Ankara Üniverstesi
SBF Dergisi
Cilt 68, No. 1, 2013, s. 21-38.

AFRICAN MIGRATIONS TOWARD TURKEY: BEYOND THE STEPPING STONE

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Abstract

The notion of transit migration emerged in policy discourse during the 1990s. Various meanings have been assigned to the notion of transit migrant or transit migration'. In this paper we argue that these are constructed categories which are unable to address fully, or to describe, a range of complex experiences, political contexts and global realities. We first argue that the construction of transit has primarily taken place within the context of European securitization policy. We next expose the limits of such a construction in the light of African migrant experiences in Turkey. Our empirical data shows that while the category of transit migrant generated out of the European securitization agenda can fit some of these experiences, there are also distinctive African migrant experiences in Turkey which cannot be easily included in this category and thus, it becomes an overloaded category. Furthermore, we aim to highlight what we identify as a new migratory system between Turkey and Africa, these modalities of operation and the expected changes for Turkey.

Keywords : Transit, African migrants, Turkey, European securitization, Migratory system

Özet

1990'lı yılların siyasi söyleminde ortaya çıkan 'transit göç' veya 'transit göçmen' kavramlarına çeşitli anlamlar yüklenmiştir. Biz bu makalede, bir dizi karmaşık tecrübeyi, siyasi bağlamı ve küresel gerçekliği tam olarak işaret etmekte veya tanımlamakta kifayetsiz kalan söz konusu kavramların inşa edilmiş kategoriler olduklarını savunuyoruz. İlk olarak transitin inşasının Avrupa güvenlik politikası çerçevesinde cereyan etmiş olduğunu gösteriyoruz. Daha sonra Türkiye'deki Afrikalı göçmenlerin tecrübeleri ışığında bu kavramın sınırlarını gözler önüne seriyoruz. Elde ettiğimiz ampirik verilere dayanarak, Avrupa güvenlik gündeminin bir sonucu olarak ortaya çıkan transit göçmen kategorisinin bu tecrübelerin bir kısmına uygun düşmekle beraber hatırı sayılır diğer bir kısmının ise bu başlık altına sıkıştırılamayacağını; dolayısıyla bu kategorinin aşırı yüklenmiş bir hal aldığını söylüyoruz. Ayrıca, Türkiye ile Afrika arasında gelişen, yeni bir göç sistemi olarak tanımladığımız sürecin, harekât biçimlerinin ve Türkiye için beklenen değişikliklerin altını çiziyoruz.

Anahtar Sözcükler : Transit, Afrikalı göçmenler, Türkiye, Avrupa güvenlik politikası, göç sistemi

African migrations toward Turkey: beyond the stepping stone

Introduction

Following the securitization of the European Union borders, the generalization of visa procedure for Schengen and some internal facts in Sub-Saharan countries (political and economical instability, such as a decline in purchasing power), the migratory system has recomposed itself and it is hardly possible to think of it in terms of the two components emigration/immigration (Bredeloup & Pliez, 2005: 3). This new migratory system implies a range of countries on the edge of a closed European Union, often called Fortress Europe by the critics whether they are academics, media or NGOs. Therefore, a range of countries is perceived as a buffer zone where migrants are either stuck or using the country as a stepping stone to Europe. Many scholars have studied cases of migrants "staying" in countries between sub-Saharan Africa and Europe[1], trying to move away from the stereotyped couple emigration/immigration and from the "blurred and politicized" notion of transit (Düvell, 2012: 415). In this context, Turkey has been perceived and is mainly perceiving itself as a transit country. Although Turkey is located in an outlying position for those routes, African migrants are also going there for both external and internal reasons which we will try to understand. Scholars who studied the subject locate the beginning of the African migrations toward Turkey in the middle of the 90's, a phenomenon which was at first very uncommon and scanty. During the last decade, it turns out to be a lasting component of this migratory system, implying a "new deal" to be studied by scholars[2]. In this article, we aim to understand how transit as a notion works to describe this new phenomenon. In the first part we will expose a critical approach of the notion of transit, showing how it assumes a peculiar view on migration and receiving countries. We will try to understand how it serves a politicized idea of migrants, migrations and countries crossed by those migrations. In the second part, with our data collected by a qualitative method of data fieldwork, we will show the limits of this notion. Indeed, we argue that migrants from sub-Saharan countries are not using only Turkey as a stepping stone on their journey. Finally, we will draft a typology showing different experiences which do not fit into the notion of transit, and thus we will point that Turkey cannot only be seen as a stepping stone country in the case of sub-Saharan migrants experiences.

