

# Other Paths, Other Destinations

## Towards a Manifold Reading of Mobility across Borders

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**Abstract:** In the past years, there has been renewed scholarly interest in migrants arriving in, or on their way to, Europe. Much of this research takes the mobile migrant as its object, forwarding analyses that consider experiences of migrants, encounters on the frontlines of migration governance regimes, and the geopolitics of non-arrival policies along the routes towards Europe. While this work is crucial, it is important to critically reflect on how such analytical and methodological approaches reify contemporary migration in Africa as primarily oriented towards European destinations. In this essay, I reflect on how selection bias intrinsic in much qualitative migration research (including my own) shapes the stories we tell about migration. By reflecting on my own research with regional migrants in East Africa, I consider what can be gained by an attention to the manifold routes that channel, constrain, foreclose and open up mobility towards particular destinations.

**Keywords:** qualitative methodologies, African migration, Eurocentrism

In the past years, there has been renewed scholarly interest in migrants arriving in, or on their way to, Europe. Much of this research takes the mobile migrant as its object, forwarding analyses that consider experiences of migrants, encounters on the front-lines of migration governance regimes, and the geopolitics of non-arrival policies along the routes towards Europe. While this work is crucial, it is important to critically reflect on how such analytical and methodological approaches reify contemporary migration in Africa as primarily oriented towards European destinations. In this essay, I reflect on how selection bias intrinsic in much qualitative migration research (including my own) shapes the stories we tell about migration. By reflecting on my own research with regional migrants in East Africa, I consider what can be gained by an attention to the manifold pathways that channel, constrain, foreclose and open up mobility towards particular destinations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> | There are many different ways that ›routes‹ are conceived of in scholarly literature. For some, routes describe the individual and collective trajectories of (migrant) journeys (Clifford 1997; Coutin 2005). More recently this route-based understanding has been taken up

In this paper, I want to focus primarily on scholarly knowledge production about migration, though I do so with a recognition that these are deeply inflected by a broader political discourse that sees migration as highly directional, moving from poorer less developed places towards more affluent places (see Berriane/de Haas 2012). I offer a reminder – because none of this is new – of some of the sticky methodological issues that, for the most part, are intrinsic to qualitative research on migration. Such a pause for reflection is critically important at this moment because recent events and political developments have prompted a spike in interest across the social sciences on themes related to refugees, clandestine migration and bordering policies. With this new cohort of researchers entering the field, care must be taken in research design in order to avoid reproducing powerful state logics that give undue attention to places like Europe, North America and Australia as the primary destinations for migrants around the world. Because much of this current turn concerns clandestine migration to Europe – whether undertaken in spaces of European migrant reception, on the shores of the Mediterranean, or further afield in places identified as nodes in trans-Saharan migration routes – and because my own research focus is on regional migrations in Africa, I use scholarly and policy representations of African migration as lens to highlight my concerns.

The paper is not meant as a rebuke of the vitally important and crucial work being done on modes of EU border externalization, and their impacts on migrants and societies in Africa. But rather, I want to read these studies and analyses against what I know from my own (and many others’) research on the practices of mobility in Africa to question the ways in which intra-African migrations are often assimilated into framings that unduly center Europe as a destination.

## **METHODOLOGIES AND THE STORIES WE (CAN) TELL**

It has long been recognized that research with migrants offers particular methodological challenges. Let us remember some of the reasons why: i) Migrants have different characteristics than people who do not migrate (Stark/Bloom 1985; Borjas 1987) or who migrate elsewhere (Taylor 1987), ii) Migrants can be hard to find (Massey 2004), in part because they do not always want to be found (Malkki 1995; Bloch

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by policy makers and used to inform governance efforts that seek to control migration (see Casas-Cortés/Cobarrubias/Pickles 2015). I use this term to denote the particularity of mobility practices as they are shaped in relation to geopolitical and geo-economic factors, including state action.

