

Networks of sub-Saharan refugees & migrants in Greece



Caption: Celebrating the 61st anniversary of independence of Guinea in Greece

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Abstract

Migration to Europe has largely increased over the last decades, but there has been limited research on the networks of refugees and migrants. This paper examines the networks of sub-Saharan refugees and migrants that reside in Greece. The networks play an important role in every step of their journey; from their country of origin, to their trip towards Europe and their daily life in Greece. This work aims to investigate the type of networks sub-Saharan refugees and migrants form and find their common patterns. The ultimate goal is to display the importance of networks and evaluate if the type of networks migrants and refugees develop in Greece matters. This thesis is based on ten original interviews with sub-Saharan refugees and migrants who have lived in Greece for at least four years. The analysis of the interviews provides evidence that migrant networks ease and help both the trip and the integration of migrants and refugees. It is argued that the theory of 'strength of weak ties' is partially proven as many weak ties tend to develop to strong ties.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last few decades, refugee¹ and migrant² flows have been consistently increasing towards Europe. Networks have been established, and the route to Europe has become more accessible. It is a topic that has drawn much media attention because of the significant number of African people arriving in Spain, Italy, and Greece. The refugee crisis of 2015 and the millions of people waiting in Turkey to cross the borders of Greece brought to the spotlight the migration topic once again. This thesis examines the networks of African migrants and refugees in Greece. It is based on ten interviews with migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan countries who have been living in Greece for at least four years. It should be acknowledged that a history MA thesis is usually based on more than just ten interviews, but these ten interviews constitute a unique source base, which provides original primary material. The goal is to present the lives of the interviewees in their countries of origin, their journey, and their life in Greece, while displaying the role of the networks of migrants and nonmigrants, in all these moments. The networks play a vital role for migrants providing them information and access during their journey, their job search, their studies, as well as emotional support while living in the host country. It is important to note that the term nonmigrant, in this case, refers to Greek people. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recommendation, people who potentially could be refugees should be mentioned as such.³ However, in this thesis, the term migrant will be used for migrants and refugees. The reason is that both employed networks during their journey and their life in Greece, and the thesis aims to bring the importance of networks into the light. It should be also noted that the term communities refer to people from the same country of origin.

The networks of migrants consist of strong ties, namely, relatives, friends, and close colleagues, and of weak ties, acquaintances and random people the migrants meet. This study focuses on the role of

¹ Refugees are defined and protected in international law. The 1951 Refugee Convention is a key legal document and defines a refugee as: “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” UNHCR, “What is a refugee?,” accessed April 17, 2021. <https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html#:~:text=The%201951%20Refugee%20Convention%20is,group%2C%20or%20political%20opinion.%E2%80%9D>.

² The term ‘migrant’ is not defined under international law, and is sometimes used differently by different stakeholders. Traditionally, the word ‘migrant’ has been used to designate people who move by choice rather than to escape conflict or persecution, usually across an international border (‘international migrants’), for instance to join family members already abroad, to search for a livelihood, or for a range of other purposes. The term is increasingly used as an umbrella term to refer to any person who moves away from their usual place of residence, whether internally or across a border, and regardless of whether the movement is ‘forced’ or voluntary. UNHCR “Migrant definition,” accessed April 17, 2021. <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/44937/migrant-definition>.

³ Ibid.

networks. Ultimately, this research seeks to answer the following research question: To what extent do networks affect the journey and the daily life of sub-Saharan African refugees and migrants in Greece?

Sub question: Does it matter if the network of a refugee and a migrant consists of strong or weak ties?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Critics of migrants and refugees are asking why they have been coming to Europe recently. The subject of migration is not a recent phenomenon, but the amount of migration has drastically increased nowadays. According to Knut Graw & Samuli Schielke, the most significant factor contributing to the plethora of people attempting to migrate to Europe is, first and foremost, the more accessible transportation means. For example, there are direct flights from Sub-Saharan African countries to France. Second, globalisation makes distances seem minor. Destinations that in the past were seen as distant and exotic seem to be more accessible. Migrants do not perceive migration only as a result of 'physical movement but as a horizon of expectation and action.'⁴

As stated by the sociologist Douglas Massey et al. migrants, former migrants and nonmigrants are setting up networks and they are easing the international migration. Friends, relatives and community persons are lowering the cost and the risk of their journey. When migration networks are being established, migration movements are rising, and accordingly, the networks are being expanded. Subsequently, the risk of the trip is being lowered and ultimately becomes 'risk free.' The first migrants face the most challenging situations since they do not have any connection to help them, and the cost to reach their destination is high. After those, a migration chain, which involves migrants, former migrants and nonmigrants is being built. As a result, it lowers the cost for future migrants to arrive. Migrants establish social ties with nonmigrants, which eases their access to employment and assistance in their new residence. Each new migrant will help their relatives and friends migrate, so the cost is automatically lowered.⁵ Networks are also necessary for the creation of communities and permanent living.⁶

As the sociologist, Mark Granovetter argued, individuals have strong ties, which are family members, and close colleagues and friends, and weak ties, who are acquaintances and people with whom the individual is less familiar with. Weak ties tend to offer more opportunities, like jobs. Those who have

⁴ Knut, Graw and Samuli Schielke, "Introduction: Reflections on Migratory Expectations in Africa and beyond." In *The Global Horizon: Expectations of Migration in Africa and the Middle East*, ed. Knut Graw and Samuli Schielke. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 7 - 17.

⁵ Douglas, S. Massey, Joaquin Arango, Graeme Hugo, Ali Kouaouci, Adela Pellegrino, and J. Edward Taylor. "Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal." *Population and Development Review* 19, no. 3 (1993): 448-449.

⁶ Ryan, Louise. "Migrants' Social Networks and Weak Ties: Accessing Resources and Constructing Relationships Post-Migration." *The Sociological Review* 59, no. 4 (November 2011): 709

many weak ties have better access to information and resources about the job market for new openings. Acquaintances tend to be part of more social circles than those of close friends.⁷ Individuals seeking employment through strong ties are more likely to be unemployed for a more extended period than those who use weak ties.⁸ The reason being that weak ties tend to function as bridges between people and communities (network segments), and they are a crucial element for integration into modern society.⁹ Moreover, people who do not have many weak ties are less likely to participate in collective action in their local communities.¹⁰ Louise et al. contended that migrants who form solid relationships with other migrants in their community and learn the host country's language are more likely to have more weak ties beyond their ethnic group. In general, migrants receive primary emotional support from close relatives or partners and informational support from colleagues.¹¹ As Burt argued, people who are well connected with various groups of people are more likely to have 'native ways of thinking and behaving', leading to better ideas.¹² The theory of weak ties has been applied to the case of Polish migrants in London¹³ and to a study of citizens of two cities in the USA and one in Germany.¹⁴ Another case that endorsed this theory was that of domestic Mexican workers in San Diego, California.¹⁵

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Most of the studies focus on migration incentives, on their routes, the situation in the borders between Asia, Africa and the 'fortress' of Europe. Only few academic papers examine Africans' living and working conditions while discussing their social integration process in the host country. In addition, the networks are vastly understudied, and the existing research has focused mainly on the trip of migrants and smuggling.

The topic of migrant networks in Greece has been studied by Kapetis, who wrote a paper about the living conditions of migrants in Greece in 2012. He used secondary literature, reports from NGOs and media. He conducted semi-structured / in-depth interviews with migrants and refugees from Asia (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey) and Africa (Nigeria, Somalia). He contacted some migrants

⁷ Mark, Granovetter. "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited." *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983): 201-202.

⁸ Ibid, 211.

⁹ Ibid, 203, 229.

¹⁰ Ibid, 224.

¹¹ Ryan, Louise, Rosemary Sales, Mary Tilki, and Bernadetta Siara. "Social Networks, Social Support and Social Capital: The Experiences of Recent Polish Migrants in London." *Sociology* 42, no. 4 (August 2008): 674-676.

¹² Ronald S., Burt. 'Structural holes and good ideas', *American Journal of Sociology* 110, no. 02 (2004), 349-350.

¹³ Ryan Louise et al., "Social Networks, Social Support and Social Capital:," 672-690.

¹⁴ Peter V. Marsden and Karen E. Campbell. "Measuring Tie Strength." *Social Forces* 63, no. 2 (1984): 482-501.

¹⁵ Doreen J. Mattingly. "Job search, social Networks, and Local Labor-Market Dynamics: The Case of Paid Household Work in San Diego, California." *Urban Geography* 20 (1999): 46-74.

and refugees, whom he knew from a previous research project, and they introduced him to other migrants and refugees in Thessaloniki and Athens, Greece. He applied direct observation by being present in places where migrants spend their free time, such as public squares, as well as participatory observation while spending time with migrants he had a personal relationship with. Throughout the paper, the narrative is that migrants were portrayed as criminals by the media. In addition, violence employed by Golden Dawn¹⁶ and the police were widespread in the lives of migrants. Reportedly, most of the migrants would like to leave Greece if they lost their jobs. The paper presents NGOs as part of migrant networks because they were heavily involved in protecting the human rights of migrants, their legal procedures while offering them accommodation and psychological support. According to Kapetis, migrant networks provide financial help and information to prospective migrants. The migrant networks of those staying for a few years in Greece included more locals. The majority of the migrants were tending to cohabitate with other migrants and were often being exploited by apartment owners. The primary concern for most migrants was to gain legal documents and go to another European country and have better living conditions.¹⁷ Kapetis' paper intrigued me since he presented the living conditions of migrants in Greece a decade ago. Apart from that, he refers to migrant networks, but without deepening further.

The behaviour of Greek natives towards African migrants has been studied by Gioulafi et al. They based it on closed questionnaires filled by sub-Saharan Africans. The researchers found the migrants in squares, cafes and social centres in Greece. The majority of them had low-skilled jobs and were dissatisfied with the poor working conditions. Most of the respondents did not have any friendship with Greeks, and they thought Greeks were discriminating against them because of their skin colour. Furthermore, it was mentioned that they could not culturally express themselves because of cultural differences.¹⁸ Since this study took place fourteen years ago, it made me keen to observe to what extent migrants in the last few years tend to have Greeks in their networks and if this is related to their job type.

The topic of state benefits for migrants in Greece has been researched by Baltzoi. She used closed questionnaires and conducted interviews with French-speaking Africans living in Greece. She got in contact with them through her work with NGO PRAKSIS.¹⁹ Her paper's goal was to determine if the respondents were aware of the benefits migrants and asylum seekers had in Greece, and if they had

¹⁶ A neo-Nazi political party in Greece.

¹⁷ Konstantinos Kapetis, "Migrants in Greece in times of crisis Opportunities and dangers" (master's thesis, Radboud University, 2012).

