

Julia Verne

Living Translocality

Space, Culture and Economy in Contemporary Swahili Trade

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‘The best way to travel is to feel’ (Fernando Pessoa)

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INTRODUCTION: MOBILITY AND THE GEOGRAPHIES OF SPACE

MOBILITY STUDIES IN GEOGRAPHY: THE QUESTION OF SPACE IN MOBILE CONTEXTS

Born in Zanzibar, living in London, thinking about moving to Dubai; having one child working in the UK, another one residing in Toronto, while the third one is about to get married in Mombasa; regularly spending one's holiday along the East African coast, while passing the rest of the year in Europe; negotiating one's Omani belonging in narrations, through looks and material objects, even though never having been there; travelling across the Indian Ocean by taking goods from one place to another; distributing presents and making business when visiting friends and relatives spread all over the globe; being on the move and yet being at home; being dispersed and yet feeling closely related. At the same time disruptive and connective, transgressing as well as connecting places in distant parts of the world, mobility not only challenges the everyday lives of millions of people, it also challenges scientific understandings of society and culture. And it challenges geographers' conceptualisations of space.

The burgeoning of mobility as a core aspect in the social sciences and humanities that can be observed in the last two decades has had a strong impact on how researchers – especially geographers – look at place and space. Relational approaches to place as elaborated most explicitly by Doreen Massey (1994b) and Ash Amin (2002, 2004), the idea of 'translocalities' as developed by M.P. Smith in his book *Transnational Urbanism* (2001), or, more generally, the almost omnipresent emphasis on networks as fuelled most effectively by Manuel Castells (1996), are only some of the most prominent examples of the ways in which place has been (re)conceptualised in order to account for mobile conditions. Moreover, ideas on transnational spaces (Pries 1996, 2008), 'folded space' (Deleuze 1988, Serres & Latour 1995) or '-scapes' (Appadurai 1996) illustrate some of the most far-reaching attempts to incorporate mobility and its impact on distance into contemporary thinking about space. It is these theoretical reflections and the ways in which they are taken up and developed further in the context of the flourishing field of mobility studies (cf. Cresswell 2006, Sheller & Urry 2006) that initiated the idea for this book. From a geographic perspective, this book is thus motivated by a deep interest in dealing with the ways in which mobility influences experiences, constructions and conceptualisations of space and place.

When trying to delve deeper into the literature on mobility, one soon comes across a certain tendency to address this issue on a very abstract level, driven by the ambitious aim to formulate general assumptions on how mobility influences 'the world'. In parts heavily relying on the authors' own perceptions, the resulting

statements generally rest on 'the West', and often seem to be in line with broader ideologies and political discourses concerning mobility.

For many people mobility stands for progress, liberty, freedom, transgression, thus a desirable central quality of modern life, with figures such as the flâneur, the globetrotter and explorer as predominantly male heroes (Pallasmaa 2008: 145, Sheller 2008: 258, Kaplan 2006). This rather romantic reading can also be discovered in some of the recent writings in the context of mobility studies. Many research projects are still built on an overly abstract celebration of travel and mobility or, as Canzler et al. put it, on a certain ‚mobility fetishism' (Canzler et al. 2008: 2), thus pursuing a rather narrow and elitist perspective, while neglecting broader structures and unequal power relations that so often seem to underpin contemporary forms of mobility (cf. Mitchell 1997). On the other hand, a bulk of work exists that is built on an extremely negative reading of mobility. Focusing on chaos, disorder and instability, in these cases, mobility is conceptualised as a central disruptive force in the contemporary world, disturbing, among other things, people's relation to place and space, and, in respect to migratory regimes, making space less controllable. Especially studies on mobility in the global south, generally marked by a strong focus on development, tend to be pervaded by a clear sedentary bias (cf. Verne & Doevenspeck 2012).

