Introduction

In this chapter I will look at the reasons why people migrated to Morocco and the ways in which their journeys evolved by relying on migrants’ own accounts of their travels. I will analyse both men’s and women’s journeys, indicating significant similarities and differences within them. I contend that this helps to analyse migration, its causes, and migrants’ journeys from a standpoint that goes beyond a mere economic perspective on human mobility. By reviewing Sub-Saharan African migrants’ conditions of departure and the variety of regulatory authorities (market, state and family) that structure their movement I will show how aspirations and capabilities to migrate are produced and reproduced not only at the point of departure, but also along the way. I conclude that on their way to Morocco, the status of migrants can shift from legal to illegal, forced to voluntary or trafficked to smuggled, and the amount of control they have over these processes changes with the places they travel to and the time they spend there. The particularly long journeys I describe significantly shape the experience of migration and mark migrants’ gendered identities in a way that the ordinary everyday movements of people do not. In fact, the migration processes described here are full of vital conjunctures, which are zones of possibility that emerge around specific periods of potential transformation in life (Johnson-Hanks 2016: 7). According to Johnson-Hanks (2016: 7), vital conjunctures are particularly critical moments when more than usual is at stake. They are outside of normal time in that they no longer entail the expectation of a particular trajectory which would lead to a particular future in some ordered way (Johnson-Hanks 2002).
These processes shape migrants’ outlook on life and their life course. They bring to the fore how migration for them is best seen as an existential quest, rather than a mere movement from A to B. Migrants change not only their physical location but also their social location (Pessar and Mahler 2003, Hage 2009a, Stock 2012) and their aspirations and expectations of the future are shaped by these experiences (Johnson-Hanks 2002).

Migration as an existential quest

Contrasting the state’s view of the migration process presented previously with a description of migrants’ journeys from their own perspectives lets us appreciate migrants’ complicated relationship to mobility and settlement. It brings to the fore how their changing migration status and control over their trajectory is mediated by state policies, but also by the market and a diversity of migrant networks. To start with, I look at migrants as ‘adventurers’ for whom migration is essentially an existential quest rather than a mere economic endeavour. I agree with Hage (2005: 469) that in contemporary migration politics and theory, the significance of movement in migrants’ lives is not considered important in order to define them as migrants. Coming from a mobility perspective, Schapendonk (2011) argues, for example, that neoclassical migration theory has resulted in a general tendency in migration research to focus on departure and settlement at the expense of travel. Transnational scholars too have critiqued economically oriented theories for neglecting migrants’ continuing relations with home countries and the fact that migrants tend to travel back and forth between home and host countries (Glick Schiller et al 1992). Because of this, some have accused migration researchers of ‘methodological nationalism’ when they restrict the analysis of migrants’ citizenship status to their social, economic, political and cultural relations with host countries (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2003).

However, recent research by authors like Hage (2005), Chu (2010) and Alpes (2011) highlights that the structural position of an individual in their country of origin is particularly critical in shaping the ways in which movement across borders is becoming a significant and important event in people’s lives, outweighing all possible setbacks and risks. Rather than being merely a means to cross borders, migration can be meaningfully understood as a movement that helps people to ‘go places’, in the sense of being a means to individual development, which cannot be realized where they are living, and they therefore choose to pursue this elsewhere. Hage argues in this context that migrants usually do not link their right
and desire for mobility to their social or citizenship status. Instead, he states that mobility is often conceived as a means to increase social and personal freedom and possibilities:

> We do not engage in existential mobility in order to experience physical mobility. The contrary is true: we engage in the kind of physical mobility that defines us as migrants because we feel another geographical space is a better launching pad for our existential selves. (Hage 2005: 470)

For Hage (2005), this is what distinguishes migrants’ travel from tourists’ journeys. It follows that in order to feel migration as a significant event in one’s life it must involve being uprooted from things that one is familiar with and a sense of being out of place. This sense of being out of place could well be defined as being displaced from one’s social location. Pessar and Mahler (2003: 816) define social location as a person’s position within interconnected power hierarchies created through historical, political, economic, geographic, kinship-based and other socially stratifying factors. The idea of social location is helpful to understand how migrants’ existential motives interact with other regulating factors in creating mobility and immobility in different places and times. I agree with Hage (2005: 471) that taking into account this relationship between existential and physical movement allows us to better explain different kinds of mobility rather than equating the experience of the ‘totally at home having fun tourist’ and that of the ‘fragile, dislocated and hesitant refugee’. It also allows us to go beyond the binary representation of the tourist as ‘good citizen’ and the irregular immigrant as ‘benefit scrounger’. By reconstructing the understandings migrants have about their trajectories in the remainder of this chapter, I attempt to outline the tensions and contradictions between aspirations for migration and detention, moving and settling, and overlapping migrant categories, which migration policies seek to distinguish and demarcate.

The adventurers

For migrants in Morocco, migration is a significant, existential movement through which they hope to shift their social location. My interviewees never considered themselves as ‘transit migrants’ but frequently referred to themselves as ‘adventurers’ instead. For the adventurers, migration is like a rite of passage that must be overcome in order for them to become a more complete individual, someone the community can be proud of,
like the adolescent child that can face important challenges and tests in life by going through a ‘rite of passage’. Like a rite of passage, migration is necessary for the building of one’s future because it involves becoming uprooted from things one is no longer suited to. That migrants consider themselves as adventurers illustrates that they are already in a liminal situation in their countries of origin, which separates their social existence from the dignity that they hope to achieve through migration (Streiff-Fénart & Segatti 2011).

Jean, a young man from Cameroon who became one of my key informants, described himself to me as an ‘adventurer’. According to his story, he had no obvious economic or political reasons to leave his parents’ home. He grew up in a very strict household in Yaoundé, not very rich, but not poor either. All in all, he considered that he lived a fairly comfortable life and he was able to attend a good school. But while his older brother and sister were excellent students (his brother now holds a PhD and has a good position at a research institute, and his sister is working and has a family), Jean achieved rather mediocre results. His father, a military man, and his mother, a businesswoman, were worried about his future. When he turned 18, he knew that he did not want to go to university and dreamt of a career in acting, an option not approved of by his family. He felt like an outsider in the family, because he had not been as successful as his older siblings and did not want to follow similar paths, but thought that he had to prove himself in his own way. This became the primary reason for him to leave the country. He told me that he did not plan his journey very much at all. One day, after a dispute with his father, he took the little money he had and, without uttering a single word to anyone, took a bus and left for Chad. His example illustrates that existential reasons to migrate are not always dependent on economic conditions in the country of departure, but rather are based on a person’s own perception of their social location with respect to possibilities and choices open to them in life. Both women and men referred to migration as aller en aventure (Escoffier 2006, Pian 2009, Alpes 2011), but clearly with gendered undertones. Lise, a woman in her late twenties from Congo, is a good example of this.

