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**Argonauts of West Africa**

*Migration, citizenship and kinship dynamics in a changing Europe*

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## CHAPTER ONE

# Introduction Kinship, citizenship and inequality

This book is about the novel and often experimental ways West African migrants in the Netherlands use kinship in their quest for international mobility, employment and legal residence. In previous research projects on Nigerian and Ghanaian migrants, first in Thessaloniki, Greece, and later in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, I came to realize the vital role of kinship in the lives of these migrants, especially those with a legally precarious status. In the social sciences and political philosophy, there has been a general tendency to assume that the emergence and growing influence of the state will restrict the societal role of kinship and its entanglement with politics and other domains of social life. But in the contexts I studied, it was precisely the ever more intensive interventions by the state – notably new measures to control mobility across borders, access to the labor market and citizenship – that triggered new efforts by migrants to mobilize and develop kinship in order to use it for creating footholds in new surroundings. Changes in the wider contexts, such as the 2009 European economic crisis and the increasing presence in the Netherlands of migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, prompted further innovations by West African migrants in the creation of kinship networks. A focus on kinship, a classical anthropological topic, turned out to be surprisingly relevant for understanding migrant struggles to retain agency in the face of mounting external pressures. Yet, in this new context, this also requires a critical appraisal of the basic tenets of existing approaches to kinship. Close attention to kinship's dynamics and flexibility is imperative, as the new generation of kinship scholars advocates. But even more important is the attention to inequality as a complement to the usual tendency of recent approaches to kinship to pair kinship with reciprocity. The following ethnographic vignette can help highlight what is at stake and guide the formulation of this study's main questions.

"Where is Joshua?" I asked my Greek friend, Eleni, about her Nigerian husband almost one hour after I arrived at their place in Amsterdam. Eleni had met Joshua in Greece in 2003. A few years later, they got married and moved to Amsterdam. "He's talking on the phone with his friend Chidi," she replied and explained that these days he talked with him on the phone for hours. Chidi and

Joshua had met in Greece where they worked together as street vendors. From there, Chidi went to Italy and later to the United States, where he got married to an African-American woman. The main topic of the long phone conversations between Chidi and Joshua were the attempts by Chidi's brother, Victor, to enter Europe. Victor, with his own passport, had only managed to travel from Nigeria to the Republic of Georgia, where he was currently stranded. Victor's original plan was to travel from Georgia to Turkey and from there to clandestinely cross the border and enter Greece. However, Joshua strongly advised him to reconsider this plan because, as he had learned from his brothers in Thessaloniki, it would be extremely difficult for him to find employment in crisis-hit Greece. Instead, Joshua suggested Victor join him in the Netherlands where there had been relatively more job opportunities – though certainly considerably fewer than in previous years. Joshua tried to find documents for Victor, or, more precisely, looked for someone willing to lend his passport to Victor to allow him entry into the Netherlands. It has not been uncommon for West African and other migrants to use someone else's identity documents to either travel or find work in the Netherlands and elsewhere. Eleni was aware of this plan and was not at all surprised by it. It was not the first time she had heard about the circulation of identity documents among West African migrants. About ten years ago, while cleaning the apartment of her boyfriend "Walter," she found another passport in the closet bearing his real name, Joshua, whereupon she left him to temporarily return to her family home, until Joshua begged her to hear him out. Eleni recalled, "He said that the only way he could get a visa, and he paid for this and did other things, was to do it with the papers of someone else because he couldn't do it under his own name." She forgave him and helped him to get legalized by marrying him.

This dissertation investigates how legally precarious West African migrants mobilize and produce kinship, especially siblinghood and marriage, to obtain identity documents, such as visas, work permits, residence permits and passports, which enable them to travel, work in formal jobs and stay legally in Europe. More specifically, it examines the role of kinship for West African migrants in circumventing restrictive immigration policies and border controls, securing waged employment in the strictly state-regulated Dutch labor market, and acquiring legal residence in the Netherlands. In this regard, this book focuses on the interplay of citizenship and kinship. It examines the process of kinship in a setting of unequal access to citizenship and its means of proof: identity documents. Thus the aim of this study is to question the role of civic inequality in the formation, reproduction and possible decline of kinship and kinship relations.

Joshua finished his long phone call and joined us in the living room. "How is your wife?" Eleni asked, teasing him about the close relationship he

had recently developed with Chidi. Joshua apologized for being away and briefly explained that Chidi had asked him to help his brother Victor travel from Georgia to the Netherlands, which he intended to do. I interrupted, asking Joshua directly, “With someone else’s documents?” He looked down at the floor, smiled, and said, “Ooh Apostolos! You know too much!” Questions about the borrowing and loaning of identity documents from an outsider, such as me, often left my migrant interlocutors feeling uncomfortable, afraid, or embarrassed, although they frequently talked and laughed about it among themselves. Similar to what Herzfeld (2016) has described as “cultural intimacy” in reference to the more disreputable aspects of national identity that contribute to the reproduction of shared national sentiments among citizens but are excluded from official national narratives, the feelings of embarrassment and fear associated with the exchange of identity documents reinforced an awareness of commonality among those involved in the practice.

Eleni urged Joshua to update us on the latest developments. Joshua said that he had met Ugo, “a brother from the Bijlmer,”<sup>1</sup> who was a Nigerian with a Dutch residence permit and “very much a lookalike” of Victor. In exchange for €2,500, Ugo agreed to travel with his wife to Tbilisi and give his passport to Victor, who would then use it to travel to Amsterdam together with Ugo’s wife. After Ugo’s wife and Victor arrived in Amsterdam, Ugo would declare to the Dutch Embassy that his passport had been lost and would request the issuance of new travel documents. “Why do you need Ugo’s wife in this story?” I asked. Joshua said Ugo’s wife would be necessary for showing Victor what to do and how to behave at Amsterdam Schiphol Airport, as a holder of a Dutch permit, especially in case someone addressed him in Dutch. Her role would become more important if the immigration officers began to doubt whether the passport belonged to him. She could provide them with a marriage certificate and claim that Victor was indeed her husband “Ugo.” Everything was set, with only the approval of Chidi’s African-American wife still pending. Once she allowed Chidi to pay this sum of money, Joshua could initiate the process. In the meantime, Victor would have to wait in Georgia.

