oft-forgotten legacies of interconnection marking European-African trajectories of im/mobility. Through in-depth ethnographic case studies, the articles in this special section show the historical embeddedness of such trajectories; that they do not appear "out of the blue," but have their own histories and follow their own temporal logic. By zooming in on the particularity of the experiences of individuals, we reveal the complex and ambiguous ways such histories seep into people's daily lives and their everyday engagements with the world.

The aim we pursue is thus twofold: first, we aim to move beyond the ahistorical frameworks of crisis dominating much public and scholarly debate on migratory movements between Africa and Europe. We do so by reading specific trajectories of im/mobility against the backdrop of their temporal contexts, both in terms of deeper historical horizons as well as their intersection with biographical trajectories. Rather than reproducing dominant imaginaries of African mobile people as figures of crisis—be it in the form of the pitiful refugee, the opportunistic migrant, or the bogus irregular border crosser—the authors focus on particular trajectories of mobility and/or immobility within their temporal embeddedness. Second, and in connection with the first point, we aim to counter the tendency of turning mobile people from Africa into metaphorical figures that have little to do with their actual lives. While frameworks of crisis tend to bypass migrants' biographies and personal histories, the authors in this special section pay attention to the details that a focus on the everyday allows them to capture. By zooming in on the existential struggles of particular individuals, we aim to develop a deeper understanding of the ways histories and legacies of im/mobility enter and envelop people's everyday lives. The articles show that an existential approach to im/mobility offers far more than particularistic and potentially depoliticized accounts of individual experiences. Instead, these experiences in themselves turn out to be both an expression of and acting upon historically rooted connections and inequalities as well as Europe's migration regime—and in that sense, they are deeply political.

Genealogies of African-European Im/mobility Trajectories

In order to discursively challenge the hegemonic crisis framework that represents migration between Africa and Europe as bereft of history and legitimacy, the articles integrate an ethnographic-existential approach with a concern for the historical embeddedness of African-European trajectories and experiences of im/mobility. The notion of genealogy here signifies a double epistemological maneuver. On the one hand, it expresses an interest in interconnected and intersecting (post)colonial histories of contemporary im/mobilities. On the other hand, in a Foucauldian sense, exploring genealogies refers to the necessity of a particular analytical attentiveness toward the tendency—by policy makers, bureaucrats, but potentially also people on the move themselves—of understanding African-European im/mobilities as "not having a history" (Foucault 1977: 139) and as appearing "out of the blue." As we outlined earlier, when deconstructing the dominant "crisis talk" (Dines et al. 2018), it is precisely the denial and silencing of histories of power relations that serve as prime ideological and rhetorical tools of stigmatizing, othering, and delegitimizing migratory quests for a better life. A further important analytical implication and result of combining the ethnographic and genealogical approach is that the often implicit and binary representation of Africa as the locus of the "bad" and Europe of the "good" life can be shown to be an ideological oversimplification. Without denying the historically grounded socioeconomic inequalities based on colonial and neocolonial/imperial appropriation of economies and bodies/lives in Africa (and the Global South), what this simplified representation excludes are diverse histories of interconnectedness and mobility between Africa and Europe. Educational migration in the context of the Non-Aligned Movement as well as (post)colonial mobility between former colonial powers and the colonies are two major examples, of which the latter is of particular importance for this collection of articles (see Perl, this volume; Souiah, this volume). Against the backdrop of these histories, migrants from Africa do not appear merely as desperate figures naively longing for Europe as the sole locus of the good life or—as painted by the ascending right-wing anti-immigrant rhetoric in Europe—as "bogus refugees" calculating how they can live a more comfortable life by "preying" on European wel-

fare systems. This collection resonates with migration scholars (e.g., Lucht, this volume; Gaibazzi, this volume; Gaibazzi et al. 2017) who emphasize the complex and diverse histories and contexts migrants act from as well as their often differentiated and transnationally grounded knowledge about particular European countries, colonial legacies of exploitation, as well as interconnections.