As a result of these often very extreme and one-sided positions, over the last years, numerous calls have been made for a stronger emphasis on the mundaneness and everyday dimensions of mobility in a variety of settings (e.g. Cresswell 2006, Sheller & Urry 2006, Smith & Katz 1993). Only by being attentive to different experiences of mobility as they come together in everyday lives, it would be possible to avoid and go beyond these generalising and dichotomising discourses. Thus, there clearly seems to be the need for ethnographic research that is able to provide a more nuanced and complex picture of how mobility effects conceptions of place and space. And, indeed, by browsing through the new publications on mobility, for example in Ashgate's book series 'Transport and Society', but also in most of the main geography journals, one can already find several examples of how this might be done.

Of special interest here is a book edited by Cresswell and Merriman on *Geographies of Mobilities* that explicitly aims at bringing to the fore the "qualitative exceptions, differences and experiences of movement" that, instead of being taken seriously were, at least in geographic accounts, so often relegated to footnotes and asides (Cresswell & Merriman 2010: 4). By structuring the book around practices, spaces and subjects the editors are able to take up and add to three strands of research that also seem to characterise the recent engagements of geographers with mobility, place and space more widely. Many geographers that can be considered part of the so-called 'mobility turn' have so far tended to either concentrate on particular practices, as for example walking (Middleton 2011), dancing (Cresswell 2006), flying (Adey 2010b) or driving (Laurier 2004), focus on very specific sites such as airports (Adey 2004, 2006, 2007) or roads (Merriman 2007), or deal with subjects that have a very obvious – though this does not necessarily mean less complex - relation to mobility (e.g. tramps, tourists, migrants and refugees). Al-

though the references are not always that clear-cut, it can still be observed, that, while the examination of practices especially facilitates a deeper insight into mobility as concrete acts of movement, the analyses of spaces particularly emphasise mobility's material effects, and a close attention to subjects often serves extremely well to bring the diverse experiences of mobility to the fore. Moreover, in all three strands of research, a sensitive engagement with the discourses of mobility has come to play a crucial role, often combined with a historical perspective on the phenomenon under study. Thus, by dealing with the empirical reality of the act of moving, its discursive meaning as well as the ways in which mobility is a particular experience of the world, *Geographies of Mobilities* altogether succeeds in providing a more holistic understanding of mobility, as claimed by Cresswell in his earlier work in which he elaborates on these three 'relational moments' of mobility (Cresswell 2006, 2008). However, this recent work on different mobilities also makes clear that a strong focus on either particular practices, sites or subjects makes it very difficult to provide a holistic understanding of mobility in the sense of contextualising mobile practices, sites and subjects. By singling out a particular mobile practice, mobile subjects, or a specific site highly relevant to these practices, what often seems to be missing is their embedding into wider lifeworlds. So, this is exactly what this book tries to do: to get to grips with the manifold and often ambiguous experiences and forms of mobility as they actually take place in, and inform the everyday lives of, ordinary people, and – referring to Cresswell once again – to more closely examine how these people 'experience the world through motion' (Cresswell 2008: 131).

Most people would probably agree that mobility impacts on geographies of belonging, processes of inclusion and exclusion, and ideas of home. It also seems undeniable today that mobility connects places, plays a decisive role in the creation of spaces and leads to a different sense of being in the world. But while all these statements suggest a close connection between mobility, place and space they are not yet very precise, and in general it seems as if the geographical research on mobility is still somehow separate from the more theoretical reflections on how a 'mobile approach' effects conceptions of space and place. As it can be observed in the work referred to above, the former is rather concerned with concrete mobilities and how they are negotiated and experienced in space, whereas the latter often remains more or less devoid of any concrete subjects and experiences and instead talks more about possible spatial outcomes.

A term that well evokes the close connection between these two fields is translocality. By transcending and going beyond a locale, the term is seen to encompass concrete movements as well as its various material and imaginative outcomes. Through people's 'translocality' different places become connected, and new spaces are created. And, apart from referring to a particular phenomenon, the term also stands for a certain perspective – a perspective that foregrounds different forms of mobility in constructions of place and space (Freitag & von Oppen 2010b). Translocality not only turns the attention to concrete movements, but also alludes to the more abstract theoretical ideas, thus appearing as an ideal lens through which to bring the two fields closer together and approach the ways in

which mobility effects constructions, experiences and conceptualisations of place and space. However, discussions of 'translocality' are so far also often characterised by a strong division between theoretical arguments on the one hand, and empirical examples on the other. The theoretical elaborations often tend to be cut off from the kinds of detailed, textured and often rather messy knowledges characteristic of ethnographic research. Following a common practice among many social scientists, they are generally first developed on a rather abstract level to later be applied to the empirical examples in a rather deductive manner. Seldom, these empirical insights are referred back to the theoretical assumptions, laying open tensions and ruptures between the two, and thus helping to refine and adapt dominant conceptions of translocality.

