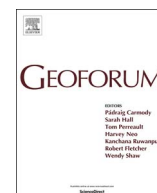




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The evolution of migration trajectories of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey and Greece: The role of changing social networks and critical events

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ABSTRACT

While social networks have been widely argued to shape migrants' trajectories, their presence and their roles are not self-evident, nor constant. Common conceptualisations of migrants' social networks refer to the linkages between people in origin and destination countries. This underlies a rather linear notion of migration trajectories as a straightforward move from one country to another, and does not pay attention to the networks migrants have elsewhere in the world and those formed en route. This paper investigates how various network members and changes in migrants' social networks are associated with the evolution of their migration trajectories. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork and longitudinal social network analysis among 40 sub-Saharan migrants, part of whose trajectories in Turkey and Greece were followed over time. The migration policy environment in both countries is rather volatile, which is manifested in migrants' daily lives through the experience of critical events. Findings show that social network dynamics explain how migrants act upon these events and shape their migration trajectory accordingly. The findings question common representations of non-linear migration trajectories as the mere consequence of onward moves interrupted by policy constraints. By demonstrating the importance of changes that take place in networks and the timing thereof, it ultimately contributes to a better understanding of how non-linear migration trajectories evolve over time.

1. Introduction

Migration trajectories of irregular migrants are characterised by non-linear moves and frequent changes in routes and applied migration strategies. These non-linear trajectories are commonly explained through micro-level factors, such as dynamic aspirations and intentions, and macro-level factors, such as restrictive migration policies obstructing straightforward moves. This paper investigates the meso-level, focusing on migrants' personal social networks. It investigates how migrants' embeddedness in their social networks is associated with the way their trajectories evolve over time. In doing so, it will demonstrate that the non-linearity of migrants' trajectories is associated with the changeable nature of their networks.

The explanatory power of networks for migration has been widely discussed in the literature, and opposed to other explanatory factors such as migration policies (Carling, 2008; Collyer, 2005; de Haas, 2010; Durand et al., 1999; Heering et al., 2007; Muanamoha et al., 2010; Massey, 1987; McKenzie and Rapoport, 2007; Pathirage and Collyer, 2011; Pries, 2004; Snel et al., 2016). In most studies, networks are conceived of as the linkages between people in origin and destination

countries, whose role in initiating and sustaining migration flows is investigated. Rather, this paper focuses on the role of networks during the actual process of migration in the case of irregular migrants. It takes a broader perspective on the composition of migrants' networks by considering network members beyond origin and destination countries. Moreover, it employs a longitudinal research design to investigate the changes that take place in networks over time (Wissink and Mazzucato, 2017). In this way, we aim to critically examine the role of social networks for understanding how migration trajectories evolve over time.

The study was situated in the transit migration hubs of Istanbul (Turkey) and Athens (Greece). Transit migration hubs are characterised by a highly volatile migration environment, which is manifested in the daily lives of migrants through the experience of 'critical events'. We investigated how changing social networks helped to understand how migration trajectories evolve after the experience of a critical event. Data was collected between 2012 and 2013, and for a small number of informants data collection started in 2009. While the analysis in this paper does not consider the more recent larger migration flows and policy developments in Turkey and Greece since 2015, our analytical

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model addresses the mechanism underlying the relation between migration trajectories and events resulting from changes in the migration environment. As such, our model can be applied in order to understand these recent developments. We discuss this further in the conclusion.

The next section explains how we conceptualise migration trajectories of irregular migrants, and is followed by a discussion of the concept of critical events and a theoretical inquiry into the role of social networks for understanding migration. Subsequently, we explain the data and methods. In Section 4, we present a typology of ways social networks affect the migration trajectory following the experience of a critical event, which is followed by the analysis of three case studies in Section 5. Section 6 ends with a conclusion.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The evolution of non-linear migration trajectories

When large numbers of people move between the same countries, it is common to speak of migration flows. Often studied migration flows are those between Mexico and the US (Durand et al., 1999; Massey, 1987; McKenzie and Rapoport, 2007; Pries, 2004) and between various African and European countries, often linked through post-colonial or otherwise historical ties (Carling, 2008; Collyer, 2005; de Haas, 2010; Faist, 1997; Heering et al., 2007; Snel et al., 2016; Toma and Vause, 2014). Many of these studies aim to explain the causes, continuation and decline of particular migration flows. In this vein, migrants' individual trajectories are considered against the background of these migration flows: for Mexicans it is investigated whether and how they aim to travel to the US; and Africans to Europe. Such images of migration flows and individual trajectories represent a rather linear and Western oriented notion of migration. This paper contributes to a growing body of literature contesting (a) the notion of migration as a linear movement, and (b) the interpretation of an individual migration trajectory against the background of a migration flow, supposing a certain intended destination of one's trajectory.

Several studies have shown that migration is often far from a straightforward, linear move. This is particular the case for trajectories that involve irregular practices in domains such as entry, residence, labour or exit (Jordan and Düvell, 2002; Düvell, 2011). In this vein, Collyer (2007) speaks of “fragmented journeys” and Schapendonk (2011) of “turbulent trajectories” to describe the unexpected twists, long stays in places people intended to transit only. The trajectories of irregular migrants are both changing in terms of the geographical direction in which they develop, as well as in terms of their migratory intentions and strategies in one place of residence (Wissink et al., 2013).

Several scholars have explained this non-linearity by considering mobility regimes and geopolitics. Schwarz (this Themed Issue) argues that trajectories evolve as migrants are navigating opportunities and constraints brought forward by mobility regimes. Restrictive migration policies, for example expressed through border arrests and rejected visa applications, may incite interruptions of journeys or alternative, often riskier, ways of travelling (De Haas, 2010; Carling, 2008; Schapendonk, 2011; Mainwaring and Bridgen, 2016). Policies may also offer opportunities, for instance through regularisation rounds. Over time, policies generate fluctuating opportunities and constraints, contributing to changing motives and modes of travelling, and thus the evolution of migrants' trajectories (Wissink and Ulusoy, 2016).