Victor’s journey to the Netherlands depended on being financed by his brother in the United States who had succeeded in his migratory goals and obtained a Green Card after he had married an American citizen. Since Victor did not meet the qualifications for legal entry into the Schengen area, he had to follow other strategies to realize his aspiration to migrate to Europe. Victor’s project not only required a significant amount of money but also involved

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1 The Bijlmer, officially Amsterdam Zuidoost, is the district of Amsterdam where most African migrants live.

the time and effort of many other individuals to coordinate and realize this plan. With some of these individuals, he already shared kinship ties, such as with his brother Chidi, while others he had never met. Nevertheless, the relations between all of these people were expressed in the language of kinship (“brother,” “Ugo’s wife”) and unity (“us,” “we”). Although each of them had a different reason to participate, they all worked together for the project’s success. For Victor, the departure from Nigeria and the passage through international borders had marked his entrance into a new web of relationships and the beginning of a life in which he could access various resources only by relying on others and impersonating someone else. This brought Victor closer to other migrants with similar experiences and to persons who could help him gain access to resources. For example, one of the reasons why Joshua was motivated to help Victor was that he had experienced similar difficulties in the past, including using someone else’s identity. On the other hand, Victor and Ugo also bonded because of their unequal civic status. In the process of his migration to Europe, Victor became closer to people such as Joshua, with whom he shared similar experiences, and others, such as Ugo, who held a relatively more privileged position. In the second case, Victor not only had to cooperate with Ugo but also had to learn about and impersonate him, at least during the time he was crossing the border.

Inspired by the constructivist turn in the study of ethnicity and identity (Brubaker 2004a; Baumann 1999; Eriksen 1994) and the critique that migration studies have prioritized ethnicity over other forms of social closure and identification to explain the process of migration and migrant incorporation (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Wimmer 2009), I have been reluctant to take ethnicity as a unit of analysis in my previous research projects and in the research on which this dissertation is based. In my first study in Thessaloniki (2004-05), following the example of other scholars (Baumann 1996; Wimmer 2004), I took a neighborhood as a unit of analysis and approached my respondents as residents of that area and not specifically as members of a particular ethnic group (Andrikopoulos 2017b). This allowed me to find out whether and to what extent ethnicity was important in their lives instead of taking its significance for granted. In that neighborhood, I came across a small but noticeable number of African residents who, very willingly, talked to me about their relations with their neighbors and shared their life stories with me. A few years later, in 2007, when I moved to Amsterdam to pursue a master’s degree, I happened to meet some of the Nigerian migrants I had interviewed in Thessaloniki. I became fascinated by their intricate migration trajectories and decided to conduct research, in the context of my master’s thesis, on the migration process from Nigeria to the Netherlands and the survival strategies of Nigerian migrants in Amsterdam. A merely spatial unit of

analysis, such as a neighborhood, was not adequate to explore these questions, thus I started considering alternative methodological options that would help me avoid the essentialization of ethnicity.

The study of social networks and the analysis of how resources circulate among network actors appeared to be a good choice. However, I feared that such a methodological approach would direct me to kinship, a topic which I was quite reluctant to address. At the time, I saw kinship as an old-fashioned concern of earlier generations of anthropologists who studied societies with no or weak state organization and more or less implicitly seemed to assume that kinship loses its significance in modern state-organized societies. Moreover, in African studies, the introduction of the concept of ethnicity signaled an increase of interest in urban processes, demographic transformations and (de)colonization in African societies; thus it replaced the concept of tribe which had been used in reference to clan-based societies, which were seen as static.<sup>2</sup> How would kinship be a better choice than ethnicity for a study on African migrants in Europe? How could the focus on kinship avoid the pitfalls of an ethnic lens, such as the essentialization of identities, when ethnicity in African studies was introduced to analyze the processes of social transformation and the dynamics of group formation in new contexts where tribe and kinship seemed to be losing their relevance? I was worried that a focus on kinship would exoticize African migrants and reproduce stereotypes about them as “traditional” and “family-oriented” people.

Nevertheless, the lives of legally precarious African migrants, such as the story of Victor above, convinced me of the urgency of studying kinship in migratory contexts. It would be impossible to understand the motivations, aspirations, choices and survival strategies of West African migrants without considering kinship. Relationships they describe in terms of kinship are typically those that have been crucial to realizing their aspirations and ensuring that the requisite resources become available at the right time for their daily survival. They may thus have borrowed from “family” in order to be able to migrate, travelled with the passport of a look-alike “brother” or “sister,” found jobs in Amsterdam using the identity documents of their “brothers” and “sisters,” obtained a family reunification visa or legalized their status in the Netherlands through “marriage.” Furthermore, the newly formed kinship

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2 Manchester School anthropologists have significantly contributed to the shift from tribe to ethnicity. In contrast to anthropologists from Cambridge and Oxford, such as Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes, who studied small isolated African societies, Manchester anthropologists studied social transformations resulting from migration, urbanization and colonialism. They argued that social relations were context-bound (Gluckman 1940) and showed how the meaning of “tribe” changed (detrribalization, retribalization) in new urban settings (Mitchell 1956; Cohen 1969). Migration and ethnic studies scholars often forget that Fredrik Barth (1969) built upon these insights for the theorization of boundaries in group formation process – arguably the most influential work in the constructivist and situationalist approach to ethnicity.

relations in Europe, especially siblinghood and marriage, crossed boundaries of ethnicity and connected legally precarious West African migrants with citizens and legal residents of African, Afro-Caribbean and European descent. Various forms of exchange took place across ethnic boundaries and resulted in collaborations between people of different ethnic backgrounds, countries of origin, socioeconomic positions and, most important, legal status. The study of these kinship assemblages offered a fascinating entry point to going beyond ethnicity. However, this requires also going beyond the way kinship has been theorized as an institution of “traditional,” stateless societies.

The social relations that organized and regulated the lending of Ugo’s passport to Victor as well as the marriage of Joshua to a Greek woman in the Netherlands and of Chidi to an African American woman in the US, which qualified both of them for a residence permit in the country of residence, indicate that the dominant presence of the state in the lives of legally precarious migrants not only did not lead to the disappearance of kinship but even continuously regenerated it. This dissertation delineates how these migrants acquire, through kinship, resources difficult to access. It examines the forms of exchange and collaboration between West African migrants, mostly Nigerians and Ghanaians, with other African migrants, Dutch Afro-Caribbeans and citizens of peripheral<sup>3</sup> European countries. The exclusion of many West African migrants from civic membership in the Netherlands designates citizenship as a scarce and desirable status. Civic membership and the proofs of it – identity documents – become valuable resources in a setting of civic inequality.

Therefore, the central question for this book will be: How does unequal access to citizenship (civic inequality) trigger new dynamics of social relations that West African migrants in Amsterdam frame in terms of kinship?

More generally, I aim to show that exploring the relationship between kinship and inequality, such as unequal access to citizenship and other state institutions, is analytically and theoretically useful. Showing how state-generated inequality impacts new assemblages of social collaboration and may proliferate kinship relations contributes to the long-standing effort to reconceptualize the dyadic opposition between traditional and modern societies and debunk the presupposition that kinship organizes social, political and economic life only in traditional societies while in modern societies kinship exists separate from political and economic activities.

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<sup>3</sup> I use “peripheral” to refer to countries of Southern and Eastern Europe, such as Greece and Poland, not only because they are located on Europe’s periphery but also because they are hierarchically included in the EU and heavily dependent on countries of the EU core (I elaborate more on this in chapter five).