The approach this book pursues has grown out of a certain discomfort and dissatisfaction with this kind of 'theoretically guided research', and instead tries to promote a more interpretive engagement with 'translocality'. As Gadamer has pointed out, building on Heidegger's ideas on a hermeneutic circle (Heidegger 1927: 153), 'a person who is trying to understand is exposed to distraction from fore-meanings that are not borne out by the things themselves. Working out appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed "by the things" themselves, is the constant task of understanding' (Gadamer 1975: 270). This should surely not be mistaken for a 'naïve empiricism', as it instead advocates to 'let oneself be guided by the things themselves' (Gadamer 1975: 269), remain more open towards their meanings, and enrich theoretical reflections accordingly. Also when following an interpretive approach, 'theoretical ideas are not created wholly anew in each study; […] they are adopted from other, related studies, and, [instead of being applied and remaining more or less fixed, they are constantly] refined in the process' (Geertz 1973: 27). In this respect, it is the aim of this book to ground existing theoretical reflections on translocality in everyday practices and lived experiences, and to crossread and rethink the theoretical arguments on that basis. As Geertz emphasises in his seminal essay *Thick Description*, in interpretive science 'progress is marked less by a perfection of consensus than by a refinement of debate' (Geertz 1973: 29).

Does it, as some of the work on translocality suggests, due to intensive connections and entanglements between certain places, really not make any difference to some people in which of them they actually live? Does physical distance really not matter anymore to people living in a translocal context, so that geographers should actually abandon the concept of topographical space in favour of topology? Does high mobility between different places actually lead to a translocal sense of home or even make people feel to be at home in the world? Only an understanding of how translocality is actually lived, made meaningful and experienced is able to show how place and space are constructed in mobile settings, thus allowing us to critically engage with dominant conceptions of mobilities' effects on these two major geographical concepts.

SWAHILI STUDIES: SWAHILI AS INHERENTLY TRANSLOCAL?

> 'This is how people like us make a living: travel, trade and make our way in the world.' (Gurnah 2005: 78)

When Azad, one of the main characters of Abdulrazak Gurnah's novel *Desertion* (2005), makes this statement in order to console his wife in Mombasa and make her understand his frequent absences due to his merchant business, he addresses what he considers to be the central features of a Swahili trader's life. Indeed, in most of the writings on people from the East African coast, Swahili people are characterised as 'a seafaring and merchant people nurtured by contact' (Saleh 2002), and accordingly, much of the immense body of academic work concerning Swahili has concentrated in different ways on an examination of their translocal connections and resulting identities.

As Pouwels formulates it in his review of the book entitled *Les Swahili entre Afrique et Arabie* (Le Guennec-Coppens & Caplan 1991), the Swahili coast including Zanzibar is conceptualised as an "intersection of multiple influences and networks from which individuals derive their identities, and through which they establish and maintain relations with others in their complex social universe through various forms of exchange" (Pouwels 1991: 411). This conception indeed seems to lie at the heart of the majority of work on Swahili, which can broadly be divided in two strands. One big strand concentrates on Swahili origin and culture by especially tracing the historical relations across the Indian Ocean, with many arguments being based on archaeological findings along the east African coast (Chami & Msemwa 1997, Freeman-Grenville 1960). Another strand of work focuses on contemporary social relations and Swahili identity. In many empirical studies, marriage has served as an access to Swahili relations, and particularly the choice of marriage partners has been a central aspect in discussions on Swahili family relations and identity (cf. Le Cour Grandmaison 1989, Middleton 1992). Furthermore, Swahili literature and especially poetry have been taken as a medium through which to analyse the various sources of Swahili culture and identity (cf. Arnold 2002, Khamis 2000, 2004, Myers 1993, 2000, Vierke 2011). Finally, there are also a few recent publications on the Swahili diaspora, the majority of them focusing on their complex positioning as 'remigrants' in Oman and Yemen (cf. Al-Rasheed 2005, Valeri 2007, Walker 2008, 2011, Verne & Müller-Mahn 2012), but also debating the 'endurance' of Swahili culture and values in Europe or the USA (Saleh 2004, Topan 2006), the latter often strongly informed by the authors' personal experiences.