¹⁸ Nikoleta Gioulafi, Pinelopi Fardella and Georgia Chrysovitsanou, "Η αντίληψη των αφρικανών μεταναστών στην Ελλάδα για την αντιμετώπιση τους από τους γηγενείς" [The perception of African immigrants in Greece to address them from the natives]" (bachelor's thesis, Hellenic Mediterranean University, 2007).

¹⁹ PRAKSIS (Programs of Development, Social Support and Medical Cooperation) is an independent Civil Society Organisation (Non Profitable Association). PRAKSIS main goal is the planning and implementation of projects of development, humanitarian and medical nature. <https://praksis.gr/en-about/>

applied for any benefit. Specifically, the benefits of housing, healthcare, and other economic ones. According to her, migrants from French-speaking African countries did not view Greece as a transit station after living there for a while, and they intended to work and integrate into the Greek society. Apart from that, they were overwhelmed by the Greek state's bureaucracy and their inability to communicate with the state employees, due to the language barrier. As a result, most of them were discouraged from investigating the potential state benefits.²⁰ Baltzoi's paper is an inspiration to deepen the research about the importance of networks and conclude to what extent they replace the state.

Papadopoulos has studied the effects of the financial crisis of 2008 in Greece on the lives of African migrants. He made a questionnaire of 532 respondents. According to Papadopoulos, the migrants who were more integrated in Greece had fewer expectations about improving their financial situation due to a better understanding of Greece's economic crisis. Among those who have been in Greece for many years, those who had a high level of education and were living legally in the country were the ones who had a better economic status. Additionally, women were coping more manageably with the financial crisis than men because they were living for longer periods of time in Greece, and many of them were living with their families.²¹ This research was an inspiration to investigate if the education of migrants and their legal status along with the networks affect the type of jobs of migrants in Greece and, if yes, to what extent.

The role of social networks of migrants and the effect they have on the trajectories of irregular migrants has been studied by Wissinik et al. The case studies were migrants who were staying in Istanbul, Turkey and Athens, Greece. The paper's topic was to investigate how critical events, such as new acquaintances or the termination of communication with members of their network, function as a watershed for the future decisions of migrants. They accumulated their data through interviews in Istanbul and Athens while maintaining contact for the next few years through social media and telephone. The researchers categorised the decision of migrants about their next destination based on the support or/and advice coming from their social network. Reportedly, the timing of acquaintances could be proven decisive for migrants. As a result, the support exchange, which enabled them to continue their migration, occurred when a migrant first had a network that could help him or her and second when a migrant was willing

²⁰ Baltzoi Hlianna, "Η μετανάστευση των γαλλόφωνων Αφρικανών υπηκόων στην Ελλάδα την τελευταία δεκαετία" "[The migration of French-speaking African nationals in Greece the last decade]" (master's thesis, University of Peloponnese Korinthos, 2016).

²¹ Apostolos, Papadopoulos. "Διερεύνηση των στάσεων των Αφρικανών μεταναστών σχετικά με την οικονομική κρίση στην Ελλάδα," "[Analysis of Stances of African Migrants in Relation to the Financial Crisis in Greece]" in *Social Views of Crisis in Greece*, ed. by Maria Kousis and Stella Zambarloukou (Athens: Pedio Publications, 2014) 445-475.

to act based on the available support.²² It is interesting to notice the effect of critical events on the life of migrants, and it made me keen to find out if there are any in the lives of my interviewees.

The topic of remittances and their factors has been studied by Chort et al. The research data came from MIDDAS²³ project, where 300 Senegalese migrants in France and 302 Senegalese migrants in Italy were interviewed over the year 2009 using a standard sampling method and questionnaire. Thanks to networks, Senegalese migrants in Italy and France could keep up their communication with their country of origin. Senegalese were well-behaved in Italy because of fear of nasty rumours being spread for them, and they were sending remittances in fear of being ostracised by their families. Their non-compliance with the 'rules' of the networks could cause isolation in the destination country and Senegal. The goal of Senegalese migrants was to avoid any punishment in their home country. Senegalese migrants in Italy were collecting weekly money to support the newcomer's compatriots while offering them free accommodation and financial support to start their own businesses. Those who have never received support from their network in their host country, France and Italy in this case, were those who gave smaller amounts to remittances, regardless of their working conditions. As a result, networks functioned as an incentive to offer remittances in Senegal.²⁴ It was worth it to observe the way the Senegalese networks developed in Italy because it enhances the understanding of how migrant networks work.

Fokkema and Haas have studied the socio-cultural integration of migrant populations. In 1997 IOM²⁵ did a project of face-to-face interviews, with structured (closed questions) questionnaires with migrants from Egypt and Ghana living in Italy and migrants from Morocco and Senegal living in Spain. In total, the interviewees were 1707 males and 307 females. They aimed to explore the pre-and post-migration factors in socio-cultural integration. They hypothesised that even migrants who had high social capital were not integrated into society if their social network did not include locals. Another hypothesis was that migrants who left from their countries for financial or work-related reasons were more motivated to integrate culturally than those who migrated for political reasons. Moreover, they hypothesised that migrants who less used migrant networks to migrate should integrate easier. The hypothesis also included that female migrants coming from more traditional countries would have been less likely to spend time in public spaces and hence to be integrated into the host society. Some of the conclusions

²² Marieke Wissink, Franck Düvell, Valentina Mazzucato, "The evolution of migration trajectories of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey and Greece: The role of changing social networks and critical events," *Geoforum* 116, (2020): 282-291.

²³ Migration and development in Senegal: an empirical analysis using match data on Senegalese migrants and their origin households.

²⁴ Isabelle Chort, Flore Gubert, Jean-Noël Senne, "Migrant networks as a basis for social control: Remittance incentives among Senegalese in France and Italy," *Regional Science and Urban Economics* 42, no. 5 (2012): 858-874.

²⁵ International Organisation of Migration is the leading inter-governmental organization in the field of migration and works closely with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners. <https://www.iom.int/about-iom>

contradicted few of the hypotheses. For example, female migrants were more integrated than the male ones. In addition, the researchers ascertained that migrants who migrated for political reasons were more likely to integrate, than those who migrated for financial or other reasons. However, the hypothesis about the better integration of those who less used migrant networks during their trip was proved valid.²⁶ I found this study fruitful since it took place in two other Mediterranean countries, similar to Greece. They focused on the deciding factors for the integration of Africans.

All the papers about migrants in Greece are focusing on their decision, their route, but there is no research concentrated on the networks and their role. It has to be noted that many studies about sub-Saharan migrants in Greece were completed by Greek students and a few by professors. To my knowledge, there has been no research focusing on the networks of migrants in Greece. The fresh approach that this research brings to the literature is that the interviewees are migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan countries who have lived in Greece for at least four years. Thus, they have interacted with natives and, intentionally or not, they have attempted to integrate to the society of Greece to a certain extent.

METHOD

My initial motive was to gain the trust of the migrants and refugees before interviewing them. Thanks to my involvement in the Humanitarian sector for several years, a network of ex-colleges connected me with a group of people from Sub-Saharan Africa living in Greece. In total, I have conducted ten interviews through the Zoom application, and I recorded them after getting the interviewees' consent to do so. I performed semi-structured interviews with migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan countries. Four of them were from the Democratic Republic of Congo, three from Guinea, one from Senegal, one from Burkina Faso and one from Ivory Coast. All of them had already been in Greece for at least four years. I used open questions to allow the interviewees to speak freely and unfold their stories and opinions. I conducted six interviews in Greek, two in English, and two in French. Eight of them had advanced knowledge of Greek language and two a basic knowledge. The duration of the interviews was 1 hour and 10 minutes for the shortest and 2 hours and 6 minutes for the longest. The interviews took place in May and June 2020 and in March and April 2021. I should also note that nine of the interviewees were males and one female. None of my interviewees identified as LGBTQ during the interviews. Thus, the study has a predominantly male perspective.

To analyse my data, I applied qualitative analysis. Qualitative research is based mainly on constructivism and interpretivism to understand and describe society through events and experiences

²⁶ Tineke Fokkema and Hein de Haas, "Pre- and Post-Migration Determinants of Socio-Cultural Integration of African Immigrants in Italy and Spain," *International Migration* 53, no. 6 (2015): 3-26.

from various social characters.²⁷ In-depth interviews can produce knowledge, with valuable insights about the social conditions of the interviewees' lives. They also comprise a communicative interaction between the researcher and the interviewee, which goal is to acquire information about interviewees' interpretations of their experiences. In-depth interviews are a way to obtain information about society and, more specifically, about social relations. Interview data function as a tool to understand the perspectives of the interviewees, but also to explain them. While doing an in-depth interview, the researcher's aim could be to acquire the interpretations of the interviewer about its own experiences in the society where they work and live.²⁸

As for challenges, it was proven difficult for me to find persons from Sub-Saharan countries who have been in Greece for over four years and were willing to be interviewed. Even though I have various contacts from NGOs and UNHCR, the criterion I set for interviewees who had lived in Greece for at least four years, made my search challenging. The coronavirus crisis played a major role due to travel restrictions along with the fact that the interviews had to take place through the internet. I would like to note that I intended to do more interviews with women, but they were more sceptical than men. The one woman who accepted to do an interview, is a former colleague of mine with whom I worked closely with for almost a year.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND OF HOST COUNTRY AND COUNTRIES OF INTERVIEWEES

This chapter begins with a brief overview of Greece's contemporary migration history. There is a brief demonstration of the key events in the countries of interviewees after the end of their colonisation by France in order to present the political instability and the violent conditions under which they had to grow up. Additionally, there is an introduction of the interviewees and their lives in their home countries. The intention is to display their living conditions and their limited job and education opportunities and to better understand their options and their lack of choices.

²⁷ Theodoros, Iosifides, *Qualitative Methods in Migration Studies: A Critical Realist Perspective* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 97-124.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 178-182.

MIGRATION HISTORY OF GREECE

Since independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1830 and until 1970, Greece was an emigration country.²⁹ However, on 27 November 1919, the Treaty of Neuilly was signed by Bulgaria and the Allied Powers. One of its terms was the voluntary exchange population of minorities living in Greece and Bulgaria. The exchange was voluntary, so there were no accurate numbers.³⁰ On 24 July 1923, Greece and Turkey signed the treaty of Lausanne, which resulted in the exchange of population between these two countries. Turkey received 356,647 Muslims from Greece and Greece some 1,300,000 Christians from Turkey.³¹ Refugees from Asia Minor arrived in a destitute situation, having abandoned their fortunes. Despite their Greek origin and their Orthodox religion, most times were mistreated and seen as hostile by Greeks due to the country's dire economic condition.³² In the 1970s, Greece could be seen as a country that received much migration. The first wave of African migrants was from Egypt and Ethiopia.³³

The scenery transformed during the 1990s, as the collapse of the Central and Eastern European regimes in 1989 brought an uncontrollable immigration flow in Greece, transforming the country into an immigrant destination. One of the most important reasons for the transformation of Greece into a receiving country is the geographic location of the country, with easily accessible borders and extensive coastlines. In 1990, Albanians began crossing the borders with Albania and they led to a change of the old immigration law of 1929. The new law then gave way to the Greek government to start massive deportations of undocumented migrants. Thus, from 1992 to 1995, some 250,000 migrants, mainly Albanians, were deported out of Greece each year. Greece's need for low-skilled jobs and the fact that Albanians worked hard was the combination for their success and their rise in the social hierarchy, despite their 'criminalisation' by Greeks.³⁴ Nowadays, Albanians have integrated into Greece to such a level that they are considered as equal as Greeks.