However, we cannot overlook the fact that the history-occluding and binary perspective prevails in dominant representations and forms of knowledge production on Africa. It crucially frames the anxiety and distrust marking the ways people on the move from Africa are represented and encountered in Europe. In their endeavor to uncover the forgotten history of the political-economic formation of "Eurafrica" and its role in European integration, Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson question the dominant (post)colonial historiographical paradigm, which presents Africa and Europe as "poles of a binary constellation" within which Africa "cannot escape the fate as the weaker part of the dyad," and Africans appear as either "victims or villains" (2014: 11). The latter image profoundly reflects the binary ways migrants from Africa are perceived in Europe and consequently seen as either a burden or threat.

As Johannes Fabian ([1984] 2014) famously demonstrated—echoing Edward Said's seminal insights into the crucial connection between othering and dehistoricization (Jhally 1998)—the temporal othering of Africa (and beyond) was an essential instrument of colonial rule. For a long time it also formed an (implicit) component of theorization in the social sciences and humanities, particularly in anthropology. The temporal placement of Africa outside and before "modernity" served as the ground for legitimizing the power of producing knowledge about it in the first place. This mode of knowledge production had different manifestations on different epistemological scales. As Fabian's postcolonial and micro-scale analysis of the disconnection of the fieldwork encounter and the ethnographic text production shows, the ("African") native "Other" was denied "coevalness" ([1984] 2014: 174) and banned into a past, which the "modern" West had left behind, as soon as anthropologists left the shared present of fieldwork and took up the task of writing up their research. By particularly focusing on the experiences of migrants, the articles of this collection embody what Fabian referred to as a "dialogical" anthropology (Fabian 1990), an approach that can ethnographically grasp both the shared present(s) of the researcher and research subject as well the large-scale interconnected histories their encounters and relations are embedded in.

Of further importance to this collection is Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) critique of historicism. Chakrabarty's postcolonial approach focuses on hegemonic images of history, both in terms of a specific ontological mode of seeing and interpreting the world from an ethnocentric historicist position and as an instrument of power enacted through the temporal location of the (African) other in the realm of an "elsewhere" or the "not yet." "Historicism—and even the modern, European idea of history—one might say, came to non-European peoples in the nineteenth century as somebody's way of saying 'not yet' to somebody else" (Chakrabarty 2000: 8). According to this logic, Africans and other colonized people are consigned to the "waiting room" of history.

This collection takes up Chakrabarty's move to "provincialize" Europe by exploring African migrants' perspectives of Europe—perspectives that reveal informed and critical ideas of mobility trajectories between Africa and Europe. The focus on migrants' experiences of im/mobility shows that rather than the ultimate and only locus of good society and a good life, Europe appears as but one (and a potentially temporary) destination on a pathway of existential mobility (Hage 2005), which often ultimately leads back to Africa (see Bachelard, this volume; Lucht, this volume).

The texts in this collection represent different takes on history and reveal particular ways migrants perceive and place themselves in and between Africa and Europe. Paolo Gaibazzi

traces the history of migration from Soninke villages in Gambia to Europe and other African countries and shows how these im/mobilities are grounded in the social fabric of the villages and, crucially, impact family relations and livelihoods. Here, migration is a process of "moving with others," actively engaging both those who are mobile and those who stayed put (and possibly anticipate moving). In that sense, rather than representing a temporal-spatial binary, Africa and Europe form a common historical-social space in spite of obvious inequality on a global political-economic scale, where European countries represent but one of the potential destinations for the villagers.

Some of the articles in the collection particularly engage with deeper historical (pre)colonial horizons to better understand the present-day dynamics and experiences of im/mobility between Africa and Europe and discover new facets of complexity of their interrelation through time. Gerhild Perl's analysis of al-Andalus shows that the history of (pre)colonial expansion is in its essence a history of interaction. The ambiguous image of the *moro* (Moor) "at the coast," which (re)surfaces as people on the move from Africa (from and via Morocco) cross and die in the sea, testifies to an ambiguous history of multiculturalism (*convivencia*) and ("Muslim") danger to Spanish identity, which has inscribed itself in vernacular idioms.