## INEQUALITY AND THE STUDY OF KINSHIP

Following different schools of thought in British, French and American academia, anthropologists in earlier decades studied kinship primarily in stateless, relatively isolated and remote societies. For European and American anthropologists of kinship, Africa was the ideal place to study kinship systems as the basic structure of societies conceived as non-modern, and thus different. Yet it is clear that the study of what constituted kinship in Africa and other “non-Western” societies was informed by anthropologists’ understanding of kinship in their own societies. In this way, the anthropological study of kinship was limited to the examination of social relations that shared some common characteristics with what was understood as kinship in anthropologists’ societies of origin.

David Schneider’s groundbreaking work, *American Kinship* (1980 [1968]), shifted the focus of anthropological kinship research to North America and Europe, and his subsequent rigorous critique of kinship studies (1984) challenged one of its well-established assumptions that “blood is thicker than water.” Schneider’s critique pointed out that the analysis of “non-Western” kinship systems, from Morgan to his contemporaries, was rampant with Euro-American folk understandings of kinship. According to these understandings, “[K]inship has to do with the reproduction of human beings and the relations between human beings that are concomitants of reproduction” (Schneider 1984, 188). Schneider questioned the universality of kinship and therefore the appropriateness of using it as an analytical category for the study of cultures in which “kinship” does not necessarily derive from relations of procreation.

Taking Schneider’s critique of the anthropology of kinship as a point of departure, a new generation of anthropologists (Carsten 2000; 2004; Franklin and McKinnon 2001; Faubion 2001; Bamford and Leach 2009; see also Strathern 1992; Sahlins 2013) have contributed to de-linking biology from the study of kinship and showed how kinship evolves out of socially contingent contexts rather than referring to a set of biological relations. Although Carsten was sympathetic to Schneider’s critique of the centrality of procreation in the study of kinship, she did not share his view that kinship cannot be a universal category of comparison. “If we accept that both the definition and the meaning of kinship are culturally variable, then we certainly must reject a universal definition of kinship in terms of procreation,” maintained Carsten. “But this does not mean that we cannot compare both how people conceive of relatedness and the meaning they attribute it in different cultures” (1997, 290). To move away from the distinction between physical and social kinship, Carsten suggested the term “relatedness” as an inclusive concept for use in cross-culturally studying “indigenous idioms of



being related" (2000, 4). Similarly, Sahlins suggested conceptualizing kinship as a "mutuality of being" in which "relatives" refer to those "who belong to one another, who are parts of one another, who are co-present in each other, whose lives are joined and interdependent" (2013, 21). For Sahlins (2013, 29), "[A]ll means of constituting kinship are in essence the same" and may range from commensality, mutual aid and shared experiences to adoption, marriage and procreation. "Relatedness" and "mutuality of being" prioritize local understandings of how people see themselves as related and include all the ways of constituting intersubjective participation in the study of kinship. Nonetheless, the theorization of "mutuality of being" and the way "relatedness"<sup>4</sup> has been applied in ethnographic studies tend to ascribe a prominent role to sharing and reciprocity as a basic mechanism of kinship. Several studies (Carsten 1997; Pauli 2013; Thelen, Coe, and Alber 2013) have shown most convincingly the key role of sharing in the process of kinship. Yet the importance attached to sharing in the theorization of kinship as a "mutuality of being" or "relatedness" risks obscuring the complexities, tensions, and inequalities that exist within kinship relations.

Sharing and reciprocity imply closeness, mutuality, and often equality. This conceptualization of kinship bears the risk of locating practices such as violence, treachery, jealousy, fights, and secrecy outside the realm of kinship. As other anthropologists (Geschiere 2013; Lambek 2011; Delaney 2001; Piot 1996; Fennell 2016), and especially sociologists and psychologists (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Gelles 1972; 2017; Smart 2007; Taliani 2012; Duyvendak 2011), have warned us, these unpleasant practices and emotions are part and parcel of kinship relations. Marxist and feminist scholars have already pointed out the extent to which ideologies of kinship naturalize patriarchy and power dynamics within the family and mask hierarchical relations of production (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995; Collier 1988; Siskind 1978; Goody 1990; White 2004). These caveats are important for this ethnographic study. Although feminists have been primarily concerned with gender inequality, their insights are useful for the study of other forms of inequality, such as civic inequality. Taking inequality as an entry point for

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4 This criticism of "relatedness" mostly targets the ways other anthropologists employed this term rather than how Janet Carsten herself used the concept. In her Langkawi ethnography, Carsten's understanding of sharing as constitutive of relatedness is close to Gibson's (1986) critical use of the term, as a negation of reciprocity, in his study of the Buid in the Philippines. "For the Buid, sharing involves an obligation to give, but none to receive or to repay the giver. According to this formulation, 'sharing' seems to fit the relation between houses of one compound in Langkawi more closely than Sahlins's generalized reciprocity" (Carsten 1997, 166). Carsten acknowledged "the intense, often too intense, emotional experiences that embody family relations" (2004, 6), and in a more recent commentary, on Sahlins's book on kinship, criticized the notion "mutuality of being" because it "emanates a warm, fuzzy glow rather than a cold shiver... Differentiation, hierarchy, exclusion, and abuse are, however, also part of what kinship does or enables" (2013, 246-7).

studying kinship makes us more careful about idealizing kinship relations and enables us to see beyond the positive discourse on kinship our informants engage in.

In the 1970s and the 1980s, there was a proliferation of feminist studies on kinship which challenged the popular, usually male-centered, consideration of the family and home as safe havens (Friedan 1963; Oakley 1974; Pahl 1989; Hochschild 1989). Barret and McIntosh (1982), for example, argued that family is both a socio-economic institution and an ideology that creates and perpetuates gender inequality and the subordination of women. Feminist activists and scholars maintained that family norms, such as the ideal of the male breadwinner, and institutions, such as heterosexual marriage, privilege the position of men and reinforce patriarchy. In an attempt to understand the subordination of women, feminist anthropologists paid closer attention to the lives of women in marital unions and the exchanges that take place in the context of marriage. Although feminist scholars (e.g. Rubin 1975) have been inspired by Levi-Strauss's (1969) analysis of marriage as the exchange of women between men, they showed that women do not lack agency and do participate in exchanges in the context of marriage (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002). This view was particularly prevalent among materialist feminists and those who considered marriage and prostitution as part of the same continuum of sexual-economic exchanges between men and women (Tabet 2012; 2004; Broqua and Deschamps 2014; Combessie and Mayer 2013). However, this does not imply that these exchanges are of reciprocal character and establish equality. Sexual services and sexual pleasure, for example, are rarely reciprocal,<sup>5</sup> and sex is usually framed as a gift from women to men (e.g. Hunter 2002; 2009; Tabet 1991; Adomako Ampofo 1997; 2007). The one-directional flow of the sexual gift, according to Tabet (2004), is an outcome of men's ability to openly express their sexual desires and try to satisfy them. The socio-economic inferiority of women prevents them from talking about their sexual desires and seeking their satisfaction in the same way as men do. Does this mean that empowered women can become the recipients of male sexual services (in and out of

