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Article

From Transit Migrants to Trading Migrants: Development Opportunities for Nigerians in the Transnational Trade Sector of Istanbul

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Received: 4 May 2013; in revised form: 10 June 2013 / Accepted: 19 June 2013 /

Published: 27 June 2013

Abstract: This paper critically discusses the relation between human mobility and development. It moves away from conventional migration-development policy discussions that mainly focus on diaspora-like actors, who have established a stable and integrated socio-economic position in the destination countries. Instead, it looks at mobility-development dynamics in the context of less privileged and less integrated migrants; Nigerian migrants who are (or have been) living in transit-like situations in the city of Istanbul (Turkey). Based on in-depth interviews with Nigerian migrants, it analyses migrants' personal developments in the light of their migration trajectories. The analysis particularly shows how upward social mobility is not so much found in onward migration to Europe, but in getting involved in a different form of mobility; informally arranged transnational trade between Turkey and West Africa. It outlines the diverse roles of migrants in this informal trade sector and elaborates on their relations with fly in/fly out traders originating from Africa. With these empirical insights, I conclude that these migrants do not belong to settled diaspora communities, but nevertheless, act as bridges between “here” and “there” and contribute to the creation of (new) development corridors.

Keywords: migration-trade nexus; translocal development; Istanbul; Nigeria; migration hub; informal trade; transit migration; transnationalism

1. Introduction

Transnational mobility is increasingly seen as the motor for sustainable local development. With the transfer of remittances and human capital [1,2], as well as with the establishments of diaspora organizations [3], it is believed that migrants are the new development agents taking up the role of classical development apparatuses [4–7]. At the same time, migration scholars have always had conflictive views regarding the impact of migrants' human capital, which is reflected in the brain drain/brain gain/brain circulation discussions. Similarly, there have always existed disagreement about migrants' remittances as consumptive or productive investments in the countries of origin [6,7].

In most of these “roundabout discussions” on mobility and development, and particularly in migration-development policies, emphasis is put on diaspora-like actors. In other words, the focus is mainly on those migrants who have established favorable socio-economic positions in the countries of destination, while they, at the same time, feel closely connected to the countries of origin. The cream of these actors establish diaspora organizations aiming to contribute to the development in their communities of origin and act as frequent flyers between “here” and “there”. The other members of diaspora communities are at least expected to be committed migrants sending out money regularly to their families in the countries of origin.

There are two major, and related, concerns regarding this narrow focus on diaspora-like actors in mobility-development discussions. First, it overlooks the politics of mobility [8], implying that not everybody has become mobile to the same level and for the same reasons. In fact, mobility has become one of the most significant stratifying factors of globalization [9,10]. Sharpened border controls and increasingly restrictive migration policies make it more difficult for would-be migrants living in developing regions to reach their aspired-to destinations in the North [11,12]. Moreover, once migrants have reached their destinations, they often face precarious socio-political living conditions and, hence, are unable to act as the idealized trans-migrants moving easily between places of origin and residence. They may even be the receivers of family money, instead of being the remitters of it [11]. Our sampling on the dependent variable [13], implying that we empirically focus on cases in which migrants are acting as formalized development actors across borders, excludes the experiences of “less privileged migrants”, such as asylum-seekers, irregular migrants and so-called transit migrants having not yet reached their destinations. To enrich our insights into the link between human mobility and development, we should be more sensitive to migrants' perspectives on, and situatedness of, their eventual transnational linkages and the development effects deriving from them.

The second concern is strongly related to the latter argument regarding the role of “less privileged migrants”. The fact that many migrants are not in the stabilized position to act as the diaspora-like development agent does not mean that they are automatically disconnected from their countries of origin. Through more informal channels, and in more indirect ways, these migrants may also bring positive effects for the people they feel affiliated with [14]. More fundamentally, their migration processes can be seen as the ultimate way to achieve upward socio-economic mobility. Thus, following a Sennian approach to development [15], mobility can be regarded as being rather central to people's development, as it is an important way to enhance someone's freedom to live the lives s/he is aspiring. With our focus on diaspora-like actors in mobility-development discussions, we run the risk

of ignoring other, less visible and less formal ways in which mobility materialize in positive development effects for both migrants, as well as their communities in the countries of origin.

With these two concerns in mind, this article moves away from conventional migration-development policy thinking and focuses instead on the life-worlds of, seemingly, less privileged and less stable migrant communities. Starting from a people-centered development approach, I present an atypical case of Nigerian migrants in Istanbul (Turkey). Many of these Nigerians initially came to Istanbul in the hope to move onwards to the European Union (EU) [16–20]. Whereas some migrants manage to reach the EU after a short transit phase, others stay put in this Turkish city for considerable periods of time. During this period of immobility, one significant opportunity for migrants to upgrade their socio-economic position in Turkey is to connect with fly-in fly-out traders from Africa in the hope of getting further involved in the emerging transnational trade between Turkey and Nigeria [19,20]. From the ways these Nigerians move out of their status of “involuntary immobility” [21] or “transit” [22], we learn that a new form of mobility (trade) can be a welcome alternative for the lack of migration opportunities.

