

Migration and networks in transit

Citation for published version (APA):

Wissink, M. J. (2019). *Migration and networks in transit: The co-evolution of migration trajectories and social networks of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey and Greece*. Proefschrift Maken Maastricht. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20191004mw>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/01/2019

DOI:

[10.26481/dis.20191004mw](https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20191004mw)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

www.umlib.nl/taverne-license

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl

providing details and we will investigate your claim.

Valorisation Addendum

Valorisation Addendum

Valorisation concerns the societal value created from knowledge produced by the study. In one of its most concrete outcomes in the case of social sciences, these result into policy recommendations, which have been presented in the conclusion of this thesis. In this addendum, I illustrate the societal value of the study by explaining how it contributes to the societal and political debates about irregular migration. This is continued by describing various activities I have employed to disseminate the insights from the thesis.

Societal relevance

On June 29 2019, the captain of rescue ship from the organisation SeaWatch was arrested after bringing in migrants rescued from the Mediterranean Sea into an Italian harbour town¹¹. Her arrest made it to the headlines all over the world and sparked debates on whether her act was criminal or one of heroism¹². The Italian Minister Salvini claimed that: “[the Italian government] will use every lawful means to stop an outlaw ship which puts dozens of migrants at risk for a dirty political game”¹³, and he called her act one “of war”¹⁴. The European Union takes the stance that rescuing migrants at sea provides incentives for people to migrate and cross the Mediterranean Sea, hereby facilitating smugglers and encouraging this type of migration¹⁵. Others have argued, however, that SeaWatch admirably acted upon the alleged failure of the European Union to provide humanitarian corridors for people travelling to and seeking refuge in Europe, and that there is no link between rescue acts and smuggling¹⁶.

These contrary views are illustrative for the divided lines along which public debates on, notably undocumented, migration take place. While migration is of all times, and therefore not a new topic of societal concern and debate, debates are held on a larger scale and have become more polarised in the past decade¹⁷. Views clash on whether migration is a national security threat, or an inevitable phenomenon and basic human right. An extreme example

¹¹ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/29/sea-watch-captain-carola-rakete-arrested-italian-blockade>

¹² <https://www.euronews.com/2019/07/01/heroine-or-criminal-sea-watch-3-captain-carola-rakete-divides-opinion>

¹³ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/29/sea-watch-captain-carola-rakete-arrested-italian-blockade>

¹⁴ See: <https://www.euronews.com/2019/07/01/heroine-or-criminal-sea-watch-3-captain-carola-rakete-divides-opinion>

¹⁵ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/27/ngo-rescues-off-libya-encourage-traffickers-eu-borders-chief>

¹⁶ See: <https://theintercept.com/2017/04/02/new-evidence-undermines-eu-report-tying-refugee-rescue-group-to-smugglers/>

¹⁷ See: https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/findings/IE_Handout_FINAL.pdf; https://www.iemed.org/osservatori/arees-danalisi/arxiu-adjunts/anuari/med.2017/IEMed_MedYearbook2017_media_migration_crisis_Matar.pdf;

of this polarisation are the two instances of shutdowns of the American administration, when President Trump did not receive support from Congress to finance the establishment of a wall between the United States and Mexico – one of his main election promises.

Debates on migration take place on a variety of levels and among a variety of actors: from community members discussing the arrival of migrants in their neighbourhood in the local coffee house, to municipality councils designing local integration strategies, to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) implementing rescue actions and public awareness campaigns, and to the European Commission where minimising security threats versus the right to protection is discussed.

Debates are not only polarised in terms of opposing opinions of groups in society but also in terms of the rather dichotomous approach towards the debated policy solutions: people can either get access or not; they have either genuine motivations or not; migration can be banned or it cannot; the stay “in the region” or come to Europe. The societal value of the knowledge produced by this thesis lies in bringing nuance to the rather polarised and dichotomous debate on migration, hereby enhancing the understanding of not only the process of migration, but also the *people* who are migrating. I will illustrate this by addressing four themes that are present in societal and political debates on migration:

1. Migration is a process, not a single decision to migrate taken in the country of origin.

In political and societal debates on migration in Europe, there is a strong assumption that migrants take the decision to migrate to Europe in the country of origin, and that, ideally, migration follows in a stepwise fashion from there. While people may not be successful in their attempt to reach Europe, it is assumed that Europe remains the anticipated destination. This assumption is evident, for example, in campaigns discouraging migration to the EU by providing negative information to people in countries of origin. Such campaigns are based on the assumption that there is a direct link between reasons to emigrate and the view that people have of the European Union; and that the European Union is the anticipated goal. This study showed that this is not necessarily the case. Ideas about Europe and the anticipated destination are highly subject to change as the migration trajectory evolves. The focus on the start of the migration trajectory and the emphasis on the anticipated destination in public and policy debates undermines the course of the trajectory following from there.