²⁹ Georgios Mastrogeorgis, "Όψεις των Ελληνοβουλγαρικών Σχέσεων κατά τη Διάρκεια του Μεσοπολέμου" "[Views of Greek-Bulgarian relations during the interwar]" (master's thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2007, 28).

³⁰ Ibid, 46.

³¹ George Kaloudis, "Ethnic Cleansing in Asia Minor and the Treaty of Lausanne," *International Journal on World Peace* 31, no. 1 (2014): 80.

³² Dimitra Giannuli, "Greeks or Strangers-at-Home – the Experiences of Ottoman Greek Refugees During their Exodus to Greece, 1922-1923," *Journal Of Modern Greek Studies* 13, no. 2 (1995): 279.

³³ Maria S. Nikolaou and Lida Stergiou, "Προβληματισμοί μεταναστευτικής πολιτικής στην Ελλάδα και την Ευρώπη," "Concerns of the migration policy in Greece and in Europe," *Education & Science* 1, no. 3 (2006): 275-276.

³⁴ Stelios E. Gialis, "Trans-border mobility and integration in border regions: Albanian migrants in Epirus and the Ionian Islands in Greece," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 13, no. 3 (2011): 308.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF COUNTRIES OF ORIGINS OF REFUGEES & MIGRANTS

All the countries of the interviewees were French colonies. Six interviewees are from West Africa. Guinea was a French colony from 1895 to 1958, when it became independent. Sékou Touré was its first president from 1958 to 1984. Even though the country was rich in terms of natural resources, it did not flourish due to the economic strategy of its president. In 1984, The Military Committee for National Recovery and Colonel made a coup, and Lansana Conté became president until his death on 22 December 2008. After his death, another military coup was organised, and the National Council for Democracy and Development was supposed to be a transitional government, with president Captain Moussa Dadis Camara. In the view of Camara's possible candidacy in the elections of 2010, a protest against him resulted in the death of at least 150 people. In the next few years, political instability and corruption scandals dominated the country, all while the coup was continuing.³⁵

Ivory Coast, Senegal, and Burkina Faso became independent in 1960. Felix Houphouët-Boigny ruled Ivory Coast and maintained peace until he died in 1993. Political instability followed, which led to a civil war from 2002 to 2007.³⁶ After the 2010 presidential elections, there was a 'six-month political violence, and armed conflict', where according to BBC, at least 3,000 people were killed and 500,000 were displaced.³⁷ Since Burkina Faso's independence, three coups took place; continuous political unrest dominated the country, and the civil war of IC, which began in 2002, affected their trade heavily. Protests, strikes, and a lot of violence followed until the resignation of the 27-year ruler Blaise Compaoré in 2014. Another coup took place in 2015, and since 2017 violence has erupted, which has led to one million Burkinabé being internally displaced.³⁸ Senegal, after its independence, had a more stable transition as it continued receiving support from France. It also had relative political stability in comparison with other West African countries. However, in 1994 the devaluation of the African franc by 50 per cent by France had a significant adverse effect on the economy for the next decades. In 2012, Macky Sall was elected as a prime minister, and there is continuous development.³⁹

³⁵ Thomas E. O'Toole, "Independence," Encyclopædia Britannica, last modified March 10, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Guinea/Independence>.

³⁶ Nancy E. Lawler, Jean L. Comhaire, and Robert J. Mundt, "Côte d'Ivoire," Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified March 11, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Cote-dIvoire>.

³⁷ "ICC to investigate Ivory Coast post-election violence," BBC, October 3, 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15148801>.

³⁸ Myron Echenberg et al., "Burkina Faso," Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified March 10, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Burkina-Faso>.

³⁹ Camille Camara, John D. Hargreaves, and Andrew Clark., "Senegal," Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified March 10, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Senegal>.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is in Central Africa. It was a colony of Belgium under the rule of King Leopold II from 1885 until late 1960, when Congo achieved its independence. His cruel methods resulted in the death of approximately 10 million Congolese.⁴⁰ In 1997, Laurent-Désiré Kabila, a former rebel leader, became the president of DRC. In 1998, a five-year civil war started, where several African countries took part, including DRC. Afterwards, in 2001, Laurent was assassinated by one of his bodyguards, a former child soldier. His son Joseph, the current president, took over and even though he exceeded the term limit in 2016, he refused to step down. During his presidency ‘Violence, intimidation, and abuse of the population have become anchored in the very structures of life in Eastern Congo’.⁴¹ In a rally in September 2016, seventeen people lost their lives, and over ten were arrested. As the BBC commented, ‘DR Congo has never had a smooth transfer of power since independence more than 55 years ago’.⁴²

LIFE OF INTERVIEWEES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

In order to understand the role of networks in the stories of the migrants, we should first understand the lives of the interviewees in their home countries. The purpose of this section is to present the circumstances that led these people to leave their home countries and the choices they made along the way. The interviewees left from their countries due to the dire living conditions, political reasons and the lack of opportunities.

Youri, 30 years old, was born in Kinshasa, DRC. He said he had a peaceful life until he started being involved in political issues. In 2011, he joined a political party opposed to the DRC government, and he protested with other people against the president of DRC Kabila. His parents are deceased. Youri’s father was a politician, a member of the opposing party to the government. In 2012, according to Youri, his father was arrested and poisoned by an injection. Afterwards, his mother was raped by unknown people, and she committed suicide. Youri’s sister, two years older, was raped in DRC as well and moved to Congo Brazzaville in 2012. Youri continued to fight against the ‘injustice’ in his country. In DRC, he worked as a manager for a shipping company, which was importing cars from Europe to Africa. He studied for two years in Commercial Marketing at the University of Kinshasa, but he did not finish his

⁴⁰ Adam Hochschild, “Leopold II,” Encyclopædia Britannica, last modified April 5, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leopold-II-king-of-Belgium>.

⁴¹ Sarah Van Beurden, “A New Congo Crisis?,” Origins, January, 2018, <http://origins.osu.edu/article/new-congo-crisis>.

⁴² “DR Congo election: 17 dead in anti-Kabila protests,” BBC, September 19, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37406407>.

studies because the police arrested him. From 2012 to 2016, police and government officials detained and tortured Youri many times. The reason was his participation in the protests. He was accused of mobilising people against the president of DRC, Kabila. Protests in DRC were violent. Due to the severe torture Youri experienced, he could not even remember the number of times he was arrested. Youri's dream was to find a secure environment.

Minka, 28 years old, is from Guinea, and he had studied at a Vocational National Institute for two years and graduated as a computer technician. His life was pleasant in Guinea. 'I did not have any problem. My family did not have much money, but we could live [under good conditions]'.⁴³ He worked at a computer company. After 6-7 months at this company, his father called him, informing him he found a way for Minka to travel to France. The goal was to study computer science in France. Minka's dream was to travel to France, study computer science, and return to Guinea and help others.

Capi is 40 years old, and he is from Guinea. He has studied law in Guinea. He did not want to work for the Guinean government because there was no freedom of speech. 'In a few words, we did not have democracy'. Capi, who speaks four local dialects, wanted to help adults who were struggling, so he did a three-week seminar in Burkina Faso to learn how to teach adults. Then he found a job as a teacher in a German organisation aiming to improve the language skills of adults who have not finished school and do not have a job. His father, a businessman, working between Guinea and Ivory Coast, was murdered in Ivory Coast. The Guinean government and other business people owed him money. In 1998 two persons, one of them a close friend of his father, according to Capi, killed him in Ivory Coast to avoid paying him. Afterwards, he started receiving letters in front of his door, saying, 'People are looking for you to kill you. You must leave the country.' After receiving a few letters, he fled to Senegal.

Amadou (pseudonym), 37 years old, is from Guinea. In Guinea, he was a football coach for minors while studying international relations at a University, but he had to quit his studies due to economic issues. Furthermore, he was a semi-professional football player. Amadou was facing many family issues because, as he said, his father had married for a second time, and there were many fights. Many of his friends had left for Europe to study, and they stayed there. As he said, 'I was looking for a better future'.

Jean-Diddier, 32 years old, is from the Democratic Republic of Congo. He has studied in DRC electronic systems. He grew up in Kinshasa, the capital of DRC. His father was a member of a political party, working in the Ministry of Sports. His father was responsible for a department he had access to the personnel list of the ministry. When Jean-Didier was 20 years old, his father discovered that some employees had double citizenship, which is illegal in Congo. 'It was a document from an African country embassy, which had some names from various ministries of persons in prominent positions.'

⁴³ The quotes with the words of the interviewees have not been edited for grammar or syntax due to my intention to display their way of speaking as it is.

Then he disappeared for two weeks. Suddenly, he found Jean-Didier in the student campus where he was living and told him to leave Kinshasa for a few weeks, for a change to the government was to happen. Thus, Jean-Didier moved to the inner Congo. The change in the government took place, but his father was still facing political issues. One month after his return, his father died in his car, with no mark of evidence. Then, a government intelligence agency, Agence Nationale de Renseignements (ANR), started searching their house for documents. After that incident, Jean-Didier and his family were threatened. His mother fled to a village. He had a USB stick containing files in Portuguese from an embassy. ANR searched his room on the student campus while he was not there, but he had the USB stick with him. While he was planning to do a Master's, the University expelled him from the campus. He stayed for a few days with a friend, and then he left. The dream destination for Jean-Didier was Germany. 'I knew exactly what I wanted to do.' He had found a specific program at a University in Germany. He wanted to study incorporated systems.

Omar, 41 years old, is from Senegal. When he finished his high school studies in Senegal, although he got accepted by a university, he decided not to go. He did it because of the financial difficulties of the family. Since the other seven children of the family were studying, he sacrificed his studies for the rest of the family to continue to study. However, he did seminars for some months to be a computer technician, which became his work from 1998 to 2008. When the rest of the family members finished their studies and started working, although he was in a good financial situation, he left to explore what existed outside of Senegal.