2007; Rojas-Wiesner/de Vargas 2014; Turner 2016; Kihato 2007), and iii) migrants do not sit still (Beauchemin 2014: 929; Schapendonk 2012), which in turn requires more complex research design that can capture the processual and itinerant nature of migration. These social facts present some of the enduring obstacles to knowledge production related to migration. While some of these issues are of particular concern to those researchers working quantitatively (see Castles 2012), the question of how we as researchers can apprehend migration processes that extend across disparate locations and through time is vitally important (Silvey/Lawson 1999). And how we address these obstacles unquestionably influences the data we gather as well as what analyses it is possible to undertake and the interpretations we are able to offer (Jacobsen/Landau 2003). This remains the case even when researchers work from critical, feminist or other non-positivist theories of generalization (Silvey/Lawson 1999). It should be uncontroversial, then, to state that choices around research design shape who we talk to, the kinds of knowledge we produce, and the stories we tell. In what follows, I identify some trends in qualitative migration research design, and explore their consequences for our understanding of migration processes in Africa, Europe and across the Mediterranean.

Migration is and has long been a highly politicized topic of inquiry. As Jacobsen and Landau (2003) recognized fifteen years ago, much migration research, particularly when undertaken in times or events labeled as crises, is motivated in part by a desire to intervene in some way in the debates that swirl around a topic that is nearly always to some extent politicized. While Jacobsen and Landau focus primarily on forced migrants, the points they raise are also pertinent to understanding processes of migration that have more mixed motivations (see, for example, de Genova 2002). The politicized nature of migration generally, then, makes knowledge production about migrants and migration processes particularly fraught, as various actors including scholars, funders, functionaries, politicians and activists from across the political spectrum seek to shape discourse and policy towards particular ends (Berriane/de Haas 2012). Often the end goal of such knowledge production is to affect policy or shame states, whether this is to impose tighter restrictions (see for example the work of the Center for Immigration Studies in the US context), to push for greater rights for migrants and refugees through liberal (and libertarian) appeals to law and rights, or even to take more radical abolitionist critiques of containment (see for example Mezzadra/Neilson 2013; Loyd/Mitchelson/Burrige 2013). In such a contested social field, critical reflection about the ways in which our knowledge is produced, the underlying assumptions informing research design, how we define migrants and migration, as well as how we gain access to interlocutors is imperative if we are not to simply reproduce state logics (de Genova 2002).

One of the key points Jacobsen and Landau (2003) raise is that of how we go about selecting the people with who we speak, in their words the question of ›selection bias‹ in participant recruitment. While many readers who are committed to critical, ethnographic and or feminist approaches to knowledge production may veer away from the language of sampling, it is nevertheless worthwhile to pause for a moment and consider what qualitative research can gain from thinking rigorously about who we are (and are *not*) talking to, and how we find them. As my brief review above suggests, this is not such a simple question to answer given the challenges that migrants and mobile people pose to the standard modes of participant recruitment. To offer just one example: if we are interested in understanding the differential drivers of migration from a particular location, it would be particularly useful to generate qualitative longitudinal data – e.g., conduct long term field research – that captures the social, economic and political realities of those who migrate *and* those that stay put, a process that may extend across decades rather than the short field seasons which are the ambit of the established academic on research leave, or the field-work year of the doctoral student.

One of the most common methods of recruiting interlocutors in ethnographic and other types of qualitative research with migrants is through various modes of convenience sampling (Jacobsen/Landau 2003). This is a catch all term that includes such techniques as snowball sampling, some web-based surveys and social media methods, embedding within institutions or service organization, as well as some forms of geographical sampling – selecting people that pass through a particular location, to name just one example. What they share is the selection of participants based on those who are readily or easily available. But it should also be recognized that these ›convenient‹ modes of gaining access to migrants leave the decision about who participates to factors ›outside‹ of the research process – whether that is to key informants in the case of snowball sampling, to those with internet access and time on their hands in the case of web-surveys, to powerful institutions in the case of embedded research or to geographical processes. Given that research with migrants may be conducted in environments of legal jeopardy or contexts of social discrimination, this way of negotiating access is often critical to being able to do the research at all. It can help by offering anonymity or because it builds needed trust between the researcher and migrants (as when a researcher embeds with a migrant rights organization, for example), trust in the absence of which research would not be possible. But these techniques also demand our thought and attention to better understand, and perhaps account for, how they shape research results. As the limits and benefits of snowball recruitment (Biernacki/Waldorf 1981; Wright et al. 1992; Browne 2005), institutionally embedded ethnography (Campbell 2006; Mountz 2010; Newhouse 2015a; Jubany 2017;

