Time, Migration and Forced Immobility
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Introduction

Sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco

The first Sub-Saharan African migrant I ever met in Morocco was in 1999. He was sitting next to me on a bus when I was travelling from Tangier to Tetuan, two cities on Morocco’s Mediterranean coast. While we were chatting, he explained to me that he had been living in both Morocco and Spain for several years, depending on where he could get seasonal work. He also said that irregular border crossing had never been an insurmountable problem in the past, but that in recent years increasing controls in the Strait of Gibraltar were making it very difficult.

At that time I lived in Rabat, the capital of Morocco, and worked in the social sector. Since the year 2000, I had noticed that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were beginning to draw attention to the humanitarian problems of Sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco, particularly those who were continuing on and arriving at Spanish shores. Media reports about irregular boat people who attempted to reach Spain were multiplying. Whereas some years before, such reports had focused on irregular migrants from Morocco, now, images of half-drowned Sub-Saharan African migrants being assisted by tourists on the crowded beaches in Andalucía were frequently featured in Spanish newspapers. By the time I left Morocco in the summer of 2001, the boats with irregular migrants from Morocco’s northern coast were filled almost exclusively with Sub-Saharan African migrants who had replaced the mostly Moroccan migrants that had boarded them until then (Belguendouz 2009).

When I returned to live in Morocco at the end of 2007, the situation had changed. Rather than being a topic rarely talked about in government circles and NGOs, African migrants living in precarious conditions in Morocco had become a key area of interest for many organizations, including
certain local NGOs and the academic community in Rabat and beyond. Migrants were living in marginalized areas, often deprived of the most basic rights and services, suffering exclusion and poverty. Even though it appeared that the overall number of migrants present in Morocco had not changed significantly since 2000, migrants were more and more visible in Rabat and Casablanca, and less frequently concentrated in the woods surrounding Oujda, Ceuta, Tangier and Melilla, the places from where the inflatable zodiacs and fishing boats used to leave for Spain. Now it appeared that the numbers of boats leaving the coasts were diminishing, in part because border surveillance had increased and Ceuta and Melilla were surrounded by a fence of barbed wire. The transition camp in Oujda, close to the Algerian border, where most migrants used to stop over before taking the clandestine boats, was now significantly smaller. The dynamics of this migration seemed to have changed. Migrants appeared to ‘get stuck’ in Morocco in increasingly difficult conditions and for increasingly longer periods, instead of travelling through it (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008). Strangely enough, in policy circles, the term ‘transit migration’ appeared to be used much more frequently to describe the situation or characteristics of these migrants than it had been six years previously. NGOs made funding applications for projects concerning ‘transit migrants’, policy documents were written about people ‘transiting’ through Morocco, and the country itself became labelled a ‘transit country’ (Khachani 2008, Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008). The new popularity of the term was curious, given that migrants seemed not to ‘transit’ very actively towards Spain now, but rather found themselves in a situation of ‘forced immobility’ in Morocco. Khachani (2008) for example, found in a survey of more than 1,000 Sub-Saharan African migrants in Rabat and Casablanca that, on average, the majority had been in Morocco two and a half years – some of them significantly longer than that. More than 75 per cent of them stated that they wanted to leave Morocco as soon as possible but were unable to do so. Stuck for indeterminate periods in Morocco, they felt stripped of the possibility to participate meaningfully in economic, political and social life.

This situation started to change slightly in 2013, when the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, amended the newly established immigration legislation of 2003 by introducing a one-off regulation decree, which allowed undocumented migrants in Morocco temporarily to claim restricted residency and work permits (FIDH/ GADEM 2015). While this measure indeed helped over 20,000 migrants to legalize their status at least temporarily, it had only a very marginal impact on their employment situation and their access to social services, or indeed on their abilities to move on (Mourji et al 2016). Moreover, as an extraordinary measure, it did not impact on the situation of the continuing new arrivals.
INTRODUCTION

This book is specifically designed to look at the life conditions of this group of migrants, because they are on the one hand migrant settlers in Morocco and at the same time potential onward migrants towards Europe who are only temporarily immobilized during their travels. Their case exemplifies the complicated interplay of forces which condition movement and stay as well as the consequences of this situation for the life worlds of the people concerned. The book shows how they are virtually living in a ‘no man’s land’, in which they gradually lose their name, their status, their home, their past and their future. Throughout the book, the existential consequences of forced immobility on people’s lives are explored and related to questions of inequality and lack of rights.

Migrants’ ‘stuckness’ in Morocco is not a unique feature in today’s world of increasingly restrictive migration regimes. It has striking and worrying parallels with situations in other places in the world where migrants are successfully immobilized during their migration trajectories (see for example Schuster 2005a, Hamood 2006, Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008, Suter 2012, Schapendonk 2011) or else are unable to move in the first place (Carling 2002, Lubkemann 2008, Chu 2010, Alpes 2011). This book warns of the existential consequences of these practices for the people concerned and shows how they impact on the social, moral and political fabric of the many places in which they occur. In fact, the book contributes evidence of the paradox between the proclaimed moral world polity of human rights and their selective application in practice (Faist 2018a).