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5 Some feminist scholars (Gilfoyle, Wilson, and Brown 1992; Braun, Gavey, and McPhillips 2003) have argued that sexual reciprocity is primarily a discourse and an ideal rather than a lived reality. As long as heterosexual sex takes place in an unequal gender setting, mutually enjoyable sex does not always reflect women's position as an equal partner. In sexual exchanges framed as mutually enjoyable, especially from the male point of view, a female orgasm is a condition for the man's pleasure. Although men's desire for their female partners to experience pleasure may "signal the development of more egalitarian and reciprocal sexual standards," as Vance (1984, 12) argues, "the anxious question, 'Did you come?', may demarcate a new area of women's behavior men are expected to master and control – female orgasm." Therefore, although female orgasm may be framed as an entitlement for women, in practice, it may become an obligation that confers power to men and reproduces their masculine dominant roles in heterosexual relations.

marriage)? This remains to be seen in contexts – like some of the ones I studied – in which women seem to be better placed and with better access to resources than men. The marriages of legally unauthorized African male migrants with citizen women offer an opportunity to examine the question of the sexual gift’s directionality as well as the impact on gender relations of this and other exchanges in the context of marriage.

### **POLITICS, STATE, KINSHIP**

As mentioned, in classic anthropological and sociological accounts, kinship has been conceptualized as the organizing structure of primitive/traditional societies, inseparable from other domains of society, such as the economy, political organization, and religion (for a critical review of this perspective: McKinnon and Cannell 2013a; McKinnon 2013; Kuper 1988; Thelen and Alber 2017b). In this view, kinship supposedly became irrelevant to and disentangled from other social domains in so-called modern societies. This decline was due in part to the presence of a centralized state authority, which granted equal rights and obligations (citizenship) to its citizens, and in part to the capitalist market, which had transformed socially embedded economic relations into impersonal transactions. According to this narrative, the presence of the state and the capitalist market also caused a transformation in the conceptions of personhood: from *persons-relatives*, whose social existence was firmly embedded in the web of kinship in traditional societies, to autonomous, rights-bearing, and rational persons-citizens in modern societies.

Many anthropologists have been critical of the modern-traditional dichotomy and the place of kinship as a differentiating marker. Kuper (1988) noted that European anthropologists constructed the “myth” of a kinship-based primitive society as a way to contrast and portray their own societies as democratic and economically rational. For instance, Mauss’s conception of the tribal clan-organized society, as it is known to us by his seminal study of exchange economy [The Gift (2002 [1924])], served as a sharply contrasting counter-case for his lesser known analysis (never translated into English) of modern nation-state societies (Mauss 1953 [1920]; 1969 [1920]) which he praised for being “the last and most perfect” form of social organization, with “incomparable moral dignity” (Brubaker 2004b, 108).

From an empirical perspective, Carsten (2004) argued that the conceptualization of the modern society as composed of equal and autonomous individuals, in contrast to kinship-based traditional societies where interdependence formed the core basis of coexistence, is mainly based on philosophical, legal, and religious sources rather than on the study of everyday practices. Indeed, the anthropology of kinship, especially before Schneider, studied only small, stateless societies in the global periphery, and hardly

ever societies in Europe and North America. Even when Schneider urged American and European anthropologists to study kinship in their own societies, the proposal was not to examine whether kinship was important and disentangled from politics and the economy. On the contrary, and as with his teacher Talcott Parsons (1977), his starting point was the presupposition that kinship is an autonomous domain in the West:

“The kinship systems of modern, western societies are relatively highly differentiated as compared with the kinship systems found in many primitive, peasant societies. By ‘differentiated’ I mean simply that kinship is clearly and sharply distinguished from all other kinds of social institutions and relationships...It makes particularly good sense, it seems to me, to study kinship in as close to its ‘pure form’ as possible here in America, rather than in some other society where it is hidden beneath layers of economic, political, religious, and other elements” (Schneider 1980 [1968], vii-viii).

This logic of social evolution regarding the role of kinship in societal organization is also evident in the division of intellectual labor between anthropologists and sociologists. In Africa, Asia, Oceania and South America, the “anthropology of kinship” focused mainly on societies with no or weak state organization, while in industrialized, capitalist societies of the Global North, the “sociology of the family” focused on nuclear families. In recent decades, a stream of anthropologists in Europe and the United States have begun studying kinship in their own societies. However, their concerns about “families of choice” and their urging to reconsider the place of nature as a given in kinship, especially in studies on new reproductive technologies, gay kinship, and adoption (Strathern 1992; Edwards and others 1993; Weston 1991; Howell 2006; Levine 2008), have turned their attention away from questioning whether and how kinship is intertwined with politics and the economy. Nevertheless, these ethnographic studies persuasively demonstrate that kinship is also salient in the West and that the boundary between modern/Western and traditional/non-Western cannot be sustained through kinship as the marker of difference.

This study both builds on the valuable contributions of the new generation of kinship scholars and calls for a closer examination of the role of the state and citizenship in the process of constructing kinship in contemporary settings. Given that civic inequality is also an aspect of state-organized societies (Brubaker 1992; Bosniak 2008; Wallerstein 2003; Duyvendak, Geschiere, and Tonkens 2016), this dissertation examines how exclusion from citizenship and other forms of state membership (residence permits, visas, etc.) can reinforce the formation of kinship relations. The findings of

this research provide evidence of the “persistent life of kinship” (McKinnon and Cannell 2013b) in state-organized societies with capitalist economies. To be sure, this study does not argue that there were no transformations in the way people related to each other due to the presence of the state and the capitalist market. But it does direct our attention to the ways in which exclusionary mechanisms of state institutions and their impact on social relations among those who live at the margins of the state produce new ways of mobilizing kinship. Such emphasis on the consequences of the intrinsically exclusionary character of citizenship is more necessary than ever in an era of increased transnational mobility and globalization.

### **KINSHIP AND MIGRATION: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

One of the first attempts to study the interplay between kinship, state politics, and the market in the West came in the form of a number of postwar sociological studies on the migration process. Litwak (1960a; 1960b) questioned the validity of Parson’s modernization hypothesis that extended family relations would lose their importance due to the occupational and geographic mobility that characterized industrialized societies. His findings showed not only that there was no decline in the cohesion of extended family but that, on the contrary, the new conditions of industrialism sustained this cohesiveness by assigning new roles to its members. Litwak also noted that the extended family, having survived geographic dispersal, facilitated the migration of its members. In times of economic and political hardship, individuals could rely on their relatives for financial and psychological help to migrate. Those who migrated established open lines of communication with their family members and transmitted information that assisted the migration of other family members (Litwak 1960a, 386). Later this process was described by sociologists as “chain migration” (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964; Choldin 1973).