1 Here a selection of authors : Lisa Anteby-Yemini (2008); Hassen Boubakri and Sylvie Mazzella (2005); Jocelyne Streiff-Fénart and Philippe Poutignat (2008); Julien Brachet, Armelle Choplin and Olivier Pliez (2011); Eleonora Castagnone (2011).

2 Such as : Kelly Brewer and Deniz Yükseker (2009); Brigitte Suter (2012); Joris Schapendonk (2011); Nicolas Fait (2010); Nil Delahaye (2011).

Variation of definitions from officials to academics

As Frank Düvell argues, institutions have not been able to agree on a common definition of what transit migration might mean. For instance: the Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union in Geneva describes transit migrants as "aliens who stay in the country for some period of time while seeking to migrate permanently to another country" (Düvell, 2005). Some ten years earlier, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe described transit migration as "migration in one country with the intention of seeking the possibility there to emigrate to another country as the final country of destination" (UNECE, 1993). The Council of Europe placed the same emphasis on intention in their definition of a transit migrant "a foreign national in a legal or irregular situation whose intention is to leave his or her current country of residence 'as soon as possible' in order to reach a third country" (CoE, 2004). The IOM, on the other hand, posits that "transit migrants are migrants who come to a country of destination with the intention of going and staying in another country" (IOM, 1995). Whatever the variation, however, these descriptive definitions tend to naturalize the categories "transit migrant" and "transit migration", thus erasing from view their constructed nature and the political purposes they serve to which we now turn (Collyer, 2012: 407).

The notion of transit migrant was employed mostly by international organizations and European agencies in a context marked by the development of immigration as a securitised issue (Huysmans, 2000: 751, Bigo, 2002: 63, Buznan, 1998). In this context the transit migrant is uniformly framed as illegal, normally from the South, the transit migrant is constructed to represent a threat for the state. This "threat" then legitimizes the putting forward of a migration policy for the EU, entailing preventative measures and an optimization of border surveillance (e.g. Frontex agency). This framing process reduces the transit migrant to an illegal, part of an anonymous collective entity purportedly seeking to enter the EU. The sense that transit migrants are invariably "on their way to Europe" is central to the manner in which the notion is used in institutional discourse. So-called transit countries refer almost exclusively to countries bordering the EU thus omitting any reference to the phenomenon occurring among EU member states or the domestic politics of so-called transit countries. In this sense one could argue that transit countries and transit migration are political techniques which support the expansion of a securitization agenda largely in European interests. Thus arguably, the transit migrant category is embedded within a larger discourse that legitimizes the externalization of European migration and asylum policy. This process of externalization has the effect of deterritorialising the European border so that migration control policy begins well before the European common border.

Having explored the way in which transit migration has been employed as a political technique, we now turn to conceptual problems that arise if we are to treat transit migration as a scientific concept. Düvell notes how the definitions of transit emphasize intention as a determining factor which raises the question as to how we should measure this intention. For example, should the person have made concrete efforts such as saving money to continue his or her migrant journey, or, Düvell asks whether transit has to be "actual" at all or can it remain as a state of mind (Düvell, 2005)? How can a focus on intention take account of migrants changing motivations – whether that be in view of their social-political context or personal experiences, migrants' motivations are not static. Furthermore, academics have pointed out that the question of temporality is insufficiently addressed in institutional discourse; while it tends to emphasize the individual's desire to move "as quickly as possible", at no point are we informed of what exactly this entails. Migrant journeys are often long and made up of stages so how can we distinguish between temporary settlement and transit migration? Indeed, some individuals might have initially regarded themselves as transiting through a country before moving on to another, but in the end preferred to stay put; maybe they

