

A Different *Kargo*: Sub-Saharan Migrants In Istanbul And African Commerce

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ABSTRACT: This ethnographic description and analysis of West and Central African migration to Turkey is based on fieldwork conducted mostly in Istanbul. Sub-Saharan migration to Turkey developed full-fledged in the past 15 years. A theoretical discussion of global development and some migration literature leads to an examination of the rising economic growth rates in sub-Saharan Africa and Turkey's developing economic, diplomatic, and educational ties with it, two macro-level circumstances that can be understood as the springboard of migration. The article offers an extensive description of the work, living, and housing conditions of the migrant population and its links with the business world. It concludes that West and Central African migration is primarily a middle-class movement of urban traders and white-collar workers who want to improve their condition. Their objective is to return to their birth country with wealth and take up a more ambitious project. Turkey's production and export boom is feeding the hopes of these migrants, subjective factors overlooked under the blinders of the refugee and transit literatures in migration studies. The migrants are a heterogeneous set, not only in ethnic, religious, gender, and national terms, but also in levels of education, and even such factors as class standing. Despite this diversity, entrepreneurial

ambition is a constant among the actors and provides a key to understanding the forms under which this migration is realized.

Introduction

Abderrahmane Sissako's film *WAITING FOR HAPPINESS* (2002) is set in an impoverished fishermen's village in the Atlantic seaboard of Mauritania, harboring now sub-Saharan transient migrants trying to cross to Spain. In one of its engaging jolts, the film cuts to a closeup of a Chinese peddler holding a display case of watches against a view of the ocean. Later we witness the same man in a karaoke bar, singing his heart out to a young Black African woman who sits across the room on a sofa, while on the video monitor above enigmatic visuals (flags, men marching, Chinese inscriptions) go by. The woman, we learn elsewhere, has been to France to visit an erstwhile lover, and came back, but only to live as a displaced foreigner elsewhere. The young protagonist observing all this, a temporary visitor, seems also on his way to an overseas journey. Perhaps he is a student.

Sissako's movie lightly touches upon the kinds of migration that remain peripheral to the public perception of the West. The media in Europe focuses on unsteady boats crammed with illegals, rocking in the waves. The Lampedusa Island Emergency moment supplies its exemplary case. These images, archetypes of fear and desperation, make it difficult to develop a reasonable sense of the perspectives and aspirations that guide the migration. A long distance separates our time from the regulated South-North migration that was almost a European internal affair of the post-World War II period. In those more sober days, migration rested on bilateral agreements and factory employment, and dormitory tenement blocs for foreign workers served as bulwarks of state control. Terms encountered in the current literature register in disconcerting

contrast the lack of state regulation in the present migration: “globalization from below,” “third tier globalization,” “pariah capitalism,” all tinged with chaos.

The deep discrepancy in average income between the countries of the world provides perhaps a better conceptual entry for disentangling international migration. In a recent book that received wide exposure, Branko Milanovic (2011) explained how income disparities in the world escalated in the course of the past century. Most crucial is the radical shift from inequality within countries to overwhelming inequality between the countries (although the former are rising too). Workers’ wages between rich and poor countries differ by a factor 10 to 1. Besides a basis for understanding the new global migration, this view also offers a more charitable and optimistic assessment of it. Currently transnational migration is the only occurrence that can make a dent in the staggering growth of world inequality, and this no doubt on account of the ingenuity, sacrifices, and perseverance of the migrants themselves.

Enlightening as the argument is, anticipating from it the patterns of migration that prevail in different parts of our contemporary world would be difficult. The argument mostly serves to underpin the element of aspiration and striving in the movement of migrants as agents of their own destiny. Bakewell (2009: 6) found that whichever way we define the South (income level and the Human Development Index being two possibilities), South-South migration represents the largest share of migration in the world and outweighs South-North migration. A significant portion of world migration consists of flows between and within Europe, North America, and Oceania. Migrants from poor countries do not travel necessarily to the richest countries. Least developed countries’ migrants go mostly to less developed (middle income range) countries, and in the second place to other least developed countries. With the exception of Latin America and the Caribbean, most trans-

border migrations from poor countries target other countries within their region (Bakewell 2009: 5, 19).

As the categories deployed in these statements are politically constructed, we cannot be sure that such comparisons carry much analytic meaning, but as descriptions they serve to destabilize unfounded opinion. Two thirds of sub-Saharan African migrations have as a destination other sub-Saharan countries (Whitehouse 2012: 5). African countries offer only a small proportion of their population to international migration, and overall generate a small percentage of the world's migrants. In addition, only about a quarter of these have migrated to wealthy OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries (Bakewell 2009: 20). Some reasons why the scope of African migrations is limited in numbers and destinations may be obvious, but other reasons are not so obvious. The growth of new, gigantic, urban conurbations offering financial and commercial services in the formerly not hegemonic parts of the world, and the shift of international transactions to an East-West axis, including China's massive investment in Africa, can explain some of this pattern (Li, Lyons and Brown 2012; Sassen 2012: 12-16).

If we shift gears now, case study-based, fieldwork-oriented studies suggest that the people who emigrate from the poor countries are not their poorest citizens. They are rather middle-ranking actors with a moderate amount of personal wealth and varying degrees of international experiences (Lyons, Brown, and Li 2008); the relatively educated predominate among many migrant groups (see below). The revival in consumer spending in sub-Saharan countries and Turkey's reconfigured relations with sub-Saharan Africa are the more immediate bases from which the observations of the following ethnographic description rise, but these developments, too, may have links to the East-West geographic shift in ways that yet need to be elucidated more clearly.

On the ethnographic ground, actors' decisions to migrate are the outcome of a complex interplay between macro-level variables, micro-level institutions, and individual agency (O'Connell Davidson and Farrow 2007, quoted by Hashim and Thorsen 2011: 43). Broader social, economic, and political structures provide the context in which individuals and groups decide whether they want to migrate. Personal histories, collective identities, material or cultural resources, and connections in a destination country provide the opportunities and the drives for the decision (see also Bredeloup in this issue). For African migrants these connections were made possible, with developments in Africa and in Turkey, which took shape within the on going relocation of global industrial production and reorientation of export. In the rest of the analysis, I emphasize the aspirational component of this migration, not only as subjectivity but also as objective condition.

Some of the emerging literature on sub-Saharan migrants in Turkey has the mark of the asylum seeker/refugee problematic and national security perspective. The policing aspects of harboring large numbers of undocumented migrants, European anxieties over African migration, the concerns that these raise in Turkey because of the country's relations with the European Union, and finally worries that migration displaces local workers underlie academic research writing as well as popular media coverage.¹ In the course of my own developing understanding, I moved step by step away from this framework. A survey of the Chinese migration to Africa (signaled in the jolting visual leap in Sissako's movie) calls for greater attention to "new entrepreneurial migration" (Haugen and Carling 2005). We can only pay heed as we try to understand the obverse: the new African migration, either to China or to other emerging commercial centers in the world.

The difference between the perspective adopted in this article and contrasting suppositions found in some migration literature can be made clearer with an example. In a recent

contribution, Schapendonk (2013: 14) offers an original discussion advocating for greater stress on mobility and trajectory, aspirations and intentions, but then writes the following: "The reasons to migrate are often overlapping: Underdevelopment, weak governance, conflicts, human rights abuses, and environmental degradation." It is thought provoking that the point of view has suddenly shifted. The items of this dreary list are all macro-level "causes," rather than reasons in the sense of motives that actors can verbalize. Other macro realities of our time, African economic growth, and rising incomes and consumption levels are not part of the picture. Can the effect that these might have on liberating desire, stoking ambition, or providing material means to realize long-held dreams of mobility find room next to such a list? It seems to me that greater attentiveness to migrants' own words, self-perceptions, and deeds would open up a researcher to those factors as well.

The Numbers

African migration to Turkey is concentrated in Istanbul. It started about 15 years ago. The city grows in leaps, with formal high-rise developments as well as suburban areas and gated communities, but beyond any expectation of normalcy or orderliness. A population of aliens of all nationalities is also quickly swelling with it. Sub-Saharan Africans have now become a significant part of this population of aliens. African migrants in Istanbul form a diverse plurality, culturally and in terms of socioeconomic standing. In the account that follows, I highlight the different trajectories, living conditions, and jobs, and I base my conclusions on them. The information was gathered during fieldwork conducted between September 2010 and August 2011, and return trips in December 2011 and July 2012.² I met migrants in the streets, call shops, and social service centers, or by way of informal introductions and in so-

cial events. I visited their homes or their places of work when I could. I attended their soccer games and the Sunday services of the Pentecostal churches, which have a predominantly Nigerian following, and developed close acquaintanceship with a number of Muslim Senegalese. I scheduled semi-formal interviews with a fraction of these people.