In this framework, this contribution finds itself at the cross-road of two nexuses related to migration. First, it is framed by literature on the migration-development nexus as an evolving debate in social sciences and policy arenas. Instead of merely focusing on the development impact of migration in the countries of origin, I deliberately take into account the individual development processes of the migrants in question.

Second, by focusing on transnational trade that is often organized in informal ways, this paper also relates to the migration-trade nexus that has predominantly been explored by economists investigating the correlation between stocks of migrants and trade flows. With regard to the latter, this article does not so much aim to analyze the quantifiable economic benefits of Nigerian migration on the macro-level; its main objective is, instead, to provide an insider perspective into how migrants’ involvement in the emerging informal trade sector helps them to move out of “transit situations”. In other words, this paper adds a qualitative dimension to the existing literature on the migration-trade nexus by investigating *how* migrants create trade connections and *how* these trade connections help migrants improve their life situations.

2. Mobility and Development; Puzzling Policies and New Perspectives

2.1. The Opposing Logics of Migration-Development Discussions

As several authors have indicated, the academic debate on the migration-development nexus is rather segregated [4–7,23]. On the one hand, there are “migration optimists” that build on modernization development theories, valuing the distributive trickle down effects that derive from migration (e.g., remittances, skills). On the other hand, there are “migration pessimists” that follow dependency approaches and focus on the sharpening of spatial disparities as the negative consequences of migration. With the emergence of transnational migration studies in the 1990s, the conceptual arguments and empirical evidence has become more mixed, which is generally referred to as the pluralization of the migration-development debate [7].

This lively academic debate is reflected in various policy arenas. Since the establishment of the Global Commission on International Migration in 2003, migration-development has become a true global policy field [23]. While the development impact of human movements is celebrated by many stakeholders, including governments of receiving and sending countries, as well as NGOs and diaspora communities [24,25], its practical outcomes in terms of policy initiatives illustrate the conflicting logics of this celebrated link between human mobility and development. The debate seems to balance between two opposing logics:

- (1). Migrants are the new development agents, not only for their financial remittances, but also for their bridging capacities in the field of development cooperation and knowledge transfers. The main point of departure is: more mobility is more development.
- (2). Development policies must aim to improve the socio-economic situations in the sending regions, so that potential migrants are able to stay. The main point of departure is: more development aims for less mobility.

These opposing logics lead to remarkable initiatives, such as information campaigns and information centers (financed by development aid), in the sending countries in order to discourage outmigration. In some occasions, diaspora organizations (the “new development agents”) also design projects that aim to discourage would-be migrants in developing areas to depart to the North or are involved in return migration programs. However, the opposing logics of these policies become the most evident in the case of “sustainable return migration programs”, designed by governments of migrant receiving countries. The return of a migrant is mainly considered as sustainable by the designers of the program, when the migrant remains in the place of origin after his return [26]. It is hoped for that the migrant in question is able to create a “sustainable livelihood” that prevents him from another emigration decision. It is also hoped for (but that is often of secondary importance) that the migrant brings in new skills, entrepreneurship and capital that may foster development processes in the regions of origin. These initiatives are fundamentally criticized, as they do not promote voluntary return migration, but are designed to return those migrants who are not allowed to stay in the destination area (e.g., ex-asylum seekers, irregular migrants, victims of trafficking). Hence, these programs are designed for those migrants who are considered to be “redundant”, unskilled and unwelcome. To strengthen the sustainability of returns, those migrants are “assisted” in the return progress, as they are offered some financial and non-financial support [26]. In that sense, sustainable return programs are repatriation programs in disguise and resemble the second logic of migration and development policies (development = less mobility) [27].

These rather restrictive migration programs may dominate the migration-development policy agendas of countries in the global North. In the case of the Netherlands, for instance, the government has identified six policy priorities in the field of migration-development; one of them is the issue of sustainable return migration. Almost half of the total migration-development policy budget of €9 million is spent on sustainable return migration (€4.1 million). Some other €2.3 million is earmarked for another restrictive migration measurement; the improvement of migration management in developing countries. Thus, together, these two policy pillars aiming for less population movement accounts for over 70% of the total expenditure of the 2008 Dutch migration and development

policies [28]. The remaining 30% goes to circular migration programs, the formation and professionalization of diaspora organizations and lowering the costs of remittances.