Aims of this book

The process by which immobilized migrants become displaced within humanity is a theme that runs through this book. In effect, by looking at migrants’ lives in Morocco ethnographically, this book seeks to make them visible as part of some unaccounted for movement of people through a space between worlds, where the normal rules and codes through which we recognize the humanity of others are in suspension. Designed to look at these processes from a migrant’s point of view, this text links their changing feelings of belonging and identity to the interplay of political and economic structures that shape migration trajectories over time and in different places. By privileging a migrant’s perspective in this research, I hope to contribute to the transformation of practices in migration policy in the hope that it may in future afford more centrality to migrants’ rights. Marginalized in much migration theory, undocumented migrants’ life worlds are often absent or misrepresented in policy-making processes and
theorizing on migration. This is the case for undocumented migrants in Morocco. I believe that this state of affairs has negative consequences for the applicability and relevance of migration policy and theory in general, but particularly with respect to migrants’ own interests. Furthermore, the vision that currently informs policy making can only lead to a partial understanding of the effects of mobility and immobility in people’s lives, because it rests on a static and categorical distinction between legal and illegal mobility which does not hold true in reality for the majority of migratory movements. The aims of this book are threefold. First, it aims to add to the critical literature that documents the human consequences of migration control policies in Europe and beyond (Schuster 2005b, Carling 2007, Willen 2007, Streiff-Fénart & Segatti 2011, Anderson 2012, Andersson 2014b). In addition to exploring the constraints such policies impose on migrants’ lives, this text explores how policy measures that help to criminalize and persecute migrants also challenge them to design a creative life plan and find strategies to maintain their individual human dignity. Second, through a critical assessment of migration from a perspective of ‘forced immobility’, the study contributes to literature that challenges some of the bias in contemporary migration theory with respect to the importance accorded to mobility at the expense of immobility as well as liberal economic thinking at the expense of universal human rights values. By doing this, I aim to add to a body of literature that highlights fundamental contradictions between the concepts, norms and rationalities evident in much contemporary migration policy and the lived experiences of migrants (Malkki 1995b, Carling 2002, Bakewell 2008b, Alpes 2011, Anderson 2012).

Third, the book contributes to an emerging concern with temporality in migration literature and brings questions about time into dialogue with questions about migrants’ aspirations and immobility (Cwerner 2000, King 2002, Griffiths et al 2013, Andersson 2014a, Griffiths 2014, Elliot 2016). In doing so, it adds to a growing body of literature on existential aspects of migration (Hage 2005, Madison 2006).

The guiding question which runs through this book was initially framed as: ‘What does the experience of “being stuck” do to the lives of Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco?’ In the course of the research process, I decided to approach this question through various, more specific sub-questions that run through the different chapters: Why and when did migrants become immobilized during their migration trajectory? Which individual and structural factors contributed to this situation? How do migrants experience this state existentially and physically? How does immobility shape their participation in and identification with community networks in Morocco? How does immobility influence migrants’ actions
and their perspectives on their present and their future? How does a life in forced immobility influence migrants’ view of time? And, last but not least, how are these experiences gendered?

In order to answer these questions, however, it is useful to place them first within current thinking in migration theory by presenting the crucial conceptual approaches which guide the book’s content. What becomes apparent is that thinking through the answers to these questions forces us to question some of the established concepts and ideas guiding migration theory and policy making and focus instead on hidden aspects of migrants’ experiences.

**Revisiting policy-charged concepts in migration research**

As mentioned earlier, Sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco are often labelled as ‘transit migrants’, even though they are immobilized for long periods of time. Only very few researchers and policy makers in Morocco have investigated exactly how and why ‘transit’ is no longer best described as a ‘fragmented journey’ (Collyer 2010) but increasingly becomes a ‘fragmented stay’ when migrants are living for years in the country without actually wanting to. ‘Transit’ migration is mostly approached as a form of movement, and the nature of the periods of ‘involuntary stay’ that most so-called transit migrants are also subjected to are only rarely explored. A typical transit migrant is generally assumed to be young, single, male and unskilled, that is, the traditional image of the guest worker and migrant labourer (Icduygu 2005). Furthermore, in much of the discourse on transit migration, individual migrants are considered as rational and economic men whose positions in the various stages of the migration process are determined by their ‘human capital’ and their own ‘free will’. As a consequence, economic considerations are given priority in explanations of transit, making the individual the primary conditioning factor for migratory movements and strategies from Africa towards Europe. This type of ‘transit’ research consequently relies heavily on neoclassical push-and-pull theories of migration (Castles & Miller 2003: 22) to explain migrants’ motivations for travel. In many studies on transit migration, great attention is furthermore paid to the irregularity of migrants’ movements, and the functioning of so-called smuggling and trafficking rings, their routes and how they are organized. Rarely is there a detailed ethnographic analysis of migrants’ migratory trajectory from their own viewpoint, in which their decision-making processes with regard to travel arrangements are revisited in light of both choice and coercion, as
has been done in the critical literature on ‘trafficking’, for example (Agustin 2005, O’Connell Davidson 2008b, Alpes 2011). There is therefore an absence of critical analysis of the ways in which ‘legal’ movement and ‘illegal’ stay are categories constructed by the state and the market, rather than being objectively verifiable aspects of migration.