Other authors also emphasized the role of kinship in how chain migration operates. Networks of kinship span beyond legally closed borders and connect sending and receiving communities. Kinship provides a pool of resources potential migrants can make use of in order to circumvent legal restrictions and that ultimately allow them to migrate. Upon their arrival, new migrants rely on their kinfolk for accommodation, assistance in finding a job, and important information about beginning a new life in an unfamiliar place. Tilly and Brown (1967, 142-3) stressed:

“Migration under the auspices of kinship seems to be most common among groups which have the least skill in dealing with impersonal urban institutions like markets, bureaucracies, and communication systems, or the most uncertain relationships to those institutions. The support and protection of their kinfolk balance their weakness in these other respects.”

Although this body of sociological literature emphasized the vital role of kinship in migration, it lacked an analytical theory of kinship and relied on scholars' ethnocentric understanding of kinship as a blood relationship. Soon sociologists realized that the social relations that were important for migrants were not identical to what sociologists comprehended as kinship relations. They gradually started using the term "fictive kinship" (Li 1977; Ebaugh and Curry 2000; Kim 2009) to frame migrant relations that resembled what they implicitly understood as real kinship. But not even fictive kinship could capture the diversity of relations that played a pivotal role in migrants' lives, and sociologists shifted to more general concepts, such as community, ethnicity, social networks, and social capital.

Building on the contribution of previous studies on the phenomenon of chain migration, Massey and his colleagues developed what came to be known as the migrant network model. For Massey and his colleagues (1987; 1994), the migrant network is the set of social ties connecting nonmigrants of the sending community and the migrants of the receiving communities. The network's members "carry reciprocal obligations for assistance based on shared understandings of kinship, friendship, and common community origin" (Massey, Goldring, and Durand 1994, 1499). Massey and his colleagues (1987, 140) suggested that these reciprocal obligations are stronger among kinsmen, especially between fathers and sons who have "the strongest relationships" in the network. The existence of migrant networks decreases migration costs and risks and thus facilitates the migration of well-connected aspiring migrants. According to this model, when migrant networks reach a certain threshold, migration becomes a self-perpetuating phenomenon and cannot be curtailed by structural factors, such as restrictive immigration policies or a drop or rise in labor demand.<sup>6</sup>

The above sociological approaches and numerous empirical studies showed the significance of kinship in the context of migration and how migrants rely on their social relations to overcome barriers and respond to opportunities created by the state and the capitalist market. However, these approaches, lacking an analytical understanding of kinship, also considered kinship only as a source of support and assistance with a positive impact on migration and the life of migrants. The migrant network model and the chain migration literature, in a striking similarity to Sahlins's (1972) concentric circles model, considered kinship a greater source of support and of "generalized reciprocity" than other social relations and thus implied that the degree of assistance depended on social distance. This is also a more general tendency

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6 For a critical discussion of Massey's migrant network model see: Krissman (2005); Collyer (2005); De Haas (2010); Zolberg (1999).

in the sociological literature of social capital, which tends to consider networks resources and to see the negative consequences of social capital only for those outside the social networks. For Putnam (2000, 21), for example, “[N]etworks and the associated norms of reciprocity are generally good for those inside the network, but the external effects of social capital are by no means always positive.” There have been critical approaches to social capital that suggest a decoupling of social networks and resources and pointed out the downsides of social capital even for its holders (Portes 1998). However, this critical literature has not been very popular among migration scholars (for an exception: De Haas 2010; Cranford 2005).

This dissertation shows that kinship is indeed important for migrants to obtain resources that are difficult to access. At the same time, the ethnographic cases demonstrate that kinship is not simply a safe haven or an ultimate source of support (see also: Cole and Groes 2016b). Inequality and fear are intrinsic parts of social relations framed in a language of kinship by West African migrants. New forms of inequality generated by the state can in fact fuel the reproduction of kinship and its survival in a modern state society with a capitalist economy.

## **RESEARCHING KINSHIP**

This dissertation is primarily based on ethnographic fieldwork that I carried out in Amsterdam on legally precarious migrants from West Africa. By the term “legally precarious migrants”, I refer not only to those who do not have the right to reside legally in the Netherlands, but also to migrants who have a temporary legal status but fear that they will soon lose the right to reside legally. For migrants who do not have a residence permit, I use the term “legally unauthorized” instead of the commonly used term “undocumented.” The story of Victor as well as the detailed case studies in the following chapters show that these migrants are anything but undocumented.

Legal precarity is not an autonomous, external condition that exists in a vacuum. It is an aspect of the unequal relationship between the state and migrants. This relationship renders some migrants more insecure than others (cf Chauvin 2017; 2010). Legally unauthorized migrants are certainly “legally precarious,” but they are not always in the most extreme situation of legal precarity. As Torpey (2000) argued, it is important for states to first “embrace” their subjects, using techniques such as identification, registration and census, in order to control them and differentiate between members and non-members. As a result, “[I]ndividuals who remain beyond the embrace of the state necessarily represent a limit on its penetration” (2000, 11). A Nigerian woman who was granted a temporary residence permit as a victim of human trafficking told me that she felt more insecure about her stay in the Netherlands than earlier

as an unauthorized migrant. Her residence permit could be renewed every six months, only as long as police investigations were going on, a process which was nerve-racking. From the moment she appeared in the records of the Dutch state, her fear of deportation had been intensified. “Now, they have my name, they have my address, they have everything,” she told me. “And they keep saying that it is better if I go to a rehabilitation center in Africa.” Eventually, she obtained a family type residence permit after she married a Dutch citizen. Although the extension of both types of permits, either as a human trafficking victim or as a spouse, were uncertain, and she had no full control over it, getting her papers through marriage gave her more freedom and agency – at least according to her perception.

Beyond the vulnerabilities that precarious legal status entails, this dissertation is interested in the modes of action that uncertainty elicits (Cooper and Pratten 2015). As the Nigerian woman’s story shows, migrants might deal with the uncertainties of their legal status by turning to kinship. But can kinship help them overcome these uncertainties? If so, how? Does kinship not introduce new uncertainties? Can kinship eventually bring order, stability and predictability to their lives? In order to answer these questions, it is important to go beyond normative discourses that usually portray kinship relations in a positive light. If we want to understand what kinship does to the lives of migrants – and not only migrants – we need to observe people’s practices, how they behave with one another and how norms of kinship affect their interaction.

Furthermore, the ethnographic method can help us observe how, whether and why people categorize their social relations in terms of kinship. In 2013, a Dutch migration lawyer, who is well-known among West African migrants, told me that he usually has to explain to his African clients, when they talk about family relationships, such as brotherhood, the different meaning of kin terms in the Netherlands, especially in Dutch Law.