Like Jean, Lise came from a middle class household, and both her sister and aunt were French residents, living in Paris. Because of this, her family counted on frequent remittances from them and Lise knew a lot about life in Europe, particularly in France. Despite holding a good job in customer relations for a Belgian firm, she wanted to see the world and ‘amuse herself’, as she told me. Her family was very much against her leaving the country, so she made the preparations secretly and only
told her brother in Kinshasa and her sister in France about her migration plans. She told me:

“They didn’t understand why. They couldn’t see a valid reason. There were no money problems, my life was OK. They thought that if I was to go, I should be waiting to marry someone abroad. Because of my family, I could have married someone well established, some Cameroonian abroad, in France, maybe. True. But I wanted to go, see the world, do something different. I did not want to wait for a man to come and get me.”

Jean and Lise both migrated in the hope of finding a place where they could be free from the family constraints that prevented them from pursuing their own wishes and goals for a future they had freely chosen.

The adventure and its relation to economic and political reasons for departure

At this point, it is worthwhile pointing out that only four of the migrants I interviewed talked about their migration as an existential question in similar terms to Jean and Lise. The majority described their decision to leave as motivated primarily by a mixture of economic and political factors in which a desire for ‘adventure’ was just a part of other, complex reasons. Similar to Pian (2009), I found that the refugees and asylum seekers I encountered were adamant in distinguishing themselves from ‘adventurers’, because they did not choose to leave primarily in order to improve their social status but because they feared for their lives. However, even refugees generally acknowledge that they are ‘in the adventure’ when they refer to their travels through Africa. This indicates that existential motives can exist alongside others, even in cases of forced migration. The migrants’ description of the adventure complicates the idea of a clear-cut difference between ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ migration, to which policy makers usually refer.

I got the impression from interviews that migrants’ decision to leave their home countries often came at a moment when something unexpected had happened and disrupted their lives. In fact, migration appeared to be the response to some profound uprooting. The migration project resembled a coping strategy that helped them to deal with existential shocks. Angelique from Cameroon is a good example of a
migrant who had very mixed motives for leaving, which could be described as both ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’, but who preferred nevertheless to give me the adventure-story reason for leaving. According to her description, Angelique also comes from a fairly middle class background:

“... everything was fine. But then, the business where I worked got broken into, they stole everything and killed the boss, so I got laid off. Then, a bit later, my husband left me, just from one day to the next, I think he was sick and tired of the economic difficulties. I guess he went to Gambia for work. I don’t know, I never heard from him again. So I was sitting there on my own, with my daughter to look after. It was very hard. I started to get angry at my husband because I thought: He just leaves me here to deal with everything. So I thought, I can do the same thing he can, if he can go on the adventure, I can as well! I had heard that people were going to Spain and picked oranges there. I thought: I am strong, I am young, I am not going to stay here, hands crossed and lament myself. And this is how I decided to leave my daughter with my mother and come to Spain.”

In Angelique’s case, migration was her solution for recuperating or maintaining a certain status as mother, employee and wife, which she had lost when she lost her job and her husband left her. In her narrative, and other accounts I heard, the ‘adventure line’ was used as a rhetorical means to give their story a more ‘heroic’ or exciting turn and to make it more of a deliberate choice than a ‘forced’ act of desperation. By turning migration into an adventure, migrants regained control over their decision, at least while talking about it. Furthermore, the adventure reasoning made migration look like a legitimate choice and a good alternative in the face of otherwise daunting perspectives for their future lives. I found that women’s motivations in particular to migrate together with their husband and/or children was often related to their fear of losing their status as mother and wife if they stayed behind alone, or fear of political persecution related to their partner’s political activities (see Table 1).

By contrast, in male migrants’ accounts, migration was often narrated as a strategy to become someone important in public life, someone to stand out in the community as a respectable individual who was contributing to the reputation of his family and kin. They felt that achieving this status would have been impossible had they stayed. An illustration of this point is that in eight cases of male migrants with whom I talked, the decision to
leave coincided with moments in which men had lost business ventures, jobs or other means of making money (see Table 2). Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the diversity of events that have triggered migrants’ decisions to leave and which emerged during my interviews with migrants. Often, several events and reasons were combined in their accounts and not all of them wished to talk about them.

Often, migrants’ accounts revealed that there was not just one clear reason to leave but that the decision was taken in response to a variety of factors and events (see also Escoffier 2006, Collyer 2010, Schapendonk 2011). So rather than representing simply an economic move, in these accounts migration was legitimized by migrants as a desire to modify, maintain or attain a certain ‘social location’. As Pessar and Mahler (2003) imply, social status or self-worth is often also intrinsically interwoven with economic means or political power. Therefore, existential motives for migration should not be viewed separately from economic or political

### Table 1: Women’s accounts of reasons for leaving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important events in female migrants’ accounts that influenced their decision to leave their country of origin</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Follow husband in order not to be left behind</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Violent attacks on home or possessions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Separation or death of partner/husband</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Partner’s loss of job</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Political persecution</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Death of family members</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Wish to increase business success</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of choices regarding career and lifestyle or those of their children</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Men’s accounts of reasons for leaving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important events in male migrants’ accounts that influenced their decision to leave their country of origin</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of choices regarding career and lifestyle</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Political persecution</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Loss of job/income</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Financial obligations towards family members</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Family problems</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accumulation of debt</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Violent attacks on home or possessions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Death of family members</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Violent conflict with neighbours over land access</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conflict with business partner over money issues</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ones, which are very often also present, or are even the primary motives. The point I want to make, however, is that it is often the more existential aspirations for migration that give the migratory project its legitimacy from migrants’ own viewpoints. In their view, they are not seeking money or freedom simply for the sake of it, but in order to improve themselves as a person or, by extension, offer their families and communities the opportunity for improvement. In some conversations, like that with Angelique, it became clear to me that ‘going into the adventure’, not the fact of actually arriving somewhere, was also a way of re-establishing themselves as worthwhile community members. Despite the difficulties, risks and uprootedness which migration involved, it was considered a ‘courageous act of determination’ and better than ‘staying put’, doing nothing. The challenge of border crossing in a world of increasing mobility controls gives a heroic and social dimension to mobility, and as such the category of the adventurer is distinct from that of the labour migrant or the trafficked victim, for whom migration is thought to be motivated by desperation or mere economic calculations (Streiff-Fénart & Segatti 2011: x).