Gracia, 35 years old, is from the Democratic Republic of Congo. She grew up in Lubumbashi, where she finished high school with excellent grades. She started studying Finance and Commercial Science at a university in DRC. She wanted to have a better education, so she applied for a student program between the governments of DRC and Greece. In 2008 she got a scholarship by the ministry of the exterior of DRC, based on her excellent notes in school, to study in Greece.

Patrick, 34 years old, is from the Democratic Republic of Congo. His father was a minister of the DRC governments a few times until 1997. Afterwards, he created his political party, and he died in 2007. Patrick grew up having a luxurious life, and after his father's death, he realised that there are people, for example, who cannot afford even to buy shoes. His father was a doctor, and because of it, he decided to study medicine. At the same time, he had already started the application process to study in Greece. He studied medicine for one and a half years, and then he dropped out and studied international relations for two years, which was more interesting to him.

Moussa, 30 years old, is from Ivory Coast. He stopped going to school when he was 15 years old because there was not anyone to support him financially. His father had already died when he was young, and his mother was sick at the time. Thus, he was forced to work. His mother died when he was 19. In Abidjan, the capital of Ivory Coast, he started working by selling technology products in the

streets, and after a few years, he had his own shop. His shop was going well until the violence erupted. Moussa, having a Muslim name, became a target automatically. People got searched and arrested by police only because their names were Muslim, as they were considered rebels.

Theophile, 42 years old, is from Burkina Faso. He has studied Marketing at a university in Burkina Faso. He owned a cleaning shop, and he was working as a DJ at Burkina Faso's bars. Life in Burkina Faso was relatively calm, but there was much poverty. His shop was not enough to offer a better life. As he said, 'There was work for the shop but just to survive, I couldn't have any significant profit, I couldn't support creating a family'.

Migration to Greece has been relatively new. Thus, it can be easily understood that the number of migrant networks was limited in the past. The conditions of the interviewees' countries since their independence include major political instability and violence. Through the interviewees' stories, it can be argued that political violence, dire economic and job opportunities, and the lack of educational perspectives led them to decide to leave their home countries.



Caption: Minka in Athens

CHAPTER TWO: THE IMPACT OF NETWORKS IN ALL THE STAGES OF MIGRATION PROCESS

In this chapter, there is an analysis of the networks of migrants during their journey from their home countries to Greece and their stay in Greece. It is also shown the effect of networks in the asylum procedure. The theory of strong and weak ties prevails during the analysis as the central concept. There is an effort to find different patterns the interviewees used from their countries of origin, in the transit countries and Greece. There is also a demonstration of the support of weak and strong ties offered to migrants in terms of education, jobs and moral assistance.

EFFECT OF NETWORKS ON THE JOURNEY TO GREECE

The migration from sub-Saharan countries to Greece is a long process, where networks help them advance and reach their destination. Furthermore, migrants use networks to obtain the adequate documentation and information needed to travel to other countries. During the period that nine out of ten interviewees arrived in Greece, the Greek State did not provide accommodation or any kind of assistance. So, many migrants were forced to live in squares. To avoid this from happening, migrants had to rely on their pre-existing networks or form new ones. There are four patterns that this section observes concerning the first stages of their journeys. The first one is that the process that allows migrants and refugees to move is monetised. The second one is that migrants make use of pre-existing networks. In some cases, migrants have counterfeit documents. The last observed pattern is the use of strong and weak ties. Those people were strong ties or weak ties, but in nine out of ten cases they were migrants.

It was observed that half of the interviewees had pre-existing networks before arriving in Greece. These existed or were formed either in their home countries or in Turkey and Greece. All these networks resulted in the interviewees finding at least a temporary accommodation and to avoid staying in public squares as it happened with Minka and Amadou.

Most of the interviewees in this research initially fled to a transit country before arriving in Greece. Seven of the interviewees spent a period from a few days to a few months in Turkey. For the trip from their countries of origin to Turkey to be possible, they need the required travel documents. It should be noted that a common pattern we see in two cases is that the migrants were offered counterfeit travel

documentation to cross borders. Specifically, in 2011, Jean-Didier left for Congo, Brazzaville. He lived in Congo secretly because 'the [DRC] government knows whoever has a problem moves to Congo, Brazzaville'. For two years, he lived in a village where he worked in a school and developed a computer program. When Jean-Didier found out that his family house had been bought, demolished and replaced with a newly built home by the new owner, he realised he could not return. 'It was like a trap. You cannot return to understand what happens because you will end up in jail'.

The second case is this of Youri, who in September 2016 left from DRC to Turkey by paying two thousand dollars, excluding the aeroplane ticket, for a fake visa, with details of another person. The payment included that police will not check his documents at the airport in DRC.

Weak and strong ties constitute a determining factor on whether the migrants could reach either Turkey or Greece. Granovetter's theory applies to Youri's case, where one can see the impact of weak ties. A Nigerian man, whom Youri met in Istanbul's streets, offered to arrange his smuggling to Greece in exchange for two months of free work in a restaurant. Youri's weak tie offered a job and access to information that enabled Youri to make his trip and reach his final destination. His weak ties also lowered the risk at the beginning of his trip by providing a flight from DRC to Turkey.

In seven cases, the individuals had pre-existing networks in their home countries that smoothed the first stages of their journey. For example, Minka's journey started with a flight from Guinea to Istanbul, Turkey, with a tourist visa. A music band from Guinea invited to a music festival in Istanbul registered him and his brother as their members. In contrast to Minka, a job was offered to Amadou in 2004 by a football team in Damascus, Syria. The agreed job fell apart after his arrival in Syria, so he ended up working as a worker. Thus, even though it did not turn out as planned for Amadou, he got a safe trip from his country to Syria, a destination closer to Europe.

The journeys of Moussa and Theophile had a common element based on which they got a visa for Turkey. They both had shops in their home countries, and based on their business activities, they got a visa to Turkey. As a result, the fact that they were owners of businesses in their home countries enabled them to go to Turkey without considering any risk for this part of their trip.

A unique case was this of Capi, who reached Greece based on his father's network. Initially, he fled to Senegal because it was the safest amongst the neighbouring countries. 'Whatever they could do to me in Guinea, the same could happen in Sierra Leone or Liberia'. He stayed in Senegal for one and a half years, where he played for a football team, which provided accommodation and nutrition to him. Then a Greek friend of his father called and informed him he could provide him with a visa to Greece. So, they met in Guinea secretly to receive a document from the state and the same day, Capi took a flight to Athens in 2004. In the case of Capi, networks enabled him to have a safe trip and easy access from Guinea to Greece, while he did not pay for anything. Simultaneously, it's clear that the evolution of

means of transport made his entrance to Europe easier and faster, as was argued in the theory of Schielke and Graw.

The pre-existing networks also show up in the story of Gracia and Patrick. They both had strong and weak ties in the country of origin and Athens. Their random first meeting at the Greek Embassy in DRC in 2009 when they both applied for the student program ultimately turned them into each other's weak ties. They had student visas, which enabled them to have a more structured and safer trip. In Gracia's story, her initial network consisted of migrants, who helped minimise the risk of experiencing hard living conditions in Greece and lowered the living costs. In particular, upon her arrival, she stayed at the apartment of a cousin of hers who was already living in Greece. Her network of DRC students made it possible for her to find a roommate to share accommodation costs. Thus, a strong tie, her cousin, provided her with accommodation for the first period, and then a weak tie, another student from DRC, became her cohabitant.

Gracia was Patrick's weak tie who offered him accommodation after first arriving in Greece in November 2010. Gracia and the other migrant students became sources of information for Patrick, through whom he became acquainted with the processes and documentation required so that he could start taking Greek language courses at Kapodistrian University. The offered accommodation and information helped him adapt faster to his new life in Greece.

The pre-existing networks and specifically his cousin provided information to Theophile to have an accommodation. When he arrived in Athens, he stayed in a shop rented by the community of Burkina Faso in Amerikis Square, where his cousin was already staying. In total, there were around 20 migrants in the shop, and each of them was paying ten euros per week. The value of a strong community and the cousin, a strong tie, provided Theophile with a low-cost accommodation to make his arrival in Athens more effortless.

The significance of information transmitted through strong and weak ties is highlighted throughout the interviews. For example, Theophile was informed about the better living conditions in Europe by his cousin, a trader, so a strong tie. However, weak ties seem to have a more drastic role in the lives of migrants. In September 2007, Theophile arrived in Istanbul. Through migrant networks in Istanbul, he learned about the ways of crossing the borders to Greece. Afterwards, in his third attempt in February 2008, Theophile managed to enter Greece by boat. He was arrested by the Greek coast guard and moved to the detention centre in Samos. Theophile's network, which included his acquaintance, a weak tie, provided him with the required documents to travel to Turkey and his cousin, a strong tie, provided him with information about life in Europe.

The following story could be seen as an example of the theory of Massey et al. that as international migration evolves, the cost becomes smaller, while at the same time it displays the impact weak ties

could have to migrants' journeys. In July 2012, Moussa arrived in Istanbul, where he met in a square an African who was speaking English and Turkish due to his long living in Turkey. A month later, the African who knew how to pass the Turkish-Greek borders asked Moussa to accompany him for free. They entered Greece through the Evros river. The network of Moussa, the African guy, who was a weak tie, lowered the risk of his journey and at the same time did not ask him for any money, eliminating any cost Moussa would have to pay in any other case.

The significance of weak ties is also shown in Capi's and Moussa's stories. He arrived in Greece without any pre-existing network, and thanks to a weak tie, he found accommodation. After two days of being in a hotel in Athens, he went to Amerikis square, where he found a migrant from Guinea. This migrant put him in touch with the president of the Guinean community in Greece at the time, who found him an apartment. In the detention camp in Greece, Moussa met a person who gave him a contact in Athens, who offered him a room to stay for free. Thus, networks and specifically weak ties prevented Capi and Moussa from staying in the streets and made accommodation for them easier accessible.

Throughout the interviews, it was noticed that weak ties which offer crucial help tend to become strong ties. An example is Moussa and the African guy with whom he entered Greece in August 2012 and were detained for seven months in a detention camp. During their detention, they were in the same cell, and there he learnt English. 'I was writing what he was telling me, and then I was using the phrases and the vocabulary'. The African guy, a weak tie at first, became a strong tie, as he helped Moussa to enter Greece for free and learn basic English.

The existence of migrant networks in transit countries also seems to be an essential factor in these migrants' stories. In general, migrants' journeys take place in steps. Transit countries are in the stories analysed here, the in-between step to the final destination. One could argue that networks in transit countries are essential for the migrants to reach their goal, which is to arrive and settle in Greece safely. An example of that is Jean-Didier's and Omar's story, who secured their accommodation while they were in Turkey waiting to cross the borders to Greece. While Jean-Didier was in Turkey, a migrant gave him the contact details of a Congolese who resided in the centre of Athens and offered him accommodation. Jean-Didier used his weak ties, who were other African migrants, who allowed them to secure temporary accommodation, preventing him from staying in squares as other migrants or paying a hotel.