Fluctuating opportunities are typical in transit migration hubs, which are characterised by volatile social and institutional structures (Wissink and Mazzucato, 2017). Transit migration hubs, therefore, provide excellent locations for studying the evolution of non-linear migration trajectories. A volatile social structure entails that the social composition is frequently changing as a consequence of daily arrivals and departures. A volatile institutional structure entails that the rules of the game pertaining to asylum and migration are subject to change. In

Turkey and Greece, it was observed that sweep operations by the police could be followed by regularisation rounds; that border controls moved from one border region to the other and that seemingly random apprehension rounds on the street in Athens could lead to a detention period of a few hours, or even result in indefinite confinement (Wissink and Ulusoy, 2016; Tsitselikis, 2013).

While the evolution of non-linear migration trajectories has thus been associated with fluctuating opportunities, it is unlikely that they have the same impact on everyone. After all, not everyone makes use of opportunities offered, or handles constraints in the same way. Not much scholarly attention is given to the underlying mechanism explaining how and why it is that fluctuating opportunities result in changing trajectories. In order to empirically study this, the next section introduces what we have called ‘critical events’ as a way to operationalise how fluctuating opportunities manifest themselves in the everyday lives of individuals.

2.2. Critical events

We use the notion of critical events to describe pivotal moments potentially fostering a change in or secure a continuation of an ongoing process, because of new opportunities or constraints they bring forward. A change can entail a change of plans, but also a new direction when there was no prior plan. Critical events thus form potential turning points during the migration trajectory. We distinguish between three types of critical events: events taking place within the realm of social networks, outside the realm of social networks in the institutional structure, and in the personal lives of migrants. Examples of critical events within the realm of social networks are meeting someone new, losing someone's contact details, or receiving a request for help. Manifestations of the volatile institutional structure are for example the rejection of acceptance of a visa application, an arrest at the border, or the experience of an accident while travelling. Life events such as getting a child and getting married are a third type of critical events.

Whether an event is critical and how big its impact is differs from person to person and from time to time. A critical event, therefore, does not occur in a vacuum of space and time. As Rachman (1991) argues, it is not a mere external variable inserted into the ongoing everyday lives of people. Rather, it “occurs in the midst of a history, causing us to redistribute our sense of what has gone before it, and what might come after” (Rachman, 1991, p xi). It thus depends on the conditions at a given moment in time, whether the factors that make up the potential event set other mechanisms in motion, or not (Kaiser, 2012). This implies that to understand when, why and how events become critical for the way trajectories evolve, it is important to embed them in the context in which they are occurring. We will analyse how the nature of migrants' social networks at the timing of the event, explains how the trajectories evolve. It is thus not our aim to analyse which types of critical events matter for the way migrants' trajectories evolve. Rather, we use the concept of a critical event to mark turning points in the trajectories of our informants as revealed throughout the fieldwork.

Several studies have demonstrated that to understand how migrants deal with opportunities and constraints, we need to consider how migrants make use of information and communication technologies (ICT). Indeed, ICT potentially enable migrants to deal with constraints imposed by restrictive policies, and herewith greatly contribute to the mobility of migrants (Benítez, 2012; Collyer, 2010; Dekker and Engbersen, 2014; Hiller and Franz, 2004; Zijlstra and Van Liempot, 2017). After the experience of a critical event, such as a failed attempt to cross the border, it is easier to make and receive quick money transfers and contact people for assistance when migrants have access to ICT facilities. Yet, the mere presence of ICT is not sufficient. Social relationships need to be created or maintained that are able and willing to provide a source of support through ICT (Dankyi et al., 2015; Mazzucato, 2011; Smith and Mazzucato, 2009). This, as we will argue, cannot be taken for granted. Similarly, the fact that technologies have

stretched out over the globe does not necessarily imply that social relationships are maintained or have similarly expanded (de Bruijn et al., 2010). Thus, in order to understand the evolution of migrants' trajectories, we examine how migrants react to and act upon critical events, and assess how the nature of their social networks at that moment in time, helps to understand this reaction.

2.3. Social networks

Social network approaches to migration have helped to embed the behaviour of individual migrants in larger macro structures (Boyd and Nowak, 2013; Gurak and Caces, 1992). According to migration network theory, migration is more likely to occur when social networks are prevalent between people in origin and destination countries (Massey, 1987). It stipulates that through networks, migration becomes a self-sustaining process where earlier migrants facilitate the migration of newcomers. Social networks thus constitute channels through which resources, such as information, goods, ideas and money, can be exchanged across the borders of nation states (Faist, 1997; Fawcett, 1989; Massey, 1987; Pries, 2004). Such transnational social networks have been found to be crucial providers of various support types during migration processes: emotional, instrumental, financial and informational support (Bilecen, 2016; House, 1981). Studies have demonstrated that this is particularly so for migrants who cannot rely on state support, such as irregular migrants in a transit context (Broeders and Engbersen, 2007; Collyer, 2007; Devillanova, 2008; Koser Akcapar, 2010; Muanamoha et al., 2010; Suter, 2012; van Wijk, 2010).