thought it too risky to cross the border or found decent economic opportunities, so no longer felt the need to continue their migration journey. Collyer and de Hass emphasize the way in which transit migration implies migration as a linear process "with fixed starting and ending points" that render the transit space as a "through" space. They prefer to conceptualize this process as one of fragmented journeys (Collyer and Hass, 2012: 468). Transit migration has been also understood as a process. Papadopoulou points out that, while intentions are important in the migration process, this interplays with other factors such as the structural context in the first reception country and available migrant networks (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2004: 167). In this sense she views transit migration as a process rather than a status; it is a state of unstable residence that may or may not lead to further migration. She suggests that transit migration sits somewhere between migration and settlement. This notion resonates with some of the testimonies we gathered, however, we feel it does not sufficiently capture the complex and varying forms of settlement to which those migrations may sometimes belong.

A further difficulty lies in whether transit migrants are an overarching category comprised of irregular migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (awaiting resettlement) or whether this category should only be used regarding irregular migrants. Thus transit migration is an analytically problematic concept; its blurriness endeavors to make up for the heterogeneous experiences it tries to encompass; it artificially fixes individuals intentions and opportunities without taking into account the dynamic and changing nature of migrant processes. The problematic nature of the concept grows even larger when we look at a so-called 'transit country'.

Turkey: over the transit country

Turkey has been mainly perceived as an emigration country, but recently Turkey has been frequently described as transit country. Some current evolutions might change or at least complexify the situation. Regarding asylum and migration policies, a number of important changes are taking place in Turkey, some of them as part of the Turkey-EU negotiations to align its migration and asylum policy with the Schengen acquis: Firstly, while Turkish authorities have highlighted the vast and mountainous territorial borders (notably with Iran and Iraq) as a key factor in explaining the difficulties of controlling irregular migration, EU actors emphasize Turkey's liberal visa regime for so called "high risk" countries, including numerous African states, whose nationalities score highly among irregular migrants in the EU. Secondly, it is argued that Turkey's asylum regime needs reforming, particularly in respect to the geographical limitation she has imposed on the Geneva Convention so that only Europeans have the right to settle in Turkey when accepted as refugees. In this situation, other nationalities are able to apply for asylum in Turkey but can only ever be considered as asylum seekers and must be resettled to a third country. In addition, refugee determination and resettlement process is long and arduous, lasting anything between one and ten years, in which individuals have no or very little access to social assistance. Furthermore, asylum seekers in Turkey are designated a satellite city, often in parts of Turkey with little opportunities for informal labor and scarce NGO assistance. If they leave their satellite city, this can result in the loss of their asylum seeker status. Arguably, this situation pushes many individuals to try to make it to Europe, where conditions during the refugee determination process are supposedly superior. Thirdly, Turkey's immigration policy, or lack of one, means that it is virtually impossible to acquire Turkish nationality (outside of marrying a Turkish citizen and the full application of the settlement law – *İskan Kanunu*; law n° 5543, articles 5-7, 14) and although, under certain conditions, formally certain individuals can obtain a work permit, there are many obstacles in practice, such as the obligation to hold a resident permit and to find a sponsorship (Alp, 2004) (*Yabancıların Çalışma İzinleri Hakkında Kanun*; law n° 4817). It is foreseen that the new law relative to the status of

foreigners in Turkey (*Yabancılar ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu*) will change some conditions, especially for refugees who will be then allowed to get work permits, education for their children and easier access to health care (Foça, 2012). We have here drawn to attention how the evolution of the Turkish policy on asylum and migrations questions the status of transit country for Turkey. Moreover, we will see that a new foreign policy toward Africa implies a range of migrations that cannot be contained in the label of "transit country".

Turkey and Africa: a new migratory field?

