Working Papers

Nigerian entrepreneurs in Istanbul, Turkey: spatial and temporal dimensions of mixed embeddedness

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The IMI Working Papers Series

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- analyse migration as part of broader global change

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Abstract

This article analyses the macro-institutional framework, urban opportunity structure, and micro-level resources of Nigerian entrepreneurs in the Istanbul textile market. The paper argues that: (1) in a context of low initial capital, a limited legal framework, and ethno-racial distinction, Nigerian migrants are successfully building organisations as immigrant entrepreneurs in the textile trade of Istanbul, and (2) root causes for this growth stem from (a) Turkey's fragmented categories of ethnonational citizenship which give space to unfamiliar ethnonational constructions and categories; (b) new economic divisions arising from the re-ordering of urban commercial space in Istanbul, and (c) temporal resources and strategies of individual migrants in shaping the urban opportunity structure. The article ends with a discussion of migrants as agents of change and directions for future research.

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1 Introduction

Immigrants from nations across Africa are increasingly arriving in Turkey to do business, gain an education, or claim asylum. As political and trade links between Turkey and African nations expand, immigrant entrepreneurs from African countries are settling in Istanbul in order to exploit the growing opportunities to set up small businesses and engage in transnational trade. African entrepreneurship in Turkey, however, has largely escaped public or academic discussion, which is largely a result of a sustained focus on transit migration (Icduygu 2005; Icduygu and Yukseker 2012), irregular migration (Icduygu 2003), and forced migration (Yukseker and Brewer 2006b), as opposed to immigrant incorporation, entrepreneurship, or social mobility. Considering that African migrants are beginning to have a visible impact in Turkey (Brewer and Yukseker 2006; Yukseker and Brewer 2006b 2011), in particular the city of Istanbul, a new perspective on immigrant entrepreneurship in the Turkish context is warranted owing to these new developments in trade, politics, and migration. A number of unanswered questions arise surrounding the movement of labour and the restructuring of urban economies which must be seriously addressed in order to understand how new inequalities in Turkey are being reshaped through international migration: How are newly arriving African migrants embedded within the Turkish economy? What roles do space and time play in their economic embeddedness? Is there a relation between space, time, and entrepreneurial opportunities in Turkish cities, and if so, why? Can we think of African migrant entrepreneurship in Turkey as a typical case of economic embeddedness within a newly globalising economy, or are we witnessing something new?

In this article, I provide answers to these questions through an exploratory analysis of fieldwork among Nigerian migrants in Istanbul. I also seek to broaden the discussion of immigrant entrepreneurship in Turkey by synthesising the literature on mixed embeddedness with the literature on African immigration to Turkey. Much of the literature on mixed embeddedness covers immigrants in North America and West Europe, meaning theoretical insight is drawn primarily from wealthy capitalist democracies with established traditions as immigrant-receiving countries. Turkey, however, is a growing economy and burgeoning political power with only recent experiences of immigration, as it is transitioning from an emigration to an immigration country (Kirisci 2003). By studying Turkey we can gain further theoretical insight into processes of mixed embeddedness in newly globalising economies and comparatively recent experiences with international migration. In particular, exploring how recently arrived Nigerians in Istanbul have embedded themselves we can explore how the structure of residence (in this case a rapidly globalising Istanbul) interacts in complex co-dependence with migrant agency (in this case young Nigerian entrepreneurs) and how migrants may act as agents of change within Turkey's new economy.

Using the framework of mixed embeddedness, I explain new patterns of immigrant entrepreneurship gathered from fieldwork conducted alongside Nigerian migrants in Istanbul in 2011–2012. I argue that (a) at the macro-institutional scale, the limited legal framework for international migrants and ethnonational citizenship categories in Turkey do not pose significant obstacles to Nigerian entrepreneurial growth; (b) the restructuring of Istanbul's commercial spaces has fostered new spaces of formality and informality, wherein Nigerian migrants are creating new opportunity structures for themselves, and (c) individual strategies of using time as a resource re-shape the opportunities available to new migrants.

The article begins with a presentation of mixed embeddedness and the methods used, including a brief discussion of the transnational geoeconomic space of politics and trade between Nigeria and Turkey. The article then moves to three interrelated scales of analysis: first to the national macro-institutional scale in Turkey, second to the scale of urban opportunity structures in Istanbul, and finally down to the individual level to tease out the particular temporal resources that comprise immigrant

entrepreneurship. I then turn to a discussion of the three levels, discussing how we may conceive of migrants as agents of change in Turkey. I conclude with a brief discussion of the findings and suggestions for further research.

2 Background and need for research

Entrepreneurship, defined as the creation of new organisations (in this case businesses), has been an enduring topic of analysis in the economic sociology of migration (Aldrich 2005, p. 452). Early work on immigrant entrepreneurship has emphasised 'ethnic' or 'cultural' factors in explaining the rise of entrepreneurship (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p. 198; Kloosterman, Van der Leun, and Rath 1999, p. 257). Finding this 'supply side' approach insufficient and one-sided, Kloosterman, van der Leun and Rath (1999) have employed the concept of 'mixed embeddedness' to explain immigrant entrepreneurship. The concept of mixed embeddedness moves away from the conception of embeddedness as solely denoting social capital or position within social networks. Mixed embeddedness then focuses not only on the micro-level of the individual and their motivations and resources, but on the complex socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors located at multiple geographical scales (Kloosterman 2010). As such, this article will set out to analyse three inter-related scales: the macro-institutional scale, the urban scale, and the individual scale.