Consequently, policy makers can easily conclude that the phenomenon of transit migration represents a ‘security threat’ to European governments in the form of migrants intending to circumvent border controls and enter the European Union unauthorized, ‘snatching’ local jobs. The ‘myth of invasion’ (De Haas 2008) was born. In such a discourse it is generally not acknowledged that the state and the market actually condition these ‘irregular’ migratory strategies through specific legislation and economic interdependencies. The roles states undertake in migration management are only analysed with reference to their ability to control borders. Despite this reductionist view, these ideas have become widely accepted in policy talk. If policy documents on migration in Morocco (or elsewhere) refer to ‘transit’ today, the term is normally used in the context of measures to prevent and control migration through increased border enforcement or disincentives for irregular migration in the countries of origin or in the countries of transit (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula 2008, Collyer 2010, Streiff-Fénart & Segatti 2011).

Undoubtedly, the increasing visibility of Sub-Saharan African migrants who have travelled to and through Morocco in the last 20 years appears to reflect changes in the scope and dynamics of migration in the region which require investigation and academic research. This, however, is something that the transit terminology is not able to explain adequately. My own research and that of other authors increasingly demonstrates that many migrants’ trajectories are far more complicated than the abovementioned definition of transit migration suggests (Icduygu 2005, Cassarino & Fargues 2006, Escoffier 2006, Pian 2009, Schapendonk 2011). It is increasingly clear that migrants’ trajectories differ between countries according to the policy framework, economic situation, social and cultural ties and the role and nature of migrant networks. In the specific case of Morocco, critical research has shown, for example, that migrants travelled across various countries overland where they stayed sometimes for years before travelling on to Morocco (Collyer 2006, De Haas 2008, Schapendonk 2011). In the remainder of this book it will become evident that these dynamics are due to a series of complicated political, economic and social developments in the European Union and beyond which cannot be reduced to market forces alone.

According to Turton (2003a: 3) the usefulness of conceptualizing something means constructing it as an object of knowledge, not simply
describing what is already there. In his words, the analytical usefulness of concepts lies in their role as ordering devices:

A concept is a mental representation which stands for, or represents something in the external world, such as a table. We need concepts in order to think about the world, to make sense of it, to interpret it and to act in relation to it. You can’t think with a table. You can only think with the concept or representation of a table.

The problem is that certain concepts are more influential than others and shape not only research agendas but also help to consolidate political projects. In a highly policy-driven area of research such as migration (Malkki 1995a, De Haas 2006, Bakewell 2008b), concepts have always played a major role in defining models and theories on human movement and settlement. In migration theory, the liberal-economic inspired distinction between economic push-and-pull factors has until now served as a basis for many economics-based models of migration (Castles & Miller 2003). The distinction made between political and economic migrants, which soon became the basis for refugee protection policies, has its origins in particular political views on the nation state and international relations (Malkki 1995a, Turton 2003a). Similarly, particular ideas about family, work, nation states and civil rights have laid the foundations for our current understanding of ‘mobility’ and ‘settlement’ (Turton 2003a, Vertovec 2006). These notions in turn have been used to a great extent to determine what actually counts as migration and what doesn’t (Hammar et al 1997, Anderson 2012).

The ways in which concepts such as transit migration are created and converted into objects of knowledge is never value free and can perpetuate or even exacerbate the biased nature of already existing concepts. The perspective from which this knowledge is generated can have profound consequences for the people concerned, particularly if their actual experience is not reflected in the concepts we use (Turton 2003a). The transit concept forcefully demonstrates how conceptual binary divisions like those alluded to above threaten to generate oversimplified analyses of far more complicated realities (Malkki 1992, Turton 2004, Bakewell 2008b). Moreover, by giving preference to one binary opposition over the other, some aspects of migrants’ experience tend to be systematically overlooked in both research and policy making. Typically, it is the vision of the market that prevails in contemporary migration policy and research (Alpes 2011). This can lead to a distorted picture of migrants’ experiences and to a lack of understanding of
what a migrant’s life entails and what its main challenges are. A range of critical migration scholars have, for example, drawn attention to the fact that particular meanings given to mobility or settlement in migration theory and policy making have given rise to approaches that focus on the immigrant instead of those left behind (Carling 2002, Lubkemann 2008, Madziva 2010b), while often ignoring the important interconnections between these two populations (Bash et al 1994, Faist 2000, Sayed 2004, Carling 2008). Liberal models of migration also have a tendency to overlook how structural factors, like gender or class, influence the trajectories and experiences of migrants (Massey 1993, Pessar & Mahler 2003). The focus on voluntary or forced mobility has also given rise to bureaucratic classifications of migrants as asylum seekers, refugees, guest workers or ‘highly skilled migrants’, trafficking victims or illegal criminals, which are imagined often with a fixed set of characteristics ‘as persons’. Bakewell (2008b) criticizes the use of these classifications in both policy making and research as analytical categories because this procedure often obscures the fact that migrants are above all normal people. Adding to this, Willen (2007) argues that treating irregular migrants as ‘freeloaders’ and ‘criminals’ causes them to lose their status as persons who deserve full human rights regardless of their citizenship status. Furthermore, such thinking overlooks the fact that bureaucratic classifications are not static, but rather constantly changing (Schuster 2005a), and therefore have little if any analytical value in terms of describing a bounded group of people and their characteristics. But more than anything, the ‘forced/voluntary’ divide in mobility thinking completely obscures the fact that ‘immobility’ too might be differentiated with respect to its ‘voluntary’ or ‘involuntary’ status, particularly in a world that is increasingly characterized by migration controls (Carling 2002).