In a context in which Turkey's foreign policy opens and diversifies and in which Turkey-Africa relations deepen, African migrants in Turkey provide an interesting example to explore these questions. We argue that the link between foreign policies and migrants policies in Turkey has already an impact on African migrants' decision making process. The growing trade, the humanitarian and political policies with Africa has already included a renewed discussion on conditions of asylum and residence for African migrants (Baird, 2011). A new direction in Turkish foreign policy towards Africa began with Turkish foreign policy becoming more open and keen to develop partnerships with new countries (especially with African countries). This development is quite new, although the Ottoman Empire had strong links with Africa – both North and sub-Saharan – it is commonly accepted that the period 1923-1998 was at its lowest in terms of relations between sub-Saharan Africa and the Republic of Turkey (Özkan and Akgün, 2010: 525). This long period of low activity between the two regions came to an end in 1998, when Turkey adopted a new policy document called the "Opening up to Africa Policy" and took a real turn when Turkey announced "The Year of Africa" (Özkan, 2008: 1). This document aimed to develop economic and political relationships, with Turkey committed to supporting development in agriculture, construction and defense and African countries committing to the purchase of goods and contracts with Turkish companies. For instance Ethiopia is the biggest importer of Turkish goods in Sub-Saharan Africa. Besides Ethiopia and Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Congo and Kenya are the leading countries that Turkey is targeting for heightened relations. Turkey is also well known for its involvement in African conflicts (e.g. Somalia) and development in the continent (The Turkish cooperation and development agency – known under the acronym *TIKA* – is settled in five African countries, mostly situated in the Horn of Africa and seeks to extend its representations). In terms of diplomatic matters, Turkey tends to develop its representation abroad in countries from Sub-Saharan Africa. Turkey opened eight new embassies in those countries bringing the total number of abroad diplomatic representation up to twenty. The former minister of foreign affairs Ali Babacan claimed that, in such a context of relationships, Turkey would open fifteen new embassies in Africa (Turkey-Africa cooperation summit, 2008). This is followed by the development of the airlines' destinations between Turkey and sub-Saharan Africa. Futhermore, most sub-Saharan nationals can apply for a short term visa and travel legally (even if the visa will then be overstayed). These new relations are not sparse any more and it implies a new status for Turkey in decision making for sub-Saharan migrants, a phenomenon we have observed during our field work and that we are now going to underline with our empirical material.

Migrant intentions: beyond the stepping stone

We will now turn to our empirical data (interviews with migrants from Congo, Eritrea, Nigeria, Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Sudan, Cameroon, Guinea, Rwanda and Senegal) to see what challenges it presents for the coherence of the transit migrant/country categories. This material has been selected in order to draw attention to some findings particulary interesting for our study.

The field study was conducted in Istanbul for six months (first semester of 2012), combining various qualitative data collecting processes into a "policy of field work" (Olivier de Sardan, 2006). First, in-situ observation was conducted in several associations dealing with migrants and refugees, but it was also conducted in neighborhoods where the migrants I was working with were living. Then, a system of data collection was made up in order to understand migrants' intentions and shift in intentions during the journey. So far, 16 people have been interviewed with an in-depth methodological perspective (interview and informal discussion for a period of 4/5 months), and furthermore, 13 punctual interviews were made (with no chance to be renewed). Most of the material we present here is from the repeated in-depths interviews, except for **K.G.C**, **A.E** and **C.S**. One of the clearest biases of this study lies in the fact that it is arduous to control the samples. People were not only chosen for their age, gender, education level or any kind of variable, but mainly because they were interested in the research project or keen to talk about their personal experience. Thus, the gender was the most important bias, especially because women were more willing to take part in informal discussions and/or punctual interviews. Yet, the relevance of the samples remains suitable for a comprehensive questioning relative to the sub-Saharan migrations toward Turkey. The period of time in which the study has taken place has clearly determined those biases. A longer and broader study (within my thesis, currently being led) will respond to these questions more accurately.

Our data demonstrates how Turkey is increasingly considered as a country for settlement (maybe not at first) and as a target country (intentional since the beginning of the journey), by means of both legal and illegal stay. This was particularly so where countries had growing economies and partnerships with Turkey (such as consular representation) and the possibility to get a visa easily (Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Senegal, Ethiopia...). But firstly, we will acknowledge that the "stepping stone" status of Turkey is not a myth at all.