Drawing on Polanyi, the success of immigrant entrepreneurs is a function of their 'embeddedness' within 'mixed' social, economic, and institutional structures:

In this view, the rise of immigrant entrepreneurship is, theoretically, primarily located at the intersection of changes in socio-cultural frameworks on the one side and transformation processes in (urban) economies on the other. The interplay between these two different sets of changes takes place within a larger, dynamic framework of institutions on neighbourhood, city, national or economic sector level. (Kloosterman et al. 1999, p. 257)

The focus on social, economic, and institutional structures allows us to chart the patterns of opportunities available within particular geographical spaces and scales – national, regional, urban, neighbourhood, and individual – and to understand how these multiple scales refract upon each other, or 'mix', shaping individual or group economic outcomes. While theories of incorporation or integration focus on how migrants become full members of receiving communities (and contribute to debates on assimilation, multiculturalism, and other modes of belonging in cities and states), the mixed embeddedness approach aims at explaining processes and patterns of immigrant entrepreneurship by linking migrant agency and resources with political, economic, and geographic structures at multiple scales. In other words, the mixed embeddedness framework focuses less on forms of belonging such as citizenship, and more on forms of market interaction and opportunities for migrants to engage in business. Thus, it envisions migrant activities embedded in mixed structures of opportunity which stretch across multiple scales from the urban to the national and the global. Understanding migrant agency within diverse opportunity structures at multiple scales permits exploration of the divisions of labour within dynamic urban, national, and global economies (such as the expanding economies of Istanbul, Turkey and their extension globally to Africa and elsewhere). In other words, the mixed embeddedness framework allows us to derive questions about how migrants actively deploy entrepreneurial strategies, shape market opportunities, and become directed towards particular opportunities depending on the structural constraints of the socioeconomic context. In the analysis section below we will explore how migrants are shaped by and shape diverse economic contexts in Turkey and Istanbul.

Much of the literature on immigrant entrepreneurship takes place in the European or North American contexts, with very little work concentrated in Asia, Oceania, Africa, or the Middle East. The major reference work on the topic, for example, displays work primarily from Europe, in addition to South Africa, the United States of America, and Canada (Kloosterman and Rath, 2003). I intend to partially close this gap in the literature by investigating dimensions of mixed embeddedness among recently arrived migrants from Nigeria in Istanbul, Turkey. To my knowledge there are no major academic or policy-related developments in the field of immigrant entrepreneurship in Turkey, whereas a great deal of literature is concentrated on immigrant incorporation of Turkish migrants in Europe. As such the research is exploratory, with the aim of opening a dialogue for further work on immigrant entrepreneurship in Turkey and the region. The article adds value to the literature on African migrants and mixed embeddedness by demonstrating that Nigerian migrants in Turkey motivate economic change in particular ways through their entrepreneurial practices, even in the face of structural constraints. The article places some emphasis on time, and how temporal dynamics enable or constrain opportunities for entrepreneurial advancement within the mixed embeddedness framework. Temporal dimensions of immigrant entrepreneurship, such as how time is used as a resource, are explored in depth in the analysis of the individual level later in the article.

Compared to the literature on the African diaspora in other contexts (Koser 2003; Zeleza 2005), up until a few years ago there was relatively little literature concerning Africans in a Turkish context. This however has changed slightly in the past years with a number of contributions highlighting experiences and trajectories of migration and expanding opportunities for African nationals, mostly in Istanbul (Saul and Pelican 2014; Suter 2012a). There is an extended history of refugee movements in Turkey, primarily from Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan in the contemporary period, and significant circular labour migration from the former Soviet Union beginning in the 1990s, but Sub-Saharan African migrations of refugees and entrepreneurs are newer and less understood (Kirisci 2003).

Turkey is becoming an immigration country for African citizens, and they are not exclusively 'transit' migrants as European and Turkish discourse tends to claim. One survey on African migrants in Istanbul provides a snapshot into the proportions of the population (Brewer and Yukseker 2006), and more recent ethnographic work situates the experiences of African migrants in the transit space of Istanbul (Suter 2012b). These studies present an environment of exclusion, marginalisation, and a lack of state support for recent arrivals. Recent studies in political science focus on politics and trade between Turkey and Africa (Ozkan 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Ozkan and Akgun 2010), but they fail to incorporate the migration dimension. The current study takes a slightly different course, highlighting 'windows of entry' for Nigerian migrants and the growth of low capital, high-growth potential entrepreneurial activities in Istanbul (Kloosterman 2010).

2.1 Transnational geoeconomic spaces between Nigeria and Turkey

Turkey, over the last few decades, has gained a dominant position in the economic and political affairs of the Middle East. Having a suitable position between continents, Turkey is a port of entry and exit for the massive growth in global trade with Europe, the Middle East and, increasingly, Africa. The Ottoman Empire had deep relationships with African regions over centuries, even incorporating some regions into the Empire (Casale 2010; Walz and Cuno 2010). However, following the formation of the Republic, political and economic relations between Turkey and Africa waned considerably and first resumed in volume in 1998 with the adoption of the Africa Action Plan. The Africa Action Plan attempts to de-emphasise the perception of Africa as split between North and Sub-Saharan Africa, 'in order to create a new and united image of Africa in Turkish society' (Ozkan 2011b). Since 2003, African nations have appeared more intensely in Turkish foreign and economic policy, with 2005 appearing as 'the Year of

Africa', the hosting of the first Turkey–Africa Cooperation Summit in 2008, and the conference on Least Developed Countries in Istanbul in spring 2011. Turkey's renewed interest in relationships with African nations is driven by geoeconomic, geopolitical, and ideological interests. Turkey seeks new investment, trade, and development opportunities to increase its diplomatic and political influence beyond the East Mediterranean, and to gain solidarity among domestic and global Islamic conservatives. By stressing trade, development, diplomacy, and solidarity with Islamic communities in Sub-Saharan Africa, Turkey aims to be a geoeconomic and geopolitical counterpoint to other economic and political actors in the African region and globally.