Despite the demonstrated importance of social networks, scholars have warned for a network bias (Schapendonk, 2014); a tendency to explain migration predominantly through the lens of networks, while negative feedback-loops within networks (De Haas, 2010) or other factors, such as labour market outcomes, remain neglected (Boyd and Nowak, 2013; Carling, 2008; Snel et al., 2016; Taylor, 1999). A growing body of literature questions the explanatory power social networks have for understanding migration processes (Collyer, 2005; Broeders and Engbersen, 2007; Krissman, 2005; Kalir, 2005). For example, the mere existence of transnational social networks does not automatically lead to migration, neither can it explain to where people migrate. Collyer (2005) showed, for example, that Algerians preferred to move to the UK instead of to France to be away from their families. Similarly, Kalir (2005) demonstrated in his study of Ecuadorians in Israel that migrants move to countries where they do not maintain any strong relationships. Additionally, the facilitating role of social networks can be hampered through migration policies that hinder the transfer of resources and of communication and visits, such as strict family reunification procedures or the presence of a fence (Broeders and Engbersen, 2007; Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008). Moreover, network members sometimes deliberately choose not to help newcomers, for example due to labour market competition (Broeders and Engbersen, 2007; De Haas, 2010). Another criticism of network studies is that networks often remain loosely conceptualised and it is not clear why some actors are considered part of networks, and others are not (Krissman, 2005). It is therefore not clear how exactly networks play a role in migration.

These critical perspectives on migrant network theory have helped to recognise that networks are not self-evident factors in migration processes. However, this does not mean that social network approaches to migration studies should be dismissed. Instead, in order to grasp the value of networks for understanding migration processes, we have to look at them differently than along the lines of a particular migration flow, as has been common in migration studies.

Conceptualisations of networks along the lines of migration flows, entail that they are considered as linkages between people in particular origin and destination countries. Such conceptualisations refer to a known pre- and post-migration context. We know that in particular in the case of irregular migrants, trajectories evolve in unanticipated and

unknown directions. Defining network members by virtue of a destination context is not helpful when this destination is unknown.

Furthermore, an origin-destination country conceptualisation of networks does not allow for the inclusion of influential network members residing elsewhere in the world; in the places people transit, but also in other parts of the world. Especially when people make use of ICT it is not required for a network member to live in a particular (foreseen) destination country in order to exchange resources that may affect the migration trajectory. What is more, in line with conceptualisations of networks as the linkages between origin and destination countries, most studies focus on the role of strong ties between family and friends in either one of the locations (Ryan et al., 2008; Haug, 2008). Recent studies have addressed the role of weaker ties in migration processes (Suter, 2012; Ryan et al., 2008; Gladkova and Mazzucato, 2015). Suter (2012) found, for example, that fellow migrants in transit contexts are crucial providers of instrumental support. And Gladkova and Mazzucato (2015) illustrate the effect chance (co-incident) encounters can have on the turn migrants' trajectories take.

By predefining the geographical locations of network members and the relationship strength, we not only risk missing out on other influential network members, but we also fail to notice the dynamics in networks. From longitudinal social network analysis (SNA) studies we know that the presence and nature, such as the relationship strength, of relationships with network members can change over time (Feld et al., 2007; Lubbers et al., 2010). Migration studies have only recently begun to recognise and analyse changes in migrants' networks (Somerville, 2011; Schapendonk, 2014; Ryan et al., 2008; Wissink and Mazzucato, 2017). This implies that over time, relationships are dissolved, and (re-) created. This is the case both for relationships that existed prior to migration, as well as for relationships that are formed along the journey. As the nature of networks is not constant over time, nor can it be expected that their role in the migration process is.

In our conceptualisations of migrants' trajectories and social networks, we move from an origin-destination country perspective on networks to a subject-oriented one (see Schwarz, this Themed issue). This implies that we lift all time, strength and geographical restrictions when qualifying network members. A subject-oriented approach identifies relationships based on interaction that has taken, is taking, or can potentially take place between the migrant and anyone else (in SNA this is known as personal network analysis, see: Lubbers et al., 2010). Following SNA studies, interaction is defined as an exchange of contact or of a type of support, where we distinguish between instrumental, financial, informational and affectional/emotional support (House, 1981; Bilecen, 2016). We thus understand social networks as the changeable collection of all people with whom migrants exchange instrumental, financial, informational or affectional support, can, or have done so. We further recognise that the presence of people in a network may change, as well as the type and intensity of interaction that takes place between them.

3. Methodology

3.1. Transit migration hubs as primary field sites

The fieldwork for the study was conducted in Istanbul, Turkey and in Athens, Greece. Contact with informants who left these cities was maintained using social media and telephone. With some informants, follow-up interviews were held in other places, including Norway and the Netherlands. Both Istanbul and Athens form transit migration hubs for migrants trying to (often clandestinely) continue their journey elsewhere. The transit character of both cities is visible in migrant neighbourhoods through the large numbers of hotels and other shared accommodation facilities, shops with travel equipment such as life vests (only Istanbul and Izmir) and suitcases, call shops and internet cafes, civil society organisations offering services to migrants and sometimes employment opportunities. It is also visible through the presence of

smugglers and “connectors” who link migrants with them (Suter, 2012; Wissink et al., 2013).

Both Turkey and Greece are under pressure from the EU to curb irregular border-crossings, as the border between them forms one of the main entry points for irregular entry into the EU over land and sea. The presence of the EU, amongst others through FRONTEX missions or EU-funded projects, contributes to the volatility of the migration environment in the region. The volatile policy is also the result of migration policies lacking statutory power, as was the case in Turkey at the time of study, leaving decisions on, for example, granting residence permits and detention to the interpretation of local authorities (Wissink and Ulusoy, 2016).

Uncertainties and vulnerabilities created by migration and asylum policies contribute to a perceived sense of temporariness in the region: access to asylum and a fair assessment is not guaranteed, and the noticeable threat of apprehension can be felt through the abundant presence of armed police, notably in Athens. Informants reported feeling they were in a state of transit due to these conditions, even if this did not imply they had actual plans to move. In this context, migratory intentions and strategies are highly subject to change (Wissink et al., 2013).