Polzer Ngwato 2012) and digital methodologies (Postill/Pink 2012; Groves 2011) have been more widely discussed, I want to focus here on the final mode of convenience sampling I mentioned: where geography plays a ›deciding‹ role in the shape of selecting research participants.

Geography is a foundational and inextricable aspect of migration as a human experience, and thus it is central to scholarly treatments of the topic. More specifically, geographical containers – such as nation or city – have long shaped the study of migration (Ravenstein 1876, 1889). But it is with the emergence of intersectional feminist approaches to borderlands (Anzaldúa 1987), the rise of the concepts of transnationalism (Glick-Schiller/Basch/Blanc-Szanton 1992) and globalization (Appadurai 1996; Castles/Miller 1998) as well as the critique of methodological nationalism (Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2003) that migration scholars began, as a matter of urgency, to more seriously interrogate the underlying geographical assumptions and frames that shaped their work. This critical impulse led to a reconsideration of some of the common sense ways of studying migration, away from *stocks* and toward *flows*. The result was a period of conceptual and methodological innovation, which sought in part to account for the geographical assumptions and limitations of migration research more explicitly (for a review of these developments see Levitt/Jaworsky 2007). This turn encompassed reworkings of qualitative research practices spanning from Marcus' (1995) evangelism for multisided ethnography, Coutin's (2005) ethnography »en route«, the emergence of the autonomy of migration approach (Bojadžijev/Karakayali 2010), to the new mobilities paradigm, drawing influences from actor-network theory (Sheller/Urry 2006). While each of these approaches differ, they share in common a distinct concern for the ways in which social life extends across space and through time. Here, space is not merely the background to a study, but fundamentally co-constitutive of the social processes and experiences which the research seeks to apprehend (see Massey 2005).

One result of this period of conceptual and methodological innovation has been an increasing tendency in recent decades in choosing to focus on specific sites or points of condensation where migration comes in to focus. Indeed, the last decade has seen a florescence of research on transit migration as well as compelling and insightful examinations of routes, way points and bottlenecks that migrants pass through, or remain stuck in, as they (attempt) transit elsewhere (see for example Schapendonk 2012; Collyer/Düvell/de Haas 2012; Hess 2012; Brachet 2012; Mountz 2011). The strength of this approach is in its ability to capture to some extent the processual nature of the journey, which had largely gone unexplored in research focused on sending and receiving contexts. Perhaps, this shift has been driven by externalization policy imperatives that have extended bordering practices outward from Europe, Australia

and North America, as de Haas has oft argued (de Haas 2008). But regardless of the origin, this route-based approach has come to be a new common-sense way to approach and understand migration. This trend has been particularly pronounced in relation to clandestine migration toward Europe.

But this approach, too, has particular limits and constraints. As scholars design research projects around particular ›flash points‹ of migration – the fences of Melilla and Ceuta (Collyer 2007), Calais (Millner 2011; Rygiel 2011) and the Chunnel (Zhang 2017), Lampedusa (Andrijasevic 2006; Dines/Montagna/Ruggiero 2015) and Lesvos (Franck 2017), Agadez and Ajdabiya (Brachet 2012), bottlenecks that might be viewed as gates to Europe – they will encounter there, primarily, those migrants who have already made the determination to head to Europe. In addition, perhaps, they might also meet a handful of discouraged migrants, ready to give up on that goal, and consider other options. But it is critical to remember that these bottlenecks and stop-over points are in themselves also a selection mechanism. Those people that find themselves in these locations, have already made substantial investments – material and imaginative – in the idea of a European arrival. They are already »en-route« to a specified destination (Coutin 2005; Andersson 2014). Otherwise, one would not find them there. So, regardless of the specific method or technique used to gather data – interviews, focus groups, participant observation or participatory methods – the data, in the form of migration narratives, trajectories and so forth, will tend to point in a particular direction: toward Europe.