2. Categorisations of migrations should not be used to ‘fix’ migrant attributes, needs and intentions.

Understandably, policy-makers and researchers as well as the general public need categorisations to make the world understandable and manageable. Categories used to label migrants (e.g. refugees versus undocumented migrants) have fixed definitions, but are not necessarily fixed attributes of people. We should be wary of letting these categories become

a new reality, disqualifying the underlying complexities. It is the ultimate challenge as well as contribution of the social science to constantly debunk these underlying complexities.

For example, whether or not someone meets the legal criteria to get official recognition as a refugee is determined in the 1951 Geneva Convention of the United Nations. Often, this is put forward as an objective measure to distinguish between refugees and non-refugees. However, the applied legislation is not necessarily objective: Turkey applies a geographical limitation to the definition of a refugee according to the Convention, implying that anyone from outside of Europe cannot be qualified as a refugee under Turkish law. Moreover, while some may meet the criteria laid out in the Convention, others may not apply for asylum – for example because they do not have the means to sustain a livelihood during the application procedure. These persons would then be categorised as irregular or transit migrants and not be eligible for support from refugee organisations, as I have observed in Turkey.

This value of this finding is to challenge how common categories of migrants – such as asylum-seekers, labour migrants and irregular migrants – guide policy and research, as if they concern different people. This thesis has shown that, instead, migrants can be or become different types of categories throughout their migration trajectories. Categories can be used to label people's circumstances, not the people themselves.

3. Migration is not a goal or distinctive feature of people, but inherently part of their walk of life.

Where migration is the topic of debate, logically this aspect of people's lives is being analysed. Yet, for people migrating themselves, it is more plausible that migration is not a goal, but rather a means or side effect of their overall lives. Their goal is, for example, to find safety, adventure, a stable income or family. To interpret migrant behaviour, it is crucial to contextualise this in other life domains, and not narrow the scope of analysis and vision to migratory acts. For this reason, migration is not a topic or a policy challenge that can be solved, curbed or managed on its own – as it is not a phenomenon operating in isolation. This thesis calls for an approach where the role of migration in people's overall lives is analysed. This will help to understand why trajectories evolve in the way they do, and why they cannot be explained predominantly through factors that are directly related to migration (e.g. policy measures, means of travelling, et cetera).

4. Needs and intentions are defined by opportunities and constraints, not vice-versa.

A common fear in migrant-receiving societies is that migrants put a lot of pressure on the social welfare system, either by intention or because these systems can simply not cater to this extra "burden". In the same vein, migrants are either conceptualised as victims in need of support, or as abusers of our social welfare system, by intent or otherwise. Either way, there is a tendency to regard this as a fixed attribute, and to disregard that needs and intentions, as well as capabilities to act upon them, can change over time: a person who is in need of social assistance today may not be tomorrow. A call for social assistance is

rather a reflection of the person's opportunities and constraints at that moment in time, than indicative of his or her genuine intentions. In order to lower the alleged pressure on the social welfare system, not merely migrants' intentions should be addressed, but their constraints and opportunities. The thesis revealed that these are shaped through critical events and social networks. Municipalities responsible for social welfare should thus invest in enhancing capabilities and positive effects of social networks.

5. The importance of a historical and transnational perspective.

This thesis calls to put policy questions in a larger historical and transnational perspective. During my work for an NGO in the Netherlands, in close cooperation with a local municipality there was a large emphasis on the 'fresh start' of permit holders. Yet, there are not a *tabula rasa*. The highly bureaucratic context they had to deal with (e.g. by providing an integration plan to the municipality justifying every three months how they spent four days each week in order to achieve their integration goals) stood in sharp contrast to the absence of bureaucratic involvement when it comes to integration in countries they have passed through, such as Turkey and Greece. People who did not adhere to this were addressed as if they had to learn a lesson or whose intentions were not to be trusted. On the other hand, permit holders who participated well or who no longer depended on social assistance, were addressed as "pearls" and often used as indicative examples of the successful integration programme. Both instances disregard the history prior to the arrival to this city, explaining difficulties with intensive interference of authorities, but also disqualifying the capabilities that people possess and have gained independent of the integration programme. It is likely that counselling programmes by NGOs and municipalities will be more successful taking this historical perspective into account.

A greater sensitivity towards the historical development of the migration trajectory is also helpful to understand the impact of a person's past on the current circumstances. Since the relatively high number of arrivals of Eritrean and Syrian refugees in the Netherlands, these groups are often compared based on country of origin information. It is then easily overlooked that it is likely that many Eritreans have spent a long time in Syria, before coming to Europe and are also fleeing the same war.

This thesis has adopted a transnational perspective on migration, implying that the social network and resources that migrants can mobilise may stretch beyond the borders of the country a person resides in. Persistent images exist in public discourses where specific roles are attributed to specific parts of the network, notably in countries of origin and (anticipated) destination. This study revealed that also network members in other parts of the world can have a valuable impact on the evolution of the migration trajectory. Moreover, this study found that the location, type and character of social networks changes over time.