During this time, Turkey has not only increased its official aid to various African countries, it also increased its exports to African nations, opened diplomatic relations with a number of countries, and opened more than two dozen regular routes to African cities below the Sahara through its national airline, Turkish Airlines (for an overview of Turkish relations with African countries, see Fait 2013; Ozkan 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Ozkan and Akgun 2010; Turkish Airlines 2014). According to the Turkish Ministry of Economy, for example, relations with Nigeria are 'developing at a rapid pace' (T.C. Ekonomi Bakanlığı July 2013). The import of Nigerian goods to Turkey (primarily petroleum products) increased to $1.1 billion in 2012, a 478 per cent increase since 2004 (ibid.). Turkish exports to Nigeria increased in tandem by 447 per cent between 2004 and 2012, topping off at $438 million consisting primarily of iron and steel, electrical machinery, appliances, metal manufactures and textiles (ibid.).

In parallel with developments in trade, there has been a consistent rise in arrivals of Nigerian nationals to Turkey since 2000. 4,238 Nigerian arrivals were recorded in 2000, rising steadily to 22,869 in 2013 (TurkStat 2013b). The difference between arrivals and departures also reveals that as a trend, more Nigerians are coming, and more Nigerians are staying in Turkey (authors own calculations from (TurkStat, 2013a, 2013b). Departures of Nigerians from Turkey have remained around 1,000 below arrivals since 2009 (down from 2,783 in 2000 but up from 131 in 2006 after a period of negative fluctuation), suggesting that at least some of those arriving from Nigeria are staying to do business, gain an education, or apply for asylum even with high visa fees. The numbers, however, are likely to be low due to the macro-institutional framework and meso-level constraints (explained in more detail below). In 2010, for example, 200 Nigerian citizens were registered in Turkey (out of 25,899 total registered from all African countries) (Republic of Turkey 2010).

According to the Republic of Turkey consular website, visa costs for a single-entry tourist or business visa for a Nigerian national with a normal passport are 9,401 naira (approximately $60). The visa fees for a multiple-entry tourist or business visa are 31,336 naira (approximately $195) (Turkiye Cumhuriyeti Konsolosluk Sitesi n.d.). However, the Turkish visa and residence policy is traditionally perceived by migrants to be liberal, allowing for migrants to travel and remain easily. Although current efforts have address issues of visa overstaying, so-called 'stamp runs' every three months to renew a sticker visa, digitising the visa process, signing the readmission facilitation agreement with the EU, and streamlining the process of residence application and approval, migrants still perceive that arriving and remaining in Turkey is possible without much interference compared to stringent Schengen policies just across the border.

In addition to airline costs, accommodation costs, and costs within personal or business networks, those who do arrive in Turkey are doing so at a heightened financial price, with those who stay taking a comparatively higher financial risk, precipitating a social space to form for entrepreneurial migrants who are willing to take risk to thrive. Furthermore, when comparing the numbers of irregular entries, visa overstays, and asylum applications, we see that asylum is unattractive for the majority of African migrants in Turkey, suggesting that a majority of asylum applicants are moving on (or

becoming invisible to the state) and that entrepreneurs are beginning to remain (Icduygu and Biehl 2009).

2.2 Methodology, respondents, and field locations

Multi-sited fieldwork within various neighbourhoods was conducted in Istanbul between 2011 and 2013. The analysis is based on exploratory fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews with 10 individuals, two semi-structured group interviews with 5 and 10 individuals respectively, and participant observation with Nigerian groups in Istanbul working in the textile trade. Questions focused on migration histories and strategies of migrating, experiences in dealing with the peculiarities of Turkish immigration bureaucracy and law, labour market strategies in Istanbul, strategies of gaining capital, experiences of exploitation, and experiences with race and discrimination. The scope of the interviews was explained with a focus on understanding migration strategies to Turkey and how migrants are gaining economic opportunities in Istanbul. As a migrant myself (I had lived in Turkey for over two years at the time of the interviews) many of the discussions moved towards shared experiences of life in Turkey and differences in experiencing the national and urban opportunity structures presented to us. Our differential experiences, coupled with the fact that recruitment was done primarily in public spaces and direct approaches in neighbourhoods throughout Istanbul, lead to some bias in findings. By speaking with visible migrants who congregate publically, my data may be biased towards the experiences of those who find themselves in a relatively advantaged position. I was unable to speak with migrants who have chosen or been forced to remain invisible in Istanbul or those who were isolated from the textile economy. The findings of this article must be read with these biases in mind. Field data has been complemented by desk research and analysis of the literature, as field insights were deepened by an in-field and out-of-field imagining of the macro- and meso- structures complementing field observations, blending memory, fieldnotes, imagined spaces and scales of opportunity, and *post-hoc* analysis. The integrated synthesis of field observation and social imagining also lends a bias to the analysis, as gaps in field observation were complemented by desk research. Furthermore, rather than try to understand broad relations of migrant entrepreneurship in Turkey from the outset, I sought to analyse potentially meaningful relationships for future research through the small respondent size, but came to broader conclusions after closer integration of the data with the literature after returning to complete the write-up. These biases must be kept in mind when reading the analysis.

All respondents were approached in public venues and new respondents were recruited using snowball sampling and oral informed consent. Respondents were approached directly and orally informed about the nature of the research in English, the national language of Nigeria, and then asked to participate in an interview. All respondents were told they would be given full anonymity and data would be kept confidential, and given the option to decline, stressing the voluntary nature of the research. The locations of the fieldwork were located in multiple neighbourhoods in Istanbul, especially in districts where many African traders congregate to do business and conduct trade. All local fieldwork locations have been obscured for ethical purposes, and all names of respondents have been pseudonymised.