No official figures exist on the number of West and Central African migrants in Istanbul. By taking the major national groupings separately and talking with knowledgeable insiders and outsiders, I produced my own estimates. If we define the migrant population operationally as foreign-born people who arrive for work and spend long years in Turkey, or indicate their intention to stay by not using and letting lapse the return part of their round-trip ticket, in 2012 the number of West and Central African migrants in Istanbul was, in my calculation, about 35,000. More than half of these, about 25,000, hail from Senegal. Nigerians, with about 5,000 people, are the second-largest national community. There are perhaps about 1,000 migrants each from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon, and smaller numbers from Gambia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Central African Republic. I left out of my scope migrants from East Africa, and the Sudanese, Somalis, Ethiopians, and South Africans. These other sub-Saharan migrants total at least an equal number to the West and Central Africans.³ In a city of more than 13 million, the sub-Saharan migrant population is still a drop in the bucket. But sub-Saharan African migrants are noticed because they stand out with their different physique. This kind of diversity is a novelty in the recent history of the city. The city harbors even larger East European and Central Asian migrant populations, the oldest stratum of which arrived about 40 years ago.

Africans come to Istanbul not only as migrants but also as traders, to source trade goods in short-term trips ranging from a few days to a few weeks, as I will explain in detail. I refer to

them as “visitors,” and they are left out of the numbers given above. A strong connection exists between the trade activities of these visitors and the presence of a migrant population in Istanbul. Also, migrants and visitors frequently switch places. But it is better to keep in mind that in order to make sense of these processes I am treating migrants and visitors as separate categories. The traders do not always arrive from places in Africa, but occasionally from cities in Western Europe, or even South America, places where they have emigrated.

African Growth and the Shift in Turkey’s Economic and Diplomatic Ties

The circumstances of sub-Saharan migrants revealed by field research vividly brought to my awareness that Africa is in rapid transformation. Migrants’ stories take root in the hopes raised by this transformation and reverberate. If part of what is happening is the economic vitality witnessed in many regions of Africa, a correlate of this is Turkey’s changing relationship with sub-Saharan African countries.

Starting with the Africa end of the spectrum, reversing the trend of the 1980s, sub-Saharan countries enjoyed an uninterrupted rise in income over the past ten years (Leke et al. 2010). Africa’s economic performance is now only second to that of Asia. Many countries sustained growth rates that range between 4% and 6% (while the old industrial countries hovered around zero). Major African cities are experiencing a consumer explosion. Financial newsletter headlines read, “Africa’s economic growth miracle” (Allison 2012). We may want to be cautious about this exuberance, but it is clear that the time has come for the social sciences and humanities to shed the oppressive language that seemed like the only sensible one in the 1980s with regard to Africa.

The correlate, which is highly relevant to the present analysis, is Turkey's strengthening economic, political, and educational ties with sub-Saharan Africa (Harte 2012; Özkan and Akgün 2010). Turkey experienced an export boom, and simultaneously a diplomatic opening to Africa. Both developments draw their energy from a new business class rooted in Anatolian cities and well represented in the government. The trade and manufacturing concerns of this class flourished in the 1980s in response to external consumer demand caused by the Iran-Iraq war (Kirişçi and Kaptanoğlu 2011: 710). The restless industry it exhibits can no longer be contained within regional borders. During the last 15 years, Turkey's exports to Africa rose more than 15 times. Medium-size partnerships have now begun investing in sub-Saharan Africa in such ventures as milling, furniture making, and construction. These changes had an impact in diplomacy, and the country's foreign policy was recast. Turkey organized high-level diplomatic visits and opened new diplomatic missions in sub-Saharan African countries; Turkish Airlines expanded tenfold, starting frequent flights to many sub-Saharan capitals, including daily flights to Lagos, Accra, and Dakar, and four weekly flights to Niamey, Ouagadougou, and Abidjan. Adherents of the religious movement led by the Turkish preacher Fethullah Gülen started schools dispensing a secular curriculum in most African cities.⁴ This private business and school-building frenzy opens the channels of sub-Saharan migration to Turkey.

Few publications view sub-Saharan African migration in the way the extensive literature on Asian migration and entrepreneurship did (say, Koreans in the U.S. and Canada; Chinese in America, South Asia, Africa, and Europe; or Indians and Pakistanis in East Africa and the U.K.).⁵ The extant literature often traps sub-Saharan migrants in images of hunger, misery, civil war, and forced dislocation, granting them little control over their lives by way of planning and investment for the future. A study on West and Central African migrants in South Africa

finds that with their education and organizational skills these newcomers enhance the climate of the economies they join, by creating employment for themselves as well as for locals (Kalitanyi and Visser 2010), an observation that my findings in Istanbul echo. Another more extensive study on West Africans in the Congo Republic, in a different setting and history, offers refreshing parallels about resources, orientation, and motivation (Whitehouse 2012). Analyses of the vast diaspora in the U.S. as well are finally presenting more uplifting interpretations (Babou 2013).

Images of Migrant Undertaking

A Senegalese observer wrote: "The migrant is perceived by the Senegalese as a model of achievement" (Tall 2002: 549). The self-perception of successful West African migrants in Istanbul confirms and complements this assessment. I start with two parables as an illustration.

The first experience came my way as I was in frivolous pursuit of a personal project, seeking yams in Istanbul. The majority of Nigerian migrants in Turkey are Igbo, and having read Chinua Achebe and much about the Yam Festival in the ethnographic literature, I thought they would provide a neat opportunity to introduce this quintessentially African cultural element to my Turkish friends in need of awareness. But yams, the hefty tubers of *Dioscorea rotundata*, did not exist in African migrants' milieu in Istanbul as a commodity, only like the fabulous beast of myth. African acquaintances said you could find them, but the Nigerian or Cameroonian women running the small home restaurants could not supply any.

One day, a long-time Nigerian resident of the city who was involved in the *kargo* business disabused me of my naivety. We were in a migrant business office in the rather upscale neighborhood of Osmanbey. Agbo, my interlocutor, worked for two

other Nigerians, partners who owned the business, both of whom had become naturalized Turkish citizens by engaging in marriages. Agbo himself had started in Istanbul many years ago as a soccer player. Now, however, he earned a living as a guide / interpreter / freight broker. "We don't care about yams or plantains," he said. "It's Cameroonians who make a big deal about such things. What we think about is business." It was not the first time I had heard such words, and it compelled my attention. "We Igbo," he went on, "think of making deals. Even while on a job, we keep one eye open for the next opportunity. If we find it, money poses no problem. Somebody in the family back in Nigeria will send it to us, or we'll find a partner who will join us in it. Even farmers in Igboland trade on the side. They don't put all their eggs in one basket, they are not satisfied with only tilling the land." He went on a riff about why, for that very reason, the travel difficulties most migrants faced in Turkey were paralyzing. "If you have an irregular visa situation, for example, you will be afraid to go to Izmir, because you may get in trouble." And if you cannot go there you'll remain ignorant of all the things that you would have discovered along the way. To make the point more concretely, he picked up from the shelf the remote control for the security monitors that stood on one side of the room and placed his finger on it. (Multiple camera surveillance of premises is now standard in established Nigerian businesses in Istanbul.) "You can say 'I found this' and sell it. Or, if you lack the money, you find a prospective buyer, put him in touch with the seller, and receive a commission. The knowledge you gained previously is money. You don't need capital. But if you are unable to leave Istanbul, then you can't do it." He immediately added, to avoid the wrong impression, that he and everyone else present in this office had the proper visa and work permits and they could travel as much as they pleased. He nodded toward the three documents framed and displayed on the wall, bearing taxpayer ID numbers for the businesses represented in the office. He was making a larger

argument, advocating on behalf of other compatriot migrants. "Knowledge," he declared in conclusion, "is money." For him that was essential Igbo philosophy.

The second parable concerns a Senegalese migrant. The Senegalese in Istanbul come across as less effusive than the Nigerians. They, too, are money-minded; after all, they migrated because of income. But they are not apt to extol the sharp eye for opportunity or the genius of the shrewd deal. It is more like them to stress economic usefulness and the liabilities of the breadwinner.

Serign, a Senegalese man in his late thirties, had first come to Istanbul in 2001. Even then, it was not his first cross-border experience; he had visited Mali and Morocco earlier, and he had spent five years in Mauritania. He was unusual in possessing an advanced sense of craft ethics in this highly mercantile migrant environment. Early in life, he had been trained as a tailor, the profession of his father and grandfather. In Dakar, before coming to Istanbul, he had sold t-shirts that he produced himself. But machine imports ended this activity. Originally he arrived in Istanbul to buy clothing items for resale in Dakar. After a couple of trips, however, he decided to stay, and he spent two years in Istanbul. He ended up returning to Dakar, where he took up TV sales this time. He bought a container-full of imported, used TV sets, sold those that worked, and repaired those that did not (another skill that he had picked up along the way), retailing the entire lot one set at a time. He had engaged in this trade for another five years when a money crunch hit Senegal, extinguishing his sales. He decided to make another move, sold his shop, and came back to Turkey. "The Senegalese work very hard," he said. "In the city an entire family may rely on the remittances of one person who is abroad." But his own wife was an elementary school teacher, and, with his son and daughter, lived with his parents in Dakar.