3.2. Sample and data collection

Fieldwork took place over 17 months in 2012 and 2013. We also build on an earlier field study in 2009 and contacts that were made between 2009 and 2013 by one of the authors, prolonging data on 7 informants up to four years (Wissink et al., 2013). With most informants contact was maintained via social media and telephone until 2015 or 2016. The main research sample is composed of nineteen sub-Saharan African migrants in Athens and 21 in Istanbul. It includes only migrants from the West and Horn of Africa to enhance the variety in migration trajectories, while simultaneously allowing for immersion in migrant communities during the fieldwork. We included both men and women in the sample to enhance variation in the trajectories. The choice for sample inclusion was primarily based on theoretical saturation where we aimed to capture variation in applied migration strategies. To do so, informants were approached using various gateways: in public places such as squares and markets and snowball sampling techniques. People were asked to participate in the study and its purposes were discussed repeatedly to ensure informed consent. The longitudinal approach of the study entailed that informants were repeatedly contacted and visited. It was possible people to drop out at any time of the study. In two instances, contact with the informants was lost after the first SNA interview, as keeping in touch was challenged through a language barrier.

Data was collected using a triangulation of methods: participant observation, semi-structured interviews and personal network analysis. Participant observation enabled the identification of critical events and the observation of how relationships were managed and how migration strategies changed over time. Observations were conducted in public places, private houses, and common meeting points such as Internet café's, call shops, restaurants and coffee houses. As the fieldwork progressed, participant observation increasingly centred on the lives of 40 informants whom the first author regularly visited in their homes and in some cases in detention facilities, and accompanied to various places such as hospitals, NGOs, lawyers, call shops, local authorities, airports, public transport stations, churches and mosques. Furthermore, participation in daily activities of a selected group of informants was also practiced by selling watches and jewellery, working in sweat shops, shopping, and having dinners together with respondents. These activities provided occasions to observe and experience the critical events migrants encountered, what the role was of social networks in dealing with these and how this shaped the way the course of migration evolved next.

The same informants were repeatedly visited during different

periods and contact was maintained in between periods by telephone and the Internet. This allowed witnessing changes in their interactions and activities, and contextualising these within living conditions and policy changes.

Semi-structured interviews were designed to get a longitudinal perspective of the trajectories of informants until the time we met, and to reflect on observations of their migration process and social networks. The interviews also helped obtain informants' own accounts of their personal social networks, which enabled the identification of what network changes were perceived as relevant. An interview guide was used which contained questions on the importance, maintenance, nature and role of various types of social relationships and the experience of critical events. The interviews further invited informants to reflect on their migration process and networking experiences and practices.

A social network survey was designed to analyse the composition and structure of migrants' personal social networks. A multiple name generator questionnaire containing 15 questions on various kinds of support was developed to identify the persons with whom the informants exchanged four types of support: emotional/affective, instrumental, informational and financial (House, 1981; Bilecen, 2016; Amelina et al., 2012). A year later, we reflected on changes in the outcome of this survey with 17 migrants who remained in Istanbul and Athens.

3.3. A mobile research approach

Research on migration trajectories can be conducted in various ways. One is to follow informants to the various countries to and through which they move (for example: Schapendonk, 2011). Another way is to study how trajectories evolve during residence in a particular site, as trajectories not only evolve in terms of the geographical direction, but also in term of migratory intentions and migration strategies. This study concerns a combination of these two approaches: I met with some informants in both Turkey and Greece, or included their onward or backward movement between Turkey and Greece in the analysis. Within Turkey and Greece, several places were visited to follow the migrants' journeys. Within Istanbul and Athens, we followed changes in migrants' trajectories in terms of the aspired or adopted migration strategy. Finally, we maintained in touch with informants who had left Greece or Turkey, or returned again after a journey to a third country.

Keeping track of the various locations and strategies of our informants, required the adoption of a mobile research approach. This has several advantages. First, data on trajectories evolve was collected as it was evolving, rather than retrospectively. Second, new migration strategies, changes in networks and the experience of new critical events could be understood in relation to contextual information about the new geographical context. Third, meeting informants in various places further contributes to the level of trust and familiarity between the researcher and informants. The approach is also challenging; it adds to the complexity of the research subject: it is impossible to take all new contextual information into account that is gathered as the trajectory progresses. Furthermore, the approach is time consuming and therefore choices need to be made on what trajectories to follow in-depth. This potentially leads to a biased selection of trajectories that are rapidly changing in favour of those that evolve at a calmer pace. We dealt with these challenges by selecting cases based on theoretical saturation, where we strived for a diversity of trajectories in terms of pace and adopted migration strategies.

4. The evolution of trajectories and networks

As we will demonstrate, the fieldwork revealed a relation between the type of interaction and support exchanges that are taking place in a migrant's network, and the ability to pursue the trajectory as desired following the experience of a critical event. Support exchanges and

Table 1
Typology of network roles for dealing with critical events.

		Ability to pursue desired trajectory following a critical event	
		ENABLING	DISABLING
Exchanges within network at the time of the event	Interaction/support exchanges are taking place and are sufficient	Type 1: The interaction/exchanges enable a desired continuation of the trajectory	Type 2: The interaction/exchanges disable a desired continuation of the trajectory
	Interaction/support exchanges are lacking or insufficient	Type 3: Lacking interaction/exchanges enable a desired continuation of the trajectory	Type 4: Lacking interaction/exchanges disable a desired continuation of the trajectory

interaction in the network, or the lack thereof, can be both enabling and constraining this ability. This led to the construction of a typology of ways in which migrants' networks are associated with the evolution of trajectories following the experience of a critical event (see Table 1).

Below we discuss each type. In Section 5 we subsequently we explain that as networks continue to change and new events continue to occur, several types may be at play at different times during the evolution of the migration trajectory of individuals.

Type 1: The interaction/support exchanges enable a desired continuation of the trajectory

This type of network role implies that interaction and support exchanges that are taking place at the time of a critical event enable the continuation of the trajectory as desired. This implies that, because of the existing interaction and support exchanges, migrants are able to make use of opportunities, or combat constraints brought forward by critical events. This is the case, for example, when following an arrest at the border and the confiscation of travel documents, which are examples of two critical events, migrants can mobilise support in their networks to arrange a second attempt to cross the border. Another example is when results of the asylum procedure are not forthcoming and migrants are not allowed to work but receive continuous support from network members to cover living expenses.