On the boat from Turkey to Greece, Omar met a Senegalese who had a friend living in Athens. After they arrived in Athens, Senegalese migrants already established in Athens accommodated one of the 'new arrivals' for a minor fee of 50 euros per month. The important takeout from Omar's story is that a weak tie lowered the cost of accommodation after his arrival to Athens, which displays the already established migrant networks in Greece and again proves the theory of Massey et al.

Another pattern we see is that access to these networks is monetised. Seven out of ten interviewees were asked to pay certain amounts or pay back with free labour. Thus, the process of crossing borders becomes a good that can be bought. Amadou paid smugglers 400 euros to cross the Turkish-Greek borders and arrive by boat on the island of Samos. Theophile paid an acquaintance one thousand and two hundred euros for his connection to get him a business visa to Turkey. Additionally, he paid one thousand euros to smugglers in Turkey to enter Greece. Minka's father paid 3,000 dollars to smugglers when Minka was in Guinea and an extra 3,000 when his son called him from Turkey, mistakenly believing they were already in Europe. Omar found a smuggler in Senegal, who promised to send him to Italy through Turkey. So, in August 2008, he fled to Istanbul with a tourist visa. He had paid five thousand dollars promised to arrive in Italy. Even though Omar paid a relatively high price for his trip, he fulfilled his goal as he arrived in Turkey safely, and he came to Greece thanks to smugglers.

After analysing the networks during the first stages of the trips of migrants, it was noticed that in a few cases, the journey included a significant amount of danger, which comes in contrast to the theory of Massey et al. for a 'risk-free' trip. For example, when Omar arrived in Istanbul, he gave his passport to a guy who was supposed to help him, but he took his passport, gave him the smuggler's contact details, and disappeared. A few days later, they were sent to a beach at night and forced to enter small boats under the threat of guns (by Turks). 'To not kill you, you get inside the boat; there is no choice'. The 1st time the Turkish coast guard found them and put them in jail for 14 days. The 2nd time the smugglers put them on a boat and arrived in Samos. Consequently, it becomes evident the danger Omar had to face, where due to his network, he lost his passport, and he was even forced to enter a boat in a distressful situation. Theophile attempted to cross to Greece three times. The first time he tried to pass through the Evros river, he crossed the borders with ten other people. Police found them and detained them for 3-4 days. They gathered them all together, they were around 300 people and pushed them back to Turkey. In Turkey, they were imprisoned for two weeks. Thus, migrant networks and especially smugglers, cannot guarantee a safe passage. In his first attempt to enter Greece, there was an abuse of human rights by Greek police, and in the second, he had to spend time in a Turkish jail.

In Minka's and Amadou cases, the small number of migrants from Sub-Saharan countries already living in Greece offered few options of getting help through networks. When Minka and his brother first arrived in Athens, they stayed in a public square for a week. A random meeting with a compatriot from Guinea who had already been living in Greece for a few years became their way into accessing an apartment and, therefore, better living conditions. In 2007, Amadou arrived on Samos island in Greece, and after a few weeks, the Greek authorities provided him with a ferry ticket to Athens. For the first three months, he lived with 40 other migrants from Guinea in public squares without food or basic necessities. Amadou, even though he had the opportunity to live in an apartment of a migrant in Athens, did not do it, because as he said, 'I didn't feel well with my consciousness, to let them [the other migrants] alone'.

Youri arrived on the island of Lesbos, where he was transferred to the camp of Moria, and he stayed there for two years. ‘It was tough! There were many people; there was not good food or good health conditions.’ The newspaper The Guardian has described Moria camp as ‘Overcrowded, violent and awash with human sewage, Moria camp may be the world’s worst refugee facility’.⁴⁴

Most of the interviewees used networks to leave their countries of origin and to arrive in Greece. Eight of them had to stay in at least one country other than their country of origin, and seven out of the ten passed through Turkey either for a period of a few days or a few months. Apart from that, eight of them got visas, either with fake documents or not, with the help of networks. It should also be mentioned that all of them used an aeroplane either to arrive straight in Greece or come closer to Europe, making this trip more feasible than a few decades ago, which supports the argument of Graw and Schielke. Weak ties seem to have played quite an important role, as they gave them access to initiate or continue the trip of migrants. The theoretical argument of Massey et al. about the impact that the evolution of migration could have is being proven through these stories as sub-Saharan migrants who arrived earlier in Greece had to face more difficult living conditions, for example, staying in the streets than those who arrived later. Consequently, migrants who arrived later in Greece stayed in apartments of migrants who have established their residence in the country or got information on how to find accommodation.

⁴⁴ Sebastian Leape, “Greece has the means to help refugees on Lesbos – but does it have the will?”, The Guardian, September 18, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2013/sep/13/greece-refugees-lesbos-moria-camp-funding-will>.



Caption: Theophile in his apartment in Athens

ASYLUM APPLICATION

The stance of Greek authorities against migrants who were willing to apply for asylum or a residence permit cannot be characterised as helpful. Migrants had to deal with documents that were in Greek, without any explanation given to them. Thus, to deal with this challenging situation, migrants were in need of networks to give them information or assistance. In 2011, the process and status of asylum applications was in a chaotic state.⁴⁵ To apply for asylum and get a ‘pink card’, which provides the legal right of residing in Greece,⁴⁶ migrants were waiting from Monday until Saturday, when police were registering just 20 asylum applications per day. Thus, migrants who did not have the ‘pink card’ were afraid to move outside their houses before the sunset to avoid getting arrested. Until 7 June 2013, only the police were examining the asylum applications. Then the Greek Asylum Service was established.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ “Μόνο όσοι έχουν ροζ κάρτα ελπίζουν σε άσυλο,” “[Only those who have pink card hope for asylum],” *Eleftherotypia*, accessed April 22, 2020, <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=265540>.

⁴⁶ UNHCR, “Παρατηρήσεις σχετικά με την Ελλάδα ως χώρα ασύλου “[Remarks regarding Greece as an asylum country],” December 2009, 11.

⁴⁷ UNHCR, “Greece as a Country of Asylum”, December 2014, 15.

Nine out of ten interviewees arrived in Greece before the creation of the Greek Asylum Service. So, they had to face a dysfunctional system managed by the police. Strong and especially weak ties have been involved in this process, providing helpful information for migrants.

After being in Greece for eleven months, on a Saturday of May 2012, Minka and other migrants complained vividly to the police station, and police registered their asylum application. After two days, police began looking for undocumented migrants, even entering their homes. This event refers to the decision of the right-wing government of Nea Dimokratia party to create closed detention centres. The first one was that of Amygdaleza, which opened on 28 April 2012. In June 2017, the Greek Asylum Office called Minka, informing him that he could not receive asylum in Greece, but they would not deport him because he lived in the country for a few years by then. They provided him with a one-year temporary residence permit.

In 2004 after a few weeks of living in Athens, Capi went to the police department to be registered. His application was almost complete. It was only missing the number of his address. After waiting for five hours, a police officer came to him, checked his document and asked him in Greek, the number of his address. Capi did not understand. Then, the police officer tore apart his application and shouted at him, 'Go away' in Greek. Fortunately, a migrant from Senegal explained to him, and he left. Thus, a weak tie again helped him to avoid any possible escalation with the police officer. A week later, he went with a lawyer to file his application, not to be treated like before. Capi, having faced difficulties, asked for a nonmigrant's assistance not to meet any issues with his asylum application filing. For the next twelve years in Greece, he renewed his "pink card" temporary residence permit every six months. Then Greek authorities gave him a residence permit of two years duration.

When Jean-Didier learned what he had to go through to get the 'pink card', he decided not to bother. All that time, he was afraid to move around the city because the police were sending migrants who did not have legal documents to detention centres and deporting them. This reference is to the operation of the Greek police, 'Ξένιος Ζευς', which in its first seven months, police detained 85.000 people to check their identification papers and legal status. Out of the entire operation, only six per cent of detainees were arrested for unlawfully being in Greece, while police used excessive violence.⁴⁸ After a year of living without documents, Jean-Didier went to IOM (International Organisation for Migration) to ask the procedure for his repatriation, and there he got informed that the Greek Asylum Service was about to be established. So, he changed his mind, and he made an asylum claim after sleeping in the street outside Athens' asylum service the previous night. In 2013, he did an interview with the Greek asylum service. A few months later, he received a rejection at the first instance. Six months later, he received a

⁴⁸ Eua Kosse, "Οι μετανάστες, ο «Ξένιος Ζευς» και η πραγματική έννοια της ελληνικής φιλοξενίας," "[Migrants, Xenios Zeus and the real meaning of Greek hospitality,]" 1 July 2013, <https://www.tovima.gr/2013/07/01/opinions/oi-metanastes-o-ksenios-zeys-kai-i-pragmatiki-ennoia-tis-ellinikis-filoksenias>.

rejection at the second instance. Then he made an appeal without a lawyer, and they asked him for a brief interview, and after two months, they recognised him as a refugee.

After living for three months in the streets, Amadou, with the help of the Greek Council for Refugees (GCR) got his temporary residence permit. Another form of network is the NGOs, which displays the impact that could have on a migrant to receive legal status, even temporarily. From 2009 until 2018, he was renewing his pink card, after which he was given a two-year residence permit.

In 2008, Omar went to the police to be registered. They gave him a document that he did not know what it was. A migrant that he knew advised him to go to Greek Council for Refugees, where they explained to him that he had a 1st instance rejection. They wrote him an appeal, which he gave to the police, and he took a pink card. As he said, 'Fortunately, fortunately, he told me to go to GCR'. In 2015, the Greek government announced that someone who has not done an interview could not work in the asylum service. A Greek lawyer friend of his filed an expedited application, and, as a result, Omar did an interview. In February 2016, he was granted asylum as a refugee. Thus, a weak tie gave him crucial information to legalise his stay in Greece and automatically minimise the risk of going to jail.

From 2013 until 2019, Moussa was renewing his residence permit every three months, sometimes even every couple of weeks, until he got married to his wife and got a permanent residence permit. Theophile, one month after his arrival, got his pink card. He was renewing it every six months, and from 2014 till he got a residence permit, which was being renewed every two years until 2020, when he got a five-year residence permit. Patrick and Gracia had a residence permit as students. After the end of their studies, Patrick has to renew it every year and Gracia every two.

The most recent case is that of Youri. In April 2017, he did his asylum interview. In March 2018, he received a first instance rejection, and in May 2019, he received a second instance rejection. Then he was informed by the Asylum Office that he should go to the Ministry of Interior. They did not recognise him as a refugee, but they gave him a one-year residence permit for humanitarian reasons. It should be noted that in Greece, this permit is rarely provided to migrants.