The second time around in Istanbul, he started selling watches and knockoff cologne as a street vendor, what most

Senegalese do after they arrive. From his vending experience, he got a new idea. The stock of watches that the itinerant vendors carry is a heavy load; displaying the merchandise attractively and using for that purpose an easy and light setup are also important considerations. Watch vendors used to lug their wares in back or shoulder packs, and place them for sale on makeshift tables that they had also to carry. Serign improved this arrangement with a special case that he designed, and thus created a new career for himself.

He spent days rummaging in Tahtakale, the homely shopping district of stores pell-mell specializing in hardware, kitchenware, plastic goods, and electronics. He spotted a square doormat made of rigid plastic that was 20 inches to one side. It had the shape of a grid of small rectangles. He figured that each little rectangle could be made to house a watch, in which case the frame could hold 64 watches. He bought two mats for a trial. After applying a carton backing to one side of each mat, he glued a fine plastic mesh fabric of the prayer rugs that he had brought from Senegal to their back and sides, turning the frames thus into cases. He upholstered the display side of each case with red carpeting material purchased in the market. The little compartments meant for the watches then looked like jewelry boxes, and the frames were strengthened. Finally he hinged the two cases together, display sides facing each other, so that the contraption worked like an oversize attaché case, fitted with three plastic catches and two solid handles. Opened, it turned into an exhibition rack that could hold 128 watches. As a final refinement, he cut inch-thick disks from foam tubes sold as children's pool toys, to wrap each watch around and make it fit snugly into its compartment. The disks also elevated the dials of the displayed watches, making them look great against the scarlet background.

After he made his prototype, orders from other vendors started pouring in. Serign produces his cases in the narrow balcony outside of his bedroom. His small apartment houses

nine other migrants. Some of them sleep in the daytime in the adjacent room, and his noise bothers them. He cannot help this. The cost of moving out on his own is something he cannot bear.

With the initial success, other constraints surfaced. First he ran out of the prayer rugs he used as backing. He commissioned an acquaintance to bring him more from Senegal. Fitting it and sealing the edges with a hot knife were also time consuming. A single case took him an entire day to finish. As back orders accumulated, he redesigned his case, replacing the backing with a sturdy outer cover that encased his frames, closing with a solid zipper. He commissioned a leather bags manufacturer to produce these for him from crocodile-skin pattern synthetic black leather. This added about half as much to the original cost, but it was not an imprudent step and he did not need to add 50% to his new sales price (which would have been prohibitive and moreover provoke blame for him for profiteering). He increased his price from 100 to 110 liras only, and while his markup went down, as he is relieved from the work of making the backing, he can now finish several cases a day. The look is also upscaled. The plastic prayer rug matting lent the original case a rustic appearance, whereas the new black crocodile skin design looks slick and modern, befitting the worldly feel of the watches it is meant to hold. The orders come in faster than ever.

Serign is open to the world and aware of it. A band of Ecuadorian migrants perform Andean music in public spaces. He loves their sound and seeks out their performances. He also bought the CD they offer for sale. He finds people in the street parochial when they ask him if this is like music from his home in Africa. Could anything be less like Senegalese music, he asks? They are ignorant not only of music but of the difference between Africa and South America, and one can sense his resentment of their indifference to the galactic cultural distances he is encompassing here.

Serign had little formal schooling, as betrayed by his halting French, but his thoughts on the contribution of migrants is almost an *apologia* with political economy overtones against the prejudice that envelops the foreigners. The vendors, he says, buy the watches that they sell from Turkish wholesalers, increasing the latter's business. They take these goods where the consumers live and walk, providing a useful service. The vendors spend half the money they earn in Istanbul, to pay rent or buy retail goods. He also volunteers thoughts on the merit of the cases he designed. They improve sales; a vendor with one of his cases will register more sales than one without it who stands nearby. The spirit of Adam Smith lives in Serign's discourse, his original mind expressing what many other migrants also feel but do not verbalize with so much eloquence.

African Migration to Turkey

West and Central Africans came to Turkey at the tail end of a series of recent migration waves of foreign nationals. These started about 40 years ago, and we can think of them as three overlapping phases (İçduygu 2003). The first phase began with the nationals of Romania and Moldova, followed by those of Russia and Ukraine, and later other former Soviet republics, Georgia and Turkmenistan. These movements established a pattern, which is valid for the sub-Saharan as well. Work migrations follow the trail opened by shoppers who engage in informal micro-scale international commerce, commonly known and described as "suitcase trade" (a good study is Yüksek 2004). It involved first, in the 1980s, Polish and Romanians; in the 1990s, Russian and Ukrainians, arriving by ship (from Odessa), or bus (through Moldova), or plane-loads of chartered flights; and in the 2000s Tajiks, Turkmen, Kazakhs, and Uzbeks; the most recent raft is Chinese Uighurs from Xinjiang (Peraldi 2009: 39). Occasionally the commuting

traders themselves decided to stay during a visit, and thus turned migrant. In other instances, they brought in their wake co-nationals seeking employment. A number of young people who set out as international students are a visible contingent among those who stayed. Of this group of initial migrants, some Russian and Ukrainian women naturalized by marrying Turkish men, ended up single again, became property owners, and now lease apartments to African migrants in Kumkapı and elsewhere (through Kurdish real estate agents, who themselves came to Istanbul as refugees from the 1990s military crackdown in southeastern Turkey). Trade with the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent Countries) countries has grown, but is now better capitalized and institutionalized in the hands of larger companies, reducing the opportunities of solo entrepreneurs and making the trips by individual traders less frequent. What replaced them is an ever-growing number of work migrants from the same countries, who are found employed in construction, the commercial agriculture of the Aegean region, and, for women, urban domestic and elderly care work.

The second phase of migration involved at first people from Iran and Iraq, the eastern neighbors of Turkey, which since the 1980s have undergone civil strife or war. After 2000, other migrants from further afield (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia) followed them. At present there is an influx from Syria. These migrants came over land and crossed the eastern borders of Turkey, typically without a passport or a visa. Upon arrival, many lodged asylum applications at the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). (Turkey does not grant them asylum, but accepts them temporarily for relocations to third countries.) Yet they spend years in Turkey in legal limbo, first as part of the protracted application process, and afterwards following the denial of their application or even its acceptance (while waiting for admittance to an asylum-granting destination country). Much attention has been focused on these political asylum seekers, or those who,

having been denied political asylum, stay on undocumented (İçduygu 2003; Danış, Taraghi, and Pérouse 2009).

The migrants of the third phase are the West and Central Africans, the topic of this article. The public mind and the fledgling academic literature often grasp them through the lens of the leitmotifs associated with the second phase: illegal border crossing and application for asylum. This tendency persists, although Yüксеker and Brewer (2011), in their pioneering research, pointed out that West and Central Africans, and some other sub-Saharan Africans as well, do not fit this profile at all.

The contemporary sub-Saharan presence in Turkey began at the end of the 1980s.⁶ First, small circles of university students formed in Ankara and Istanbul. Many of them had received scholarships from the Islamic Development Bank (headquartered in Jeddah, but funding students from Muslim communities around the world for college degrees outside their home country).⁷ Other Africans appeared in the late 1990s. Following in the footsteps of peers from Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya, where Turkish building firms have secured privileged access and large contracts, West African men and women who earlier had been importing consumer goods from places like Dubai, India, Hong Kong, or Taiwan discovered Istanbul as a viable source of manufactured goods, such as clothing, plastic wares, glass, and kitchenware. Among them the Senegalese and the Nigerians were prominent, but soon large numbers from a wider set of countries also started arriving. (In July 2000, during a mission to Mali and Senegal, I conducted extended interviews with women and men traders in Bamako, Dakar and some secondary major cities, who had started making business trips to Istanbul, then a new destination, whereas Dubai was most popular, and Hong Kong and Taiwan also frequently mentioned; some women had traveled to India and Austria.)

It did not take long for a diverse set of West African residents to emerge in Istanbul. It included traders who had lost

their standing, or who hoped for more rapid improvement by settling down in Istanbul and putting their knowledge of the place in the service of visiting traders with less experience; men and women dreaming to reach a West European destination, but for now eking out a living in Istanbul until an opportunity opened up; African students or former students, who made careers also assisting traders; and aspiring soccer professionals striving for a spot in a club, but in the meantime making ends meet in other ways (more on them later).