2.2. *Moving away from Migration-Development Policies; Mobility as Freedom?*

The bulk of migration and development studies focuses on the local development or community development aspects of migration. The general line of thought is that migrants improve the well-being of communities “back home” through remittances and skills accumulation. As a consequence of this emphasis on the collective dimension, the migration-related development opportunities for individuals, let alone for the migrants in question, are regularly overlooked. As Parvati Raghuram rightly argues ([5], p. 110):

“The ability to develop oneself through mobility was an important tenet of migration, especially in literatures on internal migration. However, only elements of these are being recuperated and exteriorized in the new initiatives around migration and development ... self-development through migration is limited to those who move with an already available composite of skills.”

To put this argument further, this article prioritizes the development opportunities from the perspective of the migrant. In line with Sen’s capabilities approach [15,29], I argue that we can perceive mobility as a form of freedom that has significant effects on human development issues, such as income, health and education. Movement from such a perspective, as also underlined by livelihood approaches [30], is indeed “*one of the basic actions that individuals can choose to take in order to realize their life plans*” ([29], p. 14–15). In line with this, some authors approach mobility as a form of capital that can be put in the same line as human and social capital [31]. Following this logic, migration-development policies should aim for more mobility and open up channels for migration, also for the so-called unskilled migrants. This message is, for instance, reflected in the 2009 Human Development Report on the link between mobility and development [29].

Although I am highly supportive to the notion that mobility as an inherent aspect of (personal) developments, especially in times of globalization, it is important to have a differentiated notion of the role of mobility in development processes. As the mobilities debate informs us, mobility means different things to different people in different situations [32,33]. Some mobilities are, of course, enforced and do not reflect freedom at all, but rather coercion, conflict and stress. To the same extent, migration trajectories can be rather turbulent phenomena, as they regularly involve personal sacrifices, risks and unpleasant social and economic situations, both *en route* [16,34] and at destinations [35]. This becomes particularly clear in the context of African migration in the direction of the European Union (EU). An actor-oriented perspective helps us to differentiate mobility-development dynamics through time-space and allows us to see linkages between different forms of mobility in relation to development issues. The latter is the main focus of the remainder of this paper.

2.3. *Connecting Mobilities; Transnational Migration and Informal Trade*

Migration and trade are closely connected at the macro-level [36,37]. This migration-trade nexus has been analyzed extensively in economist literature [36–39]. In this framework, several studies indicate that trade agreements often coincide with migration possibilities and attract speculative

migrants. At the same time, migrants act as transnational pioneers linking markets, and creating new ones, in the countries of origin and destination [38]. With respect to the latter, it is argued that migrants' involvement has several positive effects on trade connections. First, they help to overcome informal barriers to transnational trade related to language, culture and institutions, which finally help to lower transaction costs (especially in relation to consumer goods) [37,38]. Second, they boost imports of specific goods produced in the countries of origin. In this framework, it is argued that a relatively large community is required before one can observe a positive economic effect on the aggregate level [36–40]. Finally, from an actor-oriented perspective, the entrepreneurial route can be an effective way for migrants to overcome barriers of local labor markets and help them to fulfill their life aspirations [41,42]. This contribution rather contributes to this last segment of literature.

Interestingly, in the context of emerging debates on Africa's position in a multi-polar world, there is growing attention for the link between transnational migration and informally organized transnational trade [43]. Notably, the emerging China-Africa relations have resulted in new mobility flows of goods, capital and people, in both directions. It is documented that many of the emerging trade relations have an informal and grassroots character and rely on highly mobile and flexible traders originating from Africa [43,44]. These traders move in and out to China and reside for different periods of time in cities, such as Guangzhou and Beijing. In this context of mobility and flexibility, it is not easy to distinguish “settler migrants” from “free-floating traders”, let alone to identify integrated diaspora communities [44]. “Traders” sometimes behave like “migrants” and stay for longer periods of time in a particular place, and over time, “migrants” may become “traders” who commute as flexible actors between different places [43]. What is clear, however, is that these traders/migrants are key actors in grassroots globalization processes and contribute to what we call “development corridors”—being the solidification of translocal links fostering development processes in different places [45]. Next to China, they also connect Africa to other parts of the world, including Dubai and Turkey. The role of these African migrants/traders in transnational spaces strengthens the argument that we should not only look at stabilized diaspora-like communities in certain destinations to understand the link between mobility and development opportunities. More mobile, flexible and less integrated migrants may also bring their development effects. The next sections specifically focus on how migrants become active in emerging transnational trade and how this triggers new development opportunities.