Networks have eased the asylum process of migrants by giving them essential information and have minimised the risk of going to jail or being deported from Greece. Weak ties mitigated tense situations and provided guidance, while strong ties, composed of nonmigrants, offered help to migrants, resulting in their legalisation in Greece.

ROLE OF NETWORKS IN JOBS, STUDIES & COMMUNITIES

Education and jobs are usually the most effective way for migrants to get blended with the host society. Greece from 2008 to 2017 was in a financial crisis, making the accessibility of jobs for migrants much harder. Thus, migrants had to use their networks to gain access to the labour market, improve their living conditions, and gradually integrate into the host country. There is an extensive reference to networks, strong or/and weak ties, highlighting their importance and how they could help migrants by providing them with information. Migrant communities have a vital role in the daily life of migrants by offering short-term help through information and accommodation and long-term support through language courses and social activities. It is interesting to analyse the contacts of migrants with other migrants and nonmigrants, their effect on their own lives, and the lives of other migrants. In other words, the evolution and the shape of networks during different phases.

It was also proven the claim of Granovetter that people with a few weak ties were less likely to participate in the activities of their communities. Only Gracia was not involved in the collective actions of her community, and she was also the only person who did not have many weak ties. There was a tendency among the interviewees to be involved in their communities' activities or offer support to co-ethnics. They also had many weak ties during their life in Greece.

Four interviewees have worked as call agents, while the three worked in the same company, Teleperformance. Three interviewees have worked as workers for cleaning boats, and two have worked as gardeners. The interviewees found most of these jobs through weak ties, either of migrants or nonmigrants.

With regard to the argument of Burt, it is safe to say that people who have many acquaintances, friendships and contacts with diverse groups of individuals are likely to have native ideas. This was observed in four cases. The four of them had unusual ideas for jobs, and through them, they became self-entrepreneurs. First, Minka has been trading electronic devices to other migrants in Greece and Africa for the past few years. Second, in March 2021, Moussa opened his clothing shop in Athens with African clothes made in Ivory Coast by locals. To make it happen, he went to Ivory Coast and France and made some deals. Amadou, in 2014, rented a small restaurant where he cooked African food but did not have any significant profit, so he closed his business within a year.

It is noteworthy that Patrick had two native ideas since he arrived in Greece, one which was realised, and one is close to being fulfilled. During the years, he observed that many French tourists were walking alone in Athens. So, for the summers of 2015 until 2017, he became a tourist guide on his own for French tourists in Athens. To implement this project, he contacted people in Paris through friends and contacts of his in Athens who promoted him. Further, he made deals with some restaurants and hotels

in Athens. Patrick had an idea for a long-time to start his clothing collection, which to an extent has become true. He has opened a clothing company in DRC selling to Paris, and he is going to open one in Athens and set up his internet website.

A significant example of the transition of weak ties becoming strong ties was in Minka's case. This contrasts with Granovetter's theory about the categorisation of people into weak and strong ties. In November 2012, Minka was in a square, crying alone. Suddenly, a taxi stopped, and an older woman stepped out. While Minka didn't know any Greek, fortunately for him, she knew French. So, when she asked him, 'why are you crying?', he replied, 'I am hungry, I have nothing to eat.' They went to the supermarket together, and she bought him food. Minka was living in an abandoned building with no electricity or water. After a few weeks, the older woman rented a house for him and his friends. Besides, she enrolled him in an informal school in Exarcheia, Athens, where he attended Greek language classes. After he had learned to read and write in Greek seven months later, she enrolled him in IEK (Institution of Vocational Training) AKMI. Two years later, he graduated as a computer technician. Until now, he lives in the same apartment, and he feels grateful to her. 'She is like my mother... I am helping her all the time.' Thus, this woman, a clear example of a weak tie who transformed into a strong tie, offered Minka access to accommodation and education. Consequently, she functioned as a network segment between Minka and his integration into society.

Throughout the interviews, there was a consistency about the way migrants found their jobs. It was primarily thanks to weak and strong ties. For example, after completing his studies at the institute in Athens, Minka had to do an internship. He applied to OTE, one of Greece's largest technology companies, but they rejected him because he had not finished secondary school in Greece. A few months later, depressed by a feeling that he studied for two years with nothing in return, 'I was thinking that I have lost a few years of my life here [in Greece] and that there was no future for me in this country until a French friend of mine called me and told me to apply to Teleperformance, [a customer service company], that was looking for native French speakers.' He applied for the position, they hired him, and he worked there for eight months. In this case, the information about a job came from a strong tie.

In Minka's case, a Greek woman provided him with a residence and helped his integration by enrolling him in Greek courses and at the Institution of Vocational Training. Thus, nonmigrants could play a significant role in a network system by improving the living conditions and liaising for the gradual integration of migrants.

A common observation is the development of friendships with Greeks. Minka has many Greek friends who studied alongside him in the institute, he spends much time with them, and he is even in contact with their parents (which is not a usual phenomenon in Greece). At the same time, he is socialising with other Africans by playing football and hanging out in bars, which has enabled him to have a large social circle. The Guinean community in Greece is called Conakry, after the capital of Guinea. Minka is a

member of Guinea's community in Greece, and they are helping migrants living in the streets or those who have health issues or cannot cover basic needs. In a venue rented by the community, a Sunday per month, they gather to discuss their problems. According to Minka, there is a large migrant community chain. A Guinean migrant who is in contact with the church is sending to him every month, on behalf of the church, big food boxes. Then Minka asks friends of his to come to his house and to pick up food. When his friends have some spare money, they call him to find a person in need. In other cases, he volunteers himself, as he did with a patient suffering from cancer, and he accompanied him in the hospital and translated for him. Thus, Minka uses his network, other migrants from Guinea, to ease the living conditions of other migrants.

There was a tendency of strong ties recommending migrants for jobs or providing them useful information. For example, Moussa's current wife, who is Greek, helped him work in a family-owned business where he was cleaning and maintaining boats for tourists renting boats. He also held a second job as a part-time hotel worker. For this job, he was recommended by a friend of his, a migrant from Ivory Coast, to replace her as she left her position. His current wife helped him create a CV. However, he could not find a job for a year, which proves the theory of Granovetter that people who make use mainly of strong ties are being unemployed for a greater period than those who rely mostly on weak ties. In 2015 he was hired by Teleperformance as a call agent for French-language speakers. A few months later, Moussa felt that people of colour were being discriminated against. He complained, he went to a journalist who published an article and then he was fired. Afterwards, friends of his informed that the working conditions in Webhelp were better than in Teleperformance. So, he applied for a customer service position, and he was hired. All these jobs resulted from networks, either of migrants such as his friend or nonmigrants as his current wife.

Access to information was a crucial key for migrants' development in Greece. For instance, in early 2018, a friend of Moussa sent him a link about a program of INGO IRC and Citi Foundation, which offered training and funding for young people who wanted to create their own business. Moussa's dream was to open a restaurant. After four months of training in Athens, Moussa's business plan was approved, and he got a fund of 1,750 euros. Thus, a strong tie who provided information about this program resulted in Moussa acquiring a fund but most important a crucial knowledge about the operation of a business, which was used to start his current business.

As Louise argued, networks are a fundamental element for the creation of communities. Moussa created the community of Ivory Coast in Greece in 2018. A few months later, he was elected as president. Then, in an effort to connect his community, he got in contact with the Greek Forum of Refugees. Before Covid-19, they were doing English, Greek, French courses in their office and promoting the Ivorian Coast culture and traditions. Moussa represents the Greek Forum of Refugees at PICUM, a platform for international cooperation on undocumented migrants, where he is a board member. He is also

representing PICUM in European Commission Expert Group. Thus, Moussa tried to extend his network and to offer the tools to migrants to live permanently in Greece.



Caption: Moussa at the European Parliament with the General Director of Picum, Michele LeVoy.

In January 2011, Patrick started the Greek language courses at the Faculty of Philosophy, and he passed the exams in May 2012. After staying at Gracia for a week, Patrick rented an apartment on his own. He stayed there for one year until he moved to the student campus as a student of Topography at National Metsovio Polytechnic University. In the Faculty of philosophy, he became friends with some Greeks who had left school young and some Americans learning Greek for their jobs. They helped him improve his Greece by correcting him continuously.

As it was argued by Louise et al., migrants indeed receive great emotional support from strong ties. In 2013 a migrant whom Patrick met at a church introduced him to Jean-Diddier, who was going to fix his laptop. Afterwards, Patrick hosted Jean-Diddier at his apartment on the student campus. It helped him a lot, as he said, 'he was someone who understands what I was passing through because he is open-minded and was experiencing the same difficulties as me'. Jean-Diddier, a weak tie who became a strong tie as a friend, helped him psychologically and motivated him to continue his studies. When Patrick was sad, Jean-Diddier gave him courage, 'he had telepathy in his understanding'. Patrick's first year at the university was harsh. His friends at the university were only Greeks; they helped him a lot with the Greek language and assignments; they even included him in team assignments while his participation was minimal due to the language barrier, especially during his first year. Patrick's friends

from the university helped him a lot with the courses, and they were inviting him to parties or even to weddings of unknown persons to him. As a result, he felt his friends became part of his family. 'There are not only friends. They mean something more [to me].' The nonmigrant network of Patrick at the university, his fellow Greek students, strong ties, supported him in a crucial period of his studies.

To a lesser extent weak ties offer psychological support as well. For example, before starting at the university, Patrick met members of student political parties, who explained to him how the university functions, about the semesters, internships, and notes. 'I was feeling afraid, how I will study in Greece with those born in this country.' The acquaintances of Patrick provided him with helpful information to be psychologically more prepared.

Weak ties can also recommend migrants for jobs. For example, Patrick from the 2nd year of his studies, he was going to the professors' offices, asking them for help. In 2014 and 2016, he did two internships for two chartered surveyor offices in the islands of Nisiros and Kos, respectively. He found the internships through his professors, who recommended him. The fact that Patrick was reaching out to his professors asking for help contributed to the relationship he developed with them and their recommendations. Thus, the inclusion of his professors, weak ties, in his network helped Patrick acquire a necessary experience.

The large network of and specifically weak ties offered to Patrick access to jobs. He worked as a worker in transportation a few times, where he found this job from an acquaintance of his. He had also worked as a waiter for a couple of months at student parties. He got this job through a person he knew from his student campus. Thus, two times Patrick found his jobs through weak ties. Since 2019 when he finished his studies, he has been working as a call agent for Hewlett-Packard. He feels that the university helped him at most to be integrated into Greece. '[University] it's like a mirror that shows you how society and you learn different mentalities.' The extensive network of Patrick consisted of migrants and nonmigrants, enabled him adapt to an unfamiliar environment, and helped him finish his studies. Patrick was quite active in the Congolese community in Greece, and he was assisting other migrants, for example, by explaining to them the national health system and acting as a translator for them. He stopped being much involved in his community in 2018 when Jean-Diddier became its president.