Type 2: The interaction/support exchanges disable the desired continuation of the trajectory

The presence of interaction or exchanges with certain network members can also constrain the evolution of the trajectory as desired. This is the case, for example, when perceived expectations and obligations directed the way migrants allocated their resources following a critical event. The objective of providing for family members was in several cases prioritised over continuing journeys to Europe. In other instances, we observed that support provided to informants was conditional; support was only provided if it was used for specific purposes, which not necessarily matched the informants' desires. This is the case for example when financial support is offered to travel to Europe and not to sustain a livelihood on Turkey as some informants aspired. The exchange of notably information support, could lead to a continuation of the migration trajectory in a way that was initially not desired.

Type 3: Lacking interaction/support exchanges enable the evolution of a desired trajectory

Contrary to type 2, sometimes the absence of interaction in networks meant the absence of related constraints, expectations or obligations vis-à-vis others because of which people were better able to deal with critical events and continue their trajectories as desired. Some, for example, did not want to maintain in touch with family members when his living conditions deteriorated, in order to be better able to emotionally cope with the way his trajectory evolved. We observed various other cases where turning down offers for support

enhanced the informants' feeling of self-worth and autonomy in shaping one's trajectory.

Type 4: Lacking interaction/support exchanges disable the evolution of a desired trajectory

This last type entails the opposite scenario of type 1, where a lack of support exchanges constraints the evolution of the trajectory in a desired fashion. Ultimately, crossing a border, waiting for asylum results and finding a job, require some kind of resources that are mobilised through relations with others. These relations do not need to be strong or present for a long time; moreover, they can as well result from a chance encounter with someone sharing a valuable resource with you in a crucial point in time. Yet, when required resources are absent, this can result in rather precarious and vulnerable situations where the trajectory is mainly shaped by survival strategies.

Over time, migrants experience a variety of critical events whilst their networks continue to change. This implies that the nature of migrants' relationships with network members is not constant. Over time, various types of network roles can explain how migrants deal with critical events and shape their migration trajectory accordingly. Therefore, investigating migrants' changing embeddedness in their social networks over time is key in understanding the impact of critical events on migrants' evolving trajectories. We illustrate this by presenting three case studies.

5. Case studies

We present three case studies to illustrate how our typology of network roles help to explain how trajectories evolve in relation to critical events and changes in social networks. The three cases were selected because they jointly illustrate how over time various network roles are at play. Each case is introduced by a short vignette, explaining how a migration trajectory has evolved. We subsequently show that the way migrants have dealt with critical events explains how the migration trajectory evolves and how this is embedded in how their networks have evolved until that point in time. Next, we show that as the migration trajectory evolves, migrants' networks continue to do so as well. This in turn affects how they deal with subsequent critical events. For all cases, data were collected over a longer period of time than is presented. Here we focus on the part of the trajectory that illustrates how networks and trajectories co-evolve to affect the way migrants deal with critical events.

5.1. The case of Osman

Osman had fled from Eritrea to Sudan after a colleague informed him that the authorities were after him. In 2009, he travelled via Turkey to Greece, from where he first attempted to move to Albania, and later to Italy. Eventually, he applied for asylum in Greece. When his application was rejected, he continued his journey to various other countries in Europe where he applied for asylum.

Osman and I met in 2012 when he was awaiting the results of the

asylum procedure. Earlier on, he had lived in an informal settlement on a hill, from where he and others had been trying to leave Greece by climbing under a truck that would be shipped to Italy. He had to abort his attempts after he dislocated his shoulder during an accident. This formed a critical event because of which he was unable to continue trying to leave Greece in this way. Even though this is what he desired, he continued to live on a hill for another fourteen months. Because of his dislocated shoulder he was unable to work and thus would need to mobilise financial support among others to pay for less risky ways to leave Greece. Yet, as Osman had been living on the hill for months, away from communication infrastructures to reach out to others, he did not maintain any other relationship beyond the hill than with his brother in Sudan, who occasionally sent a bit of financial support. The lack of sufficient, mainly financial support, constrained him to find an alternative way of leaving Greece as he desired. As a consequence, he continued to reside on the hill. This is an example of type 4 of the network role, where lacking support disables the continuation of the trajectory as desired after the experience of a critical event, in this case an accident.

Fourteen months later, the hill was raided by the police. This formed another critical event after which Osman's trajectory took a new turn: he applied for asylum. Many others who had been living in the informal settlement continued trying to leave Greece one way or another or stayed on irregularly in Greece. A chance encounter explains Osman's new turn: When the police raided the hill, activists from migrant solidarity groups support the people living on the hills. Among them was Despina, who would later introduce me to Osman in Athens. She was well connected to NGOs and human rights lawyers. Hearing about the accident, Despina offered to take Osman to Athens to get medical care. Moreover, she offered to assist him with filing an asylum claim. Being a single man, this would have been virtually impossible without Despina's help, as the Immigration services only accepted 20 applications a week, while hundreds of people would gather in front of their building (see: UNCHR, 2012). NGOs mainly assisted families and single women with filing an asylum claim. Because of his application he obtained a "pink card", which is an asylum seeker's residence permit which allowed him live and to move around Athens legally and thus relatively free. This is an example of a type 1 role of networks, where a chance encounter provided him with a source of support, enabling him to find a way to deal with the event of the police raid because of which he was unable to stay on the hill.

As his length of stay in Athens extended, Despina's role in his life became bigger: she assisted with finding accommodation, accompanied him to the immigration services for interviews, and connected him to NGOs. When I met Despina, she always inquired about him, and asked me to send him her regards when I was going to meet him. The friendship that had grown between them was a vital source of both instrumental and emotional support to Osman. Among the other migrants Osman knew in Athens, he was one of the few ones with a pink card, and who was not attempting to leave Greece because his prospects in Greece improved (type 1).