Farida Souiah's contribution makes us consider the reasons for and meanings of not (explicitly) referring to colonial legacies in the course of contemporary migratory quests. While actively "burning" present-day borders, young men from Algeria (*harragas*) have no expectations toward the French immigration regime. They do not question its legitimacy as historical subjects entitled to free movement within the Algerian-French frontier. *Harragas* acting upon the present-day border-mobility regime by "burning" the borders without invoking a historically grounded right to movement can be read as a rejection of their banishment into the "waiting room" of history, rather than indifference toward historical power relations and inequality.

In Sébastien Bachelet's account of young men from Central and Western Africa stranded in Morocco, the explicit and repeated invocation of the history of colonialism figures as an expression of claiming the right to mobility and a good life. While stranded in transit in Morocco, the self-perceived adventurers "looking for their life" experience their (attempted) movement toward Europe as claiming their "grandparents' right." Moreover, the emic experiential framing of their migratory quests as "adventure" challenges the one-way (post)colonial monopoly on exploration (and in this case appropriation) of spaces and peoples.

Finally, Hans Lucht's article shows how fascist and racist ideas of northern Italian employers—embedded in Italian history in complex and ambiguous ways—go hand in hand with their dependence upon workers from Africa. Lucht's ethnography represents a contribution toward exploring Italy's struggle to come to terms with both its fascist past and its colonial ambitions—a process manifesting precisely through the ambivalent ways migrants are irregularized, racialized, and exploited in the present.

Toward an Existential Reading of Im/mobility Trajectories

Besides the genealogical perspective, the special section brings two key theoretical debates of contemporary anthropological theory into conversation with each other: studies of mobilities and existential anthropological approaches. In recent years, there has been an increased interest in the relationship between mobility and immobility (e.g., Elliot et al. 2017; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Gutekunst et al. 2016; Palmberger and Tošić 2017; Salazar and Smart 2012). In looking at different forms or "figures" of mobility (Salazar 2017), scholars attempt to overcome the celebratory view on movement that marked many earlier engagements with migratory

phenomena. Rather than describing the free-floating, nomadic, and borderless as the defining characteristics of our age, scholars have moved toward a more nuanced perspective on mobility. By putting a stronger emphasis on the social, political, and economic processes that allow some people to move and force others to stay put, proponents of the "new mobilities paradigm" have shifted the emphasis to the interrelationship of mobility and immobility (e.g., Cresswell 2006; Faist 2013; Hannam et al. 2006; Urry 2003). They argue that in an age of globalization and movement, the complexities of social life require an analytical point of view that involves an understanding of both the things that move us and those that keep us anchored in place. Rather than assuming a universal "flow," scholars now stress that the analysis of the dialectics of im/mobility should involve a deeper understanding of the different and intersecting experiences of movement and stasis. The task for contemporary mobilities scholars, then, is to develop a focus that analyzes "how mobilities, as sociocultural constructs, are experienced and imagined" and how "various forms of movement are made meaningful" (Salazar and Smart 2012: v).

The authors in this special section share a profound interest in the ways individuals from African countries experience and make sense of their trajectories of im/mobility. They argue that peoples' movements and halts cannot be reduced to simplistic patterns or push-pull factors of migration. Instead, they suggest that the hopes, desires, fears, and anguish connected to individuals' migratory projects attest to the crucial social and *existential* role of movement and stasis. In their quest for a deeper understanding of the ways African migrants negotiate their situatedness in a world that is often not of their making—a world interspersed with legacies of exclusion encroaching on their ability to move forward or stay put—the authors make use of existential anthropological approaches to experience. Taking the existential leitmotif of *zooming in* on the daily struggle for existence as an epistemological point of departure, they examine the extent to which a return to experience as a crucial dimension of inquiry can lead to new theorizations of movement and stasis beyond the binary of structure and agency.