3 Analysis

In this section I cover three structural levels of the mixed embeddedness framework: the national macroinstitutional structure, the urban opportunity structure, and finally the micro-structures of individual agency. Following the analysis of each level a discussion of agency-structure relations will synthesize each level.

3.1 Macro-institutional framework: ethnonational citizenship and the environment of intolerance

Citizenship regimes have effects on immigrant entrepreneurship, and the building of an ethnonational citizenship regime which stresses 'Turkishness' over competing identities has had an important influence on the growth of commercial capitalism in Turkey (Onis and Turem 2002). Competing visions of citizenship and capitalism have been at the center of debates over democracy in Turkey, with competitions over privatisation and marketisation famously erupting into large-scale civil disorder in 2013 with the Gezi Park protests and the growth of the Taksim Solidarity Movement. Several currents contribute to the macro-institutional citizenship regime, including Kurdish nationalism, the EU accession process, historical population exchanges, and both internal and international migration (Icduygu and Kaygusuz 2004; Yegen 2004). For example, immigration and settlement policies have been explicitly tied to the ethnonational citizenship regime, as a strategy of the Turkish nation-state to construct a homogenised political community from which it gains legitimacy. In relation to contemporary migrations from Nigeria, two features of this macro-institutional framework can be explored.

First, ethnoracial categories beyond 'Turk' have trouble gaining firm ethno-political ground, witnessed by the ongoing violence between Kurdish rebel groups and the Turkish state as well as ethno-political and ethno-religious claims by Alevis, Armenians, Greeks, and other minority groups in the Republic. Migrant categories work in similar ways, as potential threats to the state or to Turkish ethnonational identity structures (Icduygu, Göker, Tokuzlu and Elitok 2013, p. 16):

Turkey faces a major challenge in the field of migration. Since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, migration policy has been designed within the context of nation building with the intention of establishing a homogeneous identity. Hence, immigrants without Turkish descent and culture are seen as a threat to Turkish and Muslim identity. Turkey's current ambition to become an EU member and the accompanying political liberalisation is straining the state's traditional concept of national identity.

Recently arrived migrants who identify strongly with a global religion may find alternatives, as incorporation within theological or religious structures can facilitate local opportunities in business and cultural modes of incorporation. For example, both Protestant Christians and Muslims from Nigeria are able to find robust organisational structures for practicing religion at either prominent international Protestant churches or at local mosques across Istanbul, which may be crucial for network formation and overcoming the faults in the macro-institutional structure. I have witnessed and participated in ceremonies and rituals at both Christian and Muslim venues attended by Nigerian migrants, and although both fora represent contrasting alternatives, each provide a space for migrants to attain local resources and shared knowledge(s) about opportunities in the city and in Turkey, facilitating not incorporation into a static national identity structure, but continual incorporation through transnational religious structures beyond the Turkish state.

Second, current government strategies in the area of migration do not explicitly reference identity issues, but focus more on establishing a robust and coherent legislative framework for immigration and asylum, establish a more effective system of asylum and refugee protection, bolster border security and enhance deportation processing, and provide targeted humanitarian aid to Syrians in need of protection in Turkish territory (Icduygu, Göker, Tokuzlu and Elitok 2013). While the new law on Foreigners and International Protection of April 2013 brings about a strengthening of the asylum seekers' legal position while in Turkey, the country has not given way to absorbing entrepreneurial migrants by allowing for incorporation into Turkish society. Since developments in trade and politics

between Turkey and African countries have occurred only recently (Ozkan 2012), new migration flows from African countries to Turkey have only recently begun to form an identifiable system, and it has been difficult to ascertain precisely when new entrepreneurial opportunities have emerged from these new developments. As such there is no formal policy of migrant integration which addresses newly arriving migrants, and African migrants face an uncertain legal framework within which to assert political or economic claims.

The lack of incorporation policy and its effects have been concomitant with widespread intolerance of migrants and migration policy in Turkey, especially after the recent influx of Syrian refugees. For example, public opinion regarding current immigration policy is overwhelmingly negative, with 67 per cent of Turks disapproving of the ruling party's approach to immigration (Erdogan 2014, pp. 1–2):

This situation is not surprising if the results of several surveys are compared. In the *World Values Survey* covering 51 countries, Turkey is ranked in 13th place – third on the European continent – in terms of intolerance toward immigrants and foreign workers. The results from the *Life in Transition Survey II* (LITS2), conducted in 2010, named Turkey as the most intolerant nation among 34 European and Asian countries, tied with Mongolia. The *Transatlantic Trends* 2014 Survey of the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) provides further evidence for the worsening perceptions of immigrants. According to this survey, 42 per cent of the Turkish population thinks that there are too many foreign-born people in Turkey.

The environment of intolerance boiled over into outright aggression in August 2007 when the Nigerian footballer Festus Okey was shot and killed in a Beyoglu police station, sparking a number of ongoing political demonstrations in support of migrants as well as a number of controversies surrounding the killing, including the allegation that police tampered with the evidence. In 2011 a police officer was convicted of the killing, and in 2014 a new investigation was launched to delve into allegations of tampering with the evidence. A number of other migrant rights violations have occurred in Turkey, usually while in custody or in detention, including the death of Nigerian Courage Aigbedion in 2011 in police custody after he was denied medical assistance. He had been detained after he was allegedly beaten by five men in Istanbul. Istanbul police claimed that the story was untrue, and that Courage died due to medical complications related to HIV infection, but failed to produce any evidence supporting either the claim of beating or infection. Intolerance is further evidenced in part by the mass arrival of Syrian refugees and the absence of firm structures to incorporate them, with various *ad hoc* positions and approaches playing out at the local level, which has led some to comment that there is 'increasing resentment of Syrians everywhere' in Turkey (Gokay 2014).