Another theoretical argument that was proven was that of Louise et al., who argued that migrants with strong relationships within their community and knowledge of the host country's language have more weak ties who do not belong in their ethnic group. For example, Capi has achieved an advanced level of the Greek language mainly thanks to his employer when he was working as a labourer in the fields for two-half years. Every day after the job, his employer was teaching him how to write and speak in Greek. 'He is like my brother'. He is a coach of two Greek adult football teams for the last three years. In one team, all of them are Greeks and Albanians, and in the other one, which is composed of deaf players, only three are Africans, and the rest are Greeks. Capi has been the president of the Guinean

community in Greece since 2018. For a few years, this community rented an apartment for the newcomers providing them with accommodation for their first couple of weeks. Nowadays, they are setting up an integration program where teachers would teach the Greek language to migrants.

The discussion of Louise et al. about migrants who create strong bonds within their communities was supported in the case of Amadou as well. From 2009 to 2012, he was the football coach of the Guinean community and every summer, there was a tournament in Athens called Copa Africa, where they were participating. He is also the vice president of the Guinean community. According to him, he owes a large part of his integration to a Greek family that he met in 2011 in a football stadium while a Greek friend of his was playing a match. He has spent much time with this family, including many dinners, and they usually call him to find out how he is doing. This family should be considered as a weak tie that was transformed into strong ties and helped his integration. Thus, another example where the theory ‘the strength of weak ties’ by Granovetter cannot be applied, as weak ties tend to be transformed to strong ones.

A common element that came up during most interviews was that job opportunities were offered by weak ties. Capi, while coaching for a friendly game, the Guinean community team, the deaf football team coach, offered him to be his assistant. He accepted the offer and worked as an assistant coach for two years, where he learned sign language. A friend of the president of the Guinean community called him and offered him a job as a labourer in the fields at a small family business in a village close to Athens. ‘I was thinking of going for two weeks, but I stayed for two-and-a-half years’. The first job opportunity provided a network that helped Capi learn Greek and later get better jobs. His interaction with Greek locals and the help he received from locals such as his employer in the fields allowed him to understand the Greek culture faster.



Caption: Capi as a football coach

Jean-Didier's path was rough, but his networks lowered the cost of living significantly. To make ends meet, he was fixing computers and mobile phones for Greeks and migrants. 'I was staying with seven other people. Each of us was paying 20 euros for rent. My expenses were 126 euros per month. I was not going outside, and I was not smoking or drinking alcohol'.

It was observed that the interaction of migrants with Greeks helped them overcome obstacles and easily integrate into Greek society. It is also apparent that Greeks who were strong ties to migrants provided emotional support. Jean-Didier followed the Greek language courses at the Faculty of Philosophy of Kapodistrian University, and he passed the exams in less than a year. Right after, in August 2014, he applied and was accepted to study digital systems at the University of Piraeus. The following four years of studies were quite difficult for him, as the university required much time, and he could not understand everything in Greek. In the meantime, he was earning some money by creating web pages. During his free time, he spent much time with his Greek fellow students, who helped him a lot to improve his Greek, while he was not ashamed of making mistakes in the Greek language. As a result, his performance improved, and he was the only student out of the two hundred in his class who completed his studies in precisely four years (the minimum duration in most undergraduate university studies in Greece). The friendship with his fellow students helped him to, as he described, 'to escape from a hard reality', as he was struggling economically and psychologically. He felt that he received support that went beyond his language learning process. He received emotional support from his friends.

Jean-Didier's case was unique as he was offered a highly skilled job while he had not finished his studies, and the offer came from a weak tie. Before the start of his fourth and last year for his bachelor's a professor asked him to join a Pan-European program which had the duration of three years. During that time, he did a two-year master program at Piraeus University, which he finished in 2019. In early 2020 he joined another program of his university, which he will complete in 2023. During the studies of Jean-Didier, his network was his fellow students. They enabled him to improve his Greek language skills, integrate into the local community, and subsequently enhance his access to the university environment.

The support of communities and the empowerment offered to migrants was observed in many cases. For example, from 2016, the Congolese community provides Greek and English language courses and seminars about information technology, entrepreneurship and digital marketing. They also inform newly arrived migrants and refugees about the paperwork and the Greek bureaucracy they have to go through. In 2018 Jean-Didier became the president of the community, who is also the president of the Greek Forum for Refugees. In 2020, during the first wave of Covid-19 in Greece, they distributed to the Congolese community members supermarket vouchers.

Amadou found jobs thanks to weak and strong ties. After he had been in Greece for five months, an old Greek man who he met by chance asked him if he was looking for a job. The job was outside of Athens, in Elefsina, where he was cleaning vessels for ten hours per day for two weeks. Afterwards, he worked as a freelance translator with a Greek NGO for six years. In the meantime, he was cleaning and painting ships. In May 2015, he found a job as a barman in a bar through a Greek friend of his, where he worked for five months. The company, who owned this bar, proposed him to work as a sous-chef in one of their restaurants in the centre of Athens, where he works until now, while at the same time he is responsible for the other migrants who work at the kitchen. Amadou's collaboration with nonmigrants provided him with the chance to work in bars and restaurants and access to positions that are uncommon for migrants to work in Greece.

As it happened with Amadou, the first job of Theophile in Greece was cleaning and painting boats in Perama. They both found jobs through acquaintances, weak ties. When there was no work for the ships, Theophile worked as a gardener, a job he found through Burkina Faso's community. After living for eight months in the shop rented by the community, along with three other migrants, they rented an apartment with three bedrooms.

In Burkina Faso, Theophile had done an internship in a bank. However, he did not want to work in Greece in a job based on his studies. After five months of being in Greece, a person from the community introduced him to the owner of an African bar in Amerikis square who was looking for a DJ. Thus, another weak tie which intermediates for a migrant to get a job. The woman of the owner of the African bar was working for Teleperformance and, after a few months, in November 2008, convinced Theophile to apply for work in Teleperformance. Migrants who met him in the African bar asked him to go with them to other bars and nightclubs to introduce him to the owners. As a result, he found work in many bars, especially in a bar, Folie, which was organising Latin nights, where he played music from 2010 to 2012. The next few years, he worked in a few other bars, and in 2016, he returned to Folie. Acquaintances of Theophile, weak ties, helped him have more job opportunities and increased his network, either by offering him jobs or recommending him to bar owners and to Teleperformance.

Theophile's case also sides with the theoretical argument of Louise et al. about migrants who have more weak ties which do not belong in their ethnic group. He got involved in the activities of the community of Burkina Faso soon after he arrived in Greece. In 2015 he became the president of the community, which helps migrants, who, for example, could be in jail, 'We discuss if we should hire a lawyer.' If the case is complicated and they believe that the person will not get out soon, they gather some money to give him food or/and phone cards. 'If someone is in the hospital and does not have any friends in Greece, we send people every day to support them.' He has spent much time with a Greek rapper artist from 2010 to 2012, who helped him improve his Greek, as they talked mostly in Greek. He has done some Greek lessons organised by Teleperformance, which helped him to acquire a basic knowledge of

the Greek language. He spent much time with his Greek colleagues at Teleperformance, who taught him how to say specific phrases and explained to him their meaning and use.

Theophile has a child with his now ex-partner. He had a custody battle over the child. The fact that he later married another Greek woman improved, in his opinion, the court's view of him and gave him better visitation rights. Another example of the way networks could affect positively even only by their existence.

Youri is a personal contact of this thesis' author. In Moria camp, he was extremely active in his community, acting as its leader. In the summer of 2018, he moved to Lavrio camp, which is close to Athens. His first job in Greece was as a dishwasher in a restaurant, where he was spending almost six hours commuting. After a couple of months, in March 2019, he found a job in another restaurant, where he still works, and he moved to an apartment in Athens. Migrants he had met in Moria camp helped him to proceed with the Greek bureaucracy. Consequently, weak ties provided him with information that was difficult for migrants to have access to.

The argument of Louise et al. about migrants who form solid relationships within their community and learn the host country's language was demonstrated in Omar's case. When he arrived, his English level was already quite good, where for most Senegalese migrants was not, so he was helping other migrants by interpreting for them, for example, about governmental services. After a couple of months through his Senegalese friends, he met some Greek anarchists, who later became his friends, and he started Greek language courses. The Greek anarchists created a class for migrants in a squat in Ermou, in the centre of Athens. His staying in Veroia for three years was vital for him, 'it was there where I quietly improved my Greek because there was nobody else speaking neither English nor French. He was asking his co-workers about different words and how to phrase sentences. A co-worker of Omar, Thomas, helped him a lot because he corrected him for any mistake. Omar speaks in fluent Greek, and he believes the reason is that he has spent much time with his Greek anarchist friends, who helped him a lot. Six months after he arrived in Greece, a convocation by the name 'Assembly of Greeks and migrants' was created, and Omar was part of it. The Assembly was founded to help other migrants, either from Africa or Asia, who were facing many problems with racism and Golden Dawn. Through this Assembly they were explaining to migrants their documents that were in Greek, guiding them about the procedures and telling them to which lawyers they should go. In 2015 he left the Assembly because of his work, as he was guiding migrants and refugees about the asylum procedure and then sometimes, he had to interpret for them in their asylum interviews. Most of his friends and acquaintances are Greeks, and he has only three friends from Senegal that he is in frequent contact with. His colleagues at the NGO have offered him great emotional support. As he said, 'Metadrasi is like a family to me. All of us were feeling equal.' Omar's willingness to help other migrants led him to acquire many nonmigrants friends and contacts, and through them, he learned to speak Greek fluently. They should be considered as strong ties. Apart

from that, it is apparent that the network of his colleagues made him feel gracious and integrated into Greek society.

Thanks to a weak tie, Omar got a job with a permanent contract, which was and is rare even for Greeks. In 2010, a Turkish colleague liked the way Omar was working and proposed to him to work for a construction company as a carpenter in Veroia. The job was to work for a construction company, which among other projects, was building wooden houses. In 2013 due to the economic crisis, there was no work, but the company was still paying him even though he was not working. Then, Omar went to Athens, where accidentally he met a Senegalese friend of his, who asked him to accompany him for his asylum interview as he was speaking only Wolof and the Greek asylum service did not have an interpreter who could speak French and Wolof. After the interview, an employee of UNHCR contacted the NGO Metadrasi. Then, he did some seminars organised by the NGO, passed their internal exams and started working as an interpreter.