In establishing an experiential perspective on movement and stasis, many of the authors take their cue from developments in existential anthropology (Jackson 2013a; Jackson and Piette 2015), and particularly from a recent set of publications that have drawn the contours of an existential take on movement and stasis (Hage 2009; Lems 2018; Lucht 2012; Jackson 2013b; Schielke 2015). One of the core concerns of this emerging paradigm is to develop a better understanding of human existence through direct engagements with the experiences of particular human beings. By generating theorizations from experience, existential anthropologists aim to move away from social scientists' long-standing fascination with monolithic concepts such as "the social" or "the cultural" and toward the particularity of intersubjective, everyday processes of meaning making. They share the conviction that the existential parameters underlying the lives of the people they study need to be described in detail. They hold that anthropology, despite being dedicated to the study of humankind, often prefers abstract ideas over the actual lived experiences of humans. "We are disconcerted that one can move from one academic treatise to another without encountering a living soul. . . . The voices of those who live outside the academic pale and on the margins of the Euro-American world are heard only occasionally, or in snatches, to make a point or confirm a hypothesis" (Jackson and Piette 2015: 4). In an attempt to pay attention to the details of people's everyday experiences, existential anthropologists emphasize the microcosm over the macrocosm. This does not mean that they deny the powers or structural constraints that often govern people's lives. Instead, they "wish to restore to the anthropological worldview a sense of the small and tangible things that make life viable and negotiable despite the forces that elude our comprehension and control" (ibid.: 5).

While none of the authors in this special section is wedded to existentialist theory, they share an interest in developing analytical concepts on migration from the lived experiences of partic-

ular individuals. The challenge that unifies them is to theorize African migrants' daily struggles for existence without, to paraphrase Hans Lucht (2015: 122), "squeezing the life out of it." By taking seriously the vernacular, seemingly mundane, ways individuals in various situations of movement or stasis engage with the world, they aim to move beyond dominant forms of representations that see African migrants *either* as victims of a world they are not in control of, *or* as overly agentive border crossers heroically defying the powers attempting to hold them back. The zooming in on particular moments, interactions, events, or lifeworlds allows them to show the ambiguous ways African migrants actively negotiate their situatedness in the world. Importantly, it allows them to understand the ways legacies, histories, and regimes of im/mobility enter and envelop migrants' everyday struggles. As Laurent Denizeau (2015: 225) argues, an existential focus on particular "moments of being" encompasses an approach that sees life and the world as two interwoven entities. The world "is only comprehensible through a particular life, through its immediate world. *The* world is only understood through *a* world. Being can only be understood through *a* being."

The authors deploy different strategies to tease out these existential dilemmas. Gerhild Perl engages with a core trope of existential theory—humans' continuous struggles for recognition and worth in a world they have been cast into. She takes storytelling as a point of departure for thinking through the ways migrants negotiate the simultaneity of their positions as actors and makers of their own lifeworlds and acted upon by a world that is not of their making. Through the stories the survivor of a shipwreck in the Mediterranean chooses to tell and, more importantly, those he decides to withhold, she shows the ways people who have been humiliated by Europe's lethal border regime might use silence as a means of gaining back control over their own lives. By staying close to the social processes involved in the act of telling or withholding stories, she unravels the lived temporalities of surviving and "living-on" in an unjust world. Paolo Gaibazzi works with existential takes on intersubjectivity to analyze the ways the inhabitants of a Soninke village in the Gambia describe their ambitions to migrate not in terms of individual projects, but as a means of restoring the viability of family relationships. By reading the migration aspirations of one young man against the backdrop of the dense (family) histories of cross-border mobility they grow out of, he is able to move away from dominant discourses that present African migrants as faceless hordes of young men desperate to come to Europe at any cost. While his focus lies on the experiences of one particular man who stayed behind in his home village, Gaibazzi shows that these experiences cannot be understood in isolation. Rather, he emphasizes the importance of webs of relationships extending individual experiences in space and time. In deploying this intersubjective lens to an individual life story, he demonstrates that migratory moves can be experienced as a vital means of keeping and restoring close relationships with the people left behind. Moving away from each other can thus paradoxically be experienced as a movement with and toward each other.