“I ask them, ‘Ok, do you have the same father and mother? Is it brother like that? Or do you mean brother in another sense?’ Then, I usually get the information I need...I describe what in our language, in our system is brother and then they say, ‘Oh it is a brother from the church,’ ‘It is a church brother’ or ‘It is a tribal brother,’ something like that. And then I can place it. ‘Ok this is not a biological brother but it is another social tie.’ Let’s say we have biological brothers and social brothers.”

Similar interactions are common for West African migrants in the Netherlands. It is therefore likely not only that West African migrants become aware of the meaning of kin terms in the Netherlands but that they also describe their social relations in different terms depending on their interlocutors (Cole 2014b). For example, a relationship which is described



as brotherhood between West African migrants can potentially be translated as “friend” or “like brother” when these migrants talk with Dutch or other Europeans. For me, as a white European researcher, it is important not only to rely on what West African migrants told me in interviews about their social relations but also to observe these relations in action and how the actors addressed each other. I do not suggest that we should take at face value the terms that West African migrants use in their daily interactions and ignore how they potentially describe these relations to others. However, we should “take seriously” (Archambault 2016) the terms that people use in their everyday interactions and try to understand why they choose them, and not others, and the outcome, or the expected outcome, of such framings.

### ***Research population and fieldwork***

The vast majority of West African migrants in Amsterdam originate from Ghana and Nigeria. According to data from the Statistics Department of the City of Amsterdam, 11,463 Ghanaians (7,498 first-generation) and 1,712 Nigerians (1,096 first-generation) are registered in Amsterdam (O+S, 2012). These figures do not include unauthorized migrants and therefore do not represent the total number of migrants from these two countries. Ghanaians are by far the largest group of West African migrants in Amsterdam, and even the largest among sub-Saharan migrants, followed by Nigerians. Migrants from Ghana and Nigeria, as well as other English-speaking migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, socialize together, collaborate in various domains, live in the same neighborhoods, attend the same churches and work in similar sectors. Furthermore, they also face the same legal barriers to coming to and staying legally in the Netherlands. Although the lives of legally precarious West African migrants in Amsterdam are the focus of this research, ethnographic fieldwork was not limited to them. The research population of this ethnographic research includes wider circles of their quite heterogeneous social networks, which included other African migrants, migrants of African descent from former Dutch colonies in the Caribbean (Suriname, Curacao, Aruba, Bonaire, Saba, Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius), migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and white Dutch.

It is difficult to draw a clear timeline as to when the fieldwork actually started and finished because I have been living in Amsterdam since 2007 and my communication with many of the research participants had already started before I began my fieldwork and has lasted until today. Nevertheless, systematic fieldwork in Amsterdam, in the sense of full-time dedication to research, including keeping regular field notes, lasted 14 months, from October 2011 until November 2012. During this period, I relocated to and lived in Amsterdam Zuidoost, or “the Bijlmer,” as it is usually called. In 2012,

72% of Ghanaians and 51% of Nigerians registered in the municipality of Amsterdam resided in the district of Amsterdam Zuidoost (O+S, 2012). This district is ethnically highly diverse and due to the high concentration of black migrants, either from Africa or the Caribbean, it is known among Amsterdam's residents as the city's "black neighborhood." Indeed, 63% of the district's population is originally of "non-Western" background, including 29% from Suriname and 5% from the Dutch Caribbean islands (O+S, 2017).

With most of my African research participants I communicated in English – the official language of both Ghana and Nigeria. Legally unauthorized migrants were usually not proficient in Dutch. Unless they spoke the same "local language," English was the most common language used between West African migrants in Amsterdam, even from the same country. There is a small number of French-speaking West African migrants in Amsterdam, but they have extremely limited contacts with Ghanaians and Nigerians. English was also the language West Africans used in communication with Afro-Caribbeans and European migrants. Apart from English, I conducted interviews in Greek with Greek migrants married to Africans, and very few interviews in Dutch, with Surinamese migrants. Those who could not communicate in English usually did not participate in the networks of legally precarious migrants.

In total, I recorded 63 interviews with 36 individuals (from Ghana, Nigeria, Suriname, the Dutch Caribbean, the Netherlands, Greece and other African countries). For obvious reasons, however, the majority of my interviews, especially with unauthorized migrants, were not recorded.

## **FIELD SITES**

I have recruited my research participants through four major avenues. First, I carried out my ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation in a large fast-food restaurant where I worked as a kitchen assistant. Second, I worked as a volunteer usher in a Pentecostal church in the Bijlmer, attended mostly by African and Afro-Caribbean migrants. Third, my living in the Bijlmer allowed me to develop a network through my participation in the daily life of the neighborhood. Additionally, I conducted complementary short-term fieldwork in Ghana where I mostly interviewed Ghanaian migrants and their families.

### ***Fast-food restaurant***

Before I was admitted to the PhD program of the University of Amsterdam, I worked as a full-time kitchen crew member at a very large fast-food restaurant in Amsterdam. This restaurant employed more than 100 employees of whom only two were white Dutch. Apart from the restaurant manager and a few junior managers, all employees had a direct and flexible employment contract with the restaurant and our hourly salary was at the level of the

legal minimum salary. The majority of employees were either migrants or migrants' offspring. My colleagues were West Africans (Ghana, Nigeria), Eastern Europeans (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic), Southern Europeans (Greece, Spain, Italy), North Africans (Morocco, Egypt), South Asians (Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Nepal), Surinamese and Turkish. The working language in the kitchen was English and even many employees who worked at the cash register and took orders from customers could hardly speak any Dutch. About one-third of my colleagues was of direct interest for my research because they were either West African or married to an African (especially Eastern and Southern Europeans). When I was admitted into the PhD program, I did not quit this job but continued part-time and carried out a segment of my fieldwork there. In total, I worked there about two and a half years. Through my work there I built up a network of research participants and had the opportunity to observe the interactions of African migrant workers with their colleagues of different ethnic backgrounds.