1. The "stepping stone" at first

Many sub-Saharan migrants do not expect to stay in Turkey. They come in Turkey by plane or by road, with a visa or not. Some of them will seek asylum (and thus be legal for their time in Turkey) while some others will not. We argue here that intentions can change during the journey. Thus, the decision making process is more complicated than the notion of "transit" would let appear. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that many migrants do not change their mind and continue their journey toward the EU. We met during our field work **F.N, from Nigeria**, who appears to be a clear example of this phenomenon. He came to Turkey recently (end of March 2012). He flew from Nigeria after most of his close relatives died in a church Bokom Haram had set on fire. He went from Nigeria to Gambia, and then from Gambia to Iran, countries he chose because of visa opportunities. Then he crossed the Turkish-Iranian border with smugglers. He had frost bite in his toes during the journey in the mountains and the toes were amputated in Istanbul two weeks after the events.

"*I didn't want to stay too long in Iran. I had the contact to go to Turkey with other migrants through the mountains between the two countries. We knew it was dangerous and really cold, but you know, I had never seen snow so far, so I couldn't really realize. Now, I don't have the choice, I have to stay here until my feet heal. But I can't afford to stay here too long. Because I have no family left in Nigeria, I don't want to go back. I really want to carry on my journey, go to Greece and then I will see.*"

Because **F.N** knew his case has very little chance of succeeding in the UN process, he kept planning to go further. During the same interview, he asked many questions about Greece and even

asked if we knew a network of migrants organizing smuggling to Greece (*"About Greece, do you know people going to, do you have a contact?"*). Even if his wounds were still healing, he kept thinking of continuing. This interview was conducted in April and **F.N** has since tried to cross the border twice. We cannot deny that Turkey is being used as a stepping stone to the EU as Iran was before in **F.N**'s journey'. Furthermore, we argue that some facts such as racial discrimination, exploitation, extreme poverty, no health care, lack of solidarity among migrant networks amount to daily struggles for many of our interviewees. This situation and the lack of perspectives for legal long-term stay do push some migrants to seek to cross the border to the EU. After saying so, we would like to highlight another side of sub-Saharan migrations towards Turkey.

2. Strategies (part 1). Football as a trigger in decision making

Many African migrants coming to Turkey hope to find a great contract with a sports team, mainly in football but also in basketball or in athletics. This is the case of **H.N, from Nigeria**, who arrived in Turkey in November 2010. He came by plane with a visa which he has since overstayed.

"*I lived in the east part of Nigeria, in the Ebony state. I really wanted to try to move on, there is nothing to do in Nigeria. No job, no money. I heard that football players were having some opportunities to get recruited in Turkey. Many people told me it would be easy for me. I got interested in this and I met someone, a football manager, who arranged everything for me. He got me a tourist visa and gave me some contacts in Istanbul. When I arrive in Istanbul, it turned out that those contacts were people like me, they were all waiting to get recruited. I soon realized that it wouldn't be that easy, but I didn't want to go back."*

Just as Europe is an idyll (a place of safety and employment) for some migrants trying to get there, so too is Turkey for some Africans. Many young Nigerians are seeking an easy mobility to go abroad and make some "hot cash" (Adesina, 2007) with different strategies in which football takes an important place. Of course most people are not going to be recruited as football players but this first intention is a great trigger for decision making. In the same manner, we could have mentioned the testimony of four Ethiopians looking for opportunities in athleticism. In such a context, Turkey is perceived as a country with fairly easy legal access and in which you will find many economic opportunities. This challenges the Eurocentric thrust in European policy discourse which presumes that Turkey is conceived of as a stepping stone to the EU.

3. Strategies (part 2). Marrying into citizenship?

Because there are very few possibilities to have a non-precarious status for migrants (even with a residence permit, it is still hard to get the work permit), some are tempted to get them by marriage. **H.N, from Nigeria,** (same as above) is wondering about getting married as a strategy.