The contributions to this special section show that an existential approach to African trajectories of im/mobility does not just require attention to the details of everyday life. It also requires a particular style of writing that captures the processual, dynamic, and often paradoxical character of life as lived. The strength of such an approach is beautifully captured in Hans Lucht's reflections on Ghanaian migrant workers' dreams of returning home after enduring years of hard work on the margins of Italian society. By employing a radical empirical style of writing, he sheds light on the dialogical nature of the encounters that form the basis for anthropological knowledge production. By zooming in on particular moments and interactions involving two Ghanaian men living in northern Italy, Lucht captures their existential struggles for empowerment in an environment that constantly encroaches on their ability to act. He shows that the seemingly mundane practice of sending containers with goods back home needs to be seen as

a vital act of gaining back control in a hostile social environment. Having endured the continuous belittling, demeaning, and racist attitudes of their bosses, coworkers, and neighbors in a northern Italian town for many years, they use the container business as a means of plotting their return home. Yet, while the dream of a return to a place where their existence is valued by meaningful others can function as a means of acting upon a here and now marked by exclusion, the fine-grained existential perspective allows Lucht to also capture the deep sense of ambiguity permeating this ideal of a homecoming.

Besides engaging in dialogical forms of writing, the contributors emphasize the importance of developing theoretical concepts of im/mobility from migrants' own perspectives. By paying attention to the emic notions migrants stuck in Morocco or aspiring to leave Algeria use to describe their situation, Sébastien Bachelet and Farida Souiah show that oft-used analytical concepts, such as "transit migration" or "irregular migration," bypass the complexity of the situation on the ground. While migrants trapped on the southern shores of the Mediterranean are often described as crowds of hopelessly stuck men and women, Bachelet shows that they actually like to speak of themselves as adventurers. In exploring these narratives of adventure and heroism, he again emphasizes the importance of storytelling as a means of transforming from acted upon to actors. By taking seriously the stories migrants tell to make sense of their situation, he shows that they do not just have a clear conception of the risks involved in a migration to Europe. They also formulate a profound critique of the inequality marking African-European relationships.

In a similar vein, Souiah focuses on the ways Algerian young men waiting for a visa application to France make sense of their repeated experiences of rejection and expulsion. By focusing on their emic perspectives of the visa regime, she is able to tease out a paradoxical situation: while the young men she worked with had experienced France's exclusionary attitude toward Algerian would-be migrants firsthand, this did not lead them to a critique of France's colonial debt. Despite the long history of interconnection between the two countries, which was cut short by the introduction of a rigid visa regime in the late 1980s, the young people she worked with had no temporal conception of a "before" the current visa regime. They believed that the exclusion of people like them—Algerians from low socioeconomic backgrounds—had always been in place and that it was more a matter of finding means of circumventing or "tricking" an unresponsive system than arguing for its dissolution. By zooming in on the multiplicity of experiences with the French-Algerian visa regime, Souiah clearly demonstrates that despite the many constraints this regime poses on young men from marginalized social classes, it makes little sense to think of mobility and immobility as a binary opposition. The young men's lived experiences suggest that trajectories of im/mobility need to be thought of as a dynamic process of trying to emigrate (through a visa or irregularly), staying, coming back, trying again. As such, the experience of "burning" represents a legitimate potentiality, something one can try repeatedly and that might eventually lead some to be successful in their attempts to poke loopholes into Europe's rigid border regime.

In summary, this collection of articles based on recent and ongoing research in and between Africa and Europe seeks to contribute to a comparative, critical, and multidimensional analysis of migration as one of the core and heavily politicized dimensions of the present. By combining ethnographic-existential and genealogical-historical perspectives, the articles offer a complex picture of present-day African-European im/mobilities in historical perspective. By exploring different patterns of mobility and stasis, (imagined) movement and (anticipated) return, and individual experiences of and dealing with structural constraints and legacies of power relations, the present collection provides critical perspectives on the hegemonic, simplified, and anti-immigrant ideologies and representations of migration and migrants from Africa (and beyond).

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