Time and money restrictions are often provided as reasons for not expanding the scope of analyses, especially when policy makers are confronted with immediate policy questions. Yet, had a historical perspective been applied, the arrival of these people would

not have been “sudden” or “unexpected”. This is also true for the so called “Balkan route” which surprised European politicians in 2015. Yet, already in 2012 (see Chapter 4), people had started to leave Greece on foot through the Balkan, when durable solutions in Greece and other ways out of Greece were not in reach. Also today, when integration programs for newcomers are scaled down in Dutch municipalities due to fewer arrivals – often attributed to the success of the EU-Turkey deal – no attention is given to the fact that still no durable solutions are at hand in Turkey and Greece, which will likely lead to new arrivals in the future.

Valorisation activities

I have engaged in several activities to disseminate the viewpoints explained in the previous section in an effort to contribute to the societal and political debate on migration. These can be divided into six different types of activities, each directed at various or mixed target groups.

1. Media activities

In 2015 I wrote an opinion piece for the¹⁸ *Volkskrant*, entitled “Excluding asylum-seekers does not lead to stopping their arrival”¹⁹. This was a response to the proposal of the liberal political party VVD to inhibit non-Europeans to apply for asylum in the European Union. I also wrote a blogpost on *Versvak.nl*, an online platform making academic research available to a wider public. Here, I argued that migration is a process, and that policy designs should therefore not be based on snapshots throughout this process.

2. Public performances

I participated twice in a panel debate organised by *Studium Generale* in Maastricht, an organisation promoting debate between scientists and the general public and societal actors. In both cases, the border policy of the European Union was central, one focusing on the role of *Frontex*, the other on the situation in Greece. My contribution focussed on the first-hand experience in Turkey and Greece and the ability to share the perspective of migrants I have spoken to.

I also provided a workshop for *Amnesty International* in Maastricht, pointing out the changeability of intentions and migration strategies *en route* to students.

Recently I have received an invitation to provide a presentation to a *Rotary Club* in the Netherlands. The person who invited me told me I had punched some of his stereotypes on migration, and he asked me to do the same for his fellow *Rotary Club* members.

¹⁸ <https://www.volkskrant.nl/columns-opinie/uitsluiten-asielzoekers-belet-hun-komst-niet~b99cc04b/>

¹⁹ <http://www.versvak.nl/migratie/mariekewissink/>

3. Legal activities:

During my fieldwork I encountered three Eritrean migrants who were falsely accused of having set up an internet scam for which they risked imprisonment of 25 years. I believed in their innocence and mobilised support from a German NGO in order to hire a lawyer. I was then invited to give an expert view during the court case. Yet, while present in the court, the case was postponed to a later date, and I could not be present. The three were nevertheless acquitted. While I did not provide the actual expert view in the end, this is an example of a potential activity resulting from the research.

4. Knowledge dissemination to public actors

In addition to scientific conferences, I presented at two conferences organised for policy-makers and public actors. In 2015, I spoke at a conference by the Ministry of Justice and Safety in the Netherlands. I participated in a session aiming to find solutions for “illegal migrants”. In my presentation, I questioned the notion of “illegal”, both the word itself as well the fact it was framed as if it were a given attribute policy-makers had to deal with. A conceptual discussion was not in the interest of the public servants in need of policy solutions, and people responded critically to my views. Such conferences, however remain excellent venues to express and give attention to other views, which are more easily dismissed when the agenda is already decided upon at policy tables.

Furthermore, I have been invited by the WODC – the scientific research and documentation centre that is affiliated with the Ministry of Justice and Safety, to provide input on a research on the effect of the EU-Turkey deal on migration flows. During this expert meeting I had the opportunity to reflect on my research experiences and provide a perspective from “the field”.

I further presented at an academic seminar organised by UNHCR Turkey, inviting scholars to share their research with UNCHR staff and governmental representatives in 2012. There and in other instances I noticed strong opinions on the distinctions between refugees and other types of migrants prevail. While there is a different legal ground for distinctions, there is also a risk that blinds us for the protection needs of people who do not meet the refugee definition. This thesis can contribute to further debates and policy-developments in this field.

5. Practice

The value of the knowledge provided through this study has become evident in various practices I was part of. First, I shared and applied the knowledge by taking part in *Kayiki* – a network of lawyers, academics, NGOs workers and activists dealing with migration in the Aegean region in various ways, including border monitoring; legal aid; lobby and advocacy. Notably my field observations were of particular interest in this network.

I also integrated and shared the knowledge during my work for the Dutch Council of Refugees. For example, by giving a workshop about Eritrean refugees to colleagues and

employees of partner organisations and the municipality. I further built on the study by being aware of the history and the knowledge that migration trajectories are constantly evolving, and that transnational ties need to be taken into account when social workers assess migrants' social network.

At the time of writing this addendum, I work for a mental health organisation where a large part of the clients has a migratory background. My next opportunity for valorisation will be to engage in a discussion with the current municipality I cooperate with, after having read a letter of a public servant addressed to a homeless Somalian family in which was written that while the family would be provided shelter, they should regard this as highly exceptional since the municipality did not want to provide incentives to other homeless families to travel from Somalia to the Netherlands.