The critical events of the accident, the police raid and the encounter with Despina and the type and amount of support that was available in his network at those times informed the change in Osman's trajectory from attempting to leave Greece to applying for asylum. Tides turned again after the experience of two subsequent critical events: the rejection of his asylum claim and the confiscation of his pink card. This resulted in a situation where all his actions and daily activities were directed at daily survival. Critical events that meanwhile occurred in the realm of his network explain why these two events immediately contributed to a rather precarious situation.

First, when Osman learned his asylum application was rejected and his pink card was confiscated, he was unable to reach Despina. He hoped that she would have been able to provide him with access to lawyers to start the appeal procedure and retrieve his pink card. Yet, she was not answering phone calls, nor did she stop by in his

neighbourhood as she used to. I maintained in touch with Despina, who explained to me that she felt overwhelmed by the number of migrants she assisted at that time. Combined with events in her personal life, she took the decision to step back. The second change was that Osman's brother could no longer send him financial support as he used to, because of the devaluation of the Sudanese dollar.

The lack of instrumental support from Despina and the financial support from his brother, constrained Osman in dealing with the event of his pink card being confiscated. Without it, he risked arrest and imprisonment and therefore he hardly left his house. His actions were directed at daily survival; the absence of support disabled him to continue his trajectory by settling in or leaving Greece. This is an example of a type 4 network role, where a lack of support disables Osman to deal with the rejection of his pink card and the loss of income.

Consequently, he prioritised buying food over buying phone cards, and he abstained from contact with his family in Sudan and Eritrea. While his brother continued calling him, Osman asked him to stop doing this, as he did not want to face the confrontation of missing his family in this already precarious situation. To stop the interaction with his family enabled him to cope emotionally with the way his migration trajectory progressed, and take time for deliberation on how to proceed. This is an example of type 3, where the lack of interaction enabled him to focus on his trajectory. Meanwhile, his roommates continued trying to find ways to leave Greece. Because of the strategies this involved, the day and night rhythms of Osman and his roommates were opposites. Therefore, Osman had less and less interaction with others. He abandoned strategies to leave Greece or regularise and was only focused on daily survival. This is again an example of type 4, where lacking support exchanges disable to continuation of the migration strategy as desired.

Osman's case shows that opportunities to deal with a critical event, such as an accident and losing documents, are associated with opportunities to mobilise support within networks. These opportunities fluctuate when contacts become unavailable or unable to provide support. At the same time, Osman withdrew from his existing contacts, as a way of emotionally coping with the challenges he was facing in Greece. Thus, not only the opportunity to contact others, also the willingness to maintain these contacts inform how networks play a role with dealing with critical events. Osman's case further demonstrates that that relationships formed *en route*, rather than merely pre-migration networks, can have a vital impact on how people deal with critical events. In Osman's case, it meant the difference between being irregular without having a prospect of leaving Greece, and having a chance to apply for asylum.

5.2. The case of Ibrahim

Ibrahim was born to Somali parents in Saudi-Arabia. When he was 17 years old, he and his family were deported to Somalia. Ibrahim felt he did not belong there and he decided to return to Saudi-Arabia. Via Yemen and Turkey, he arrived to Greece in 2012. From there, he tried to leave Greece various times, he considered moving back to Turkey, worked as a connector and later left Greece by plane.

On his way to Saudi-Arabia Ibrahim travelled through Yemen, where he got engaged. When the Yemeni war broke out in 2011, the couple decided that Ibrahim would travel to a safer country in Europe, and that his fiancée would join him afterwards. Ibrahim travelled to Turkey, where we met first. Friends in Yemen had helped him to accumulate the financial resources he needed to travel. In Turkey, he was busy arranging his journey to Greece, where we met a few months later. At that moment in time, he had run out of his financial resources. Ibrahim had not intended to stay in Greece for a very long time, but the lack of financial support constrained his opportunity to travel onwards. This is hence an example of a type 4 network role.

As months passed by, the family of his fiancée was getting impatient about their marriage. Running out of resources and the conversations with his fiancée inquiring about his whereabouts formed critical events

as Ibrahim had to urgently find a way to leave Greece. The pressure he felt from his fiancée and her family constrained him in taking time to accumulate resources to continue his journey, after he had lost the financial support of his friends. Ibrahim could think of one potential source of financial support: his cousins in the USA. During several of our meetings, he told me that he deemed asking for support would be impolite. However, by telling them about the living conditions in Greece via Facebook, he hoped that they would develop the idea to support him. Indeed: his cousins had offered a type of instrumental support which enabled Ibrahim to try and leave Greece by plane. This is a type 1 network role where the existence of support exchanges enable Ibrahim to deal with the fact he had run out of financial resources and with the pressure he felt to migrate further.

Ibrahim's attempt to leave Greece with the support of his cousins was unsuccessful and traumatic to him: when police officers at the gate realised there were inconsistencies in his travel documents, he was handcuffed and taken to a room in the basement of the airport. There he was severely beaten by the police officers, after which he was sent back to Athens. Ibrahim felt devastated about what happened. He described it as if his only road to achieve something had been blocked. Although his cousins promised to help him again, this did not materialise. The critical events of failing to leave Greece and the physical abuse at the airport coincided with another critical event only a few days later: a phone call from his fiancée in Yemen telling him that her parents had arranged a marriage for her because it took too much time to wait for Ibrahim. By then, she had refused to marry someone else twice, but this time her family went through with arranging a marriage.