The environment of intolerance partly explains the low numbers of Nigerians arriving, but also hints that those who do arrive and seek entrepreneurial success gain economic ground at some personal and financial expense. Studies on African migrants in Turkey to date suggest that their labour market experience denies migrants improved occupational circumstances, especially among asylum-seekers and refugees (Brewer and Yukseker 2006; Yukseker and Brewer 2006b, 2011). Due to the harsh economic conditions, immigrants arriving in Istanbul decide to move on, and the city often figures as a place of transit for many of the migrants from the East and the South (Yukseker and Brewer 2011). While transit movements are certainly a reality that shapes many African migrants' experiences of the city (Suter 2012b), recent studies highlight that the Turkish metropolis also offers opportunities for socioeconomic mobility for African migrants, and that Turkey can increasingly be seen as a country of immigration for many migrants from the African continent (De Clerck 2013; Fait 2013). This suggests that to a limited extent migrant entrepreneurialism 'trumps' Turkish intolerance. The question whether an entrepreneurial dedication 'overrides' intolerance and leads to the creation of new organisations is

important, and to demonstrate that even in an environment of intolerance, entrepreneurs from Nigeria are gaining economic ground, has important implications for changing the macro-institutional structure in Turkey by emphasising that Nigerian migrants are positively contributing to the Turkish economy.

3.2 Urban opportunity structures: the re-structuring of commercial space in Istanbul

The Istanbul of the twenty-first century is a bustling centre of trade, a popular attraction for tourists, a regional centre of urban development and expansion (which boiled over into collective violence during the Gezi Park protests of 2013), and (important for our purposes here) a hub for both formal and informal economic practices. The high number of warehouses and the high volume of foreign trade in Istanbul have made it an attractive space to conduct business over time: in 2009 Istanbul accounted for 28 per cent of Turkish warehouses and 56 per cent of registered foreign trade (Istanbul Ticaret Odasi n.d.). The expansion of foreign trade has also paralleled migration to the city, changing its shape and character. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the beginning of the 1990s, many nationals from post-Soviet countries and from Europe found opportunities in the informal suitcase trading between Istanbul and their countries, which has spurred the transformation of commercial spaces in the city (Danis 2006; Yukseker 2004). European migrants were soon followed by North African migrants motivated to move for business by the high unemployment in their countries of origin (as well as the restrictive entry policies of the Schengen area) (Delos 2003). Entrepreneurs were steered towards the newly transformed commercial spaces of Istanbul which became synonymous with small-scale, often informal, trading opportunities. The dynamic presence of informal traders from East Europe and North Africa transformed the market place of the districts of the inner city neighbourhoods in the 1990s and 2000s, as businesses now catered to linguistic diversity and the rise of new cargo destinations. As of 2007, approximately 42,000 foreigners were registered living in Istanbul (Suter 2012b, p. 102).

Currently, Nigerian migrants are asserting themselves in the commercial spaces of the city. Respondents I spoke with were involved in actively re-shaping commercial space in Istanbul by opening new cargo shops, wholesale textile showrooms, opening call shops to improve transnational communication, or re-fashioning apartments into restaurants and lounge areas for other co-nationals or for entertaining customers. The burgeoning expansion of Nigerian entrepreneurs in the textile trade has also meant new links between the more central locations of store fronts and the peripheral locations of textile factories and production facilities: entrepreneurs and their customers now shuttle back and forth between hotel, store front, production house, cargo shop, entertainment district, and back to the hotel, as successful deals carve out new vectors of mobility and trade within Istanbul itself, making and re-making the city through expanding commercial networks across multiple economic lines.

To some extent, these immigrant entrepreneurial activities can thrive because of the informal activities employed, and because some steps in production and transaction are done in a way as to escape regulation (see also Portes and Sassen-Koob 1987). Indeed, in contemporary Turkish capitalism, informal economic practices cannot be separated from the formal economy (Kloosterman et al. 1999; Slavnic 2010). Various estimates of the size of the Turkish informal economy in general exist. The Ankara Chamber of Commerce estimated that at least 45 per cent of those working (including Turkish nationals) are informally employed, and the president of the Social Security Institution cited that 45 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was attributable to the informal economy, rounding out the point that the size of the informal economy in Turkey is robust (Icduygu 2006).

In Istanbul, the textile sector provides a good example for the inseparability of formal and informal economic activities. The sector has for a long time constituted a main share of Turkey's export products. For example, in 2001, Turkey was the world's seven largest apparel exporter and the fifteen largest textile exporter. To the EU, Turkey is the largest textile exporter and the second largest apparel exporter (Tan 2000). The informal part of the textile industry is also estimated to be large, underscoring that the textile industry in Turkey is significant. Such a large informal economic space has provided opportunities for Nigerian migrants to attain a livelihood enabled by the particular dynamics of entrepreneurship within the textile sector itself. For example, immigrant entrepreneurship often takes place in sectors that require low capital investment and educational attainments, which does not impose undue economic constraint on getting a business off the ground, but may mean that easy access ensures strong competition with others in the sector.