When existential reasons develop during the journey

Existential motivations for migration also develop during the migratory project and are not always clear at the outset. Pierre’s story is a good example of a case in which even a ‘forced’ exit from his country later turned into a search for personal growth that resulted in his conversion from a refugee into an illegal migrant.

Pierre had to leave Congo due to his activities as a student activist at university. He first managed to get to Benin, where he successfully claimed refugee status. He was very disorientated at first, and tried to survive through a variety of odd jobs, until he finally started to play in a band together with some friends, mostly to make some extra money. Congolese musicians have a positive reputation in many parts of Africa and are often sought after for their particular style of music. This opened up a new world for him. He told me:

“You know, I am a very timid person, really. I do not talk much. But this singing there in front of the audience, that really helped me to become more outgoing. I started to approach people, I was able to negotiate stuff. I was wearing fashionable clothes. I started to have a lot of friends from everywhere.
I learned English because I started talking to people … I don’t know, music just suddenly became this very important thing for me, for my whole life. I cannot be without music ever since. And then I thought, I must make something with this, I want to do more with life than just sitting here and grow old. I want to BE a musician.”

This became Pierre’s main reason to migrate further, because Benin simply became too small for a successful career in music. These examples of the mixture of existential, economic and political motivations to travel demonstrate a point that Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2007: 35) make convincingly by suggesting that migrants’ identities are actually constantly in the making, and they are reconfigured by the spaces and places they are travelling through and the interactions they have in these places.

Migration is not the evacuation of a place and the occupation of a different one, it is the making and remaking of one’s own life on the scenery of the world. World-making. You cannot measure migration in changes of position or location, but in the increase in inclusiveness and the amplitude of its intensities. Even if migration starts sometimes as a form of dislocation (forced by poverty, patriarchal exploitation, war, famine), its target is not relocation but the active transformation of social space. (Papadopoulos & Tsianos 2007: 35)

Taking ‘adventure’ as a starting point is revealing in how far migration is lived as a negative or positive experience by migrants, in how far it is conceived as a voluntary or a forced strategy, and why it is perceived as the best option available despite the risks it involves.

The long road to becoming a successful migrant

Contrary to transit explanations of migration, migration projects do not always follow carefully considered, predetermined plans. For the adventurers, migration is not limited to a fixed destination, but rather is open to opportunities that develop during the journey (Schapendonk 2011: 100).

Of the 40 migrants I interviewed, only 23 left their country of origin with the clear aim of ‘going to Europe’. Some of these, however, were women and men who followed their brother, husband or friend in order not to be left behind and did not have a clear idea of where they
were going. Ten of the remaining migrants were forced migrants and the remaining seven were heading to other destinations, such as Libya or Mali. However, all of them ended up in Morocco after their initial plans for effective settlement did not work out (see Tables 3 and 4).

The 23 migrants who clearly wanted to go to Europe had rather vague ideas of the countries they wanted to travel to and why, where they were located on a map and how they would get there. For them, supporting findings by Kastner (2010), Alpes (2011) and Schapendonk (2011), ‘Europe’ stood for an indefinite place where life was better, pastures were greener and money was to be found.

These examples contradict the idea that people who end up in Morocco do so because they had planned from the start to go there. They also contradict the idea that migrants’ direction of transit is always towards economically developed countries. For many, the desire to reach Europe only became stronger during the journey, and after the realization that other options were not feasible. In a way, some migrants appeared to see it as a ‘last chance’ to escape poverty and exclusion or to be successful in life. It was the ‘last thing’ on the hierarchy of a large number of countries they had been travelling through without finding what they were looking for: a decent way to live. Europe was not a clearly defined destination, but some unspecified goal that would signal the end of their migratory trajectory, the end of the search for a better life. The reasons why migrants cannot have clear ideas about where they will eventually settle is not only related to their limited mobility options but also to their ability to make the available avenues for migration work for them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Migrants’ original destinations differentiated by gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original destination</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male migrants (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female migrants (21)</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 4: Changes in destinations differentiated by gender</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Change of desired destination during travels</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Male migrants (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female migrants (21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The long road to paradise

Aspirations to migrate do not square neatly with capabilities to do so, leaving a great part of the population in developing countries relegated to a mass of would-be migrants in forced immobility, as the works of Hammar and colleagues (1997), Carling (2002), Chu (2010) and Alpes (2011) demonstrate. However, it would be wrong to conclude that the outcome of states’ efforts to restrict migrants’ capabilities to move in Africa is resulting in a decrease in the desire to migrate. Rather, the migrants’ journeys described here demonstrate that the increasing restrictions for legal migration in Africa lead above all to migrants taking longer and more risky journeys. Most of the migrants I encountered had travelled overland for between six months and a year before finally reaching Morocco. Five had spent between three and seven years to get there.

It was evident from migrants’ travel accounts that they had dismissed the possibility of migrating legally to Europe (or elsewhere) or of travelling by aeroplane. Their inability to do so was related to increasing migratory controls in developed nations, combined with the legal and financial difficulties of accessing passports, visas and plane tickets (Alpes 2011: 80). Furthermore, some of the migrants I interviewed, like Jean and Lise, migrated against the explicit will of their families, from whom they had received no financial or practical support in planning their migration. As Alpes (2011) shows in her study on Cameroonian would-be migrants, however, family connections, money and institutional support are often instrumental in ensuring success in visa and passport applications. Despite these constraints, the migrants I encountered did find a way out of their countries of origin, often aware of the risks involved, but unsure about the time the journey would take. Jacques’ story exemplifies how changing migratory regimes in the past 15 years have had a tangible impact on personal migration histories but do not necessarily deter people from moving.

In 1992, Jacques flew from Congo to Germany. At that time he was able to access a valid passport and a tourist visa without any great problem. When he arrived at Munich airport, he filed for asylum. He stayed there for over five years before he was deported back when his claim was rejected. Once back in Congo, he set up various successful businesses with the money he had saved while working in Germany and became rather well-off. At that time, he told me, he was not thinking of migrating again. However, due to the civil war that broke out soon after he arrived, he lost all his assets. Chased from his business and house, he found himself left with nothing and had to leave the country again. This time, however, he was unable to obtain a passport or a visa to Germany and had no money
for an airfare. This is why he finally opted to take the land route instead. After spending two years in Chad and several months in Nigeria, he finally travelled through the desert to Morocco, where he was still waiting for a possibility to reach Germany when I met him. Jacques told me that he had never expected the trajectory to be so long. He initially thought he would be able to travel there within a matter of weeks.