### ***Pentecostal church***

Pentecostalism is increasingly popular in West Africa (Meyer 1999; Marshall 2009) and in African diasporic communities in the Netherlands (Van Dijk 2002; Knibbe 2009) and elsewhere (Daswani 2015; Krause 2011). My previous fieldwork (2008) in Amsterdam had also taken place in two Pentecostal churches in the Bijlmer (Andrikopoulos 2013, 178-181). Church was not only a place of worship but also where migrants went to socialize, meet new people and maintain their established connections. Pastors of the two Pentecostal churches cultivated a sense of solidarity and unity among the members of their congregations, expressed in kinship terminology. "The church is the family," said Pastor Usman of the International Lord's House. "It is a place that provides support and solidarity. The church provides the missing link of family and kinship." Pastor James of the Family of Faith House similarly commented that "the church is a family...So we are brothers and sisters...There is a sense of belonging to each other. There is a sense of brotherliness...sisterliness...No one person can take care of himself. But as a community, as a family we can help one another." Unquestionably, church is an important site in which new relations are forged. In that sense I could not omit it from my fieldwork. I visited several churches, usually after an invitation by a church member, until I decided to do my fieldwork at the Holy Blessings Church. I chose this church for its size and composition of its congregation. About 150-200 people attended the Sunday service, which I found large enough but not too large to be impersonal. The senior pastor was Ghanaian and the junior pastors were from Ghana, Nigeria and Suriname. Although I do not have formal statistics about church members, my assessment is that about 60% were Africans (Ghanaians and Nigerians),

30% Afro-Surinamese, 5% Dutch Caribbeans (especially from Curacao), and 5% of other origin (white Dutch, Polish, Romanians). When I met the senior pastor's brother in Ghana, he told me, "The success of this church is that it is multicultural... Everyone has something different to offer."

In the beginning, I attended the church regularly as a baptized orthodox Christian who was interested in learning more about Pentecostal Christianity and the importance of religion and church in the lives of West African migrants. I attended the "orientation class" to learn about the church mission and the Bible reading group in which we discussed extracts from the Bible. I contributed a one-page article to the church newsletter, in which I summarized the findings of my previous research on Nigerian migrants in Amsterdam and explained that I was currently researching African migrant family relations. After a few months, I was asked to join the team of "Protocol Officers" and offer my services as an usher. As an usher, I had to welcome people in the church and help them find a seat. When the service started, I had to protect persons who became possessed not to injure themselves – especially when they were delivered by the pastors.

### ***Living in the Bijlmer***

Through a restaurant colleague, I found a room to rent in an apartment in the Bijlmer. The apartment was quite large, as is typical for the Bijlmer, and had three bedrooms. Two Nigerian women, one Nigerian man and myself lived in this apartment and shared the common spaces (kitchen and bathroom). As a neighborhood resident, I participated in local activities, such as shopping in the local market, going out to the Bijlmer's clubs and bars, using public transportation, including the informal taxi service (*snorder*). Through my participation in these activities, and with the help of my flatmates and many others, I expanded my networks and made new contacts that provided me with useful research information.

### ***Fieldwork in Ghana***

In 2011 (from June to August) and 2012 (August and September), I conducted complementary fieldwork in Ghana. This included interviews with deported migrants (one of them kindly hosted me during my 2012 visit), family members of migrants in the Netherlands as well as young Ghanaians who had been planning to migrate to the Netherlands. While in Ghana, I had the opportunity to talk with three migration brokers who assisted aspiring migrants in filling visa applications for the Netherlands and other Schengen countries and provided them with documents that they did not have, such as bank statements and university degrees. Furthermore, I interviewed staff members at the Dutch embassy and Spanish embassy in Accra.

## TRUST AND ETHICS

My long-term relationships with some research participants was vital to building up the necessary level of trust for carrying out this ethnographic research on quite sensitive topics. Still, conducting research on legally precarious migrants entails particular challenges. Why would migrants who are in a condition of legal uncertainty share with a researcher information about their lives, and, even more so, when this information concerns practices such as the exchange of identity documents and legalization strategies? The interviews with returnees in Ghana were indeed more relaxed than with unauthorized migrants in the Netherlands and returnees were more open to share their life stories. However, as previously stated, I was interested not only in migrant's narratives but also in their practices.

At the early stage of my fieldwork, a Nigerian Pentecostal pastor asked me to help his brother get a job at the restaurant where I worked. I had known this pastor for quite some time and was planning to do my fieldwork in his church. The pastor told me that his brother did not have his own papers but if I would help him to get the job, he would use the papers of someone else. On the one hand, I was excited about the prospect of observing from such a close distance how identity loan operated in practice. I also felt that this was an opportunity to gain the trust of the pastor who, as a gatekeeper, could give me access to other members of his congregation engaged in similar practices. On the other hand, I was intimidated by the possible consequences of failure. Although I suspected that few of my restaurant colleagues worked with other people's documents, my impression was that the restaurant management, if aware of it, would not accept it. What would happen if they found out that the person they hired through my referral used someone else's identity document? Would they only fire him or would they also report him to immigration authorities, as some employers were doing at the time? After serious consideration, I discussed the risks with the pastor. We agreed that I would submit the job application, but I would inform my boss that the included identity document was not that of the person I referred. As I anticipated, the restaurant manager disagreed and did not offer the job. I understood. Why would she take the risk and offer the job to an imposter when there are dozens of job applications every day from recently arrived Greek, Spanish and Polish migrants?

This event was a critical moment in my fieldwork and despite its outcome confirmed my loyalty to the pastor. It helped me gain his trust, which was invaluable in approaching other church members. Although he had called me his son since our first meeting, the way I handled the job application, putting at risk my relationship with the restaurant manager, added an emotional quality to the term "son." I felt that he started using it not only

according to Christian etiquette but as something more meaningful and sentimental<sup>7</sup>. However, my relationship of mutual trust with him, as well as with all other research participants, was not a one-time and forever achievement (Kalir 2006). Trust was fragile, constantly assessed and could be suspended at any moment. Every exchange with research participants had the potential to either strengthen or weaken the trust between us. After a while, the pastor came to me with a different request that was meant to help the unauthorized migrants of his church. Since employers were legally responsible for reporting unauthorized migrant labor (see chapter three), he wanted to set up a small cleaning company and hire unauthorized migrants. This company, he said, would provide better working conditions to unauthorized workers, who would not have to use someone else's documents and would not need to fear that their employer might report them to immigration. He asked me, as a legal migrant (EU citizen), to register the company under my name. This meant that if the Labor Inspectorate (*Inspectorate SZW*) inspected us, I would have to pay a fine of €8,000 for each unauthorized worker. Given the great risk of such an endeavor, I did not even consider his proposal. But at the same time I had a hard time rejecting it. If I declined his proposal, the trust between us would suffer. In order to avoid this, I followed the advice of Nigerian friends and avoided giving a precise answer. Like my friends who changed their telephone numbers when requests from family members in Nigeria became persistent and unrealistic, I distanced myself from the pastor. This meant that I had to change my plans and choose another church as a field site. After a few months, when he had forgotten about this proposal and was busy with other issues, I reconnected with him, without much having changed since.

The names of all individuals, as well as churches, in this book are pseudonyms. In order to protect the anonymity of all these individuals, especially those whose lives are presented in great depth, I have altered details of minor importance. These alterations do not change the content of the stories, or at least do not change it considerably, but they do effectively mislead anyone who might attempt to identify these individuals.<sup>8</sup> I provided drafts of my dissertation to some of my research participants (only the parts where their story

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7 Other studies by theologians (Aasgaard 2004; see also Frishkopf 2003), anthropologists (Iossifides 1991) and sociologists (Ebaugh and Curry 2000) described the use of kin terms, especially siblinghood, in Christian settings as "metaphorical" or "fictive", "all the usual polite academic words for false" (White 2000, 42). However, as I will argue in the following chapters (especially chapter three), it is important to first question whether the distinction between "fictive"/ "metaphorical" and "real" reflects our informants conceptualizations (see also West 2007, 19-38).