3. Istanbul as a Migration and Trade Hub

Since the early 1990s, Istanbul has received many migrants from the former Soviet Union, the Middle East and East Asia who are aiming to reach Europe [18,46]. Nowadays, also more and more sub-Saharan Africans move to this metropolis. While the exact numbers remain highly uncertain, it is safe to state that Istanbul houses considerable groups of migrants coming from the Horn of Africa, as well as increasing numbers of West and Central Africans. There exist no accurate estimates in newspapers, demographic databases, policy documents or academic work regarding the size of the African community in Istanbul, partly due to its fluid and irregular nature. Many documents and news reports include only extremely rough statement concerning “several thousand African migrants” [18] or “many tens of thousands of African immigrants” [47]. Although the empirical evidence is rather thin in quantitative terms, various pieces of empirical research suggest that Nigerians are among the

most prominently present West Africans in the city [18–20]. As direct pathways to Europe are blocked, the stepwise migration journey from Africa via Istanbul to Europe is an important alternative route to reach this continent [16–20].

In almost the same period, from 1998 onwards, the Turkish authorities have shown an increasing interest in developing economic and political relations with several African countries [48]. This increased interest led to the organization of the 2008 Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit, the availability of student visas for African students, the emergence of new Turkish Airline flights to African countries and the recent establishment of Turkish embassies in 15 African countries; among them is Nigeria. In 2011 the Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan, was the special guest during a business forum organized by the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and Industrials (TUSKON). During this event, the shared prospect was to let the trade between Turkey and Nigeria increase from \$1.3 billion in 2011 to \$2.0 billion in 2013 [19,48]. While Turkey has a main interest in Nigeria's natural resources, Nigeria has a lot to gain from Turkey's role as one of the largest textile exporters in the world. These developments at least suggest a strengthening relation between two emerging economies.

Methods

The findings presented in this paper are based on two qualitative research projects that aimed to get a better understanding of migrants' transit situations in Istanbul [16,19]. During two fieldwork periods (April–May 2008 and February–May 2011), we conducted in-depth interviews with Nigerians that provided rich data concerning their migration aspirations and economic activities in Istanbul. In addition, we used ethnographic methods, including observations regarding migrants' living places and trade activities, as well as follow-up telephone calls and Internet contact, to grasp the daily realities and aspirations of our respondents. In total, we interviewed 47 migrants from Nigeria (41 men, 6 women), of which 20 have been directly involved in informal transnational trade in Istanbul; 5 others were active in catering services and were indirectly linked to the trade sector, as Nigerian restaurants function as important social nodes where different trade actors meet each other [19]. All migrants' names used in this article are pseudonyms.

Generally, we had three strategies to get in contact with our respondents. First, during both fieldwork periods, the researchers were attached as volunteers to an NGO aiming to protect migrant rights in Istanbul. This position facilitated the first contact with migrants. Second, we applied a snowballing technique, implying that we tried to reach other Nigerian migrants via the contacts of our respondents. This snowball technique was vital in terms of (1) getting further access to the Nigerian community and (2) creating a trust-relationship with our respondents. However, the risk of this approach is that the research limits itself to only one social network. Hence, in order to diversify our research, we also applied a third strategy that we called the site-approach. This implies that we regularly went to various places where African migrants were gathering, such as churches, trade centers, football fields and restaurants, in order to get in contact with Nigerians outside our existing network.

As a result of both methods, our sample is far from a random sample. The empirical arguments of this paper are therefore not representative whatsoever for the Nigerian community in Istanbul. Instead, this paper provides an in-depth and inductive exploration of the dynamics of migrants' "transit"

lifeworlds and investigates how the emerging transnational trade sector provides new development opportunities for the migrants who participated in our project.

Most interviews had an open character and were not recorded to gain some trust between the interviewer and interviewed (for a general discussion, see [16]). Although our sample consists of mainly men, there is some empirical evidence that Nigerian women are also involved in trading [17]. Interestingly, only two of our respondents came to Istanbul with the initial plan to do business from there. For all the others, the informal trade sector appeared to be an unexpected opportunity to gain a daily income and, eventually, upgrade their socio-economic status.

4. Moving to Istanbul: Routes, Motivations and Frustrations

There are different ways leading Nigerian migrants to Istanbul. The majority (31 out of 47 migrants), however, came just by a direct airplane journey from Nigeria to Istanbul. Those with the direct journey passed the border in a regular way, by holding a visa that is mostly valid for three months. There are eight migrants who have lived for different periods of time in Lebanon. They have reached Turkey in an irregular way by passing its southern land border. Two respondents had rather extraordinary trajectories. One of them moved from Nigeria to China, and from there, he reached Istanbul by airplane. The other went to Iran first by airplane, and from there, he irregularly crossed the mountainous Iranian-Turkish borderland and ended up in Istanbul. The length of stay of our respondents varied from only one month to more than seven years, and the average is a little longer than a period of two years.

West Africans in Istanbul are usually portrayed as transit migrants eager to move onwards to the EU, and to some extent, this picture also applies to Nigerians. In general, Europe (as well as the United States and Canada) appeared to be a popular destination among our Nigerian respondents. However, remarkably, very few spoke about specific cities or regions that they were heading to. Europe was rather an abstract destination. Once you are inside, as many of our respondents thought, you can easily find a good place to live in. You only had to use Istanbul as a springboard. The case of Sam is illustrative in this respect. Like other migrants, he tried to reach Europe from his home country, but he ended up in Istanbul.