The West and Central African migrants of Istanbul present youthful demographics: 45% of my interlocutors were in the 20-29 age cohort, and an additional 27% in the 30-39 age cohort. Older people also are well represented; about a quarter of my interlocutors were over 40. Those who had spent the most years in Turkey were among them. That is, sub-Saharan migration to Turkey is not simply a youth adventure or a transient experience.

This migrant population is overall quite educated. The great majority has finished at least secondary school, and my impression is that the minority of women among them has on average even more years of formal schooling than the men. Among the Anglophones, especially among the Nigerians, being a college graduate is the norm. I cannot help but relay here the odd moment when a Nigerian fellow whom I befriended at the Sunday service of the Union Church in Beyoğlu revealed to me that he had written two books on Nigerian politics (they turned out to be graduate theses, but they had been published all right and I found their record in WorldCat), and that upon graduation he had worked as a journalist, and then promptly offered to become my co-author for the study that would result from my research (in the midst of a description of his work at trash collecting and the sorting out of waste in the recycling yards). Working among respondents with such high schooling qualifications was a constant source of surprise for me.

The Senegalese in Istanbul are an exception to this educational picture. Few of them have had secondary education. The very small number of college graduates among the Senegalese are all former students of Turkish universities who arrived on scholarships and stayed on after graduation. The Senegalese chain migration to Istanbul draws people from a stratum of the country that does not send its children to government schools, although most migrants have had some (but mostly only cursory) Quranic education. If they become somewhat literate in the Latin script and numerate, learn a smattering of English, manage to navigate the Internet, etc., they have learned it all on their own as adults. Most know very little or no French at all. Nonetheless, they learn conversational Turkish quickly. Those who have spent more than a year often prefer to communicate in Turkish rather than in French.

The fact that most Senegalese migrants in Istanbul do not have much formal schooling does not contradict the overall urban-white-collar characteristic of West and Central African migration. The Senegalese migrants are generally married (frequently to young women who finished high school or college) and owned their own business before migration. With a trade background and orientation, they arrive from the peripheral popular quarters of Dakar, often also after considerable international travel experience in Africa and abroad. (I met a surprising number who had been to Brazil, for example.)⁸ Many belong to the Murid brotherhood, which serves these days like a global business guidance and placement agency (Diouf 2000). As Serign's story in the introduction illustrates, most Senegalese in Istanbul may not be part of the Francophone educated elite of the country, but they belong to its Islamic *petite bourgeoisie* nonetheless, with ambition to rise.

In the larger migrant community, levels of formal schooling have little to do with religion. The Senegalese case in Istanbul is an accident of how this migration started, and also perhaps of the infatuation with the United States among the highly

educated. Among the Nigerian and Ghanaian migrants as well there were some (albeit fewer) Muslims, and these had levels of formal education comparable to those of their fellow co-nationals.

Sources of Information of Prospective Migrants

What the migrants knew about Turkey before their arrival and how they had reached their decision to migrate there was one theme I explored in my conversations with them. Most said that they arrived with some idea of what to expect. The information they possessed may have been incomplete, partial, or altogether wrong, but one rarely encounters migrants who tell you that they knew almost nothing about the country. The migration decision is momentous. It may involve family members, close friends, business associates, or a senior intimate acquaintance, and a wider set of consultations. Some of these people take on the role of advice givers or sponsors. Traders who come to Turkey in frequent business trips are a common source of information for would-be migrants. These men and women may have traveled to other places around the world as well. They are successful models in their community and are considered well informed.

I also talked to traders about these matters. Some said that when a person in their entourage solicits guidance from them about migration they do not necessarily go gung ho about it. It is possible that such comments were prompted by the fact that they were talking to a researcher that they did not know well with possible links to official circles and their familiarity with the blame put on the migrants, but they are interesting nonetheless. They said that they told counsel-seekers not to go if they did not have good prospects for finding a job, that otherwise they could be miserable. Since there are no formal job offers or official conduits for seeking them, the prospects often

take the form of informal contacts, and the traders themselves are one way of establishing those, a reason why the trade-and-migration loop is self-perpetuating and self-amplifying.

The young migrants seemed to be very alert to the perception that Turkey rarely deported aliens in irregular visa status. Whether due to neglect, indifference, lack of resources, or some other more proactive reason, such as employer or export sector interests, the disposition is largely borne out by observation.⁹ One can see why this consideration is important for prospective migrants. Starting a new life elsewhere in general and the travel itself involve great costs that require careful forethought. It may necessitate years of saving, relinquishing a job or shutting down a business, the sale of personal assets, monetary support from family and friends, or loans from strangers to be repaid with interest. It is also a daunting psychological commitment. Transcontinental migration presents itself as a once-in-a-lifetime project. If an undocumented migrant is deported after making all these sacrifices and reaching the goal, it may be nothing short of catastrophe for him or her. Avoiding this risk beats the attractions of many alternative places, including higher levels of income; the presence of luxuries and comforts; and the lure of a larger, more varied, and supportive community of co-nationals.

Prospective migrants also learn about Turkey from radio and TV programs and newspapers, where coverage of Turkey increased several fold since the intensification of its ties with sub-Saharan countries and as Turkish sports teams gained visibility. African students coming back on home visits or returning as graduates (which they sometimes do) are also important sources of information, in addition to being significant nodes channeling migrants. Some migrants in Istanbul state that they considered the alternative of going to a European city instead, but deliberately discarded this alternative after learning more from merchants with travel experience and from migrant relatives and friends in Europe (De Clerck 2013).

Prospective migrants also made self-guided inquiries on the Internet. Young, urban Africans spend hours in Internet cafes, both before and after emigration. They use the World Wide Web to explore the world; for initiating contacts on international dating sites; and, after migration, to stay in touch with family and friends back home or dispersed in different countries. It is easily observed that migrants in Istanbul make greater use of the Internet than the average member of the general population.¹⁰ Internet cafes abound in migrant localities. Sometimes they are combined with a call shop, a typical concomitant of migrant spaces, much as the flyers advertising prepaid phone cards pasted on shop windows and global money transfer company ads, all telltale signs of migrant neighborhoods around the world, from Seoul, South Korea, to St. Denis in Paris.

Several of my interlocutors used the word “research” when we talked about these issues, and it piqued my curiosity. I asked one of them what exactly he had researched. He told me that he had compared from sources he found on the Internet the gross domestic product of various countries, their growth rates, figures of unemployment in the nation, and a few other standard statistical measures. I heard, if not the exact same list, similar statements from other people. They were initially quite baffling to me. First, they reveal in another way that these young people are not just rustics. But the statements also lay open to view the optimism with which the migrants launch their venture, and their almost naïve faith in their own ability to discern.

Migrants’ accounts of their initial period after arrival reveal that most of them go through an extremely difficult time at first, no matter what their level of education. Everything appears strange to them; communication in the streets is impossible; and the living conditions, xenophobia, and long stretches of unemployment quickly break their spirit (compare similar accounts in Öcal 2005; Burtin 2009; Knight 2011; Suter 2012). The generally meager savings that they brought with them

melt away. A community of co-nationals can provide some little support, but in the early years of the migration these were too small and most people too poor and worried to be of much help. Suter (2012: 31, 42) reports stories indicating that established co-nationals might also cheat newcomers under the guise of support. Hailing from an Anglophone or Francophone part of Africa serves as the next basis of cultural affinities and solidarity, after national origins and sub-national local-ethnic identity.

Nearly a quarter of my interlocutors had come to Istanbul less than a year before the time when I met them. I talked to a few among them only weeks after their arrival. With few exceptions, they all had obtained tourist visas and had traveled by air. Travel preparation absorbs a great proportion of the modest resources of most migrants. But there was nothing “clandestine” about their arrival (to take issue with one word we commonly encounter in the literature on “irregulars”). They had alighted in broad daylight in the airport and passed through security controls like all the other visitors. As Kalitanyi and Visser observe (2010: 377), the labels applied to migrants in official writings say more about the nature of government policy on international migration than on the attributes of the individual crossing borders. The policy in the Turkish case seems to be to tolerate their stay and work, but under unfavorable conditions. The tourist visas most migrants can obtain are valid for 90 days, but allow for a 30-day stay only after entry. The migrants let it expire (or, if yet new arrivals, intend to do so as they settle and look for work), after which point they fall into “irregular” legal status. But a small number of migrants, as we will see, have been able to legalize their stay, open formal enterprises, and rise above the rest.