This remains the case even (we might argue particularly) when the validity of results is checked through triangulation or through data saturation. Indeed, as a researcher, it becomes very powerful and persuasive to apprehend, until saturation, a certain set of co-ordinates. So powerful, in fact, that it can be difficult to hold in our heads, and in our writing, the other possibilities and other destinations, precisely because migrants to those locations do not appear to be apprehended – they are moving elsewhere. It is thus in the spirit of collegial critique, that I wish to read one recent study for what it *can't* tell us, for the gaps it has no means to bridge in order to explore the impact of letting geography decide. And in the spirit of fairness, I follow this with a discussion of what a similar critique might say to my own work.

## READING ROUTES BACKWARDS AND THE FANTASIES OF ›EUROPE‹

To better understand the ways in which focusing on geographical ›flash points‹ of migration shapes the stories we tell about migration, I will focus on a large well-funded collaborative project that was conducted in the latter half of 2015 in the wake of Europe's so-called ›long summer of migration‹ (Kasperek/Speer 2015). The Mediterranean Migration Research Programme (MEDMIG) was a multi-sited research program funded under an *Urgency Grant* scheme by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council in connection with the Department for International Development to the tune of one million pounds.<sup>2</sup> However, conditions tied to the funding stipulated i) that the research be policy relevant and ii) that data collection should be limited primarily to people on the European side of the Mediterranean (Sigoña 2017). The research design was specifically organized in an attempt to capture the diversity of irregular migration into the EU, by choosing several ›hot-spots‹ of arrival, and purposive sampling to reach various demographic groups (Crawley et al. 2015). Together, the research teams conducted 500 interviews with migrants, plus an additional 100 interviews with government and civil society actors to better understand the various meta-, meso- and micro-level factors that contributed to and shaped migrant journeys across the Mediterranean (Crawley et al. 2015).

The final report presents an empirical snap shot of the research results packed with direct quotes, maps, graphs, and tables that show the breakdown of their interview partners in terms of country of origin, gender, route and number of stops along their journey and closes with a series of policy recommendations. While the report sensitively makes an attempt to unpack the indeterminacy of migration decisions, and attends to the ways routes get constructed along the way, it nevertheless reproduces ›Europe‹ as the primary destination for migrants from the Levant, West and Central Asia, and much of Africa. Regardless of the critical stance on the part of the authors towards reifying migration towards Europe, the limitation of interviewing only those who managed to reach European shores means that routes are retrospectively constructed, both narratively and visually, as emanating from a diversity of locations but with only one single destination: Europe.

This is particularly true when considering the power of the maps they employ to frame the perception of migratory flows. As Elwood (2006: 325–7) and more recently

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2 | As the images of migrants drowning in the Mediterranean splashed over TV screens, and filled the pages of newspapers across the globe, emergency funding was made available by policy-makers for scholars to help them make sense of the unfolding process.

Ciabbari (2014) and Tazzioli (2016: 5–6) argue, maps often have a particular authority and persuasive effect in political and policy debates, which *can* be used to confront and re-shape state logics, but which do not completely overcome, counter or step outside those logics. In this case, the image of multiple lines converging on Europe serves to reinforce a broader public perception of migration that is empirically more difficult to sustain. To be fair to the authors, the map does not claim to do anything more than depict the journeys of the people with whom researchers spoke; it is a descriptive representation without any claim to be representative or to form the basis of broader inferences. Yet, while it is true that more migrants arrived in Europe in 2015 than in the years previously, the *vast* majority of migrants from origination points depicted on the map did not in fact enter Europe, and may have little interest, aspiration or resources to do so. For example, in roughly the same period depicted in the map (the period running up to late 2015) Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Iran and Jordan were the top five refugee hosting countries in the world; Ethiopia, Uganda and Kenya each hosted nearly as many displaced people as did Germany, Europe's top hosting country (UNHCR 2016); and intra-regional migration accounted for 65.6% of migration from countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ratha/Eigen-Zucchi/Plaza 2016). Yet because of the way in which the research has been designed, none of these flows has the possibility to appear on the map or in the narratives conveyed in the text, effacing the most significant migrant trajectories in these regions.