“[In Nigeria] I applied for several visas. I wanted to go to UK, Poland, or somewhere else in Europe, I don’t care. Once you are in Europe, it is good, you can move. You can go anywhere where it is good for you! So what I did, I paid someone to arrange a visa for one of these countries. He said ok, and he took the money. After a while he came back, and said that he tried everything but did not succeed. But you know what he did? He arranged a visa for Turkey! He said it was really good here, a lot of Africans have a job and it is very easy to cross to Greece. So I choose to take it, for me it was a good chance!” [49].

For Sam, Europe was his initial destination, and he tried to reach it in several ways, without success. Travelling to Europe via Istanbul becomes then a good alternative.

However, when we focus more closely on migrants’ motivations to come to Istanbul, we notice that their situations do not always correspond with clear-cut go/no-go decisions. Most Nigerians have moved to Turkey with multiple plans in their heads [16–18]. Some enter the city on the invitation of a Turkish football club and have the dream to become a professional football player, wherever they are

successful. Others enter the city with a student visa and participate in University programs, but aspire at the same time to reach Europe. Some move to Istanbul, as it is both a place of transit, as well as a place where one can easily find a job.

The existence of Europe as an abstract migration destination is in line with other studies on so-called transit migration [22]. These studies conclude that a transit phase is characterized by the fact that destinations are changeable and/or unknown. In this scenario, “destination Europe” may fade away in migrants’ frame of reference. The case of Caroline illustrates this well. During the interview, she told us how she had attempted to enter Greece several times and how these attempts had failed. At the moment of our encounter, she had been living in Istanbul for seven years. She gave the following reflection on her current living situation:

Life continues, when you tried something without any success you have to try your luck somewhere else.... I decided to stay here in Istanbul. I only want to rest now, build up my life, raise my children and live the best life I can. I tried to go to Greece several times. But I failed. But I think God helped me with that, God has let me fail to let me see that life is not only about changing places. Life is about satisfaction, about rest. Now I know that life in Greece is not much better than here in Turkey; there is no paradise on earth, not in Europe, not in Canada; you have to create your own paradise.... That is why I decide to stay here. To cope with life here is better than to risk your life for a dream. And of course you have some bad feelings about not reaching your dream, but sometimes in life, you can change your dream [50].

Thus, as Caroline outlines, migrants may come to realize that the dream of going to Europe is hard to reach, resulting first in frustrations concerning their involuntary immobility, but later, this may transform into a satisfied stay [16]. It follows that “transit migrants” may transform into “settled migrants” without having moved to a third destination [22].

The opposite, however, may also happen. Some respondents (although a minority) did not have the initial plan to move to Europe, but are “pushed in transit” by the precarious living conditions in Istanbul. Remarkable stories are that of young football players coming to Istanbul with a dream to get a full contract at a Turkish club. However, after a trial period, they usually experience a sense of downward social mobility [46]. These young men then lose their legal status after three months and do not have the financial means to return to the country of origin and/or they feel ashamed to return empty-handed. Going to Europe often becomes a new dream, but they first need to find the financial recourses to reach the new dream.

Regardless of their migratory aspirations, establishing an income is a main concern of all Nigerians in Istanbul. For many migrants, and especially newcomers, the exploitative acts of Turkish and Nigerian “ghetto bosses” (land lords), who are forcing them to pay excessive rents for houses that are in concerning conditions, complicate their financial situations [17,19]. It is telling in this respect that upon arrival in a migrant area, such as Tarlebaşı or Taksim (two quarters located nearby to the city center), newcomers are asked for a “ghetto fee”—a kind of entry fee that may reach the amount of \$100. As a result of the high rents and fees, migrants tend to lose their financial savings, if they have any, in just a few weeks and have to start from scratch to try to get ahead in life. The development of “routines”, as Suter ([17], p. 31) calls it, is vital in this respect. She points to the fact that Nigerians in

Istanbul may climb up the social ladder by developing social capital and by taking advantage of, in their turn, newcomers.

We may conclude that Istanbul is not only a crossroad for Nigerians in the migratory sense. It is also the place where aspirations and frustrations cross each other. Those who intended to use Istanbul as their transit place are likely to become stuck, or they start to aspire a long-term stay in the city. Those who intended to stay in Istanbul may start thinking of moving onwards, because of their precarious socio-economic positions. The shifting aspirations of migrants illustrate further that there is actually not a very clear-cut categorical divide of *diaspora/stable/integrated communities vs. transit/fluid/mobile communities*.