The Housing

Because of the stipulations of the visa application, most new migrants arrive in Istanbul with a few days of paid-up hotel reservation, and may spend their first few nights in this hotel. But very quickly they face the rude reality of migrant tenements. In the neighborhoods of high migrant concentration, such as Kumkapı, Tarlabası, or Kurtuluş, most African migrants live in basement flats, unattractive dwellings that were hard to rent before the swell in their numbers. The hilly configuration in Istanbul means that buildings on the slopes can have two stories of basement, with apartments located two or three flights down from the entrance level. Some of these basement apartments may have small windows on one side of the building on account of the sloping terrain, but otherwise, for the majority, no natural light penetrates them. Tenants living in such places go through pitch-dark stairways and landings to reach rooms illuminated with a feeble naked light bulb hanging from the ceiling, as a thick smell of mold envelops them. I observed that if women live in the apartment, more effort might go into its furnishings and decoration, which somewhat relieves the dread of such places. But as the demographics given above suggest, most apartments include no women.

Sometimes the occupants lease the apartment directly from the landlord and divvy up the rent equally. Especially if the number of people sharing the apartment is small, it can be an agreeable arrangement. Only those who have improved their situation can afford this privilege. When the number of co-tenants is large, precarious employment makes the rent difficult to collect. Invariably some people are allowed to stay free for some stretch of time, either because they have no income or to give a newly arrived co-national a little time to breathe.

A more common arrangement is for a recent migrant to enter a crowded apartment as a lodger of an older, established African migrant who runs it. Typically, this person has another

occupation, but operates his large rented apartment like a boardinghouse, often serving meals as well, with a trusted fellow tenant seconding as helper to supervise the place and organize the cooking. New lodgers join, others leave, and their numbers fluctuate. They sleep many to a room. Double mattresses leaned upright against the wall allow for daytime activities, but when they are laid down for sleeping they cover all the floor space. And this may be the case for a good portion of the daytime hours as well, because the number of lodgers is often larger than the number of sleeping spots and they take turns using the beds. Hence the Turkish name (that migrants have also integrated into their language as part of their diaspora lexicon) for these boardinghouse apartments: *çek-yat* "pull it down and sleep." An apartment of four or five rooms covering about 1,300 square feet (120 m²) and accommodating 10 to 15 boarders could be considered comfortable. Some are more crowded than that. Some of the lodgers spend the night out and while away time in public places outdoors, the small home bar/restaurants that African women operate in the neighborhood, or in internet cafes, until a sleeping spot becomes available to them at dawn. One of my interlocutors told me that at a low point after he arrived in Istanbul he had lodged in an apartment shared by 35 occupants, which I found hard to believe.¹¹

Successful Nigerians who are several years away from the day they landed in Istanbul look back at the time they spent in such crowded apartments with consternation and affirm that conditions have improved for them. The Senegalese I met seemed to elude the worst boardinghouse situations. Maybe they benefit from the stronger solidarity of a larger community, or have higher minimum standards, but in general, thanks to their vending activity, also higher incomes. Yet it is clear that boardinghouse apartments offer a solution to newcomers' quandary: availability and cost sharing. Property values have soared and housing is expensive in Istanbul, but migrants espe-

cially are made to pay enormous rents. The cost of apartments in the shabby-looking buildings of migrant neighborhoods like Kumkapı is on a par with those of the choicest and fanciest neighborhoods. African migrants also have an extremely hard time finding a place to rent. Landlords and their real estate agents lease to them reluctantly, for reasons that are clearly discriminatory and racist, but at times including more legitimate concerns, such as crowding and cooking smell pollution. In a seller's market, sub-Saharan migrants are made to pay huge premiums as tenants. Food also can be expensive, and the meals prepared in the boardinghouse apartments not only relieve the migrants from the stodgy fare they would have to bear otherwise, but are also agreeable based on their cultural expectations.

Making a Living

The sub-Saharan migrants of Istanbul hold jobs in a vast array of occupations. The Senegalese and the Nigerian Igbo, the two sets who are in the majority, have a distinct preference for self-employment. Thanks to the extensive networks of fellow nationals in the city guiding the newcomers and providing advice and other sorts of support, some of them can avoid precarious employment at rock-bottom wages. The migrants who arrived in earlier years, however, went through very trying times, and many others still do. Poorly remunerated, unskilled jobs, interspersed with days and weeks of undesired idleness, may last for years.

The newcomers put up with the crowding and low living standards described above not only for lack of money, but also because they want to hoard every penny they earn. Most migrants arrive with some savings, whatever is left over from the expenses of their trip. This may be only a couple thousand dollars, but a surprisingly large number disembark

with considerably larger sums. These come to light only in the depressing but unfortunately all too common stories of theft. The migrants want to save it all, not for a rainy day, but in view of their dream of self-employment, hoping to use it as an investment when they better know their way around and find an opportunity. Even so, most migrants I met who had been in Istanbul for a number of years told me that they had exhausted most of the savings they had brought along, before reaching a situation of steady employment.

New migrants follow the advice of more experienced migrants to look for jobs in the small industries and services of the city. They go to workshops in places like Dolapdere, Tophane, or Şişhane, or to the clothing, footwear, and accessory manufacturers clustered in the districts neighboring Kumkapı, Laleli, and Aksaray. They stand at the door and repeat a sentence they are made to memorize: *İş var mı?* ("Is there work?"). Sometimes a contact is provided by an acquaintance, or their apartment keeper tells them about an opening of which he learned. Construction work is common, either in renovations or in new buildings. Some of the sites are far from the city center, and the employer arranges for transportation.¹² I encountered migrants who had worked in car washes, carpentry shops, cleaning buildings, house moving, sorting materials in waste recycling yards, or firewood splitting. Even in these workplaces, they are given the least qualified tasks, taking no account of their education or past work experience, such as years spent in white-collar jobs in their country. Employers are not aware of these qualifications, and some of these have no relevance for the jobs the migrants seek. The language barrier also stands in the way.

The word for these casual jobs that get remunerated by the end of the workday is *çabuk çabuk* ("quick quick"), a word that has also entered the diaspora lexicon of all migrants, pronounced with the accents of their native tongues (it sounds like *shabu-shabu* from the mouths of Nigerians). The nominal

daily wage for such work was 20 Turkish liras (about US \$13 in 2011), which was below legal minimum wage. When I probed, I discovered that some were getting less, but in most cases it is difficult to know the exact pay, because both employer and employee, for separate reasons, are inclined to hype it. In view of our opening discussion, this pay is still ostensibly higher than some mid-range African salaries. The fact was casually remarked upon by some migrants during my conversations and seems to feed migrants' illusions. They did not seem to take account of cost of living differences and of the non-monetized factors in wellbeing, nor I think of the longer-term hidden costs of being an irregular alien. Boniface, for example, a young Cameroonian I met a few weeks after his arrival, a college graduate, had been working in Duala as a truck driver for a soap factory, for a monthly salary of less than US \$100, augmented only by meager per diems when sent on deliveries outside the city. It had taken him a long time to put together the resources needed for his overseas project. (In the course of my interaction of a few months with him, he did not have any luck in finding a job; he had started by showing up in construction sites and grabbing any tool in sight to indicate that he sought employment.)

Many migrants eventually do find more permanent and better-remunerated jobs and move to better housing. Some of them reach the desired state of self-employment, although only a tiny minority can regularize their stay by acquiring legal residence and a work permit in Turkey. Among my acquaintances, those who were doing better and the really successful had generally spent many years in Turkey, but this relationship does not hold all the way. Some migrants arrive already well endowed and connected, and in much better shape than the rest. As a note of the limitations of my research, I had no way of encountering people who had terminated their stay in Turkey and left in failure.

One step up from these day jobs is longer-term salaried employment. Even if the daily pay rate turns out to be lower, a salaried job eliminates days of idleness, the anguish of a constant job hunt, and grappling with new people and situations all the time. It results in better income and a sense of security. Migrants I encountered held salaried jobs in shoe and sandal workshops, and with handbag and briefcase manufacturers, casters of brass belt buckles and such hardware, zipper makers, costume jewelry makers, electronic parts producers, metal-working lathe and machine shops, chandelier manufacturers, stone-cutting yards, call shops, and building contractors. This list is certainly very incomplete. All these are small enterprises employing at most 20 people. Without a work permit, migrants cannot find jobs in industrial plants, which are more closely monitored. Migrants also work in sales in clothing stores doing business with African merchants, and a few had stints as bar attendants. The pay is distributed at the end of the week, and layoffs on short notice are common because these businesses are super sensitive to market ups and downs.

In these businesses, migrant employees start working at the bottom of the skill ranking, cleaning floors, carrying materials from one room to another, or loading and unloading trucks. If they prove reliable, a possibility exists that they will be trained for more skilled work. Some migrants show aptitudes and gain specialist skills in fields having nothing to do with their previous life. Some who started in construction, for example, ended up as experts in finishing, painting, or applying carton-pierre moldings and cornices to walls and ceilings. My favorite story is that of Claude-François, who worked as a policeman in his native Burkina Faso, but in Turkey, after an initial rough time, became a master sculptural stone carver who could work on the restoration of historical monuments.