To be clear, the research described above was well designed, rigorously executed, and produced important new knowledge about migration across the Mediterranean, which was after all its stated objective. Indeed, in the writing up of the report, the authors make the effort to complicate the simple story of linear migration routes toward Europe. Yet, even with such a critical stance, the story they are able to tell based on their data is one that puts Europe at the center. In reading the report for what it cannot tell us, the limitations that come with using geography as sampling frame become glaringly apparent.

This also highlights the ways in which political priorities and the funding streams attached to them serve to reinforce particular political (but also scholarly) narratives that frame migration as always in relation to certain kinds of destinations. The reason for this is two-fold. First, framing mobility and bordering practices around the idea of routes toward Europe, or naming the Sahara and the Atlantic and Mediterranean shore-line as »Europe's vast borderlands« (Andersson 2014) obscures long histories of mobility between African states, and re-writes contemporary migrations on the continent in narratives that center on events of European non/arrival. This turns a blind eye to the other destinations, trajectories, historical genealogies and cultural repertoires that animate cross-border migration on the continent (see



Bakewell/Jónsson 2011; McGlennen forthcoming; Maher 2017; Lydon 2009). Likewise, we know from years of research that the majority of international migrants originating in Africa remain on the continent (de Haas 2008; World Bank 2011), while new research is also beginning to show deepening migratory ties between Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Gulf (see for example Şaul/Pelican 2014, Flahaux/de Haas 2016; Chu 2015; Haugen 2012; Lan 2015; Heck 2014). All this to say that much of the migration on the African continent has no European destination. If Europe is not wholly irrelevant – as a foreclosed option, a choice not taken, or a force impacting the policing of intra-African borders – it certainly does not merit the central place it occupies in the scholarship and popular discourses which frame African mobilities.

Additionally, the construction of migrant routes after the fact from the perspective of particular destinations (in this case Europe) fails to meaningfully account for the indeterminacy of migration. This is to say that even when the open-ended, evolving nature of many migration journeys is mentioned, the narratives constructed from the vantage of points of arrival nevertheless inscribe a more linear understanding of specified routes. This backward-looking perspective ossifies trajectories that are often decided in an ad-hoc manner along the way and is ill-equipped to grasp the trajectories that just happened to lead elsewhere (see also Ciabarrí 2014). In this way, the indeterminate nature of migration and mobility projects, which often have no consistently held destinations (see Landau 2012; Echeverri Zuluaga 2015), is likewise rendered more concrete and unidirectional than they are experienced. As an increasingly large body of literature on what has become known as stepwise or serial migration confirms, migrant routes and destinations are most often indeterminate, evolving and responsive to a variety of factors, from the possibilities of gaining legal status, to perceived economic opportunities, to rumors and information exchanges in chance and fleeting encounter en route (Steinberg 2015, 2016). As Binaisa and Jolivet (2016) have noted, migrants »search for life«, that is they search for places that offer some grounds on which they can build toward some future, some promise of a more stable or more prosperous situation; a territory from which they can expand their field of operations, or shore up the gains they have made along the way (Newhouse 2017b). In retrospect, trajectories that in the temporality of mobility choices are shifty and indeterminate, calcify into channels, conduits and routes.