**Forced immobility**

While the transit concept does not adequately describe migrants’ situation in Morocco, or the conditions which cause their particular mobility trajectories, the creation of the term does indicate that there is something in these migrants’ experiences that has been overlooked in earlier approaches to migration theory and research, which focused on the binary distinction between either settlement or movement. Moving away from the transit concept requires the construction of a different lens through which to view and analyse migrants’ experience. As I have argued above, this is important not only for analytical purposes,
but also for more adequate policy making. Therefore, I chose to look at migrants’ experience in Morocco from the vantage point of ‘forced immobility’ rather than ‘transit’. As mentioned earlier, concepts can help us to look at aspects of a phenomenon that have been thus far obscured. By talking about the ‘forcibly immobilized’ rather than ‘transiting’ migrants, we change the perspective through which we analyse migration and people’s choices, and can start to approach migrants’ experiences in Morocco from their own perspective. It is the explanatory power of ‘forced immobility’ and its relation to migrants’ rights that justifies its use over the concept of transit here, because it exposes the underlying contradictions in the conventional way of conceptualizing mobility and migration, which are evident in much migration policy in Morocco.

The analytical power of ‘immobility’ has been recognized by a number of migration researchers in recent years (Hammar et al 1997, Faist 2000, Carling 2002, Lubkemann 2008). Carling (2002) and Lubkemann (2008) both refer to ‘involuntary immobility’ in a context where an individual has the aspiration to migrate, but is unable to do so in a context of very limited capabilities. Also Hammar and colleagues (1997) and Faist (2000) contrast the immobility of most people with the mobility of the few who are actually migrating in order to show that the forces that hold people in place are often far more significant than those making them leave. While these efforts are very important, this approach maintains the distinction between the ‘non-migrant’ as the immobile person and migrants as the mobile, the travellers. This opposition obscures the fact that migrants too can be forcibly immobilized during their migratory journey. Movement and immobility are two interdependent parts of the same coin (Schapendonk 2011, Moret 2018). By questioning the connection between the migrant and mobility as self-evident, I hope to disrupt another binary account of mobility and settlement in contemporary theory.

As Turton (2003a) points out, the English word ‘involuntary’ gives the impression of an act that is done without thinking or without deliberation or as an act over which one has no agency at all. However, being immobilized or ‘stuck’ is actually not comparable to such a situation. Migrants in Morocco who were inhibited from moving further did not stay there without thinking about their alternatives. In fact, many of the people I encountered had tried to move or were consciously weighing their decisions in this respect. For this reason, I prefer to speak of ‘forced immobility’, because it allows me to convey that migrants are not moving because they find that they have a lack of feasible alternatives to do so, which they are nevertheless pondering over. Being ‘forced’ to be immobile is also very different from being ‘forced to settle’ because the latter suggests some kind of acceptance on the migrants’ part of staying in a place of
resettlement and making it their own, even though they did not intend to be there in the first place (Turton 2003a: 7). As we will see, this is not the case for most migrants in my research.

Conceptualizing the ‘forcibly immobilized’ as a distinct group of people is not possible or desirable, given their heterogeneous legal status and migration history. In addition to that, forced immobility can be experienced as a transitory status and its effects can be felt differently in different places and at different times. Therefore, forced immobility should be seen as being a part of the migratory trajectory of most migrants, not only those that are ‘stuck’ in Morocco. The subjective experience of every migrant will not be represented in the concept of forced immobility, but nevertheless it can still be useful as an ordering device that distinguishes this condition from ‘forced settlement’, ‘transit’ or ‘immigration’.

In this book, I will be using forced immobility as an analytical concept in three very different ways: as a distinctive phase during a migratory process; as a rightless state of being; and as a condition of life. All three aspects may or may not be experienced at any one time or at once by an individual migrant. They are not chronological ‘phases’ but interrelated aspects of the phenomenon. The book is centred particularly upon the ways in which forced immobility is experienced by migrants as a condition and a way of being in the world. In order to explore this, it is first necessary to show when and where forced immobility is created in the Moroccan context and how it converts migrants into rightless beings.