Only five of the migrants I encountered had actually been able to fly to Morocco directly from their home countries. The others had all travelled overland through a variety of countries before reaching Morocco. In the 1990s, the majority of Congolese refugees in Morocco could enter the country by plane (Goldschmidt 2002). By contrast, many of my Congolese respondents who had arrived in Morocco almost ten years later came via land through Cameroon, Benin, Mali, Niger, Algeria, entering Morocco through Oujda. Migrants from Cameroon, Mali, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Nigeria used similar routes through the Saharan desert. Almost all of them spent long periods of time in different countries before moving on.

It is interesting to question why, despite the increasingly difficult conditions for migration and ever more restrictive regimes, the migrants I encountered were able to make the journey and determined to continue their travels. In the following sections, I will attempt to describe how migrants move in a context of chasing high aspirations with limited capacity to do so. Other researchers have documented these migratory strategies of travel with few resources in Africa (Van Hear 2004, Escoffier 2006, Collyer 2007, Bazonzi 2008, Khachani 2008, Pian 2009). My point, however, is to show how plans for further migration were refined, changed or dismissed while migrants were living and travelling through different places. I argue that these fragmented journeys (Collyer 2010) actually influenced the ways in which they made sense of their migration trajectory. The fragmented nature of their journey forced them to find justifications for the ways in which their possibilities for mobility were modified and their motivations adapted to the reality surrounding them. In this way, the person beginning the journey is not the same person during the journey or at its finish.

Moving through the barriers: the regulatory authorities that structure migrants’ moves and stays

Ibrahim and Abdoul had arrived in Rabat six months before I first met them on the street in Takadoum. They had just turned 18 and were
childhood friends who had migrated together from the same village in order to try their luck, hoping to play as professionals in one of Morocco’s football clubs. When I asked them about how they actually planned their trip, the two started laughing: “We had no idea, really. We thought that there was a big asphalted highway that would lead from Guinea straight through the desert to Morocco!” At first, I could not understand this seeming naiveté and lack of planning. I was surprised to find out that Abdoul’s and Ibrahim’s story was not an exception. Very few of the migrants I interviewed knew at the beginning of their travels how they would reach their destination or even where exactly their destination was.

I soon learnt that it was wrong to confuse this lack of knowledge with ignorance and lack of planning. Rather, I came to understand that decisions about how and where to go were not so much based on how much they knew about their destinations, but how they interpreted the knowledge they had as credible or not (Alpes 2011: 7). Migrants’ destinations and ways of travelling were marked by a constant evaluation of the available opportunities and the risks involved, according to the information they possessed.

Their calculations were more strongly related to evaluation of their opportunities to succeed in a context generally full of constraints and uncertainties about possibilities to move. Echoing Alpes’ (2011) descriptions of aspirations to migrate in north-west Cameroon and Schapendonk’s (2011) and Branchet’s (2011) ethnographic account of transit from Africa to Europe, the migrants I encountered described how planning for their journey was often futile because the regulatory frameworks which make it possible to leave and to settle do not follow clearly discernible rules. Instead, it is a matter of luck and one’s position within networks that most often determine where one finally travels to and by which means. As a side effect of these dynamics, migrants’ journeys stretched out into infinite lengths.

Building on the work of Alpes (2011: 211) and Roitman (2005), I contend that multiple regulatory frameworks shape trajectories and migrant flows as well as migrants’ particular migratory strategies. The state, the market, family and migrant networks are all implicated in the modification of plans, destinations and forms of travel. The migrant experiences I describe here illustrate that these regulatory frameworks do not only play out at the outset of the migratory project or in the country of destination, but are omnipresent throughout the journey. In what follows, I will give a few examples of how the state uses the production of papers to exert control over migrants’ movements, and how this is experienced as an uncontrollable challenge for migrants during their trajectory.
The state and production of papers

Visa regulations within Africa are a case in point. Many West African nationals who are members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are visa exempt from travel into neighbouring countries. By contrast, Congolese and Cameroonian, for example, do need visas to enter ECOWAS countries. This in itself determined the fact that some migrants travelled legally for part of their journey but without documents for another.

Often, migrants did not know about the particular visa restrictions in the countries they were travelling through. As visas can normally only be obtained in the country of origin, it is difficult to continue regular travel if one is already on the way. Furthermore, a valid passport is necessary in order to obtain a visa. While it seems that it should be easy for a citizen of a state to apply for a passport, in reality, this is not always the case, at least not for the migrants I encountered. Apart from the obvious problems that refugees face with regard to travel documents, passports can also be a difficult issue for other migrants. Peter from Nigeria told me about his particular problems:

“When I left, I had a passport, a real good Nigerian passport. Cost me a lot of money. You see, you have to bribe people, because otherwise you wait forever to get one. But then, when I came to Niger, I was told that I needed a Malian passport to cross over the border to Algeria because I didn’t have a visa in mine. But as I was already in Niger, I couldn’t go back. So, the people offered me to take my passport in exchange for a Malian one. But in Algeria, the police got me and they said it was a false passport, and this is why they put me in prison.”

For Peter, the fact that his Malian passport was ‘false’ and ‘irregular’ made little sense, considering that he had acquired his own ‘legal’ passport by bribing an official. For him, both visas and passports were obtainable through payment so the distinction between regular and irregular travel in terms of documents became blurred. For Peter, obtaining of a passport was regulated by access to resources and people, rather than through laws and regulations.

Pierre, who I mentioned earlier, actually received refugee status upon his arrival in Benin. However, when he decided to travel on to Morocco, he had to do so irregularly, because his status did not allow him to travel unauthorized. When he arrived in Morocco and attempted to renew his asylum claim on the basis of his prior status in Benin, he was advised not to do so. Instead, he was told to lie and pretend that he had never had a
status and that this was his first asylum claim. Using this strategy, Pierre was eventually granted refugee status. Had he been honest about his prior status in Benin, it is most likely that he would not have been recognized in Morocco as a refugee.