An odd occupation that kept a few Nigerian men employed in Istanbul was sending spam messages around the globe (Knight 2011: 139-141). This job is organized by outfits in Nige-

ria, which supply the electronic mail addresses, but performed in internet cafes, paying hourly fees for use. Remuneration was by the number of messages sent. I should also mention drug dealing, which is associated with sub-Saharan migrants in the little press coverage that they receive. I know from college students that in Tarlabası marijuana could be purchased from Nigerian dealers among others. A Turkish pastor whose congregation included many migrants also mentioned censoriously drug dealing. There were cases of prosecution and conviction. I found it hard to broach the subject with my respondents (without prompting a handful of them volunteered negations). Sorting out fact from legend is not easy and how prevalent it is remains unclear.

The differences among African migrants in Istanbul are not only of national origin and educational background, but also of capital and class. Take a man I will call Nelson, who presented himself the night I met him in a migrant bar as the president of the local Cameroonians. He had arrived only six months before and was staying at a pricey tourist hotel in Yenikapı, snubbing the migrant milieu, yet close enough to patronize its hangouts in Kumkapı. When he first arrived, he lived in the house of a Cameroonian woman in Kurtuluş, he said, but his numerous countrymen's comings and goings disturbed him. He prided himself in setting up a tribunal to arbitrate the disputes that arose among the Cameroonian businessmen in the city. According to him, these businessmen were involved mostly in trade between Cameroon and Russia. He had spent several years in Spain, attested by his fluent Spanish, in addition to being voluble in French and English. Before that, he had lived in Dubai. The woman who held the three-story house in Kurtuluş where the merchants' arbitration meetings occurred also had lived in Dubai and had relatives still working there. I saw Nelson several times in public places, always nicely dressed, but the only interview I was able to schedule with him was interrupted by his constantly ringing cell phone, instruc-

tions to subordinates, the scheduling of future appointments, and other business digressions.

Less mysteriously, many Nigerian Igbo come to Istanbul to join commercial concerns run by other Igbo, who are relatives or hail from the same community. They work as managers, freight brokers, bookkeepers, or sales agents; some are sons or younger brothers brought in to take over the business. Others are poorer relatives who pack boxes, haul freight, or run errands. These subordinates are provided living space and basic necessities and they, too, are promised independence eventually, which means owning their own small business. Their bosses strive to obtain residence and work permits for them, but many of them do not seem to receive a regular salary, only gifts when business goes well.

Among sub-Saharanans in Turkey, a few have a totally different profile: professionals who arrive under contract, residence and work permit in hand. Such people are more numerous in Ankara than in Istanbul. Leaving aside the personnel of African embassies, most of them work in the field of education and either for private academies or for universities, teaching English or preparing students for TOEFL, SAT, and comparable international exams. These people had work experience in various countries outside of Africa and receive expatriate professional salaries. One might think that their situation has nothing in common with that of the typical African migrant, whether rich or poor. However, this is not true. The vibrant commercial climate of the country tempts them to be involved as intermediaries in transactions between large Nigerian companies and Turkish counterparts. They try to initiate links and facilitate the signing of contracts between these entities, and earn commissions from the deals. But in this they run into the difficulties faced by other African migrants, because their work permits are valid only for the services they provide in the workplace that brought them to Turkey in the first place. In their private initiatives, they have to grapple with non-legality,

as do the other migrants, and they may be swindled by the large enterprises they approach.

The tourist hotels of the Mediterranean and Aegean beach cities formally hire entertainers from Africa on yearly contracts (as well as chambermaids, barmen, activity leaders, etc. informally and seasonally from among migrants already in Istanbul). These people can cross over to the undocumented migrant scene. I met three young Senegalese women who had been so recruited in Dakar, and a fourth who joined them the following year. Unhappy with long work hours in the hotels, after the tourist season was over they had fled to Istanbul, where I met them. Two worked as salespeople in export clothing stores, and one as a nanny.

On a different footing, we can include among the professionals the two African Roman Catholic priests in Istanbul, and the nearly dozen pastors of the small Pentecostal African churches operating in basement apartments or rented hotel party rooms. They play the expected parts in providing spiritual guidance or emotional support and psychological comfort. They also serve as social anchors to the communities. The more prosperous Nigerian businessmen among the migrants initiate the Pentecostal churches, and recruit and pay for their pastors. (Yet two popular church leaders, a charismatic Nigerian minister and a captivating Francophone Congolese (DRC) pastor, were self-propelled, and they subsidized their mission work with income from export trade activities.)

Soccer Players and TV Stars

Sports migration is an important component of the Istanbul migrant setting. As Büdel (2013: 3) notes, football migration must be seen within the wider context of African migrations to Turkey in general. It has strong links of dependence and permeability both with the informal wage work sector and with

export commerce or the freight/guide/interpreter cluster of jobs (described in the sections below). Enormous differences of income, prestige, and fame separate the high-profile expatriate sportsmen playing for the national clubs from the numerous humble hopefuls who are at the bottom of the scale. Here I limit myself to the latter. The great majority of these young men are soccer players who aspire to find a spot in one of the professional teams, but not having achieved that, they take other jobs as a temporary stopgap.¹³

Young African soccer enthusiasts took notice of Turkey during the 1990s when major Turkish clubs started signing renowned African players, for example, the Nigerians Uche Ukechukwu and Daniel Amakochi. In 1998, Jay-Jay Okocha, an Igbo, transferred from a Turkish to a French team for a reported \$24 million and was declared the most expensive player of the time. News like this resounded in the African press. Turkish teams' international matches provided confirmation. Senegalese young men in Istanbul explained to me that when in the quarterfinals of the 2002 World Cup the Turkish team played against and eliminated Senegal, the country gained significance in their mind and they started seeking out information about it.¹⁴ A Web site lists 33 footballers from 17 African countries playing in the Turkish Super League in the 2010-2011 sports season.¹⁵ There were many times more playing in the lower divisions. Further down the ladder, hundreds or maybe thousands of talented young men arrive in Turkey with the hope of finding a spot in a professional team, and languish. They may have been professional footballers in Nigeria; they become day job seekers in Istanbul.¹⁶

It is possible to encounter some of them on weekdays in the Feriköy municipal stadium (near Kurtuluş). They arrive early in the morning, to drill and play practice games, waiting for a talent scout from a professional club to spot them. You can meet some of the same people and many others as well when the free lunches are provided in the courtyard of the Hagia

Triada Greek Orthodox church on Taksim Square on Saturdays.¹⁷ Migrant footballers also form teams that play private matches against amateur Istanbul teams.

A major social project that sub-Saharan migrants have jointly organized in Istanbul for the past 10 years is a soccer tournament, an "African Nations Cup" for the city. It is the only instance I know of sub-Saharan migrant groups of different national origins working together to present a common image to the host nation in a pan-African spirit, and it is significant that the footballers took the lead in it and were its major actors. The 2011 event took place in July, involved eight teams, and generated some coverage in the national press. The games were scheduled for Saturday and Sunday afternoons and played before a grandstand brimming with enthusiastic migrants, including a fair number of migrant women who are mostly out of sight on other occasions (Figure 1). The fans brought drummers and trumpet players to the opening and to some critical games. The business of a prominent Nigerian businessman, who served as the leader of the Nigerian community, and a Turkish bank backed the event with financial contributions. The Ghana team won the title.¹⁸

Once the excitement of such spectacles is over, however, the players go back to the trials and tribulations of daily existence. The most successful can only rise so far as to find a spot in an amateur league club. Without a proper work visa, the professional league teams and even the super amateur league teams are closed to them. They hope that a wily manager who appreciates their game will find a way around this obstacle and take them to his club, but unemployed migrant footballers are so numerous that it seems like a vain dream. Some migrant players do get fortunate enough to sign for second league teams in the provinces. A Guinean player who had had a sequence of contracts told me about one of his experiences, funny in retrospect, which suggests how this happens. At one point, he signed a contract and went to play with a team in a



FIGURE 1: Migrants in the grandstand of the Feriköy Municipal Stadium watching the opening game (Senegal-Nigeria) of the “African Nations Cup.” The game ended in a tie: 0-0. Saturday, June 11, 2011. Photo by the author.

major city in eastern Anatolia. But somebody there denounced him. The police came, and it surfaced that he had been sent with a document that was an authorization to work as a billiard player. The team had to cancel his contract and send him back. Only the largest national clubs seem to have the clout to obtain a proper sports visa and work permit for their players, who almost never come from the ranks of migrants already present in Turkey.