"*I'm still trying with football,* but so far, *it didn't work, I'm trying to get things all right. It's not easy. My girlfriend is helping me (...) But I don't want to marry her, I'm afraid I will not be able to do what I want, to loose my freedom. But many of my friends are trying to get married, most of them for the papers.*"

Thus, marriage is a way to gain all the rights a Turkish citizen would be granted. We have not met during our field work migrants with full citizenship (because the process takes three years in Turkey) but we can already foresee the great change this will produce in the process of self identification for Turkish citizens. The citizenship has been granted to very few migrants, most of them recognized as *soydaş* (literally congener, identified as Turks) (Danış and Parla, 2009: 131).

Nevertheless, marriage remains somehow an isolated phenomenon probably due to the fact that most of them are arranged. Many migrants refer to this practice with abhorrence and are more keen to rely on easier ways to get legal status, by buying the *ikamet* (residence permit) and/or benefiting from the protection of the UN as asylum seekers (the UN provides papers for all migrants applying for the refugee status).

4. Migrant unintentional settlement

We found that for some of our respondents, Turkey was neither a preconceived "final" destination, nor a transit country – rather, they came to Turkey by chance. As we have discussed above, intention is never easily captured in migrant trajectories because they include stories of adaptation, flexibility and possibility as well as restrains and obstacles. This is the case of **A.E, from Ethiopia**, who arrived in Turkey in 2008 after having crossed the Syrian border.

"*Many Ethiopian girls like me are taking the road to Europe or whatever richer country. I first went to Lebanon by plane because I knew that I could get a visa and work as a maid. I stayed in Lebanon for la little bit more than a year. I gathered some money and continue my travel. Because I had lost my passport, I had to go to Syria and then to Turkey, walking over the borders of the two countries. Since, I came to Istanbul and find the same job here."*

For migrants such as this, Turkey evolved as a place of settlement and this has much to do with the informal labor market opportunities, as well as the geographic position of Turkey. For individuals fleeing persecution, Turkey is not a preconceived final destination, but a stage in the migration process as they seek a place of safety. While Turkey is not conceived of as a "safe" destination, many migrants use Turkey as a stage in the migration process to earn money to pay the smuggler for the next stage, many of whom however get stuck there as the Turkey-EU border becomes increasingly insurmountable. Considering the lack of social assistance for asylum seekers and the difficulties in securing legal right to employment, individuals are compelled to find niches in the informal labor market which incidentally facilitate a kind of de facto integration (Danış, 2006). **M.S, from Sudan**, arrived in Turkey in April 2006. He came by boat from Libya after a long fragmented journey.

"*I left the Darfur in 2004. It was getting to dangerous. I started my journey from the eastern part of Darfur and with other refugees we went to Lybia and had to go trough the desert of sands. We had to stay in Tripoli to wait for the next boat going to Italia. The first smugglers I paid didn't came, it was a scam. I had to stay in Tripoli for four more months to gather some money. When I manage to get a boat from Tripoli, it was suppose to go to Italia, but this is a Turkish flag that we saw on the shore. We knew that some smugglers were going to Turkey because it was easier. The price of the travel was cheaper as well, still I paid the price for Italia.*"

Over time, **M.S** appears to have more or less "integrated" in Turkey after six years. Working as a translator, he can afford a resident's permit and does not plan to move forward to Europe. He claims he has enough money for himself and can even manage to send some money to his family.

5. Getting stuck in Turkey

The geographical restriction that Turkey applies to the Geneva Convention has created a very peculiar situation. Most migrants apply at the UNHCR and wait for the interviews for years before having a clear answer. Here is one testimony from **G.R, from Rwanda,** who came to Turkey 20 years ago:

"*It took me three years to be accepted as an asylum seeker and another 5 years before I was given refugee status. But for what? I am still waiting to be resettled, Canada didn't want me, we will see what the US will say... it is a policy of discouragement. They make you wait and wait, even people who have been given refugee status, they get fed up so they cross the border illegally and go to Europe.*"

While this testimony draws attention to the way in which the Turkish asylum regime in some cases favors transit migration, what is more interesting is the way in which it illustrates the blurriness between migrant categories and notions of legal and illegal migration. A recognized refugee in Turkey "stuck" in the system can become illegal from the frustration of waiting. On a different note, contrary to the widely held view that transit migrants enter the transit country illegally with the help of a human smuggler, our research shows that in the case of sub-Saharan migrants many come with a short term tourist visa, some of whom fall into irregularity when it expires. The picture is much more complex and a black and white analogy of legal/illegal or economic migrant/asylum seeker.