Needless to say that while Pierre could refer back to some traumatic event in his life that made his migratory project seem ‘legitimate’ to the state in Benin and in Morocco, other migrants, such as Jean and Lise, were not able to construct themselves as ‘legitimate’ migrants in the same way. They were, and remained for most parts of their journey, illegal trespassers in the eyes of the law. The ways in which refugee status was accorded to some and not to others was a mystery to most migrants I met. They did not understand why certain life stories were deemed to accord refugee status while others were rendered illegitimate. In a conversation about this, Marlene and Bia were talking about the senselessness of these categories. Marlene said:

“Look at us, we are both from Congo, we are both in a similar situation: small children, no husband. Poverty. Difficult life. And yet Bia has refugee status because she has seen the war. I am from a region where there were no bullets, but there was hunger. So I am a refugee of hunger. That should be counted as refugee as well.”

The market: public transport, bribes and money

It is not only visas, passports or migration status that frame mobility and directions of travel. Other papers, such as tickets for public transport, are also a problem which impacts on not only the time people spend in places but also how and where they are able to travel. In certain parts of their journey, such as in Niger, means of transport are scarce and expensive. Particularly in the Sahel, this is sometimes because there is limited access to suitable roads for motor vehicles or because minefields from former armed conflicts in the area make journeys dangerous and complicated – or both (Branchet 2011). Migrants often rely on drivers and local knowledge in order to know where to go and how to get there. In many instances, bribes must be paid to police officials, drivers, border officials and informants who know the region. Jean told me that this characterized his passage through Niger, where infrastructures are particularly scarce:

“Once you get into Niger, everyone is corrupt. The taxi drivers, the bus drivers, everyone. Even the public bus
company is corrupt. They work together with the police. So you pay a lot of money to get to the Algerian border. They have just made a business out of the people that want to travel to Algeria.”

The examples mentioned above show that the criteria by which illegal and legal movement is defined by states and other regulatory agencies in the market are subject to changing political priorities (Anderson 2012) and the economic contexts in which they occur. Often, states are implicated in fraud while policing these regulations (Alpes 2011). This makes it particularly difficult for migrants to decipher and understand the rules attached to movement and settlement during their journey through Africa. In fact, this insight stands awkwardly in opposition to the view that migrants are travelling ‘illegally’ towards Morocco because it challenges the basis upon which legal and illegal movements are produced.

Families, friends and other mediators

In such circumstances, migrants often need recourse to connections, mediators or friends and family who provide them with the right information, money or contacts in order to access the necessary ‘papers’ or resources for the next leg of their journey (Riccio 2001, Escoffier 2006, Collyer 2007, Grillo 2007, Alpes 2011, Schapendonk 2011). But families, brokers and smuggling networks can also create their own regulations for onward travel, which can lead to changes in direction and a loss of control over the journey. Often, migrants have to ask for help from others in order to find their way and continue their journey. Friendships grow and travel companions are found in these extreme circumstances. After Jean arrived in Chad by bus from Cameroon, he was very lucky to fall into the hands of a particularly nice individual who marked his entire journey thereafter, as he told me:

“When I arrived in Chad I did not know what to do. I went to a hotel and asked the owner where I could go and get a bus to Niger or Algeria. He laughed at me and told me that I had to go back to Nigeria and from there to Niger, that there was no direct connection to Niger from Ndjamena. I was quite depressed. At the bus station, I met this Nigerian student, a girl, who was going to university in Ndjamena. She was going back to see her parents in Nigeria and she told me simply to come with her to her parents’ home! I went with her and

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stayed in her house for six weeks. Then, she accompanied me to Kano and from there, I took the bus to Niger. I will never forget her. I have lost her number, I cannot contact her anymore … but she was such a kind person. I have never, never met anyone like her again. Who knows where I would have ended up without her?”

Jean was aware that this particular encounter was in fact very significant and saved him from the kind of trouble many other migrants go through when arriving in foreign places without knowledge of the future travel possibilities.

Eleven of the women I encountered travelled at least part of the way with male companions who were either their husbands or ‘travel husbands’ (Kastner 2010, Alpes 2011). According to their accounts, this provided them with the necessary protection and help. While I would not say that these women necessarily always felt better protected or helped if they were accompanied, it did legitimize their travelling in their own eyes. For example, in five cases, the women explained to me that their husband could not protect them from being attacked or robbed along the way. Four women also told me that they had to pay for the majority of the trip with their own money. In all cases, it appeared that it was usually the husband/travel companion who made the decisions about where and when they were leaving for the next destination and arranged the onward trip. But despite this lack of autonomy, it felt to me that by adopting the role of the female in need of protection, women could justify their need for male company and support. Paradoxically, this also helped them to maintain and/or increase their social status, and therefore maintain a certain control over their migratory trajectory as a socially acceptable strategy (Alpes 2011). It often meant, however, that women who travelled in this way did not make a choice about where they wanted to travel, but rather followed their husband or companion.

Families are important in facilitating access to papers and connections in another way. In Lise’s case, it was her sister in France who sponsored her first (failed) trip to Paris and her aunt in Cameroon who determined her first destination when travelling overland the second time. Most of the migrants I knew were dependent on some kind of remittances from their family members during their time in Morocco or while they were travelling in order to be able to continue their journey. Family members, however, are not always beneficial and trustworthy individuals who help migrants to succeed; they also can shape migratory trajectories in unexpected ways. In two cases I witnessed, for example, family members were involved in deceit and exploitation. Two young men from Guinea
who were friends of Ibrahim and Abdoul (mentioned earlier), had been promised a football contract in a professional team in exchange for a fee by a family member who was already in Morocco. One of the young boys went first to Mauritania to work as a domestic servant for an entire year to get the money together before embarking on his trip to Morocco. However, when they arrived in the country together, the contract never materialized and the family member had vanished with their money.

Ghettos

More often than not, however, it is not strangers or family members that migrants have to rely on but fellow migrants they encounter on the way. This is increasingly the case the further away they move from their own countries of origin. In general, migrants have to submit to the rules of intermediaries who help them to access travel documents, find work or shelter and pay for these services and not all of them have the best interests of migrants in mind when they offer their services to them (Escoffier 2006, Branchet 2011, Schapendonk 2011). Silvester from Ghana put it even more bluntly:

“When you travel, you pay. You pay all the time, for every little thing you can’t do yourself. And there are many things you cannot do yourself. You need help from other people. That’s the way it is. So you pay or you stay!”

