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Migration, citizenship and kinship dynamics in a changing Europe

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ARGONAUTS OF WEST AFRICA

MIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP AND KINSHIP
DYNAMICS IN A CHANGING EUROPE

Apostolos Andrikopoulos

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ARGONAUTS OF WEST AFRICA:

MIGRATION, CITIZENSHIP AND KINSHIP
DYNAMICS IN A CHANGING EUROPE

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ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College

voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,

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Στη μνήμη της γιαγιάς μου Άννας

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First of all, I want to express my gratitude to all those who participated in this study and shared their life stories with me. The protagonists of this book are migrants from Ghana and Nigeria – the Argonauts of West Africa – as well as other migrants, from other African countries, the Caribbean, Eastern and Southern Europe, with whom West Africans collaborate and develop relations of kinship. Obviously, the title of this dissertation is a playful alteration of Malinowski's (1922) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. But it is also a reference to the story of Argonauts in ancient Greek mythology. Like the Greek Argonauts who embarked on a risky voyage, passing through the Clashing Rocks, in quest of the Golden Fleece in the kingdom of Colchis, the Argonauts of West Africa navigate difficult and constantly changing situations to migrate to Europe and fulfil their aspirations. Both for Greek and West African Argonauts, the role of kinship is central to attaining their goals. Jason, the leader of Argonauts, managed to obtain the Golden Fleece with the help of the King of Colchis's daughter Medea, who became his wife. West African migrants use creatively old and new forms of kinship in their endeavor to travel to and find work and remain in Europe. Nevertheless, in the stories of both Greek and West African Argonauts, kinship takes on a dynamic of its own, which makes it more difficult to control than they had initially believed it would be, and shows its dark, ugly side. Jason succeeded due to Medea's help but when he abandoned her for another woman, Medea took revenge by killing their two children. For West Africans, kinship may have offered solutions to their problems but it has also created new and sometimes more difficult ones. Like tragic heroes in Greek mythology, the adventurous lives of the Argonauts of West Africa gained not only my admiration but my sympathy as well.

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