Forced immobility as a distinct phase in a migration process can be analysed by approaching migration from a standpoint of autonomy (Papadopoulos et al 2008) rather than from the standpoint of a mere structurally conditioned movement over borders and countries. In this context, Hage (2005) talks of migration as essentially a project of ‘improving’ oneself, of ‘moving’ existentially as well as physically to ‘greener pastures’. For the group of migrants in my study, existential motivations for migrating need to be taken into consideration when analysing the influence of other ‘regulating factors’ on migrants’ trajectories, such as the state, markets or family and other networks (Alpes 2011). In this book, I am concerned with how these multiple factors not only foster but also curtail migratory projects. I will show how regulatory forces and existential considerations actually constantly change and play out differently along the way, leading to stopovers of varying lengths during the trajectory. In every new stopover on their way, migrants have to weigh the price they pay in terms of reputation, status, resources and future possibilities when pursuing their travels. This discussion ties in with a concept of the migratory process in which phases of stopover and ongoing mobility are interdependent rather than conceived of as a linear line from A to B.
(Cresswell 2006, Collyer 2010, Schapendonk 2011). A focus on processes can help us acknowledge that the regulatory frameworks that shape mobility and immobility are in fact dynamic. Rather than inhibiting migrants’ movement altogether, these forces constrain migrants’ ability to control their migratory trajectory in certain instances and therefore structure their migratory process in particular ways. What is important in this method of analysing the interplay between mobility and immobility in ‘transit’ is that it helps us move beyond the binary representation of migrants as either agents or victims, and brings immobility and mobility into a different relation with each other.

Second, I will approach forced immobility as a state of rightless being. As Alpes (2011: 23) notes, the state has been largely neglected in migration theory as an effective regulator of migration at the expense of other regulatory instances, such as the market and/or migrant networks. To this, I would add that, in the Moroccan case, the state has also been neglected as an effective regulator of migrants’ settlement. In connection with this claim, my analysis shows that migration policies in Morocco exemplify the particular sedentary bias in contemporary discourses on rights (Malkki 1995a). In such a discourse, those who are considered ‘settled’ are deemed to have rights, but migrants who are ‘transiting’ are not. As a consequence, migrants in Morocco, who are supposedly ‘on the move’ (even though they are not moving), are systematically excluded from civic, social and economic participation through a particular policy framework that gives them only limited possibilities of legalizing their stay in the country. As a consequence, Moroccan migration policy discourse on the ‘transit figure’ can be understood as an excuse (Bredeloup 2012) to convert migrants into rightless beings. The figure of the transit migrant enables governments to uphold the idea that rights and citizenship are tied to nationality and to long-term settlement. But it is also based on a notion of rights that are temporarily restricted and can be given or taken away after a certain period of time, as is evident in the regulation of residency permits. This conceptual link between time, settlement and rights furthermore exempts the Moroccan state from taking any responsibility for the rights of ‘transit migrants’ on their soil and leads to a situation in which it is almost impossible for migrants to participate actively in society while living there.

The third way of looking at forced immobility is by analysing the specific ways in which it is experienced by migrants themselves as a ‘condition’. Here, I am building on work by Willen (2007), who has analysed migrants’ illegality in this way. I start from the premise that migration is a deeply personal life project that is closely related to processes of identity formation and belonging (Madison 2006) and community
building (Hage 2005). I will argue that forced immobility changes migrants’ existential outlook on life and leads them to modify their personal values and goals. This has profound consequences for the nature of their migratory project and their relationships with others. In the main part of the book, I will bring together the ways in which a life without rights and the struggle to change their social status in Morocco creates specific conditions for migrants’ lives which influence the way they experience the world, their own identity and their options with respect to how they can position themselves towards the different regulating forces of mobility and settlement. I use these three perspectives of forced immobility as a conceptual framework in order to analyse migration in Morocco. I find that by differentiating between these three levels of analysis, one can describe some of the complex dynamic interaction between migrants’ actions and the state’s reactions.

**Time and temporality**

Another important conceptual approach used to analyse the situation of migrants in this book is temporality. As Cwerner (2001) notes, social theories of time have to date been largely overlooked in migration literature, despite the fact that temporalities, rhythms and time frames are often implicitly present in conventional migration theory. This may be due to the complicated nature of social theories of time and the great diversity of approaches existing within them (Adam 1995). In recent years, however, time and temporality have started to be acknowledged as important for the study of communities more generally (Bastian 2011a) and migrant communities in particular (Cwerner 2001, Griffiths et al 2013, Andersson 2014b, Kleist & Thorsen 2017, Fontanari 2019). Social theories of time are also particularly useful for understanding the situation of the Sub-Saharan African migrants I encountered in Morocco. Precisely the fact that time and temporality can be understood, lived and felt in a variety of different ways makes them an important starting point for the arguments presented here. By working out the different and competing time perspectives of migrants, states and markets, it is possible to uncover the friction between migrants’ contradictory notions of time in immobility and how they attempt to adapt to changing temporal frames of reference. The book thus connects theories on time and temporality to migrants’ own understanding of themselves and their existential outlook on life.