5. The Trade Gateway: How Is Transnational Trade Organized?

The Nigerian transnational trade is concentrated in Osmanbey, a neighborhood in the European part of Istanbul, located a 20 minute walk from the central Taksim square and the migrant neighborhood Tarlebaşı, where many Nigerians live. In Osmanbey, a concentration of Nigerian shops and cargo agencies can be found, and these are mostly related to the export of textile. The trade is organized in various ways, but a usual process is the following. A Nigerian “salesman” (the customer) is flying to Istanbul to buy goods that he can sell in Nigeria. Upon arrival, the salesman meets his “guide”. This guide is usually a Nigerian migrant who knows the ins and outs of the city and the trade sector. Being a guide is a petty job, as migrants visit the airport on a speculative basis to get in contact with salesmen. The guide arranges a sleeping place for his customer, as well as the first contact with textile shop owners and cargo shops. The relation between a salesman and guide is vital, because the salesman purchases goods through the guide’s network [19]. The guide, in his turn, is dependent on the willingness of the salesman to grant him with a share of the purchases, but he has also something to gain from the cargo owners. As Nathan, a 32 years old respondent who acts as a guide, explains:

“We don’t have a fixed loan at the cargo. It is about how many customers you get, because they sometimes will pay you a little, and we sometimes have to make an agreement with the shop owners to get one dollar for every shirt our customer buys. But sometimes [when the guide brings a sufficient number of customers to a specific cargo shop] we get 50 lira [\$28] at the end of the week from the cargo boss [owners of the textile shop].” [51].

The salesman purchases from the textile shops, and with the products, he goes to a cargo shop in Osmanbey. The cargo shops usually charge around \$4 per kilogram to send the goods to Lagos in Nigeria. At the other side of the chain, an agent, who is linked to the cargo shop in Turkey, arranges the clearance of the products in Nigeria and sends them to the right address. The cargo shop in Istanbul, thus, offers a networked door-to-door services that includes agents at airports and transport services in Turkey, as well as in Nigeria.

Of course, flying in and out of Istanbul is costly for the Nigerian customers in question. Therefore, they attempt to build-up trust relationships with the cargo shops and guides they have met previously. This relationship enables the customer to arrange his import/export from a distance. Usually, he gives some 10% commission to the actors in Istanbul for arranging the purchase and transport of his goods.

Another possibility is that a salesman sends one of his employees from Nigeria to Istanbul to set up an export business. This illustrates that emerging trade relations may trigger new migrations.

6. Trade Careers

To understand migrants' career prospects in the transnational trade sector, it is important to realize that the majority of our respondents has had a bumpy career with ups and downs in Istanbul's informal economic sectors [19] (see Table 1). The informal jobs they take up include: casual labor in the construction or manufacturing sector (unstable income; payment between €6.5 and €21.5 a day, working hours variable); production and welding work in factories (rather stable income; payment between €6.5 and €87 per week for 55–88 working hours); and cleaning and dish-washing in restaurants and hotels (rather stable income; payment around €85 a week for around 70 working hours). Additionally, some Nigerians go to tourist places (e.g., Izmir, Antalya) during high seasons to work as street vendors or as cleaners in restaurants and hotels [19]. Table 1 provides an overview of different career paths of migrants who are (or have been) involved in transnational trade (the respondents who are not related to trade are not included in the table).

Table 1. Migrants' career paths.

Name (pseudonym)	Time spent in Istanbul (approx.)	Career paths
Owen	3 years	Football–petty job–transnational trade
Joseph	2 years	Football–petty job–transnational trade–migration to Greece
John	3 years	Unknown–transnational trade
Jake	5 years	No job–factory work–Turkish language school–transnational trade
Dylan	2 years	No job–drug dealing–migration to Greece (fail)–transnational trade
Carl	3 years	Unknown–transnational trade
Nathan	4 months	Transnational trade
Abdul	4 years	Football–factory work–transnational trade–designer
Jacob	3 years	Football–no job–petty job–transnational trade
Ethan	2 years	Study scholarship–no job–factory work–petty job–Turkish language school–informal teacher of English language, transnational trade
Oliver	1 year	Owner Nigerian restaurant
Olivia	3 years	Working in Nigerian restaurant–co-owner of Nigerian restaurant
Lewis	6 years	No job–petty job–transnational trade
Luke	6 years	No job–transnational trade
Benji	8 months	Transnational trade
Samuel	5 years	No job–petty job–factory work–ghetto boss–Turkish language school–informal teacher of English language–transnational trade–work in Church–informal teacher of English language
James	3 year	Unknown–Turkish language school–transnational trade
Charlie	3 years	No job–petty job–factory work–no job–factory work– o job–transnational trade–no job–transnational trade
Eric	6 months	Petty job–factory work–working in Turkish restaurant–transnational trade

Table 1. *Cont.*

Name (pseudonym)	Time spent in Istanbul (approx.)	Career paths
Emmanuel	1 year	Football–no job–factory work–no job–Working in Nigerian restaurant
Rufus	1 month	Transnational trade–hotel work in Antalya
Chris	3 years	Football–petty job–Turkish language school–working for NGO–transnational trade

(See also [19]. Note that this table only includes migrants who are active in the trade sector).