Many migrants I talked to had to rely on ‘migrant ghettos’ during their journeys at some point or another in order to get help and information. These groups normally include fellow migrants who are also ‘on the road’ and organize further legs of the journey, provide accommodation for new arrivals and help them in the quest for work. However, they are not always supportive or altruistic structures for compatriots in a foreign land. Instead, in ghettos migrants often exploit other migrants. Yene (2010), whom I met in Morocco, describes these networks in his autobiographical account of his trip from Cameroon to Chad:

He crossed the frontier between Cameroon and Chad on his motorbike, without any controls. The strangers appeared unwelcoming to him. Nevertheless, he managed to find a place where some other compatriots were renting rooms. He was guided to a bar where two women asked him to choose between the Congolese ghetto and a room to rent.
Alain had never heard of a ‘ghetto’ and was perplexed. He thought of a structured organization, planned by the embassy to welcome the nationals. Therefore, he agreed to be brought there. He found himself in a shed behind the bar and saw six men, without shirts, smoking cigarettes. One of them welcomed him: Don’t be afraid, I am the boss here, welcome in Chad. Which city do you come from? You will pay me 2,000 francs to stay here some time, this is what we call the right of the ghetto. How does your country do? Your roads, are they now asphalted? … I don’t know a lot about this damn country any longer. … Ah, you are travelling to Europe! Well, if you have the money, we will provide you the necessary papers. You will arrive in Libya and you can work there some months. The rest depends on you. You can then continue to Italy or you can return to your country with your money. (Yene 2010: 57)

Losing control in the desert

While the previous sections have attempted to show how migrants retain a certain control over their migration trajectories and their dealings with the different regulatory forces that shape them, the further they travel away from support networks such as families and friends, the more they lose control over the forces which structure their mobility.

Many of my interviewees found that the relative control they had over the timing and type of their migratory strategy diminished as they travelled across the Sahara from Niger, through Algeria to Morocco. Most migrants lose complete control over where they end up when they place themselves in the hands of smugglers. This is in part because travel through the desert is the only existing means to reach Morocco or Libya by land. The non-existence of public transport infrastructure and the fact that migration controls in Algeria and Libya have been tightening since 2005 make independent travel almost impossible (Branchet 2011). In this context, Jean continued to tell me about his trip from Niger to Algeria:

“Half of the trip I didn’t even know where I was, because I was just put into cars and from there to a house and the next day I was told I had to pay again and was brought to a different place and from there again somewhere else … I thought we had crossed the border to Algeria but soon found out that I was still in Niger.”
My interview data suggests that migrants experience most difficulties in their migratory project in the desert, as this part of the journey is heavily controlled by smuggling rings and is therefore expensive and very strictly organized according to very male-dominated power hierarchies in which single women migrants are particularly vulnerable and subordinated to male control. Migrants pay middlemen, who then guide them to migrant houses in different towns in the desert, where they have to wait (often cramped together in small rooms) until they can continue the journey or where they have to work until they can pay for the next part of the journey (Escoffier 2006, Branchet 2011, Schapendonk 2011). Even Lise, who until then had been able to migrate relatively autonomously because of financial support from home, recalls traumatic experiences of being stuck in a desert town, without any money to continue the journey and forced to provide sexual services to the smugglers she was dependent upon:

“You just want to get away from all these men, ... they are everywhere, they sleep in the same room, they eat from the same plate, ... So you do whatever to get away from there. So you pay with what you have got, with your body, anything. You clean their mess. You do things you would never imagine yourself to be doing elsewhere.”

Research has documented how women and children are often sexually abused or forced to work in order to pay for the next part of the trip (Keynaert et al 2008). Often they engage in prostitution in order to make the necessary money to continue the trip through the desert (Noel 2007, Keynaert et al 2008, Kastner 2010). This is particularly likely if they are travelling alone, or are separated from their male travel companions.

Jules and Sara, a couple from Central African Republic also recall that they tried to avoid separation from each other and their child at all costs, because they knew that a frequent strategy employed by smugglers was to extort money from couples and single women travelling with children in this way. Almost all migrants I talked to evoke their trip through the desert as the most horrible migratory experience. Many migrants I encountered were so traumatized by the memories of it that they did not want to talk about it.

**Trafficking, smuggling and regulatory authorities**

According to the international treaties and most international policy documents, the practices described above would probably be considered...
as both smuggling and trafficking. According to these definitions, people
who are forced against their will to cross borders and who are coerced to
work in exploitative conditions in the destination country are considered to
be trafficked and those who wilfully and voluntarily establish a commercial
transaction with others in order to be brought by irregular means into a
country are supposed to have been smuggled in (Gallagher 2002). One
could therefore assert that while they are in the desert, all migrants,
irrespective of their prior trajectories, their gender or their class, and their
former migratory status, become ‘victims of trafficking’ because, for the
most part, they do not know where they are, where they are going or
how to get there. Equally, all of them could qualify as being smuggled
because they pay for their transport, their passports and their guides in
order to reach the other side of the border. However, the processes I have
described above and by which the migrants I encountered had to move
around display a complicated interplay between moments of ‘forced’ and
‘voluntary’ movements as well as ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ stays and crossings.
It is therefore difficult to establish an exact cut-off point at which legal
migration ends, trafficking starts or smuggling begins. It is also difficult to
pinpoint with clarity which actors are effectively ‘legalizing’ which types
of movement and vice versa. It is difficult to say at which point ‘illegality’
actually begins.

Contrary to the assumptions conventional trafficking discourse tends
towards, it is not only migrant ghettos and smuggling networks that are
responsible for inhumane and exploitative conditions in the desert and
migrants’ irregular forms of movement. According to the accounts I heard,
the Algerian police had a great deal to contribute as well. Again, Jean’s
story in the desert is illustrative of the ways in which state security forces
can become implicated in human smuggling.

“One day, when we were on the truck, the chief told us to
get down, to start walking. We all had to get off the truck and
had to start walking. He told us, you just go, the town is 14
km away, you just walk along this road. And we walked. We
had almost no water left. It was getting dark. And then, of
course, the Algerian police got us. They pillaged everything,
they took everything we had, they even took our passports
and they raped the women. They took us to prison. I stayed
there for six weeks. I remember that I got my last money
from selling a pair of jeans that I had left to one of the
guards. When I got out, they deported us back to another
town in the desert. Really far away, there was nothing. No
possibility to get work or transport back. I had to stay there
six months until I was able to get the necessary money to travel back to Maghnia with one of the trucks that supplied the military with food.’