Overall, there is an understanding that the term 'Swahili' is generally used to refer to people from the East African coast who have a way of life characterised by the region's long-standing Afro-Arabic relations and the influences of the Indian Ocean, speak Kiswahili as their vernacular language and are Muslim. However, when talking to people who fit this categorisation, most of them would first consider themselves as a member of the city or region where they were born

or have grown up, for example, *Waamu* (Swahili from Lamu), *Wamvita* (Swahili from Mombasa), *Wapemba* (Swahili from Pemba) or *Wazanzibari* (Swahili from Zanzibar's island Unguja). Whereas people in Mombasa more commonly use the term Swahili to refer to themselves, those who would be expected to do so in Zanzibar are far more hesitant as a result of the politics of 'swahilisation', part of the post-Ujamaa nationalism that made use of the term to strengthen a homogenous Tanzanian national identity. What soon becomes evident is that there are complex processes of inclusion and exclusion hidden behind the term 'Swahili', and that external and internal perceptions do not always match. Nevertheless, speaking of 'people like us', as Azad does in *Desertion* and as is indeed often heard for example in Zanzibar, Dubai or London, also hints at a certain Swahili identity, a sense of connection, and a shared understanding of what it is that holds these people together. As Ho points out in his impressive study on Hadrami mobility and genealogy across the Indian Ocean, 'such bonds exist and endure only so long as people continue to speak, sing, recite, read, write, and otherwise represent them' (Ho 2006: xxiii).

As well expressed in the quote, a central dimension and way of representing 'Swahiliness' is travel. Having played an important role in most of the intercontinental commerce between the coast of eastern Africa and the Persian and Arabian Gulf, the Indian subcontinent and Indonesia for well over a thousand years, Swahili can indeed be seen as travellers for millennia. However, there still exist a number of contesting views about the time of the first contact between the Arabian Peninsula and the East African coast. Some are convinced that constant and close ethnic, cultural, economic and political links were forged between the South Arabian kingdoms and the East African coast already during the early part of the first millennium B.C.; others rather rely on the first definite mention of Oman-Africa connections in 700-705 A.D. when rulers of the interior of Oman travelled to Africa to escape the Umayyad attacks (cf. Bhacker 1992: 25-27). What is certain is, that by 1700, after having successfully defeated the Portuguese in Mombasa in 1698, the Omani had managed to establish a loose hegemony over the Swahili coast. And, when Seyyid Said bin Sultan, the Sultan of Oman, in 1832 moved his capital to Zanzibar, this was followed by another wave of migration, especially of young Arab men, who started to make their living on the islands by engaging either in the plantation economy or in trade. Thus, smaller and bigger flows of migration, anticipated and followed by frequent movements back and forth between the East African coast, Southern Arabia or India, have long characterised life in the 'Swahili corridor' (Horton 1987).

During the second half of the twentieth century, it has been movements out of this 'corridor' that resulted in sizeable Swahili communities in Europe, the USA and Canada, as well as on the Arabian Peninsula. On the 12th of January 1964, only 33 days after Zanzibar was given full independence from the British, the new government was overthrown by a troop of mercenaries and followers of the opposition party, a political upheaval towards a socialist pro-African regime in which approximately 6000-10 000 residents were killed, and about 30 000 out of approximately 50 000 people of Arab origin were forcibly expelled or fled at their

own initiative, many of them heading towards Arabia (Glassman 2011, Gilbert 2007). If the initial wave of Swahili migrants during this period was thus triggered directly by political persecution resulting from conflicts regarding Swahili identity, which led to this so-called Zanzibar Revolution, and was dominant in its aftermath, subsequent waves were more a product of economic problems and a sense of being extremely underprivileged. The often very close links these migrants are still maintaining to the East African coast as well as to Swahili people in other places are based on different forms of mobility, such as virtual communication and travelling, and therefore constantly (re)consitute and hold together what is now being called the 'transnational Swahili network' (Topan 1998, Horton & Middleton 2000).