6. Turkey as an entrepreneurial space

Turkey is seen by some migrants as a country of economic opportunities. Turkish economic growth and the Ahmet Davutoğlu "good neighbor" foreign policy has allowed economic relations to develop between various African countries and Turkey. Because work permits are not granted easily, most migrants are working illegally, a situation which is relatively tolerated. **J.T, from Tanzania**, arrived in 2008 in Turkey, by road. He first went to India by plane and then continued on to Turkey by crossing Pakistan and Iran (in which he stayed respectively 8 months, 1 month and 4 months).

"*At first it was not easy to live in Turkey. No work, no safe place to stay, you don't understand the language, you don't know what to do for the papers.... Now it's easier for me, I learned Turkish, and I have some contacts with people from Tanzania coming to Turkey only to buy textile and send it back to Africa. I take them to some place I know to buy the textil, I translate from Turkish to English or Swahili for the bargaining and then I take them to Osmanbey or Kumkapı where cargo companies are to charter the textiles. It really has improved my conditions of living."*

Because **J.T** has no contract, he works as a middleman for buyers coming from Tanzania. From other sources of our fields work, African buyers mainly send textiles, spare parts (car lights for instance) and even bigger articles such as building material. Skilled work can have different faces as the testimony of **K.G.C, from Guinea**, appears to indicate. He arrived in Turkey in 2006 when he was still a minor. He does not want to talk about his situation with the UNHCR, nor want to talk about his legal situation, but he is very talkative when it comes to his jobs. Because he speaks fluent French, English and Turkish, he worked out a way to work as an informal tourist guide:

"I learned Turkish in the streets. At first I was working in Laleli, or Dolapere, making shoes, pants or any kind of textil works. When I realized my Turkish was good enough, I started to go in tourist places to offer tourists to help shopping, to take them to some nice places. It works because the official guides are too expensive. On the other hand I would better not get caught because of course I have no license."

Those specific kinds of work need skills and are not accessible to new arrivals. The knowledge of the language and of the city (places where tourists or buyers might want to go) is, therefore, a true asset for migrants and, indeed, among our sample are migrants who are growing

their acquisition of these skills. Some others have developed skills and networks, both local and international, and are willing to construct a wider project. **J.T, from Tanzania** (same as above) has spent 4 years in Turkey and reckons he has succeeded. With the help of the IOM (see the AVR program), he is thinking of going back home and developing a business between his country and Turkey. He considers Turkey as a country with a "*booming economy*" and considers that he has enough skills and resources to start a business.

"*I am thinking to go back home. I miss my family, I miss my place, Zanzibar. My travel has been long enough, I've done enough. But my plans are not to give up. I am going to keep a link with Turkey, I want to start my own business. Maybe gem and jewels. I have a contact in Zanzibar and some others in Turkey. I am sure it will work."*

A quite similar testimony is the one from **C.S, a Senegalese** woman who arrived in Istanbul in October 2011. She came first in order to buy clothes for the markets of Dakar and Paris. When the riots took place in Dakar at the end of the year 2011, her shop was set on fire. She decided to go to Turkey to start a textile business between France, Senegal and Turkey. She was thinking of applying for the resident permit to avoid overstaying her visa.