The fact that Jean was eventually able to continue his trip through the help of military-related transport on a truck that took him back to a place where he could rejoin smuggler networks, is a striking example of the ways in which ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ is a matter of legal and normative conventions. Alpes (2011: 138) is right to point out that the ways in which states establish legitimate and illegitimate types of mediation for documents is productive of the very notion of the state and the law. It creates a narrative of legality that implies that ‘the law’ is guaranteed to be transparent and fair and thus by extension supposedly unmediated and external to monetary logic. That the law is not always universally applicable, transparent and fair, but indeed is arbitrary and place and time dependent, is exemplified by the fact that the extent to which migrants are forced to rely on mediation outside state institutions to access papers, money, work or transport is actually dependent on the places they are travelling through. So while it appears that in certain places the structural impediments to legal migration are extremely high, there are other spaces and places in which migrants are able to access the necessary means for mobility – even through state-mediated institutions. To get credible information about how to work around and with existing rules and regulatory authorities was therefore key for the migrants I encountered. This turned out to be the major challenge for many, not only in the moment of departure but during the whole trajectory.

When migrants reach Morocco having travelled through the desert in such conditions, they are usually not the same people they were when they set out from their countries of origin. All of the migrants I talked to said that they had lost all their money during the journey, were often in a bad physical state and generally frightened and exhausted. Women had often been physically abused and separated from their travel companions. Ten people told me that they witnessed friends or family members and children dying along the way. At this point, their ‘adventure’ becomes a nightmare and they are more than aware of the overwhelming forces of migration control. In all the travel accounts of the migrants I spoke to, the desert route was described as a turning point in their experience of migration and a moment in which they were fearful for their lives. The desert had converted them all into destitute and vulnerable individuals with few options concerning their future migration project.
Changing destinations – changing social location – changing self

During their travels, moments of immobility were used by migrants to orientate their social location in relation to their opportunities for movement. The constant change of destinations which characterized many migrants’ plans during these phases of the journey also reflects their struggle to adapt to the regulatory authorities that structure successful movement and stay.

Mirroring the ways in which the state, the market and social networks legally and normatively construct migrants on the basis of how and why they move, the figure of the citizen is a political and legal construct, based around how and why people settle and participate in a particular community (Anderson 2012). As migrants or citizens, people’s ability to take part in a society is therefore dependent on a range of political, legal, economic and also social factors that determine their social location with regard to movement and settlement. For example, Hibou (1999) and Roitman (2005) show how, in Africa, through the fragile position of the state, informal networks and economies are gaining increasing importance as regulatory authorities for citizenship. However, Roitman (2005) in particular argues that these alternative regulatory authorities are not replacing the state in questions of citizenship. Rather, they are working alongside it, perpetuating often exploitative relationships and hierarchies, which serve to impede some people’s ability to access citizenship (Roitman 2005). Migrants are exposed to these unequal power relationships, which stop them settling as rightful citizens in the places they are travelling through.

Almost all the migrants I encountered in Morocco had tried to find somewhere to build their lives in one or more of the countries they had travelled through. Sebastien is a good example of a person whose trajectory is marked by a constant search for a place to settle. He attempted several times, without success, to find a suitable ‘social location’ within the hierarchies of power that he encountered in the countries he travelled to. A chemistry graduate who originally fled Congo after being politically persecuted, Sebastien first tried to establish himself in Cameroon. He managed to get a residency permit for a year, but was unable to renew it. It was difficult for him to find a satisfactory job under these circumstances. He therefore decided to move to Nigeria, where he stayed for two years, making whiskey without a licence. He used his chemistry skills to make high-quality alcohol and earned a reasonable salary from it. While he was
in Nigeria, he learnt English and made considerable efforts to get a job in the chemical industry because he considered staying in Nigeria for good. Everything was going fine until a group of competitors in the whiskey business threatened to denounce him at the immigration office for irregular stay and brewing without a licence. As they had the necessary contacts to do this while he did not, he felt compelled to travel further. He told me:

“You know, if I had known people in Nigeria who could have protected me, maybe I would have stayed. But I knew that with these people, the whiskey people, it was better not to mess with them. I had no chance. They were influential people, they had connections.”

Even for people like Sebastien, who is relatively well-educated, skilled and without dependants, migration towards Morocco became the only feasible alternative after several failed attempts to become a ‘rightful citizen’ elsewhere. It is easy to imagine that people like Bia, who travelled with her two children from Congo, where she had been raped and victimized by combatants, are far less likely to overcome the barriers to citizenship:

“I don’t even remember all the countries I have been travelling through. I did not stay anywhere for long, because there was nowhere to stay. Most of the time, I have been thinking of surviving. Simply surviving. I did not go to see the UNHCR, I did not even know what the UNHCR was. I was just trying to make it to the next day.”

Unlike Sebastien but in common with many of the other women I met in Morocco, Bia could not count on formal qualifications or skills that could have facilitated her entry into a comfortable life in another African country. Instead, she told me that for the most part she was dependent on financial support from male travel companions and working in prostitution. Sebastien and Bia had no access to the vital informal networks that dominate life and survival strategies in so many parts of Africa today (Hibou 2004, Roitman 2005). Both were outsiders in countries in which neither the state nor other ‘institutions’ protect and cater for the rights of vulnerable people or migrants.

While some migrants are able to use their role as ‘foreigner’, ‘woman’ or ‘worker’ to fit into the receiving society, in many circumstances, by doing so, they are relegated to marginal extrasterritorial spaces in these countries, from which they can only escape through onward migration. These spaces are largely the by-product of tightening migration control policies that on the
one hand regulate migration status, and, on the other, heighten the power of other, non-state regulatory authorities of settlement when migrants cannot access migration status (Streiff-Fénart & Segatti 2011). The problem of finding a decent life in other African countries is not only connected to the lack of economic opportunities but also to the limited control migrants have over the regulatory authorities which structure citizenship.

**Conclusion: the existential consequences of migratory processes**

In this chapter I have analysed why the migrants I encountered in Morocco persisted in migrating despite their limited capacities to do so. The examples I have given show that migrants’ motivations to leave their country are often linked with a desire to change their social status, and cannot be reduced to simple economic or political push factors. It is therefore misleading to describe Sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco as labour migrants with a desire to reach the European Union.