Nigerian migrants in Istanbul are economic actors who are embedded in and therefore act from within a net of social, legal and political structures, and who would often choose self-employment over managed wage labour (see also Saul and Pelican 2014). This view contrasts with many studies that position immigrant entrepreneurship as an enforced solution to exclusion from formal employment or as arising from a set of 'cultural' or 'ethnic' attributes of individuals. Literature on immigrant entrepreneurship in European and North American urban environments accounts for the formation of transnational social fields between two or more locations of trade even in the midst of constraint, or highlighting how stringent legal frameworks can be overcome by engaging in informal economic activities (Kloosterman et al. 1999). In the case of Nigerian migrants in Turkey, my observations lead me to hypothesise how entrepreneurial (in)formality has had a number of spatial causes and effects: (1) rather than a passive setting within which Nigerian migrants play out their social activity, the urban spaces of Istanbul actively contribute to and are actively reconstructed by the social activities of migrants (Gotham 2003); (2) entrepreneurial migrants may begin in the informal sector, spatially segregated in low-income neighbourhoods and poorly paying jobs (see the section on temporality below) but then push up and out, moving into more 'superdiverse' neighbourhoods (Biehl 2015) and into higher-paid self-employment; (3) carving out new commercial space(s) becomes important for economic entrepreneurship when both government and society fail to offer protection from rights abuse in an environment of intolerance (cf. political contestation and rights in Turam 2013). For example, in an environment of intolerance the local urban space becomes central for economic entrepreneurship, as small shops are transformed into brightly lit 'showrooms', or as hidden apartments refurbished as lounges for co-nationals serve as important sites for entrepreneurial activity to flourish; (4) migrants are able to reclaim agency through the production of entrepreneurial space in Istanbul, as they move away from low-paid informal employment to higher paid formal textile trading within transnational space, which is influenced by the spatial concentration and marginalisation of commercial textile spaces in Istanbul. Although these insights are compelling, further empirical work is needed to see how well they hold in the Istanbul case. We now turn to the specific temporal dimensions of these spatial dynamics in the following section.

3.3 Micro-level resources and strategies: time as a resource

Rather than problematising the macro-institutional framework in Turkey through active protest or formal, legal contestation, individual migrants stress changing the urban opportunity structure themselves through expanding opportunities over time. As many Nigerian migrants have come to Turkey because of economic issues at home (over half of 21 Nigerians surveyed by Brewer and Yukseker (2006a, p. 73) mentioned they decided to leave because of 'increasing economic difficulties' at home rather than attacks or threats to them or their family) time can be a crucial component in generating resources which may be lacking upon arrival. Moving from 'no job' to 'transnational trade'

can take years and progress along a number of variable paths (see Table 1 in Schapendonk 2013, pp. 2866–2867).

Due to the prevalent context of informality in which many migrants from Nigeria find themselves in Istanbul, support networks and access to them is of crucial importance. Many African migrants coming to Istanbul in the 1990s and 2000s may not have any contact in Istanbul prior to their arrival. The observed lack of strong network ties suggests that new social networks were formed by pioneering migrants, facilitating processes of entrepreneurship. James, a Nigerian man, explains the situation upon arrival:

> When I came here I didn't know anybody. I didn't know *anybody*. I came on my own… I got the plane ticket, I got a Turkish visa, and I just found myself in Turkey... And from Ataturk Airport, I took a taxi. They said 'in Taksim you'll see lots of blacks'. So I took a taxi I came to Taksim. Just like that.

James was eventually introduced to fellow Nigerians and began to live in one of the central neighbourhoods of Istanbul under what he described as difficult conditions. Indeed, social ties based on nationality have been observed to be usually the first entry ticket into a social network and thus an entrepreneurial asset: for example, Brewer and Yukseker (2006a, p. 84) find that 42.4 per cent of surveyed African migrants live with people from the same country). The generation of social and economic ties which are extended after arrival to Istanbul become particularly important to the creation of strategies which allow migrants to make a living and achieve their desired outcomes (Suter 2012a). Nevertheless, the difficult living conditions, rather than being a constraint to new opportunity, figure as an impetus for further engagement:

> But you gotta stay because you came, you know what you came for: you came for your future. You cannot go back because you spend a lot of money to come here; for the visa, for the flight ticket, for this and for that. It's expensive. So when you go back there it's like you're going back to hell. So it's better you stay here and look for your future, you understand.

In other words, difficult living conditions are not confining individuals to the margins, but may open up new horizons for change by forcing new arrivals to be 'consciously innovative' in overcoming material constraints through seeking out new opportunities that did not exist before (Kloosterman and Rath 2001, p. 192). Over time, many entrepreneurs find new avenues:

> So, nothing good comes easy. You will suffer, as time goes on, you have patience, you believe one day you'll make it. No man starts from 100. You gotta start from 1, 2, 3. You cannot jump to hundred immediately. So that's it, that's the way we started. Sometimes we don't eat; we don't have money to eat.

Time is an important component of entrepreneurship, as James points out above – making it happen in Istanbul takes patience and the aspiration that one day one will find opportunities to make it in the market. Those I spoke with often begin work in Istanbul in low-paying jobs which require long hours and demanding shifts –so-called *çabuk çabuk* work, literally 'quickly quickly' work (33 per cent of Nigerian respondents claimed they do 'odd jobs' to provide for themselves, with 38.9 per cent claiming that a lack of income is their greatest problem in Istanbul (Yukseker and Brewer 2006a, pp. 88, 90)). One respondent named Sam summarises his situation of working in an electric factory, adjusting to the urban economy and its opportunities over time (observe here the tension between non-stop, quick work without rest, and the long-term entrepreneurial strategies which take more time):

I worked there for months. It wasn't easy. It wasn't easy at all. And Turkish people they just keep on working, they tell you *çabuk çabuk*. You work, you have maybe 10 minutes or 20 minutes to eat: you eat immediately and you start the job again. You don't rest. We also did some welding work, and we took so many heavy goods other shops. You know it's a dirty job. You can never be clean, you always look dirty, because you're working non-stop. I did it for months. But one day I just decided on my own. I said 'what's this? I didn't come here for this. Even in Nigeria I'm living better than this'. I decided to stop and find something else, even if I go hungry.