Historically and even today, it is very difficult to examine travelling in the Swahili context without also looking at trade, which is both the content and context of the above quotation. According to Sheriff (1971: 10),

> 'trade is the pervasive theme in the history of the East African coast and is essentially a unifying economic and cultural force. It formed the basis of East Africa's foreign relations with the countries across the Indian Ocean, as depicted in the Periplus [of the Erythraen See] and by the Arab geographers. It gave rise to the Swahili city states which resembled the beads of a rosary, clustering in places and widely spread elsewhere, threaded together by coastal shipping'.

Referred to as a middlemen mercantile Muslim society, the Swahili's important position in the early commercial networks across the Indian Ocean as well as through the African mainland has been widely acknowledged (cf. Alpers 2009, Freeman-Grenville 1960, Horton & Middleton 2000, Middleton 2004). Especially during the time of Omani rule, Zanzibar was part of a network of ports held together by shared commercial interests: It was trade rather than a more centralised governing that formed the central occupation to hold together an Empire that consisted of interlinked city-states. In this respect, it has been shown that trade has not only long been regarded as a guarantor of wealth but has also enormously determined the hierarchisation of Swahili society by having strong effects on social status. As several authors have pointed out, trading connections have been extremely relevant to processes of identification throughout Swahili history (Cooper 1977, Kresse 2007, Le Guennec-Coppens 2002, Nurse & Spear 1985). This has been put most bluntly by Middleton, one of the most famous anthropologists working on the Swahili, when he states that, although 'the Swahili merchants view of their worlds never exactly mirrored the commercial and political actuality,[...] it gave reason and order to what they saw as their central position in world society as they knew it' (Middleton 2003: 519).

The abolition of slavery in Zanzibar in 1873 and the loss of control of territory in relation to the increasing colonial power of Germany and the British at the end of the 19th century weakened the Sultan's Empire and its economy. By the time when Zanzibar was officially declared a British protectorate in 1890, the Sultan of Zanzibar had already sold his mainland territory, a coastal stripe of ten miles that he had been granted by the Berlin Conference in addition to the islands. However, during the time of British rule, the Sultan remained a reigning but not

ruling monarch and only little changes were made to the economic structure of the islands. It was following the Zanzibar Revolution, when the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar abolished private enterprises and took control of all imports and retailings, that the previously very intensive trading connections came almost to a standstill. Only since 1984, when president Ali Hassan Mwinyi made efforts to restore Zanzibar's international relations, trade has become more liberalised again but it still suffers from high taxes and tariffs bound by the Tanzanian Revenue Authority (TRA). Thus, despite the relaxation of trade restrictions, its impact on the economy still seems very slight. Nevertheless, engaging in trade is still a dominant practice among Swahili people not only in Zanzibar but also along the East African coast more generally. Even though the strong economic decline as well as profound changes in the organisation of the Indian Ocean trade in the course of the last century, such as the mode of transport and the commodities, cannot be denied, as an ideology trade has remained its significance until today.

Contemporary Swahili trading connections are reviving old routes and further developing them through new translocal links to the diaspora. In this respect, it seems particularly fascinating to explore how long-standing trading routes and journeys have been adapted to contemporary political and economic conditions and how Swahili traders still make use of 'old' connections and networks in order to take advantage of the way the world economy works today. Although it is difficult to estimate their economic dimensions, it is evident that their imaginary and ideological basis, which is especially relevant to processes of identification, is still present. Talking to Swahili people today soon reveals that trading practices are still recognized as a worthwhile activity, not only for the anticipated profit, but primarily to see oneself as a part of a society that is based to a large extent on this very ideology. Nevertheless, despite a considerable agreement about the persistent relevance of trade in contemporary Swahili society, so far, there has only been very little engagement with the questions of how and why this is the case. By taking contemporary trading practices as the empirical focus of this study, this book therefore contributes to this often rather historically biased debate, providing a more detailed insight into the organisation, motivation and effects of trade in the Swahili context today.