"*Of course I would like to go to France. I have many friends over there. But for the moments I am planning to stay in Istanbul for a while. Textile is more expensive in Africa and in France than here. I want to start my business and send some textiles in Africa and France. I want to learn the language, I want to settle here and benefit of the good prices, benefit of the fact I can stay legally."*

These examples indicate the adaptability and flexibility of migration processes. While Turkey may not have initially been conceived of as a country of immigration, its growing economy and informal labor market provide opportunities for it to be used as an entrepreneurial space. This is not to romanticize living conditions in Turkey for migrants living in Turkey. As **M.C, from Cameroon**, who arrived in Turkey in February, 2012 after a period of time in Georgia with a student visa (he then decided to continue his journey and, crossed illegally the Turkish-Georgian border), many migrants endure very harsh conditions on their arrival in Turkey:

"*It [Turkey] can't be worth than in Georgia, over there, there is no job. Most people are suffering from poverty. Here, there are many jobs for migrants. We call it "çabuk-çabuk", because they always tell you to work faster. I get payed every week 100 TL and I work every day except Sunday from 8 in the morning till 8 in the evening. This is not fair because the Turkish people are not facing the same conditions of work. They get more money than us for less work. But we have no choice. We don't have work permit as refugee, so we accept whatever they offer us.*"

Still **M.C** is thinking of improving his level of Turkish to get a better job, he is also seeking to get papers, whatever the means (regular resident's permit for foreigner or paper from the UN delivered to asylum seekers). In this very case, how can we claim Turkey is going to be used as a stepping stone? With the new laws on migration and foreigners (*YUKK*), it is foreseen that internal push factors will lessen, especially for asylum seekers and refugees but also for foreigners willing to stay legally in Turkey and earn money. On the other hand, it is very likely that Turkey is going to have a more planned and managed migration policy[3]. As our data tend to show, those new aspects encourage us to reconsider "transit" (migrants, migrations and countries) as a category.

3 As it is asserted in these two articles: Nicolas Fait (2012a); Nicolas Fait (2012b).

Conclusion

What seems to be emerging from our data is a distinctive set of African migrant experiences in Turkey, some of which cannot be subsumed into the categories transit migrants/migrations. They challenge the idea of a Turkey as only a preconceived "transit country" based on linear conceptions of the migration process from A to B. They illuminate how the migration journey is often made up of different stages, intended and unintended, different statuses, with changing motivations and evolving (and declining) opportunities. They refute viewing the migrant as only a victim, but emphasize the highly adaptable and varied strategies employed in migration processes. Our fieldwork tends to confirm the view that migrant journeys are not always planned and are often fragmented. While there are migrants from sub-Saharan countries who use Turkey as a stepping stone, there are others who came to settle or who gradually decided to do so. Turkey's informal labor market creates opportunities to work and, in a minority of cases, even to thrive. The need to work illegally in the absence of state support and of a robust rights framework creates the paradoxical effect of greater integration into Turkish society (learning the language, establishing trade) and, in some cases, opportunities to become economically stable. The experiences of the migrants we interviewed undermine the notion that they are in "transit" and the relationship, formal and informal, with Africa together with its informal labor market combine to undermine the concept that Turkey is a "transit country" alone. Moreover, they show the complexity of migrant profiles subsumed in the transit label so that far many are not "illegal" and not all have the intention to continue to the EU. Indeed, we would argue that the case of Turkey and African migrants exposes the concepts of transit migrant and transit country as overloaded concepts.

Finally, as Aslan and Pérouse points out (2003: 173), Istanbul and Turkey can represent different faces for migrants (all categories) and we could add that this face can change and evolve with time (e.g de facto settlement). The phenomenon should be taken through its complexity and diversity; therefore, we do not reckon that a new concept is necessary. The notion of transit is underestimating the various cases that migration to/through Turkey can develop, and thus we ask how Turkey could only be understood as a "stepping stone" country? We have argued that the new relations between Turkey and Africa, the growing economy in Turkey, the relative bad feedback of migrants who went to Greece, the legal gaps left by the preponderant informal sector, etc. have changed the situation in Turkey for African migrants. The old scheme depicting African migrants coming from Africa to a rich European country and crossing the in-between countries (such as Turkey) does not match the diversity of phenomena our data tend to show. Furthermore, we argue that our findings are fostering a new reflection on concepts that has traditionally been put forward with couples of antagonist such as mobility/immobility, emigration/immigration, temporary/settlement.

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