When we have a closer look at the trade activities, we notice that there are different hierarchical roles in the sector (see also Table 2). We have already noticed the difference between the “petty guides” (the speculative actors going to airports in search for trade connections) and the cargo shop owners with a more stable position in the sector. Next to the role of guide, there are other flexible roles, such as translators and shop watchers (those who keep an eye on the products in order to prevent theft), that only bring limited profit for the migrants. Moreover, we identified different kinds of guides in the sector. One is the petty guide illustrated above. He is a speculative and dependent actor waiting for clients in the airport. Next to this role, there is the in-between position of cargo employees. They assist the cargo shop owners with his business and act as guides for the cargo shop on a more structural basis. Although this is a more formal and long-term job, all six respondents in our research who acted as cargo employee/guide were undocumented migrants, illustrating the informal character of the sector. In addition to these employees, there are Nigerian independent tradesmen to be found in Istanbul. They combine the role as guide with their own trading activities. They are flexible actors, not out of necessity, but as a result of their own wish to be independent. As the 29 years-old John explains:

“I don’t work for a cargo, I work on my own, because I want to have the best advantage and the best commission. I do not want to be under the rule of a cargo. I want to be free. And sometimes one is a little bit more expensive than the other, I want to bet on more, different cargos. Spread my chances....The more they do, the less profit for me.” [52].

Table 2. Different roles in the trade sector.

Role in the trade sector	Number of Nigerian respondents
Salesman	3
Cargo boss	4
Cargo employee/guides	6
Independent tradesmen	5
Petty guide	1
Designer	1
Translator in textile shop	0
Caterers	5

Becoming a cargo shop owner is one of the most profitable and desirable roles in the transnational trade industry. However, to get this position is far from easy, as it requires a legal residence permit to become registered as a cargo shop owner in Istanbul. Although informal activities are a daily reality in

the transnational trade sector, the Turkish authorities are rather strict in controlling the registration and transport taxes of cargo shops. Becoming a legal resident in Turkey is very rare for an average Nigerian migrant [17,20]. The only way of doing it, as our respondents stated, is by marrying a Turkish citizen. We have heard examples in which migrants were involved in contract marriages with Turkish citizens to get their residence permit.

The informal trade sector between Turkey and Nigeria is highly dependent on trust ([19]; see also [41–43]). By building up trust with different actors, migrants are able to achieve some upwards social mobility. The usual career path is that of a migrant starting in the sector as a shop watcher or petty guide, becoming a cargo employee after some years and, eventually, an independent tradesman or (cargo) shop owner. One respondent called Lewis followed this career path. He arrived in Istanbul six years ago on a three-months' valid visa in order to find a good life. Going to Europe was definitely one of his options. After three months, he overstayed his visa and became an irregular migrant. After some petty jobs (*chabuk chabuk*), he got involved in trade. First, he became a shop watcher, then a cargo employee, and from there, his working career improved, as he explained:

Before I got this cargo I worked at another cargo here in Osmanbey for 2.5 years and there I learned the job. That was necessary to arrive at this position. Since last December I have my own cargo...I came to Istanbul in 2006 and I soon got involved in trade, which was really helpful to learn the tricks and to become big ... So now it was time for me to lead a cargo myself and to become the boss. You need papers for this, because of that I could get this place...And right now I have a good life here. I have got everything ... My life is good, I can go wherever I want [53].

7. From Transit to Trade

Lewis is one of the respondents who came to Istanbul for a good life. His first option was going to Europe, but he found himself stuck for a period of several months, as he experienced that Europe was not easy to reach. Instead of putting the risky onward migration to Greece into practice, he engaged successfully with the trade sector. He made money and upgraded his socio-economic position. He is one of the few migrants who obtained a legal status, which helped him to open his own cargo shop. This high position in the trade industry of Istanbul enables him to travel to Nigeria several times a year to see his family. From being a stuck migrant, he nowadays lives a highly mobile life between two countries.

Not only those migrants with top positions in the sector forget about their dream to reach Europe. To illustrate this, we focus on the changing situation of Owen, a 22-years-old man who entered Istanbul as a football player. We met him in April 2008, and at that time, he really felt discouraged about his life in Istanbul. Like so many other football players, he did not manage to get a contract at a club and fell into transit. At that time, the only way for him to improve his life was “the European way”. He lived in a house with four other Nigerian friends, and together, they discussed their strategies to move to Greece [34]. Two of the housemates actually managed to reach Greece some months later. Owen did not have sufficient financial means to make the journey at that time. Hence, he experienced a sense of involuntary immobility [21]. One and a half year later, however, his situation changed considerably. During a telephone conversation, he informed us that he managed to find a place in the trading sector. His words were as follows:

“I am still in Istanbul. My life is good now! I managed to get a small job here, I am selling clothes now. African clothes. You have been there at the market in Osmanbey ... The business is good. I do not live in Tarlebaşı anymore. I now live near Osmanbey, it is better there, not the crowded place like before.” [54].