Finally, the frequent absences due to his merchant business that Azad is trying to apologise for also mean frequent presences elsewhere, as well as frequent movements in-between. Being physically, virtually and metaphorically on the move is central to connect and constantly reconnect Swahili people in and between different places. Examining this mobility in its manifold dimensions therefore seems decisive in order to understand how ideas of 'Swahiliness' are negotiated, teasing out both possible tensions and unifying elements. Hence, an exploration of mobile practices and the ways in which Swahili people make their way in the world today not only contributes to the current themes in the field of Swahili studies, but also provides the detailed empirical insights from which to take further theoretical and conceptual ideas on the ways in which mobility impacts on senses of place, home, belonging and the creation of material and metaphorical spaces.

FOCUSING ON TRANSLOCALITY IN THE SWAHILI CONTEXT

Connecting these two strands - one of which being more theoretically informed and the other one driven by long-standing debates on Swahili culture and identity in Swahili studies - served as the main inspiration for the research underlying this book. First of all, this project can surely be understood both, as a response to the omnipresence of mobility in everyday life, and to the flourishing of mobility studies strongly visible in the social sciences and humanities in recent years. However, the recent burgeoning of mobility studies cannot be explained by the newness of mobility, although it might be right to state that its dimension and speed has increased in recent years - an assumption based particularly on a new attention to the role of mobility in contemporary Western societies. The Swahili case strongly 'contests assumptions and assertions that such highly connected geographies are recent developments' (Featherstone et al. 2007: 389), while at the same time illustrating the continuously high relevance of mobility for processes of identification today. Taking a look at Swahili history soon shows that mobility has been a major aspect of the construction of Swahili culture and identity for more than a thousand years, and is just as crucial today for the expansion of trading practices and the creation of relations between dispersed Swahili people. In connecting Swahili along the East African coast, the East African interior, the Arabian Peninsular, Europe and Northern America it thus offers an opportunity to tease out the meaning of mobility in a translocal setting that spans 'Western' and 'non-Western' contexts, clearly crossing the alleged binary between 'West' and 'rest'. Moreover, due to the high relevance of trade in this particular context, the empirical study includes human and non-human mobility, bringing to the fore the role of goods in the making and weaving together of different places, and thus opening the view to how the mobility of people, ideas and material objects relate to each other and come together in the constitution of translocal connections (cf. Crang & Ashmore 2009, Ogborn 2002). How do Swahili organise contemporary trading connections, what happens on the move, and how is this mobility of people, ideas and objects experienced and linked to feelings of relatedness and belonging? What is it that constitutes these translocal connections and what kind of spaces emerge out of them?

Although translocal connections have recently become one of the most popular topics in migration research, so far, the majority of research seems to concentrate on migrants' relations to nation states, their integration into the 'place of reception' or their social and economic effects on their so-called place of origin. In effect, despite much talk about links and connections, most empirical research is still conducted in 'nodes', limiting the examination of translocal connections to how people talk about them instead of how they *do* them. In this respect, bringing mobility to the fore and thus focusing the attention on what is actually happening on the move in-between places not only implies an important conceptual change, but also takes up the methodological challenges this shift necessarily involves (cf. Sheller & Urry 2006, Adey 2010a). How can we grasp mobility without loosing sight of the deep embeddedness of mobile practices in wider contexts?

Eventually, what came out of all this is a mobile ethnography of contemporary Swahili trading practices, as only this seemed to make it possible to live up to the central aim of this book: to ground the often overly abstract discourses of the relation between mobility, place and space in the lived experience of translocality in the Swahili context. Based on 'thick descriptions' of translocal Swahili connections a thorough understanding of the mobility of things, people and ideas, the ways in which they connect places and how this contributes to the creation of a specific translocal space can be gained, helping us to (re)conceptualise places, connections between places and the constructions of space under mobile conditions.