Living outside generally accepted categories of successful migrants who are able to advance their reputation, wealth and community standing through their trajectory, the subjects in this book have had to come to
terms with their peculiar situation of ‘stuckness’. In this respect, I felt that my conversations with migrants displayed above all a life in contradiction. We often talked about how little sense everything made to them. In their dealings with aid organizations, border regimes, the asylum system and the Moroccan state, they frequently complained about the lack of logic in the application of the law, of being able to ‘play by the rules’ and regularize their stay in Morocco or to continue travelling legally. On the one hand, they often talked about hopelessness and, on the other, about the need for continued survival. We also talked about the contradiction between their ideas of a successful life, community, family, belonging and their proper life in the present, the link to their past and their imagined future.

In many ways, the migrants I met had to grapple with how their moral values, their beliefs in human rights and their identity started to crumble while they were living in ‘different times’, in which past and future were losing their meaning. A feeling of alienation marked their stories and their actions and reminded me of Camus’ (1942) description of the absurd. For him, absurdity was a feeling that one’s actions are divorced from the setting in which they occur. According to Camus, absurdity was similar to feeling estranged from home and hope of a predictable future. Absurdity thus implies an estrangement from time and place and can therefore be compared to what it means to feel ‘stuck’.

Adam (1994) argues that particular notions of industrial time, where time is money, are generally at the heart of notions about progress and modernity. She goes on to argue that other experiences of time constantly coexist with these temporal discourses of modernity and have to be brought into meaningful relationships with them in order to make our contemporary life courses worthwhile and dignified in our own eyes and those of others. Similar approaches of analysis are also to be found in literature on feminist notions of time, which investigate the dominant and binary discourses in contemporary notions of time and temporality in order to uncover their particular consequences for women’s time uses (Davies 1990), political activism (Adam 2002, Tronto 2003) and feeling of life’s worth (Gardner 2002).

Dominant western discourse on successful migration also reproduces a certain linear narrative of migrants’ time, in which successful migrants use their lifetime to accumulate wealth and social capital for a prosperous future (Sayad 2004). The migrants I encountered had to come to terms with the fact that this notion of time did not match their own feeling of temporality in Morocco, where their present was not ‘moving’ into a future, but effectively standing still. This made their time effectively ‘useless’ – at least in the eyes of migration policy makers, and sometimes also in their own eyes.
Ethnography of immobility and time

Robertson (2015) argues that traditional ethnographic methods which often occur at fixed moments and over fixed durations often fail to engage with the complex questions around migration and time. It is important to capture both the times of states and markets and other regulatory authorities in the migration context in their efforts to seize people’s time or shape their rhythms. At the same time, one has to focus on how time is felt and lived by migrants themselves and how different time perspectives interact with each other. Therefore, I have made an effort to gather data over a long period of time. Much of the data regarding the meaning of immobility and time in migrants’ own accounts has been gathered through an ethnographic research methodology based on participant observation, interviews and conversations which span a period of over ten years, from 2007 until 2017. Most of the data, however, was obtained between 2007 and 2012, when I interviewed and observed the same migrants over several years, thus being able to document the way in which their lives evolved over time. Using documentary analysis of policy documents, NGO pamphlets and newspaper articles, as well as semi-structured interviews with a range of organizations providing social services for migrants in Morocco, I wanted to contrast migrants’ interpretations and perspectives with concepts used in the practical application of migration policy and theory.

During the research, it became obvious to me that underlying unequal power structures like gender, class, age and ethnic origin influence migrants’ activities, motivations and feelings, and needed to be incorporated in the analysis of mobility and immobility. While a differentiated analysis of how gender class, age or other heterogeneities shape the experiences and existential outlook of migration is beyond this study, I have attempted to describe the differential experiences of both my male and female informants when describing migration trajectories, forms of survival and also ways of waiting in immobility. By analysing male and female migrants’ actions and perceptions as motivated by and produced through their particular positions within unequal power dynamics, I hope to link the research to one of the central, yet still unresolved, intellectual puzzles in migration theory, which is the dynamics between individuals’ particular migratory strategies and larger, structural influences on mobility and immobility. In this context, I have been inspired by Roitman’s (2005) concept of regulatory authorities and Alpes’ (2011) application of the concept in the context of migration in Africa. Alpes’ work in particular is revealing of the ways in which migrants navigate between the regulatory authorities of family, state and market to realize their migratory aspirations.
in a context of restricted mobility. I have expanded this to the situation of migrants in Morocco to explain how their relation to different regulatory authorities changes during their travels and is, in fact, dynamic (Vigh 2009). I then attempt to link this to migrants’ changing perceptions of their own life course and the existential dilemmas this brings about in their lives (Johnson-Hanks 2002, Madison 2006, Hage 2009b).