Later, after deciding to quit, Sam found himself becoming engaged in the cargo trade, beginning through using local ties to expand his opportunities:

I started by walking around the streets, seeing maybe some friends, maybe someone can say hi. Just like that. And slowly, slowly I got a friend who got office, this kind of cargo office, so from there he said, 'C'mon you can start working with me. Slowly, slowly you can see what's going on, you can see what this business looks like, and if you wish to carry on with the business, it depends on you. If you wish to start another business, it depends on you'. I said, 'Ok it's a very good idea'. I started with him running some errands. Sometimes when he got some customers I took them around, took them to some clothing factories, we bought some clothes, we brought them back to the office, after I took them back to their hotels… You know like an errand boy, and from there I got $10, $20, $30 a day, you know.

Sam's experience began to change as he began to form more network ties within the textile industry. Over time he was able to stabilise his situation through a variety of strategies and ties, improving his socio-economic conditions locally, but embedded in transnational social networks of trade which further enhanced his opportunities for starting a new business (as we will see shortly). In the beginning, migrants in Istanbul are dependent more on immediate friends and family and less on friends and family in other countries who are more distant and harder to provide direct support. Over time, however, transnational ties expand, leading to a larger transnational network, like in Sam's case:

Sometimes we meet new customers on the street. Sometimes through your friends, your contacts in Africa, if someone wanna come here or you know someone that wanna come here, they call, 'I got a friend, I got someone coming here to buy goods. Do you know about some goods, can you take care of him, or her?' You say 'OK, I will take care of him or her', they give you their phone number or email address. When he comes once and he sees everything is good, that you are a good man, that he can trust you, you have quality [of goods] that is good, then he will choose to always come through you. That's it. That's it… You just have to know (…) the tricks, how to make the clients, happy, not to lose them, you know. Just take them around where they can buy good things they want, and give them your trust, let them trust you. Sometimes they can be in Africa, and send a huge sum of money to you, then you buy here and you send to them. It doesn't matter, they don't get scared, maybe you using the money or anything, you just send the amount they send to you, you do the things, you buy the things, and sell to them, and they get gain to, and you get gain to, it's the same for them.

Over time Sam developed contacts within the cargo business which spread beyond Istanbul and back to Africa. As his position within transnational social space improved through contacts in the cargo shop, so did his condition in Istanbul – he started his own business in cargo, building on his experiences

and ties which he built up over time. Sam, and many others like him, has mobilised social and material resources over time to stabilise and begin to improve income opportunities, leading to his own business – a process of entrepreneurship. By opening a new business he creates new structural conditions which can help improve the conditions of newcomers, while looking towards improved conditions of those already present:

> There are new people too. They are learning from us, we teach them. Because when we came here too, we got some people that have more than us and we stayed together in the neighbourhood… So now, after we have made it ourselves, wearing the shoes of those people who had already made it, we are helping the people coming up too… So that's life, it's not easy at first, but as time goes on it gets better.

Because of the previous work of pioneer migrants, newly arrived migrants can improve their occupational circumstances in business or trading enterprises. Newcomers can build on the entrepreneurial endeavours of the old, as the opportunity structures change to provide for new migrants. Over time migrants gain new skills and knowledge which are passed onto newcomers, facilitating their occupational mobility. The metaphor of a tree is used to describe this process: as earlier migrants move up the tree, newer migrants begin at the bottom and begin to work their way up to the top, just as the earlier migrants did before them, and helping the tree to grow. As earlier migrants become more upwardly mobile, they change the structural conditions, growing the tree, so that newcomers have the same opportunities for upward mobility, thus facilitating transnational migration as well as transnational social mobility and entrepreneurship. In other words, prolonged stays in Istanbul facilitate the creation of businesses and the opportunity structure for incoming migrants, leading to improvements in local and transnational upward mobility and more opportunity for migration and immigrant entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship takes time, and moving from *çabuk çabuk* work which is under-paid, to steady work which provides a better income, and finally to owning one's own business, sometimes takes years. Devising strategies to navigate the opportunity structures of the urban informal economy takes patience and daily networking, expanding transnational networks of trade, and re-shaping commercial space. Thus, the social characteristics of Istanbul (its economic structure, employment options in the formal and informal labour markets, and transnational economic trends in trade between Turkey and Nigeria) influence entrepreneurial opportunities as they change over time, defining opportunities for entrepreneurship locally and determining the possibilities for accumulating capital transnationally.

3.4 Discussion and synthesis: Nigerian migrants as agents of change?

The analysis of the three structural scales above shows that the changing urban and national economies offer new opportunities and constraints for Nigerian migrants to start businesses in Turkey. Although the opportunities for Nigerian migrants to create a successful business in Istanbul have historically remained limited, shifts in macro- and meso-institutional structures are providing new opportunities for Nigerian entrepreneurs. It is likely that over time Nigerian entrepreneurs will begin to settle in larger numbers in Istanbul, and may relocate themselves around the country, opening new opportunities for themselves and re-shaping entrepreneurial opportunities for newcomers. As time is an important component in the conception of mixed embeddedness given here, alternative pathways to entrepreneurship may arise (or have arisen) which are not covered by the limited data and analysis presented here, as medium- and long-term temporal dynamics have not been yet observed.