8 I have discussed these alterations with my supervisors. My supervisors met some of the research participants and visited me in the Bijlmer and the restaurant where I worked. Two of them visited me in Ghana as well.

appears) while with others I discussed their views about how they wanted their story to be included in this book.

Although I have been careful to protect individual identities, ethical questions remain regarding the disclosure of collective practices. However, as I explain in the following chapters, the practices I describe constantly change and are well known to state authorities. Identity loan, for example, hardly takes place nowadays (chapter three). In 2005, a new law shifted more responsibility for migration control to employers and imposed a hefty administrative fine on those who employed unauthorized migrants. Dutch authorities usually cite this regulation as the key reason for the disappearance of this particular type of “identity fraud.” Nevertheless, my research shows that the most important reason for this development was the labor displacement of unauthorized migrants by the recently legalized migrants from the new EU member countries, especially Poland.

The second part of the book (chapters four and five) provides ethnographic material on the marriages of West African migrants to Afro-Caribbean Dutch citizens and European migrants. The academic debate on marriage and migration has been influenced by how the state categorizes these marriages either as genuine and based on emotion, or as a sham and based on interest. Although the ethnographic material in these chapters confirms the presence of interest in these marriages, it shows the impossibility of separating interest from emotion. A closer look at sexual relations and how sexual pleasure is experienced in marriage helps us to see how interest and emotion are strongly intertwined. “You cannot understand my marriage if we do not talk about sex,” said a Greek woman married to an African man. This statement seemed quite reasonable to me. However, marriage and even sexuality research often gives short shrift to sex and sexual pleasure (Spronk 2014). If, for reasons of academic prudence, I would ignore a crucial aspect of exchanges between spouses, how could I then understand the ultimate outcome of all the exchanges that take place within marriage? Including sexual pleasure and bodily sensations in the context of marital relations in my ethnography is not meant to provoke but rather to help us explore how they are embedded in wider circles of exchange within marriage.

## CHAPTERS

The first empirical chapter of this book, chapter two, critically examines the dichotomy between modernity and tradition and the assumption that kinship is an institution of traditional societies which loses its importance with the emergence of the state. This dichotomy informed the anthropological debate on personhood and the distinction between the Western autonomous individual and the non-Western partible person (“dividual”). For Marcel Mauss,

a key moment for the transition from the one type of personhood to the other took place in ancient Rome with the institutionalization of citizenship which constituted the person as a legal entity. In other words, the social contract between the citizen and a centralized authority, the state, emancipated individuals from the necessity of relying on others. Although this argument seems plausible, chapter two points out that citizenship is not only an inclusive institution that grants rights and protection to its holders. Citizenship is also an exclusive institution, because in order to grant rights and protection to its holders it has to first exclude non-members. What is the impact of the inherently exclusive side of citizenship on the formation of personhood? To answer this question, chapter two examines the repeated and complex efforts of a Ghanaian migrant to travel “to an advanced country” and how he managed to achieve his migratory and life goals by engaging in “identity fraud” or what I prefer to call “unauthorized identity craft.”

Chapter three examines the practices of unauthorized migrants in finding employment and earning their living in the Netherlands. Unauthorized migrants borrow the identity documents of other “lookalike” migrants and find employment under their name. The relationships between document lenders and borrowers is described by both parties in terms of siblinghood. The chapter engages with post-Schneider approaches to kinship as “relatedness” (Carsten) and “mutuality of being” (Sahlins). It shows that identity loan results in intersubjective participation which can be indeed framed as “mutuality of being” and “relatedness.” However, this intersubjective participation is not very pleasantly experienced by migrants who engage in identity loan. Carsten’s conceptualization of relatedness is more attentive to power inequalities within kinship relations. But Sahlins places more emphasis on sharing and reciprocity, as means of bringing people closer together and participating in each other’s existence, at the risk of underemphasizing kinship’s dark side. Instead of asking what kinship is, as Schneider’s critique of kinship studies triggered scholars to do, this chapter investigates what kinship does and how it does it. Why do people who engage in identity loan frame their relations in terms of kinship? Does kinship impact identity loan and the associated risks? If so, how?

Chapter four examines how legally precarious African migrants gain long-term residency rights and citizenship in the Netherlands through marriages to Dutch citizens of Afro-Caribbean descent. Instead of differentiating between kinship as descent (siblinghood) and kinship as alliance (marriage), the chapter shows how closely siblinghood and marriage are interrelated. More specifically, it examines how transatlantic kinship, expressed in a language of siblinghood (“black brotherhood”), between African migrants and Afro-Caribbean Dutch citizens facilitates marriages between them. But also inversely: how



marriages between Africans and Afro-Caribbeans shape a sense of unity and common belonging expressed as kinship. The chapter examines the effects of Dutch policies aimed at restricting access to migrant legality through marriage, which effectively resulted in the devaluation of Afro-Caribbean Dutch citizens' civic resources. Does the attempt of the Dutch state to regulate marriage migration and marriage-based legalization affect the forms of collaboration between Africans and Afro-Caribbeans? If so, how?

The last empirical chapter examines the shift in marital practices of West African migrants, especially Nigerians, from choosing Dutch citizens of various ethnic backgrounds as spouses to European citizen spouses from countries of Europe's periphery. Firstly, the chapter documents why marriage to an EU citizen provides easier access to migrant legality than marriage to a Dutch citizen in the Netherlands. The chapter shows that the EU, through the rights it grants mobile EU citizens and their family members, attempts to establish EU citizenship as an institution of a civic community and not simply as a facilitator of a common European market. However, the question that is central to this chapter is why West African migrants have a particular preference for spouses from the European periphery and not just any EU citizen. The chapter looks closely at the forms of exchange that take place in these marriages and the circulation of emotions, money, civic resources and sexual pleasure. It shows that West African migrants navigate the highly asymmetrical dynamic of mixed-status marriage by choosing as partners peripheral Europeans, who are EU citizens but most of whom are working class migrants and in a similar structural position in Dutch society. Under these conditions, the exchange of resources, money, emotions and sexual pleasure between spouses results in a more reciprocal dependency.

By exploring how West African migrants rely on kinship in attempting to overcome the uncertainties of their legal status, I want to overcome the dilemma of seeing migrants as either victims of structural inequalities or active agents navigating repeatedly updated constraints. It seems that kinship offers a means to deal with institutional structures of civic inequality. However, kinship's unpredictable dynamics, especially in a context of extreme inequality, may prove more difficult to control than many expected.