To the question whether he still aims to move to Europe, he answered:

“Europe is far now. I will not travel anymore. I am sure when you visit me in 2010 I will still be around here. I am happy now.” [54].

Thus, in a period of two years, Owen changed from a “transit migrant” aiming to reach Europe into a trade agent seeing good future prospects in the booming textile trade in Istanbul.

Finally, the case of Dylan (28 years old) further illustrates that the engagement in trade may change someone’s life perspective. After a stay of eight months in Istanbul, he attempted to reach Greece by boat, but this attempt failed. He even got detained by the Turkish authorities. Having failed to reach Europe was a major disappointment for him, as he said:

“I was disappointed at first and I wanted to go back home. But I thought about the amount of money I spent before I came over here. I spent up to over 4000 dollars for visa, tickets and the agent.(...) I thought about this money and it is like this, when you go back your friends will be there and they will say that you are stupid. They will not understand why you have come back, this here is hell and there is much better places than here. That is what they will say.”[55].

Going back was not an option for Dylan, as it would mean failure in the social and economic sense. His story continues:

“Then I met some old friends, who I knew from the first time and those old friends were now doing work in the cargo business. They had an office and they told me to come every morning to learn the business and slowly slowly you get your hands on to doing something ... The first time I went away from this place because I thought the situation was bad here. I had my eyes shut. People here who complain about the situation are blind, I was blind. There are a lot of opportunities here. But now I see, you know. I have opened up my eyes.” [55].

Also for Dylan, who is now working as a cargo employee, a new form of mobility (the trading of goods) appeared to be a welcome substitute for his onward migration.

8. Conclusions

Although I am critical towards migration and development policies, I argue that the link between mobility and development does make sense from an actor-perspective. Movement, migration and mobility are important ways to realize one’s life aspirations. In that sense, it is ironic that migration-development policies are still dominated by the restrictive migration agenda of governments. Instead of lowering the barriers for human movement, as suggested by the 2009 Human Development Report, governments come up with initiatives that make the barriers for the poor to reach aspired-to destinations even higher. This sharpens Bauman’s [9] observation that mobility has become the new signifier for class in this era of globalization.

The empirical case of Nigerian migrants in Istanbul provides different insights regarding the relation between mobility and development. These migrants do not belong to settled diaspora communities, but nevertheless act as bridges between “here” and “there”. They function as facilitators for the fly-in/fly-out traders coming from Africa to Turkey in order to do business. Over time, they may become highly mobile actors across borders themselves. Although this case on Nigerians involved in transnational trade is again selected for its actual transnational involvements (so the critique regarding sampling on the dependent variable still stands [13]), the actor-oriented perspective is sensitive to the ups and downs of transnational careers. It has shown that migrants’ life aspirations appeared to be highly changeable. In this time that Europe is closing its borders [10,11] in the borderland of Greece and Turkey, Nigerian migrants find and create new opportunities in the transnational spaces linking Turkey with Nigeria. They stay put in the migratory sense, but are involved in a highly mobile and dynamic economic sector.

The latter underlines the argument that it is important to have a differentiated notion of the role of mobility in development processes. In short, as mobility means different things to different people in different situations, we may come to think of investigating “mobility careers” by focusing on the changing meanings of mobility in different situations and life phases. With such research focus, we move away from the essentialist notion that mobility is necessarily something good (or bad) for development, and we are better able to distinguish involuntary immobility from satisfied immobility, as well as turbulent/forced mobility from comfortable/freeing mobility. As a consequence, we need to maintain the actor-perspective and add a longitudinal research element to our research in order to be capable of revealing the changing meanings of mobility/development. Following migrants’ or traders’ trajectories can be very insightful in this respect [16].

Finally, this paper illustrates that Nigerian migrants may act as agents of change as they contribute to the solidification of the translocal linkages between Turkey and Nigeria. We might call those interlinked movements of people and goods a “development corridor” [45]. This corridor is strengthened by other economic and political measures, such as the establishment of new airline connections and the relaxation of visa regulations. As a cumulative effect, these new travel possibilities open doors for new fly in/fly out actors finding opportunities in mobile businesses. In this respect, people do not so much find development opportunities in bounded and container-like territories. Instead, from a people-centered perspective, development is about movement, linking up, access, aspirations, networks, paths and getting ahead. From such a viewpoint, development is fundamentally translocal.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Frederik Steen for sharing his empirical data for this article.

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