Under the mixed embeddedness framework, we would expect that those migrants with less initial capital could move into self-started business activity over time as resources and networks expand. This expectation was met in some cases as respondents moved from a position of inexpensive labour to a more active role as an entrepreneur within the textile sector of Istanbul, even in an environment of intolerance and lack of regulation. The narrative of the down-and-out Nigerian migrant moving into a more stable economic position and contributing to the local economy is in contrast to the public perception of Nigerians in Turkey. Rather than adopting the mass media portrayal of Nigerian migrants in Turkey as criminal and victimised by injustice, I have employed the mixed embeddedness framework to demonstrate that Nigerian migrant entrepreneurs are actively shaped by and re-shape commercial opportunities in Istanbul, reclaiming agency through the creation of new business organisations over time. This narrative is in stark contrast to popular images of Nigerians in Turkey and emphasises the agency of Nigerian migrants to affect change against the odds.

Nigerian entrepreneurs represent an important case of newcomers to Turkey, and as newcomers have occupied new roles in the expanding economy of Istanbul. Given the admittedly limited observations analysed above however, we can still claim that the demographic and economic profile of African migrants in Turkey is changing, and urban, national, and transnational contexts of embedded economic activity will remain significant to understanding entrepreneurial activities of newly arriving migrants. The relationships between urban space, individual time-scales, and entrepreneurial activity will remain important indicators of business growth for newly arriving African migrants. However, as business growth expands, dependence on co-ethnics within the textile markets of Istanbul may give rise to new forms of co-ethnic competition, squeezing out some while rewarding others. If Nigerian businesses expand beyond their marginal position, then new relations between space, time, and opportunity may arise, squeezing or straining some while rewarding others. In other words, Nigerian migrants are occupying important new roles as agents of change in Istanbul, but due to their marginal position, the effects of their entrepreneurial activities may be limited. More expansive change can occur if a) the macro-institutional climate of intolerance shifts towards embracing new ethnonational categories of difference, leading to expanded opportunities for migrants in general; b) new economic spaces or regulatory frames giving privilege to migrant entrepreneurial activity arise in Istanbul, drawing entrepreneurs out of marginal spaces into other mainstream economic activities outside of the textile sector (such as industry, construction, transport, or communications for example), and/or c) individual migrants devise new strategies and garner new resources to expand entrepreneurial activity beyond specific market sectors.

4 Conclusion

This article has argued that Nigerian migrants are benefitting from expanded economic opportunities in Istanbul even with little formal state benefits or structures of incorporation at the urban or national level. As such, it builds on the literature on mixed embeddedness by drawing on multiple geographical and temporal scales as well as highlighting the absence of state policies in explaining immigrant entrepreneurship in an environment of intolerance. Nevertheless, Nigerian entrepreneurs in Istanbul need significant amounts of time to move out of low-paid wage-work into opening a business.

Returning to our initial questions, can we think of Nigerian entrepreneurship in Istanbul as a typical case of mixed embeddedness within a newly globalising economy, or are we witnessing something new? Given the environment of intolerance, the size of the urban informal economy, and Turkey's rising position within the global economy, we could see Nigerian migrants exploring similar opportunities in other developing countries such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), Central or Eastern Europe, or other MINT countries such as Mexico or Indonesia, whereby

they enter into low-wage informal work and build their way towards opening new businesses. As increasing numbers of immigrants from BRICS or MINT countries are moving to other newly industrialising and developing economies, we could expect that new entrepreneurs will set up in specific sectors of the urban economy that have a low threshold which allow for (potentially limited) upward mobility within an expanding transnational economy (cf. Kloosterman 2010). In other words, even within environments of intolerance and limited regulatory frameworks, migrants from developing countries who are moving to other developing countries may benefit from an expanded transnational market structure and create their own new (limited) openings, shaping the opportunity structure for new immigrants, just as we have observed when immigrants move to advanced urban economies (cf. Kloosterman and Rath 2001). Cross-national variations in migrant entrepreneurship across BRICS and MINT countries could be a promising new avenue of further research.

'What then of the concept of mixed embeddedness?' ask Barrett, Jones and McEvoy (2001, p. 254). The empirical focus of mixed embeddedness on advanced post-industrial economies has provided important insight into how migrants from developing economies are expanding business opportunities in more developed economies. However, addressing how both low- and high-skilled migrants from developing economies are re-shaping opportunities in other developing economies can deepen our understanding of entrepreneurship while enriching the concept of mixed embeddedness. The current study attempts to chart some exploratory insights concerning low-skilled migrants from Nigeria migrating to Turkey, and argues that Nigerian migrants are expanding business opportunities over time within an environment of informality, low regulation, and ethnonational intolerance in a newly globalising economy. Understanding how these variations of mixed embeddedness play out in other contexts of developing economies could be the focus of future work.

Three further questions arise from the present work: (1) will entrepreneurial activities endure to the second generation (Rusinovic 2008)?; (2) can we link the mixed embedded framework address questions of rights and are the spatial and temporal aspects of urban entrepreneurship a means to involve diaspora in host country economics and politics, seeking political and economic representation and rights at urban and national scales?, (3) are the spatial and temporal aspects of urban entrepreneurship a means by which diaspora can pursue development or economic matters in their home countries? Future work could scrutinise the spatial and temporal linkages between urban entrepreneurship and a) transnational entrepreneurial activities of the second generation of migrants; b) the pursuit of economic and political rights in Turkey, and c) how diaspora pursue development initiatives in Nigeria. Further studies could focus on inter-generational mobility as migrants begin to settle in Turkey over time, following familiar or unique patterns of entrepreneurship. Answering these questions may require integrating the mixed embeddedness approach with the literature on incorporation or diaspora development, and may also offer important opportunities to extend the mixed embeddedness approach to rights-seeking in host countries and development initiatives in home countries.

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