Furthermore, the data in this chapter has shown that migrants do not conceive of their travels as illegitimate or criminal acts of trespassing. Nor do they necessarily conceive of themselves as ‘trafficked victims’ or ‘smuggled’ beings. Instead, migrants talk about their travels in ways that demonstrate that the regulatory authorities which shape migration opportunities are in fact multiple (Alpes 2011). State institutions sometimes overlap and compete with informal economic agents such as migration brokers, smuggling networks, friends and family ties in the regulation of migrants’ trajectories and ways of travelling. All of them shape the different mechanisms through which migration becomes possible and is made a ‘legitimate’ form of travel. Migrants have to navigate their ways through these diverse legal, economic and social boundaries to movement and settlement. As migration controls have become increasingly severe in Africa and Europe in the last two decades, it is increasingly necessary for migrants to depend on informal networks, either social or economic, to access papers, travel permits, money and protection during their journeys. These networks, or informal regulatory authorities, as they may well be called, are omnipresent in Africa in a variety of areas of life and have increasingly come to define people’s livelihoods. This is in part the consequence of a decline of state power due to privatization and conflict in many countries in Africa (Hibou 2004, Roitman 2005). Migrants therefore do not question such regulatory authorities as legitimate or illegitimate but rather perceive them as facts of life and part of their daily reality (Alpes 2011).
According to their social location, their gender and their class, migrants have more or less control over these processes and use different strategies to overcome possible barriers to mobility and settlement. But migrants’ abilities and opportunities to migrate (Carling 2002) are changing during their trajectory, and are, in fact, dynamic. Migrants’ social location with respect to mobility as well as the opportunities they have to realize their aspirations are shaped by the configuration of power relations between regulatory authorities in different places and over time (Massey 1999). Therefore, for many migrants it is necessary to spend increasingly longer periods of time in different countries in order to finance and organize the next leg of the journey or to compensate for their limited access to social relations and networks that could mediate access to mobility for them.

In places where state regulation is absent, and informal economic systems prevail, not only is migration difficult but long-term settlement is too. In the cases of the migrants I have presented here, some attempted to stay in countries along the way only to discover that their dream of a better life could not be fulfilled when the rules and norms of citizenship and state protections did not apply to them. In these instances, onward mobility becomes a necessity rather than a choice, and settlement is no longer a rational or logical option. Europe as a destination therefore often becomes more of a last resort than a clearly envisioned goal for most of the migrants I encountered. Schapendonk (2011: 112) is right to argue that both temporal and spatial aspects of migrants’ trajectories determine moving aspirations and capabilities, and contradict the idea of migration as a single shift from origin to destination.

For this reason also, I agree with Collyer (2010) that is easy to mistake the motivations of migrants engaged in ‘fragmented journeys’, as he calls them, if only the most recent stage of their trajectory is considered. In order to be able to understand the actions of these migrants, their attitude towards life in Morocco and their aspirations for the future, one must include those aspects that defined them in the past and still resonate with them in the present (Emirbayer & Mische 1998). The reasons for their current situation can only be understood by a longer-term perspective of the previous stages of their journey. In short, answering the question ‘Who are the migrants in Morocco?’ requires drawing out a spatial-temporal link between migrants’ situation in Morocco and their particular journey to arrive there.

In neoclassical migration theory, the migratory trajectory is often understood as a linear process from A to B, characterized by a relatively short, time-limited ‘phase’ of travelling and a definite period of ‘settlement’ in the new, host country. Often, this also entails a view of migration as a ‘modernizing process’ (Senay 2009), in which a one-way movement
ends with settlement, leaving behind ‘underdeveloped selves’ in order to become ‘better ones’. In this discourse, the migrant becomes the signifier of a particular conceptualization of mobility: the individualized subject laboriously calculating the cost–benefit ratio of their trip and then starting an itinerary with fixed points of departure and arrival (Papadopoulos & Tsianos 2007). This view on migration is also implicit in neoliberal descriptions of globalization as ‘time–space compression’ (Harvey 1989), in which mobility is usually depicted as unfettered and as an increasingly universal feature of the ‘modern’ world we live in. According to these views, access to mobility is not mediated by power differentials, but governed by individual interests and needs and generally open to everyone, notwithstanding their social position. People moving in this ideal world are understood as living a ‘modern’ lifestyle. The fragmented journeys of the migrants in question here complicate this picture. They suggest that migration might be better understood as a dynamic journey, which is virtually continual over a lifetime. In the process, migrants change who they are, what they are and who they want to be but also where they want to go. Also, crucially, they move in and out of the statist categories that are used to classify different groups of migrants as either legal or illegal, voluntary or forced, trafficked or smuggled.

Furthermore, the examples I have given indicate that this journey is not the same for everyone and instead of making people richer, happier and more powerful, it can also render them powerless and dependent upon others. Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2007) add to this that migrants are also simultaneously changing the environment around them through and during the migration process.

Migration is like big waves, they never appear precisely where they are expected, their arrival can never be predicted exactly, but they always come, they have a magnitude to reorder the whole given geography of a seashore, the sandbanks, the seabed, the maritime animals and plants, the rocks, the beach. (Papadopoulos & Tsianos 2007: 3)

An acknowledgement of this remaking of motivations, identities and the structural environment around them challenges the usefulness of reified and static migration categories for controlling, regulating and channelling individual people’s movements and settlement through state policies. It questions the use of time as ‘eternal’ in migrant categories such as illegal/legal, forced/voluntary, trafficked/smuggled because people are constantly shifting statuses. Furthermore, people can occupy more than one category at a time, when they are, for example, both smuggled and seeking asylum.
They are also often categorized differently in different places. Therefore, inherent in the use of these kinds of classifications is a certain violence and objectification which stems from the desire to fix and pin down what is actually fluid and profoundly human.

By the time migrants reach Morocco they are no longer at the same point as when they departed. Their expectations of being able to become someone through migration are still not realized. They are still searching, but now they have lost the relative control they once had over their journey. After their journey through the desert, migration has become a negative experience for most of them. However, as the next chapter will explain in more detail, this is just the starting point of a long period of forced immobility in which they are effectively stuck in a country against their will.

Notes

1 This has equally been noted by Escoffier (2006), Pian (2009) and Schapendonk (2011).

2 According to the work of Bredeloup (1994), Pian (2009) and Alpes (2011) similar terms for migration exist in a variety of African countries. ‘Bush falling’, for example, is used in some parts of Cameroon. According to Alpes (2011), this term refers back to tribal practices of ‘hunting in the wilderness’ in which members of tribes go out fighting and surviving in ‘bush’, in order to come back as stronger and better individuals and leaders, usually equipped with ‘trophies’ like money or other status symbols.

3 ECOWAS is composed of 15 states: Benin, Burkina, Cape Verde, Ivory Coast, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

4 This is also corroborated by other research (Collyer 2007, Pian 2009, Branchet 2011, Schapendonk 2011).

5 My translation from the original French text.

6 These are the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Article 3 (a) and the Protocol against Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Article 3 (a).