A problem exacerbating sports migrants’ risk is the work of unscrupulous managers or intermediaries, who engage in recruiting trips to African capitals and bring large numbers of eager candidates to Istanbul. All too frequently these managers

disappear before fulfilling their promises, leaving the young men stranded in hotels. Famous African footballers in the major league Turkish clubs help such victims, according to the stories that I heard, paying their bills, even buying airplane tickets to send them back to their country.

Those who are waiting to be discovered join the crowd of day workers, but as long as they have their eyes set on becoming professional footballers it is hard for them to succeed in other work. If they take low-paying, casual jobs, the contrast with the glamor they pine for is so depressing that they cannot apply themselves to their task. If they find a salaried job, they ask for leaves to play in matches or club trials, annoying their employer who may even think of it as an evasion.

Some of the sports hopefuls eventually give up their dream and take up another vocation. Among successful Nigerian migrants, several had begun as sportsmen. When I was in Agbo's office, he astonished me by pulling from the shelf an old Turkish newspaper featuring a big photograph of him after he had scored a goal, back in his glory days when he used to play for a major club. Reyhan Tuvi's moving documentary *OFFSIDE* (2010) presents a subtle portrait of the Nigerian footballers' milieu in mid-2000 Istanbul, doing odd jobs and entertaining dreams for a better life. In the documentary, it all leads to a hard blow when one of the subjects gets killed in police custody.¹⁹ Others among Tuvi's subjects had reached happier days by the time of my fieldwork by engaging in other occupations, and one of them is now a prominent member of the Nigerian migrant community. One of the Pentecostal preachers of Istanbul, capable of giving rousing sermons, is also a migrant who arrived as a hopeful footballer.

Improbable as it sounds, acting in TV series or in movies is one of the employment niches sub-Saharan migrants found in Istanbul. Film and TV producers and advertisement agencies discovered the fortuitous presence of migrants and seized it to variegate their stories. Africans mostly play extras, but after the



FIGURE 2: Nigerian Independence Day celebrated by Nigerians with a procession and dances on Istiklal Street in Beyoğlu. September 30, 2012. Photo courtesy of Laurence Salzmann.

initial exposure they started gaining screen time and roles with speaking parts. A few Africans played supporting character roles in adventure films. Sub-Saharan actors are deployed in films and in commercials to add cosmopolitan flavor (as in a Turkish Airlines ad where one of my Kurtuluş acquaintances appeared in a three-piece suit as one of the portraits representing different parts of the world). In the TV series I have seen, in contrast, they represent a character in the neighborhood.

Acting is one of those skills some migrants picked up in Turkey. None had done anything similar back home. Many artist agencies in Istanbul include Africans in their stable. A Nigerian man who started by acting in the movies himself specializes now in finding African extras and actors for producers. He prepares portfolios by taking pictures of fellow migrants with his camera, offers them to studios, and receives 50% commis-

sion on the jobs he finds, a small-scale, informal business but flourishing by those standards.

Acting jobs are sporadic and temporary, but they pay comparatively well and they recur. An extra made 100 TL to 200 TL for a day's job, not much by the profession's standards, but far better than the typical migrant wages. A supporting character role, generally a few days' work, can be remunerated at US \$1,000. African actors are moving up the scale. A few years ago, episode no. 16 of the popular comedy series *AKASYA DURAĞI* had as the lead character a sub-Saharan actor. In 2012, an acclaimed new series, *KAYIP ŞEHİR*, included an African among its main characters and several others as extras.²⁰ Prime time TV dramas flourish in Turkey, increasingly lush and extravagant, and now have also developed an international market, another export success story where sub-Saharans inadvertently found an opportunity.

One-off jobs can bring windfall gains. An Ivorian (with a college degree in art) who was unemployed found, thanks to his boardinghouse host, the job of caring for a herd of sheep for a month. It was the result of an emergency in an Aegean farm where the keeper had quit unexpectedly. A Cameroonian told me that he worked for a summer in the hotels of Cappadocia, teaching bilingual guides advanced French vocabulary to express Turkey-specific matters. As he was a recent migrant himself, I asked him how he managed that. He said that he used the Internet to educate himself while on the job.

Vendors

Self-employment seems to be the ideal of most migrants. They value both the autonomy and the higher income opportunities it affords. Many Senegalese step into self-employment right from the start, by taking up street vending. The sale of wristwatches and knockoff cologne is a Senegalese specialty,

although a handful of Francophone migrants from other countries in West Africa emulate them. They retail watches imported from China, which they source in semi-wholesale stores in Tahtakale. Their customers are young people, especially women, who now buy inexpensive watches as costume jewelry, collecting several and often buying on impulse. The colognes are of Turkish manufacture and I think primarily produced for export. But the Senegalese benefit in this line of work from a mystique that is based on their exotic appearance. Many customers are under a vague illusion that the Africans, being foreigners, have exceptional access to sources of imported watches and cologne.

These days, most vendors in Istanbul carry their watches in the large display cases that Serign has developed and heavy backpacks with more watches and cologne boxes. They set up their stalls in late afternoons or evenings on well-traveled streets. They work in specific neighborhoods both in the center city and the newer high-rise, mid-income, residential districts of the remote periphery. The tolerance of the municipal police (*zabita*) sets the limits on both the hours at which they come out and the neighborhoods where they can work. Some vendors attend the rotating once-a-week open-air markets of different neighborhoods (which are often gigantic affairs). Commuting to these places, lugging the heavy merchandise on public transportation, and the day-long work outdoors in the cold and drizzly Istanbul weather are challenges, but several Senegalese women also engage in this occupation. The women sometimes add to their display crafts brought from Senegal, which are imported by women merchants with more money and connections.

A migrant can enter street vending with little capital. A thousand dollars is enough as start-up capital, a few thousand dollars guarantees a superior inventory that leads to good sales. Critical non-monetary assets needed for this job are knowledge of the city, of its roads and public transportation system; famil-

ilarity with the official and unwritten regulations; and a manner of dealing with municipal authorities. This non-tangible capital is passed from the experienced migrants to newcomers. The work also requires a certain disposition and social skills in which the Senegalese now excel. The returns from street vending seem to be better than many salaried jobs (though fickle and, once again, not easy for an outsider to appraise accurately). I witnessed a Senegalese woman who worked as market vendor turn down, without blinking an eye, a job offer for domestic work with a salary of \$600 per month plus meals. This sort of indirect evidence is the best guide to the levels of income achieved.

More recently, Senegalese women have developed a circular seasonal migration for vending. They come for the summer, work for five or six months, and return home before the Istanbul winter. I came to know one such woman better. She explained that she was married and running this business jointly with her husband, who, however, could not obtain a visa and stayed behind in Dakar. This woman had money lying idle, because when she encountered a Ghanaian craftsman who had started a small business making sandals, she offered him capital to create a partnership. The special visa regulations that Turkey now applies to qualifying Senegalese citizens make this seasonal migration possible. Such mobility is ruled out for migrants with a lapsed visa, who become confined to the country where they migrated and cannot cross its borders.²¹

The only other case I encountered of people engaging in seasonal circular visits was a few Congolese women (DRC) with whom I had a conversation in the spring of 2011. With their lean figure, sharp European-style dress, makeup, and cosmopolitan demeanor, they were different from other migrant women. They stayed in a midrange hotel in Aksaray and told me that they were widows from marriages to Eastern European men. (I am not sure if they held European passports.) They commuted between Kinshasa and European cities. They did not

seem interested in suitcase trade or any other business activity. A few Senegalese men later intimated that such women came for the summer season to Istanbul to become escorts, especially to visiting foreign men.

For the minority of women, running small taverns/restaurants that cater almost exclusively to an African migrant clientele is a common occupation. These places operate without a license, but a range of formality exists, from private apartments where guests are entertained in the living room (and that can second as boarding houses) to outfits that do look like regular restaurants with tables and chairs and perhaps a commercial kitchen. I attended several such establishments held by Nigerian and Cameroonian women in Kurtuluş; by Nigerian, Senegalese, or Congolese women in Kumkapı and Aksaray; and by Nigerians in Osmanbey as well. In the smaller of these, the customers are normally co-nationals of the hostess. One restaurant had a commercial license thanks to a Turkish daughter-in-law. Running a tavern or restaurant calls for considerable resources and significant local contacts. Finding a suitable place to rent is difficult, and the cost of furnishing it high. Apartment outfits develop problems with the neighbors, who object to the smell of cooking or to the crowding. The women who run them long for a proper, licensed establishment, and they are perplexed to discover how hard it is for migrants to achieve this in Turkey. In a different pattern, a Congolese woman had rented in 2011 the upper floor of a café in the entertainment area of Beyoğlu to create a late-hours nightclub for Africans. (With a male associate, she also had started a freight firm in Kumkapı; both businesses folded within the year, in the latter case because she fell victim to her greedy landlord.) But most migrants have little disposable income to create a steady clientele.²²

Visiting Traders and Resident Guide/Interpreters

Migrant employment is closely connected to export trade activities in Turkey. This connection constitutes the hidden angle on sub-Saharan migration to Turkey, visited only cursorily and with less than full understanding in the current literature.