Ibrahim was even more devastated because of this, he exclaimed. Until these events, Ibrahim's network had a rather transnational character: he occasionally received some financial support from friends in Yemen and Saudi-Arabia; he had received help from his cousins in the USA who helped him to arrange a journey, and he exchanged information about travelling routes with other Somali migrants he had met on his way. Due to the critical events of the failed attempts to leave Greece, the physical abuse he experienced, and the marriage of his fiancée with someone else, he lost both his incentive and resources to travel to Europe. It was painful for him to talk with friends and his former fiancée in Yemen, and he did not see a reason to stay in touch with his cousins of whose promise to support once more did not materialise. At the same time, more and more acquaintances of his in Athens, including his roommates, were arrested and imprisoned because of their irregular status. One year after Ibrahim told me about the arrest of his roommates, they were still in prison. As a result, Ibrahim's network became smaller and more local.

Lacking support exchanges after a series of critical events directed Ibrahim's trajectory in a new direction: he considered moving back to Turkey as he had seen others do. This type 3 network role enabled Ibrahim to regain control over his migration trajectory. Meanwhile, in order to save money for a journey, he began working as a "connector": someone who brings migrants in touch with smugglers. Yet, he did not feel this work was moral and it distracted him from focusing on his own journey. Above all, it was very risky. He therefore quit, but was indecisive about his next strategy.

A few months later Ibrahim met a Somali businessperson who was touched by Ibrahim's bad luck regarding his engagement. This was an exceptional experience to Ibrahim, as he never felt he fit into the Somali community, because Arabic was his first language and not Somali. This businessperson helped him with getting travel documents, by which Ibrahim managed to get on board of a plane to another European country. This type 1 network role was constituted by a chance encounter that enabled him to proceed with his desired departure from Greece.

Ibrahim's case shows that the possibility to form or activate relationships in other parts of the world are potentially helpful to act upon critical events experienced in Greece. These relationships would have remained undetected if his network would have been defined by

relationships in the country of origin and destination only. Moreover, being born in Saudi-Arabia and having lived in Somalia and Yemen and not having a clear destination in mind, in Ibrahim's case the country of origin and destination would have been hard to identify. The way Ibrahim's trajectory evolved next shows the importance of timing: because his journey lasted longer than anticipated, his fiancée married with someone else and therefore took a different position in his network. It further shows that while contacts abroad may be activated to mobilise support, this support is not permanently available. How Ibrahim eventually dealt with a rather hopeless perspective in Greece, was largely influenced by a chance encounter with the businessperson who enabled his journey out of Greece. This illustrates the role of chance, luck and the influence of weak ties.

5.3. The case of Isa

As a jewellery maker from Senegal, Isa had the chance to travel to various countries before coming to Turkey in 2011. He intended to travel to other Europe to give workshops in jewellery making. However, he applied for asylum in Turkey instead. Later, he dropped out of the procedure, obtained a residence permit later on and travelled to the Balkans. Afterwards, he returned to Turkey, from there he went to Senegal and again back to Turkey.

When Isa and I met, his Turkish tourist visa had just expired. This formed a critical event for Isa, as it turned his status into an irregular one; this was not planned, and as he put it, "the first illegal act of his life". According to a friend of his with whom I met later in Greece, Niaye, Isa initially planned to travel to join him in Greece. Yet, Niaye had advised him not to come to Greece because he deemed the living conditions there harsher than in Turkey. Moreover, he believed that in times of financial crisis, no one in Greece would be interested in taking jewellery classes. Upon this informational support from his friend in Greece, Isa stayed in Istanbul. This can be considered as a type 2 network role, where the exchange of information implies that the migration trajectory is not continued as initially desired. His roommates in Istanbul recommended him to apply for asylum in Turkey instead in order to regularise his stay. His roommates thus provided a type of informational support enabling Isa's to deal with the fact he had become irregular, making this an example of a type 1 network role.

As part of the asylum procedure, Isa was referred to a so called satellite city, which was about a 10-h drive from Istanbul. This referral formed a new critical event and his trajectory took a new turn: he withdrew from the asylum procedure and became again irregular. The city was far away from Istanbul and he had no active network there, which would make it hard to arrange jewellery making workshops. At the same time, his wife in Senegal expected him to regularly send goods. He had to make sure he could make an income, chances of which were lesser in the satellite city. He therefore decided to stay in Istanbul, and as a consequence was expelled from the asylum procedure and became again irregular. This is an example of a type 2 network role where expectations regarding support exchanges disable the continuation of his migration trajectory as desired following the event of the referral to the satellite city.

For Isa, the closure of his asylum procedure formed a critical event, as he was unable to regularise his stay which he deemed necessary to make a career in Turkey. Yet, at the same time, he had met with an American jewellery maker in Istanbul, who involved him in jewellery making workshops. Although this meant Isa's status remained irregular, it would potentially contribute to achieving his goal of earning a living and supporting his family by giving workshops in jewellery making. Yet, this did not materialise quick. Meanwhile, he felt his mother and wife in Senegal to whom he promised to send financial support, were getting impatient. Their phone calls to Isa formed critical events because he put his career as a jewellery maker on hold and concentrated on selling watches on the street in order to support his family. In this way, his trajectory was taking longer than anticipated and Isa remained indecisive for a while whether he should return to Senegal, move to the

satellite city and reopen his asylum case in order to gain more time for finding a durable solution.

In June 2012, the government of Turkey issued an unprecedented policy directive: visa overstayers could pay a fine and apply for a temporary residence permit that would be valid for six months. The amount of the fine depended on the length of the irregular stay in Turkey. For Isa it meant he had to pay a few hundred liras, which he did not have as he sent all money he earned to his mother and wife. The policy directive, was therefore not immediately a critical event, because it did not directly impact on Isa's opportunities. However, soon after this Isa met with a well-known Turkish jewellery artist in Turkey who was willing to invest in Isa's career. He offered to help him getting the temporary residence permit by paying the fines and fees. With the residence permit he obtained, Isa could travel to various other countries, and visit his family in Senegal. This illustrates a type 1 network role event, where the availability of support enables the continuation of a migration trajectory.