In my fieldwork I have privileged two different settings in Rabat which represented separate and distinct environments for migrants’ actions and behaviour: I conducted research in migrants’ homes and neighbourhoods, where most of their private and community life took place, and I visited and observed migrants in churches, parks and NGOs, where they interacted with other migrants. I interviewed 21 women and 19 men from nine different countries (Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Republic of Congo, Ghana, Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger and Nigeria) but I have spoken with and observed many more migrants, albeit not as intensively or repeatedly, and these informal contacts have also contributed data to the research process. Migrants were both Muslim and Christian. The 40 that appear in this text all participated in the research from 2009 until 2010 and in eight cases until 2012. All migrants have been interviewed at least twice, once in 2009 and once in 2010. Five of the initial forty migrants were interviewed again in 2015, 2016 and 2017. I have spent considerable time with the migrants. I followed them while they were going about their daily chores or met them in churches, NGOs or at their workplaces in the street where they were selling items, begging or waiting for work. I accompanied them to football matches and social gatherings and did participant observation at a summer school with children and women, organized by a Spanish church-based association. Once I had left Rabat, I was able to keep in contact with some migrants via chat, email and Facebook. A regular exchange developed with only four of them, as the majority were not able to use the internet frequently because of the cost or because of their limited familiarity with computers. The names of respondents that appear in this book are pseudonyms.

A brief note about the research context in Morocco

At the time I was undertaking my research, most Sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco were living in Rabat. As the country’s capital, Rabat has roughly 600,000 inhabitants and is situated only about 50 kilometres from Casablanca, the main industrial port in Morocco and the city with
the biggest international airport. These cities are connected through a fairly modern railway and a highway (see Figure 1). As well as the Moroccan government, most embassies and international organizations are located in Rabat and there is a strong military and police presence to protect the safety of the royal family, who have their main residence here. In comparison to Casablanca and Tangier, Rabat has no industrial port, even though it is a coastal town. It has some industry, notably in the textile, food processing and construction sectors, but much employment is generated through government-related administration and civil service. Therefore, unemployment, sub-employment and poverty among the young, unqualified population are very high (Royaume du Maroc, Haut-Commissariat du Plan 2007). The move of the impoverished rural population towards the cities has increased this trend in the past 40 years (Abouhani 1995). Simultaneously, Rabat is the home of some of the country’s elite and certain families close to the monarchy are politically, socially and economically highly influential through a system of patronage.

Over the past ten years, the King of Morocco Mohammed VI and his government have increasingly invested in modernizing the centre of

**Figure 1: Map of Morocco with railway connections**
Rabat in order to improve its profile. A modern marina has been built, as well as a tramway system and a number of important new government buildings. Certain residential areas have become comparable with those of any rich, western, industrialized city: shopping malls, expensive restaurants, nightclubs and villas fill extensive areas in Rabat and testify to the luxurious lifestyle of rich, secularized Rabatis and mostly European expatriates. The subsequent increase in real estate prices has accelerated the segregation between ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ parts of town. Housing in the centre of Rabat and its main residential areas has become increasingly expensive, so that many middle class Rabatis are now obliged to live in suburbs which were once small villages adjacent to Rabat, like Temara or Khemisset. More and more working class Rabatis also tend to live or work in Sale, the neighbouring city, which is only separated from Rabat by the mouth of the river Bou Regreg (see Figure 2). Sale has large suburbs where the majority of local workers, rural migrants and poorer people live. An increasing number of middle class white-collar workers also buy houses in residential areas there, because they are comparatively cheaper than similar housing in the outskirts of Rabat on the other side of the river. From all these areas, Rabat can be

Figure 2: Map of research site
reached through shared taxis, the tramway, buses or by train, but transport is generally time-consuming and expensive.

Because of the difficulties connected with transport, many working class Rabatis who do not own a car still prefer living in areas of town that are relatively close to the centre. Some of these areas developed from shanty towns that were occupied by clandestine settlers at the beginning of the twentieth century and during the time of rural mass exodus towards the cities from the 1970s onwards (Abouhany 1995). These parts of town have since undergone enormous transformation, but half-finished buildings are still seen alongside two or three storey houses. Lively informal markets, small parks and businesses are scattered everywhere and the regions are reasonably well connected to the centre of town through buses and taxis. Urban planning has been largely neglected and much of the construction there is provisional, unplanned and ‘home-made’. There are only a limited number of asphalt roads apart from the main ‘arteries’, and public infrastructure such as schools, sports grounds and parks are limited. Within Rabat, most of my research was conducted in two municipalities (or communes in French), which belong to these parts of town (see Figure 2, map of research site). These are Yacoub El Mansour and Youssoufia. Within Youssoufia, I worked extensively in Takadoum, Hay Senai, DjiBlaisy and Douar Doum. In Yacoub El Mansour, my research was concentrated – but not limited to – the areas of Ain Cora, El Quoas, Kamra, G3 and G5. These parts of town have a large informal economy and housing remains quite affordable. They are still mostly inhabited by the Moroccan working class but are also the main areas where Sub-Saharan African migrants live, even though many of them are also moving to Sale and further out of the centre in recent years.

Most organizations working for Sub-Saharan African migrants maintain their offices in Rabat. There is a vast array of institutions that migrants can turn to for advice, help and support. These can roughly be divided into four groups: international organizations, international NGOs, national NGOs and diplomatic missions and/or development agencies.