## A VIEW FROM JUBA

In the spirit of self-critical balance, I will now discuss my own research with migrants in Juba, South Sudan, taking up both the epistemic centering of Europe in scholarly and policy knowledge projects around migration, as well as the ways in which data-saturation produced its own blind spots. My research, conducted in the first half of 2015, focuses on regional migration circuits in Eastern Africa that complicate what is typically understood as ›crisis migration‹. In the East African neighborhood, these trajectories knit together the region, and yet often fail to appear in broader scholarly discussions (Newhouse 2017a). These are movements that flow into precarious or conflict-impacted contexts; economic migrant routes that often operate in parallel to, but distinct from, itineraries of displacement or refugee return. My interest, then, was to better understand the collective assemblages of migration journeys that play a generative role in the emergence, efflorescence and dissolution of boom-towns like Juba. And so I went to Juba to further understand the motivations, decisions and experiences of the tens of thousands of migrants from all over east and central Africa who found their way to Juba, lured to the city despite the violence and renewed conflict by a once promising economy: by the windfalls of new oil, international state building largess and a »virgin« country (Newhouse 2017b).

Yet, one day in May 2015, I found myself, quite by accident, discussing clandestine migration routes toward the Mediterranean with an official of the Ethiopian Embassy in Juba, South Sudan. I had not mentioned Europe when I had asked for an interview with the embassy.<sup>3</sup> I was there hoping to track down migrant numbers, numbers which are notoriously difficult to verify in any country with significant levels of un- and minimally documented migration. Did the embassy know how many Ethiopian nationals were in South Sudan, I asked. Where in the country did they concentrate? And for what kinds of issues did they seek consular support?

Instead of answering my direct question, the consular officer veered in another direction, toward what has been discussed in the academic literature as the »Euro-African borderlands« (Andersson 2014), by way of the Ethiopian government's efforts to tackle undocumented migration between itself and its western neighbor. While echoing rights-based discourses relating to migration, the consular officer spoke of the government's efforts to persuade potential migrants to remain in Ethiopia,

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3 | While I had not mentioned Europe in any of my communications with the staff at the embassy, I offered my card when making my request for an audience with the consular officer which identified me as a scholar based in Germany. There is little doubt that my presence as a white, European-based scholar shaped how officials at the embassy chose to address me.

both through media campaigns exposing the »brutality of the migrant pathways« and through targeted capacity building efforts and microfinance projects. I found this performance intriguing, but also puzzling. It was clear that the embassy saw some benefit in presenting itself to me as a credible and *humane* partner in controlling migration towards Europe. And as I continued with interviews at the Embassies of Kenya, Uganda and Somalia the spectre of ›destination Europe‹ continued to surface, unbidden. My interest in migrant lives and experiences in South Sudan was understood not for itself, but rather through a lens firmly focused on the Mediterranean.

Some may say that I am reading too much into the appearance of a fantasy of ›destination Europe‹ in this interview, which might also be explained away by the accident of timing. As we drew into late spring and summer months of 2015, the so-called ›European migrant crisis‹ in the Mediterranean continued to unfold, with near weekly reports of dramatic rescues at sea, and even more tragic mass drownings (Collyer/King 2016). Additionally, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in cooperation with the European diplomatic mission were at that time putting pressure on the embassies in Juba to get a better handle on their nationals. But, I would argue instead that Juba was, just at that moment coming to be understood by experts and politicians as one of the way-points or stop-over grounds on a ›Central Mediterranean Route‹, which was also in construction. As the boats leaving the Libyan shores for Europe became ever more frequent after the fall of Qaddafi, there was a rush to gain verifiable empirical data on the irregular pathways originating in the East African Horn, with the migrant presence in Juba suddenly viewed in a new light.

This was so despite the fact that Europe, as a destination, was rarely mentioned when I was speaking with migrants themselves. The empirical ›story‹ that unfolded in the nearly one hundred formal interviews and the many more informal conversations I had with migrant entrepreneurs in the city, was one in which very few people expressed any interest in going to Europe clandestinely or for immigration purposes. This was as true of those with significant capital and expansive international networks as it was of street vendors and those building other micro-enterprises. A plurality of interlocutors was downright dismissive of the idea, preferring the risky but potentially much more lucrative prospects available to them where they were. A handful admitted to an interest in visiting Europe for reasons of trade, to source materials for import, tourism or to visit family or friends. Many more spoke of their desire to visit (but not necessarily migrate to) South Africa, Dubai, Istanbul, India and China, if they mentioned other destinations at all. As I have written previously (Newhouse 2017b), migrants continuously undertake a complex weighing out of the possibilities of all sorts of destinations, before deciding on a particular one. And these decisions are

constantly re-evaluated against prevailing political and economic conditions, shifts in visa regimes, and perceptions of opportunities on the horizon.