STRUCTURING THE TEXT: ARRANGEMENTS, MOVEMENTS, ENMESHMENTS

Despite the focus on connections and the resulting aim to emphasise the interconnectedness of different parts and alleged oppositions, to give some orientation to the reader it seems unavoidable to create a linear flow and divide the text in three main sections. The first part is named *Arrangements,* illustrating the development of the circumstances in which the whole study needs to be considered. Building on the ideas presented above, it therefore introduces the reader to the epistemological and methodological context of the study, making the construction and use of different ideas and views more comprehensible. Getting to grips with different understandings of translocality, the first chapter promotes a relational perspective, which shifts the focus from connected entities towards the connections themselves and the way they hold things and people in different places together. By doing so, it becomes possible to look at translocality as it emerges and as it effects complex mobile practices and processes of identification, instead of simply using it as a term to cover the existence of relations between (people in) different places. In order to avoid the structural and rationalist bend in most classical network images, the metaphor of the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari 1976) is introduced as it opens up a way to better account for this relationality, and also for the complexity, multiplicity and heterogeneity of translocal connections that are constantly in the making.

Addressing questions of representativity and positionality, the second chapter attempts to create an understanding of the research practices and processes that have led to the production of this text, exemplifying what has been done, how it has been done and why. With trade playing a central role in translocal connections among Swahili people, contributing to its constitution as well as being one of its outcomes, trading practices are used as the empirical as well as representational access to the translocal Swahili connections. Drawing on anthropological discussions of ethnographic fieldwork, the geographical reception of this methodology, and the challenges posed to it by increasing mobility and interconnectedness, the book argues for a mobile ethnographic approach. This enables the researcher to get to grips with how translocal trading practices are actually lived and experi-

enced, as well as how they influence senses of place and belonging. By accompanying traders and goods on the move, a complex and deep understanding can be gained of both the everyday business of Swahili traders and the flow of goods and ideas.

The second section is called *Movements* and consists of four empirical chapters each evolving along a different trading connection, referring to different types of mobility, different dimensions of trade, and pointing to different material and immaterial effects of the translocal practices (such as infrastructure, shops, availability of goods and negotiations of Swahili identity, senses of place and home). In this way, the diversity and multi-dimensionality of Swahili trading practices is expressed, whilst at the same time complex interconnections and interlacements are illustrated. Bringing together empirical experiences with theoretical debates, my intention is to give 'thick descriptions' of different mobilities, personalities, ambitions and places, as well as to contribute to the theoretical discussions that are addressed by them. An emerging theme, which is discussed from different angles in all of these chapters, is the role of economy and culture and the various ways in which they intermingle and intertwine on these different translocal connections, thus showing not only *how* trade is affected by 'culture', but also *how* Swahili culture is shaped by trade.

The third part is entitled *Enmeshments* as, according to the overall aim of this book – to both give a vivid portrayal of the way translocality is lived among Swahilis and to use this to contribute to theoretical reflections on translocality more widely –, here, empirical insights become enmeshed in the theoretical reflections of the first part in order to refine and enrich the understanding of translocality as a concept. While the first chapter elaborates how the different kinds of mobilities and cultural economic practices of material exchange lead to the construction of a translocal space, the main task of the final chapter is to develop arguments concerning the specific characteristics of 'living translocality'. These take up the most prominent recurring themes in the presentations of the four different connections, namely the role of location, the matter of distance and the negotiations of Swahili identity within the translocal connections under study. By drawing on empirical insights gained into these issues, the often overly abstract discussions of translocality and closely related ideas of transnationalism, relationality and cosmopolitanism are approached from an empirical perspective, confronting these concepts with the experience of those actually living translocal lives. This allows me to engage with some of the difficulties of recent contributions concerning the relation between mobility, place and space that often either miss the genuinely relational character of translocal spaces or overemphasise it by missing the continuing significance of distance and distinction. By giving a deep ethnographic insight into the effects of mobility on senses of place, home, belonging and the creations of material and metaphorical spaces, this book finally not only wishes to provide an empirically grounded contribution to theoretical reflections on translocality, relationality and respective conceptualisations of mobility and space but also attempts to provide a vivid insight into translocality – how it is lived, made meaningful and a way of being in the world – from a Swahili perspective.

ARRANGEMENTS