Isa's trajectory has shown that how the way he dealt with critical events following from migration and asylum policies is informed by constraining or enabling interaction with members of his network at that moment in time: the available instrumental and informational support, and expectations to provide support, informed his decision not to follow the official procedure to relocate to a satellite city, and to instead stay in an irregular fashion. Furthermore, his case illustrates that not merely the policy directive informed how Isa's trajectory evolved from being in a undocumented to a regular position, but the fact he had met an artist on his way who was willing to support him by paying the fees and fines to make use of the opportunity the directive offered. Had the directive been issued months earlier or later, or had Isa met with the jewellery maker at a different moment in time, it would not have been likely that Isa could regularise his stay in Turkey. This case shows the importance of timing of events and changes in networks.

The analysis of the cases, of which three are presented above, indicates that the way migrants deal with critical events is associated with the nature of their network at the timing of the event. This nature entails what types of support relationships migrants are engaged in, which can be both enabling and constraining the way migrants deal with critical events and how the trajectory evolves next.

Whether support exchanges are taking place or not, depends on two main factors: the opportunities and willingness to do so on both the side of the migrant and the network member (Wissink et al., 2013). First, the opportunities to connect, interact and exchange support need to be there. This means having the actual contact, being able to reach this contact and being able to exchange resources. Second, there needs to be a willingness to interact and to make use of support offers. Both the opportunities and willingness to interact and exchange fluctuate over time. Opportunities change when the presence of certain relationships in networks alter: migrants meet new people on their way, while others leave. Also the presence of a communication infrastructure impacts on the opportunity to keep in touch vary over time and place: informal settlements without internet connections or a mobile phone network hamper the mobilisation of support elsewhere. The willingness to interact alters as the nature of the relationships change, for example when people feel they have depended on the support of others for too long, and break the contact to regain a sense of autonomy (see for an elaborate analysis of why and how networks of migrants in transit hubs change: Wissink and Mazzucato, 2017).

We found that the dimension of timing and chance is crucial in understanding how the willingness and opportunities to exchange support change, and whether this has an enabling or constraining effect on how migrants deal with critical events and thus on how their trajectory proceeds accordingly. Thus, to understand the impact of a critical event on the migration trajectory, it is necessary to be aware of what networks looked like at that specific moment in time.

6. Conclusion

This paper studied the role of social networks in the evolution of the migration trajectories of irregular migrants in Turkey and Greece. This role has long been subject to debate in the migration literature, and often opposed to the effect of (restrictive) migration policies. In the literature, networks are commonly understood as the (potential) linkages between people in origin and destination countries that are typical for certain migration flows. We argue that this conceptualisation is not adequate for understanding how networks are associated with the evolution of migration trajectories. A network conceptualisation based on migration flows assumes that migration trajectories evolve in line with these flows, and that often strong ties with people in origin and destination countries influence the trajectory most. These assumptions give strong explanatory power to macro level factors such as colonial or other historical ties between two countries, for the evolution of individual migration trajectories. While we do not dismiss these factors, the diversification of migration patterns between Africa and Europe of the past decades (Grillo and Mazzucato, 2008; Wissink and Ulusoy, 2016) show that such macro level factors are not sufficient, nor adequate to explain the evolution of individual trajectories.

Instead, we adopted a subject-oriented approach to conceptualise migrants' networks to investigate how they matter for the way individual trajectories evolve. This entailed that network members were not identified through their geographical location or strength of the relationship with the migrant, but through the type of interaction between migrants and others. In this way, we were able to grasp the variety and changeability of network members that played a role in shaping the migration trajectory: weak relationships, including chance encounters, and network members in various parts of the world could equally, and sometimes better, explain the turns in trajectories than relationships with people in origin and (anticipated) destination countries.

We demonstrated that migrants' changing social networks explain how migrants deal with critical events they encounter in their daily lives. As social networks change over time, the availability of resources fluctuates, as do opportunities to act upon events. The continuous experience of critical events and the constantly changing social networks contribute to fluid migratory intentions and decisions and result in the creation of non-linear migration trajectories (Wissink et al., 2013).

Our approach further allowed for a different consideration of the relation between the explanatory powers of social networks vis-a-vis that of migration policies: instead of investigating which best explains the evolution of migration trajectories, we investigated how they interact as the migration trajectory evolves over time. We demonstrated that not merely policy outcomes such as arrests at the border, the results of asylum procedures or regularisation rounds shape the non-linearity trajectories, but whether network interactions enable or constrain the way migrants act upon this. It is thus important to also analyse and contextualise policy effects by examining the meso-level, meaning migrants' social networks.

It was beyond the scope of this paper to describe to what extent migrants negotiate the role of their networks in dealing with critical events. Further research could aim to provide more insight into the agency migrants exert while interacting with network members when dealing with critical events. Future research could further build on the present study by examining how the various roles networks play differ across ethnicity and gender.

Our paper has shown that the value of a social network approach for understanding how migration trajectories evolve becomes evident when the changeable nature of networks is considered, which has only been possible through our longitudinal research design. In the same vein, we show that research designs need to move beyond linear depictions of migration trajectories suggesting moves from A to B and the rather dualistic question of whether social networks facilitate migration or not. By considering migration trajectories and social networks as co-

evolving over time, we become more aware of the complexities of contemporary migration, such as the more recent events in Turkey and Greece. In 2015, a large number of people fled to Turkey and Greece. One year later, the EU-Turkey deal was concluded, where Turkey agreed to readmit migrants from Greece in return for EU support in dealing with refugees in Turkey, including resettlement. The larger number of people and the EU-Turkey deal are likely to constitute critical events in the lives of individual migrants, such as increased smuggler's fees, or a readmission to Turkey. Whether or not this informs people's choices to stay in refugee camps in Turkey, move to Turkish cities and work in the informal sector, move elsewhere, or how they act upon readmissions to Turkey (i.e. by having access to legal support) is expectedly associated with what their social networks looked like at the timing of such events.

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