I recount my conversation with the consulate because for me, this interaction indexes a critical point in relation to the production of migration knowledge by drawing attention to the ways in which researchers, governments and international organizations fail to see particular places for what they are: destinations.

But is the only story to be told from Juba? It was certainly the one that emerged most compellingly from the data. Yet, as I have mentioned, even in my own research, the geographical frame – Juba – misses out on the various and complex process of migration that lead to other destinations, including Europe. Those other itineraries entered into my research only second-hand through the stories told of migrants who passed Juba fleetingly, or passed it by completely as they transited towards the Libyan shore or, to offer another example, back home to Somalia from South Africa (Newhouse 2015b). My approach, based in the tea stalls, markets and patios that shape commercial life in Juba was better poised to capture the regional nature of migration in the East African neighborhood. My interviews and observations captured something of the short-term cross-border trading circuits, including professional labor migration of the staff of international non-governmental and community-based organizations; those moving because their skills are more valued elsewhere; or those seeking to take advantage of differentials in currency values, or of labor- and trading markets less saturated by intense competition, or less constrained by political machinations. Given my location and research design, I was ill equipped to apprehend those other paths and other destinations. The muted presence of trajectories toward Europe from the vantage point of Juba, indeed, were so rare that they were overwhelmed by the preponderance of narratives that centered squarely on Juba, or that reached outward to cities like Dubai and Shenzhen. Because of this, I remained skeptical of the reality that – at least for some – Juba was, in fact, one of the staging grounds for what has come to be understood in policy circles as the ›Central Mediterranean Route‹.

## **TOWARD A MANIFOLD READING OF MIGRATION**

In this essay, I have taken a critical look at recent migration scholarship to think through the relationship between methodology and knowledge production. I have focused on a new trend in qualitative migration research which implicitly or explicitly relies on geographical sampling to tell stories about migration, often from the perspective of migrants en-route. I traced out why this geographical approach gained traction, and pointed to some important tensions inherent in research designs which

let geography ›decide‹ who participates in the research, drawing examples from my own and others' research. In this final concluding section, I pull together the strands of my critique to argue for a manifold reading of migration which relies on sustained and critical reflection of the limits of methodologies and an openness to lateral collaborations to weave more indeterminate narratives of mobility across borders.

So, given this analysis, what happens if we take seriously the temporal and spatial unfolding of trajectories, *en media res*? Methodologically, what steps can critical qualitative researchers of migration undertake to better account for the situatedness of our research? And for the situated and manifold nature of migration itself? I have advocated here for manifold reading of migration, that is to say, a conceptualization which goes beyond an attention to stops, or stays (Crawley et al. 2015), to encompass a more fundamental questioning of what we understand as a destination in itself.

But how might we go about this? In conversations with critical migration scholars during the interstitial moments at conferences and workshops in the past few years, I have been struck by the way our data can overwhelm us, by the accretion of certainty that comes when a certain set of coordinates are repeated to us over and over again. I see reflected in others, the same sureness I feel of the migration stories I have to tell, even as these other stories diverge and contradict my own. And rather than view this as a problem for migration scholarship, I see it as a starting point of a manifold reading of migration. Because, in the multiplicity of stories, we need not find such accounts mutually exclusive, but instead we can view them as the raw material for more richly woven narratives of mobility across borders. This requires of scholars a modesty of claims, but also new ways of working in collaboration, of reading disparate work against each other to collectively give shape to new understandings, narratives and theorizations. Such a collective process of oblique or lateral comparison (see Robinson 2016), offers the possibility of constructing knowledge that more fully captures the indeterminacy and virtuosity of migration.

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Wissensproduktionen der Migration

[transcript]