A large number of Sub-Saharan African migrants are practising Christians. There is a Catholic church and a Protestant church in the centre of Rabat dating back to the colonial period. Both churches run an English- and a French-speaking service on Sundays. Sub-Saharan African nationals – mostly diplomats, students and migrants – still represent the majority of the attendees of francophone services in the Protestant church in the centre of the city. Their presence is particularly visible in the gospel choir, which plays an important part in services. However, the majority of practising migrants belong to Pentecostal church communities, which I also frequently visited during the research.
Chapter structure

If the people whose experience I describe had followed a linear journey, I would have started with their travels and ended the book with their arrival in a country of settlement. However, as this book is led by their experience, the chapters explore different dimensions of life in limbo in a circular manner. There is no escaping from forced immobility for the subjects I encountered. The eight chapters of this book are therefore not organized in chronological order and do not pretend to present temporally sequential information but rather overlapping aspects of my research subjects’ lives in Morocco. In Chapter 2, I present the ways in which international policy makers in the European Union have been able to frame migrants as rightless beings who cannot count on the protection of the international community of states, even though human rights are recognized as a kind of world moral polity of sorts (Faist 2018a). By giving an overview of the evolution of European migration policy and its effects on Morocco, I am describing how time and space have come to serve as powerful tools in global migration governance to discipline and punish unauthorized movements and stays through forced immobility and temporary protection. Morocco’s case is introduced as a particularly telling example of how these policies impact on people outside European borders. Chapter 3 focuses on migrants’ journeys from their countries of origin to Morocco. This chapter analyses how phases of mobility and immobility are interdependent parts of the complex migration trajectories of my migrant research subjects. It explores the variety of obstacles that migrants encountered during travel towards Morocco, and the ways in which they continued to negotiate their social locations with respect to mobility along the way. Thus, rather than ‘transiting’ through different places relatively unchanged, the data shows how migrants’ stays in various places and the ways in which they travel have a profound impact on them and their future migratory project. Following from this, in Chapter 4, I describe how migrants actually arrive in Morocco. The data presented in the chapter situates their lives there in a context of extreme political, economic and social marginalization. I show how ‘transit’ migrants’ rightlessness in Morocco has been reinforced by the Moroccan state through a national politics of migration that increases migrants’ feeling of insecurity. I argue that this is a government strategy inherent in Moroccan governance structures which is aimed at disciplining and subduing potentially defiant populations under the rule of the authoritarian state. Insecurity and fear make life for migrants unpredictable and shape their existential outlook on life. Chapter 5 therefore changes the perspective and focuses on migrants’ image of themselves when stuck in Morocco. It describes the experience
of being stuck in transit as an existential dilemma and analyses migrants’ effort to resynchronize their temporal frames of reference with those of the external world. Through the stories of migrants I interviewed, I show how people become gradually disconnected from the past and the future and struggle with a meaningless life in the present. Chapter 6 then shifts the view from how migrants see their own life to how they view each other. The chapter explores the contradictory community relations between migrants in Morocco by looking at moments of reciprocity and mutual help on the one hand, and exploitation on the other. I discuss how migrants’ relation to mobility, place and time conditions these dynamics. Chapter 7 is about the diverse strategies migrants use to ‘revolt’ against the absurd conditions they find themselves in by attempting to leave the country. The description of migrants’ activities in view of their departure shows how they employ a variety of waiting strategies that help them re-establish some sense of temporal and spatial order in their lives.

The conclusion in Chapter 8 wraps up the arguments made in the course of the book and attempts to give some tentative answers to the main question concerning the consequences of ‘stuckness’ on people’s lives in Morocco. In summary, the book shows how the current policy mechanisms which limit certain people’s mobility through border controls can have particularly negative effects on the life course of individuals. The discussion of migrants’ situation in Morocco shows how international migration control policies are actively hampering migrants’ and would-be migrants’ abilities to design a dignified, self-controlled life plan and to establish productive and mutually supportive relations with others. Such policies foster segregation, marginalization and exploitation. As such, control policies are doing much more than simply inhibiting movement. They are also inhibiting people’s effective settlement and their development as persons.

Notes

1 According to unofficial estimates from NGO representatives I interviewed who had worked in the country since then.

2 According to humanitarian workers from NGOs working in Oujda, there were 300 migrants in the camps in the summer of 2009, as opposed to roughly 600–800 three years earlier.

3 It is estimated that in urban areas of Morocco, around 35 per cent of the population relies on work in the informal sector, most of which is concentrated in business and service sectors. (Haute Commissariat du Plan 2007, Enquete Nationale sur le secteur informel 2006–07, Rapport de synthese, p. 39, www.wcp.ma). According to recent official statistics, in the region of Rabat there are approximately 127 food processing industries, 89 textile and leather industries, 234 chemical industries and 119 metal-related industries. Together, these sectors generate only 38,000 jobs, of
which almost two-thirds are in the textile industry. The current unemployment rate is officially 16 per cent, but is unofficially estimated to be 25 per cent of the active population (Royaume du Maroc, Haute Commissariat du Plan 2009, Annuaire Statistique de la Region Rabat Sale Zemmour Zaer, www.wcp.ma).

4 The English-speaking Protestant community is more divided and there is a strong prominence of American religious social workers and missionaries whose rites are becoming dominant in the anglophone service of the Protestant city centre church. English-speaking migrants from Africa are present here less often and the majority of community members are still predominantly white American or European.