Gracia, like Patrick, initially had to pass the same process, the exams of the Greek language, to be eligible to enrol at a university. She started the Greek courses at the faculty of Philosophy in October till May, when she gave the exams and passed them. She had a significant incentive to learn the Greek language rapidly because the scholarship she had was dependent on her passing the exams. The scholarship was from the ministries of Greece and DRC. A friend of hers, also from DRC, who was already studying at a University in Greece, helped her a lot. She asked him questions about the Greek language, and he explained to her what she could not understand. She studied Computer Science at Harokopeio University. The first year of her studies was challenging because she could not understand the professors due to the language barrier, and she could not communicate properly.

Gracia was exchanging with fellow students a few messages from time to time or asking questions, but she did not have any friendship with them. During the years, her studies became more complex; she was feeling overwhelmed and was even thinking of abandoning her studies. As it was claimed by Louise et al. about migrants receiving psychological support from partners, Gracia received it from her husband. As she said, 'He gave me much courage'. The evolution of weak ties to strong ones was observed in Gracia's case as well. One professor gave her useful advice and supported her during her studies. Gracia was going to her office, and they were chatting even about topics unrelated to the university. As she said, 'She [This professor] became like a friend of mine'. Even if it was limited, Gracia's network galvanised her to finish her studies.

Granovetter, as presented in the theoretical framework, argued that migrants who mainly rely on strong ties to find jobs are more probable to stay unemployed for a greater period than those who rely on weak ties. Only Gracia met these criteria, and in her case, the theory was not proven, as she found four jobs through strong ties and was not unemployed. When she finished her studies in September 2016, she found a job as a babysitter and cleaning worker in a hotel through her cousin, who was living in Greece.

In March 2017, a friend of hers from DRC, told her about an NGO, and he sent her the link to apply for an interpreter position. A month later, she started working as an interpreter of French to Greek for NGO Metadrasi in Lesvos until October 2018. A friend of hers who was working already for EASO recommended her as they needed interpreters who could translate in Lingala, French and Greek. Since November 2018, she has been working for EASO in the Greek islands. The network of Gracia, her family and a friend of hers from her country recommended her or/and gave her information about jobs. Another network member, a strong tie, suggested Gracia and resulted in her having a better job.

Most of the interviewees seem to have significant social circles of migrants and nonmigrants. They have made many acquaintances, which have enhanced their living conditions, provided them with accommodation and access to information about jobs, or actually offered them jobs. Their networks and their weak ties, along with their willingness to learn the Greek language, positively affected the accessibility of opportunities and their cultural integration. Apart from that, it is apparent that the students received significant psychological support from their network, either if they were migrants or nonmigrants, but definitely they were strong ties. Apparently, sub-Sahara African communities in Greece function as big networks, which provide mainly assistance and knowledge to members of their communities. Most interviewees have large social circles, which, as mentioned in the theoretical framework, lead to collective action for the communities. Most of the interviewees tend to socialise with many migrants and Greeks as well, which made them comprehend the Greek culture and language. As a result, as their years in Greece progressed, they began to help other sub-Saharan Africans in Greece, who did not have knowledge of the Greek society and definitely of the Greek language.

Weak ties have a crucial role in migrant's journeys, providing them with information and access to networks. Migrants' networks constitute an essential tool for migrants to reach their destination, find accommodation, and avoid staying in the streets. These networks either existed before the start of the journey or they were created in a transit country or even in Greece. The interviewees tend to learn the Greek language and develop friendships with Greeks while forming their communities or supporting the existing ones. Weak ties seem to positively affect the access of migrants to the labour market, while strong ties tend to mostly offer emotional support. However, it was observed a tendency of weak ties becoming strong ones.

CONCLUSION

Migration from Sub-Saharan African countries to Europe seems a pretty challenging process, and most of the time, there are many obstacles. People who make this journey have grown up in unstable environments where poverty, torture and violence are daily issues. Most of the interviewees had to face harsh situations during their life in Africa. They left their countries because they expected to find a safe environment, a better life and working conditions in Europe. Their journey from the day they decided to leave their countries was long for the seven of them, and it included living in a transit country for at least a few weeks or months before reaching Greece.

All ten interviewees took a flight from their country to Greece or another destination closer to Europe. Thus, as Schielke and Graw stated in their theory, the improvement of transportation means makes migration easier, while the knowledge of their compatriots raises their hopes. For example, Jean-Didier had a friend in Athens who was waiting for him and hosted him. Theophile had been informed by his cousin about the living conditions in Greece. Consequently, Jean and Theophile did not have to pay for a hotel or stay in a square, as had happened with many other migrants arriving in Greece at that time. Studying outside of one's home country has become easier and accessible to more people in this globalised world. In this context, the Congolese nationals, Jean-Didier, Gracia and Patrick, realised their dream of studying in Europe.

Out of the ten interviewees, only Gracia did not seem to have many weak ties of migrants and nonmigrants. She was the only one that was not involved in helping her community or/and other migrants. However, she did not spend more time searching for work in comparison to other interviewees. The rest of them were active in their communities or were helping other migrants through networks. Apart from that, most of them found a job through weak ties at least once, which in some cases became strong ties eventually. This contradicts the theory of Granovetter, which argues that people who rely mainly on strong ties cannot find a job quickly, and they tend not to be involved in their communities.

The journey, in this case from Turkey to Greece, cannot be characterised as 'risk-free', an argument that was used by Massey et al. For example, Jean-Didier, when he learned that many people died while crossing the sea borders between Turkey and Greece, he was afraid to do the trip. Because the river was overflowing, the payment to the smugglers had fallen to approximately 100 euros. Thus, Jean-Didier paid an amount to smugglers to cross the borders, but the risk was great. So, it can be said that even when the weather conditions are bad, smugglers put the lives of migrants in danger.

The appearance of networks is prominent from the start of the interviewees' journeys. Thanks to their networks, the interviewees lowered the risk and the cost of their trips by taking flights to countries

Conclusion

closer to Europe or, in the case of Capi, directly to Europe and specifically to Greece. The networks that the interviewees used consisted of a mix of migrants and nonmigrants. Migrants were able to have access to accommodation, as it happened in the case of Minka, where a nonmigrant provided him with an apartment and in the case of Jean, where a migrant hosted him in his apartment. A nonmigrant eased Capi's integration by helping him to learn the Greek language, while Amadou established a fruitful collaboration with nonmigrants, which resulted in having stable jobs in restaurants and bars. Finally, Jean associated with nonmigrants and specifically with his fellow students, which enabled him in the first place to excel in his Bachelor in Greece, and secondly to work in European programs as a member of the University of Piraeus. Consequently, due to his studies and his involvement with the Congolese community, Jean integrated harmonically into Greek society.

One observation that confirms Louise et al.'s theory is that migrants who had strong connections with their community and learned Greek had many weak ties outside their ethnic group. Capi, Jean-Diddier, Amadou and Theophile speak Greek. They all have solid relations with co-ethnic migrants as they are also presidents or vice-presidents of their communities and have many weak ties, either of Greeks or/and migrants from other countries. In many cases, these weak ties provided them information about job opportunities or introduced them to people who later offered them jobs.

Regarding Burt's theory, through the interviews, I found out that people who have native ideas, such as Minka, Amadou, Moussa and Patrick, had large social networks. They have created their own business, where it is apparent that they have thought innovatively. It has to be noted that all of them were active in their communities, and they had many interactions or friendships with Greeks. Amadou opened an African restaurant, but he had to close it after a year. Moussa opened a clothing store with products from Ivory Coast, Minka is trading electronic devices, and Patrick has created his clothing brand. Apart from that, Patrick had the innovative idea of becoming a tourist guide for French tourists in Athens. The two of the three have studied in Greece, which extended their network automatically, and all of them were at some point active in their communities.

In response to the research question, it can be argued that Granovetter's theory of strong and weak ties does not fully apply to this study. On the one hand, the weak ties did significantly help the migrants more than the strong ties. On the other hand, weak ties often tend to develop into strong ties. Thus, the distinction between strong and weak ties could be characterised as ambiguous. It was observed that weak ties tend to provide more information about job opportunities and help to migrants than strong ties. Thus, the number of people included in a migrant's network can dramatically improve their access to the labour market and their living conditions. It has to be noted that Granovetter argued from a sociological perspective, which focused on employment and integration, while this study looks at migration through a historical perspective.

Conclusion

Eight out of ten interviewees have learned Greek, which was their essential tool to achieve their goals. Despite the university-level education of three interviewees, obtained either in Africa or Greece, all of them, except Jean-Diddier, first got low-skill jobs. Throughout the years, it becomes apparent that they became able to provide a higher standard of living for themselves and their families. They found jobs with better working conditions, and they feel satisfied with their current occupation. In comparison to the beginning of their life in Europe or Greece when they either lived on the streets or in shared accommodation with numerous others, they can now afford their housing either for themselves and their immediate family. All ten of them can support an adequate standard of living.

These observations are made based on the interviewees' stories analysed in this thesis. A larger sample of migrants' stories should be assessed in order to address this point more effectively. For example, the theory of Granovetter that people who employ mostly strong ties to find a job, spend more time as unemployed than those who employ mostly weak ties, was observed in Moussa's and Gracia's case. In the first case, the theory was proven, as Moussa did not have a job for one year, but in the second case, it was not proven since from the moment Gracia finished her studies did stay out of work. Thus, there cannot be any certain conclusion regarding Granovetter's argument, as the results were equivalent, and the number of cases was minor.

The term integration can be analysed, assessed and possibly debated. Capi's story, though, highlights that it is possible for a migrant to become an active member in the host society, in this case, Greece and feel accepted and loved. While Capi was working in a cash and carry company, one of the persons he had to cooperate with every day was a member of Golden Dawn. One day he approached Capi and told him, 'Do you know that I am [a member] of Golden Dawn', 'I will not hurt you, because you are one of us. You are interested in [Greek] language, you are not selfish, and you have a good relationship with everyone.' The knowledge of Greek and his relations with his colleagues functioned as a deterrent factor to face any kind of violence from a member of Golden Dawn, a period when the racist attacks by members of the neo-Nazi party in Athens were constant. He is clearly the exception and not the rule, but the story highlights that networks can effectively help someone integrate and even protect him from deadly racism.

Studies about sub-Saharan Africans in the Mediterranean countries are limited. This research illustrates the networks during the journey of sub-Saharan refugees and migrants and their living in Greece. It would be interesting for future research to examine if the theory of weak ties could be applied with the case of migrants and refugees in Spain or Italy. Another possible topic of research could be the way migrants and refugees perceive the feeling of 'home' and its relation to networks in Greece.

To conclude, living as a migrant in Greece must be extremely difficult, first because of the language barrier and second due to the inability or unwillingness of the Greek State to ease the integration of migrants in Greece. In reality, the Greek State has not established any integration project for migrants,

so they have to rely on their networks solely. This research suggests that through the networks, they managed to integrate into Greek society, have adequate living conditions, and have access to job sectors that are not easily accessible to migrants.

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