Many migrants think that becoming an agent for visiting African traders, or being involved with the export business in some other way, is their best opportunity in Turkey. The most common way to achieve this is working as a guide/interpreter, an occupation closely associated with freight and brokerage services. Day worker, vendor, teacher, sportsman, churchgoer, Murid, Qadiri, or Tijani, they all aspire to become commercial guide/interpreters, and it can be considered the elite occupation for migrant Istanbul, probably outside of sub-Saharan circles as well.

Every year, a considerable number of traders from sub-Saharan Africa visit Istanbul to purchase trade goods. They come typically for a few days, stay in the moderately priced hotels of the Kumkapı-Aksaray zone, and quickly return to their country. They are a mixed group, ranging from beginners at one end, who board the plane carrying US \$20,000 or so in cash, to merchants at the other end, who can transfer US \$200,000 or more to source what they need. Where these customers lodge, you may see a woman visitor arrive in the lobby of the hotel worn out from her day's outings, set down her bulky shopping bags next to the easy chair where she collapses, and pull out of her purse a handful of crumpled bills in half a dozen different national currencies before she sends for a drink from outside. The frequency of these trips is variable. I met merchants who come to Istanbul every 10 days or so (not an exaggeration), and others only once a year. Many of these traders had also traveled for business to Dubai, Cairo, Mumbai, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Guangzhou, different cities in Western Europe, or the

United States. Some still traveled to such places in between their trips to Istanbul.

African traders include émigrés to other continents. Among buyers who rummage the showrooms for high-end knockoff women's bags (a thriving line in leather manufacturing) you encounter Africans who live in Italian or French major cities. A couple of them explained that during each visit they fill two suitcases with this precious commodity, and take it in the airplane as accompanied luggage. It is a risky operation, because these days trademark royalty infractions are severely penalized. Once in his city of residence, the trader retails this merchandise personally, going with a single bag in his hand to a fancy neighborhood and approaching a potential woman client in the street to speak with her one-to-one. It takes about a month to sell the entire consignment. I estimated roughly, from their figures, that one lot can yield a net gain of two to three thousand dollars. Other Africans come from Paris or from Dubai to purchase clothing in big lots to stock wholesale stores in those places, for re-export via other African traders arriving from Africa. In June 2012, I met in Kumkapı a man from Koudougou, Burkina Faso, who lived in Ecuador and was married to an Ecuadorian woman. He was on his first trip to Istanbul, and had come because he had heard that shoe prices were advantageous. He said he supplied retail stores in Costa Rica and Honduras. There was also a small Cameroon, Honduras, Uruguay trade nexus in Istanbul, involving migrants who presented themselves as of mixed African and Latin American/Black parentage.

All the same, the great majority of visiting traders arrive from sub-Saharan locations, and the African export trade and African migration are mutually reinforcing. First, visiting merchants depend on the migrants as guides and interpreters, and to find a shipping agent. Second, likewise, working for export and shipping firms and for visiting traders is remunerative employment for the migrants. A third aspect of the comple-

mentarity is that many migrants hope to eventually return to their country of birth and start a commercial venture there that involves imports from Turkey, thus parlaying the experience of their migrant years into success in their native community and an easier life during their later years.²³

Traders also become conduits facilitating mobility for aspiring migrants back in the home country. With first-time travel candidates, they help with contacts in the destination and even in the visa application. They can secure a letter of invitation in the name of the prospective migrant from a manufacturer, wholesaler, or freight firm in Istanbul. Although Turkey does not stipulate a national sponsor who guarantees a visa-soliciting foreigner before issuing the visa to that person (as the Gulf countries do), these letters help. The firms in Istanbul write these letters hoping to gain new customers or to remain in the good graces of the established customer who asked for them.

Because this trade is small scale and personalized, the traders need the local guides as interpreters, and in order to find suppliers, freight brokers, and shippers in the city. This is especially important in initial trips, but even experienced traders depend on local guides to locate suppliers with better prices or new products. Frequent visitors develop a trust relationship with their guide, who can start serving also as buying agent for orders communicated from a distance.

The trade works mostly one way, Turkish manufactures moving to Africa. The only import activity in the opposite direction that I learned about is occasionally a Senegalese trader bringing on his or her way to Istanbul a shipment of craft items commissioned by a woman who supplies the street vendors.²⁴ African craft items were more available in Istanbul a few years ago, but customs controls tightened in Turkey against such informal imports. There is also an informal gold market, in which presumably Cameroonians and other Central Africans engage. Runners propose in whispers small quantities for sale

in the street, but that is all I could find out about it. Dealing with the Turkish import regime requires skills and networks that the small-scale operators discussed in this article seem to lack. Turkey's major imports from Africa (oil, gold, commodities such as timber and sesame seed) are in the hands of large Turkish firms in the formal sector.

The interpreter/guides depend for their work on their knowledge of the social and commercial life of the city. Speaking Turkish reasonably well is a fundamental requirement, as is familiarity with the business districts, the wholesale suppliers in them, and the hotels, ethnic restaurants, and other services that the visitors want or appreciate. This information is earned after long years of residence in Istanbul, but a special aptitude and apprenticeship are also needed. All the guides that I met or heard about in Istanbul were men. People opined that this was too exhausting a job for a woman to do.

A migrant becomes a full-time guide/interpreter only gradually. He starts on a part-time basis. Happenstance brings his first customers. Then these become acquaintances who give his name and telephone number to other traders who plan their first-time visit to Istanbul. Some interpreters loiter at the airport to meet co-nationals who disembark, in order to offer their services to them. This way the guide/interpreter widens his network of customers among visiting traders, and with each customer also his knowledge of the commercial life of the city. In between the visits, communication is maintained via phone and email.

The bind of a migrant who wants to break into the occupation of guide is lack of flexibility in the use of his time. If he seeks wage work or holds a salaried job, as he must to meet running expenses, he may lose his ability to respond to a potential customer's unpredictable visiting schedule. He also does not have time to develop local market knowledge. Migrants who are already self-employed are better positioned in this respect. African students who study in Ankara or in other cities come

to Istanbul during their vacation time to learn about the commercial milieu, and in the hope of meeting a merchant who will employ their services. The students have the advantage of speaking (usually) better Turkish and enjoying higher status in Turkish circles. Students who are successful in their first initiatives often end up making the guide/freight shipping business their main occupation, even before they finish their degree. Others wait until graduation before moving to Istanbul to engage in this occupation on a full-time basis.

A guide's first customers often come from among his co-nationals. Often they are traders from the same region or ethno-linguistic group. Successful guides eventually also acquire clients who are not co-nationals, but the Francophone/Anglophone divide seems impossible to breach. The stiffest competition among the guides takes place in the clothing sector, which is what most visiting traders come for. But the trade has developed to the point where some specialization became possible. Construction materials or home furnishings are some niches of specialization. One of the Senegalese migrants who works daily as a call shop operator in Kumkapı is at the same time a specialist for those who want to export dentist's chairs and associated medical equipment.

The guides are most frequently attached to a freight broker, a small hybrid business establishment that forms the nerve center of this small-scale export trade. I now turn to the description of this dynamic sector.

The *Kargo* Business

Hundreds of small freight brokerage firms are established in the districts of Laleli, Aksaray, Kumkapı, and Osmanbey. They line the streets of these neighborhoods, their signs in Cyrillic, English, Arabic, and Persian, indicating the reach of the Turkish export web around the globe. Now these signs

also include words in Wolof, or the names of major African cities. Most of these businesses occupy one floor or two in a small building, with a few interconnected rooms, either on the street level or in a half-basement floor with direct access to the street. Larger freight agencies, however, occupy several floors and even have an entire building to themselves. They serve as end stations and havens to the busy work days of visiting traders and their local guides. These outfits go in Turkish by the name *kargo*, but are of a hybrid nature and offer more than shipping services.²⁵

The *kargo* firms combine with shipping customs brokerages, and also front as exporters for the visiting traders. The model for these mixed enterprises developed in the 1990s, when traders from Eastern Europe stepped up from the “suitcase” phase to a scale that necessitated professional services in freight shipping and customs. The firms quickly proliferated, and prospered as new paths of commerce opened: Iraq, Iran, North Africa, and finally sub-Saharan Africa. Most of the early trade involved overland shipping and was conducted with semi-trailer trucks. The founders of many early firms were drivers or vehicle owners (and of Kurdish or Arab ethnicity, born and raised in eastern Turkey, themselves internal migrants). Freight for Africa, however, is airborne, except for such materials as rebar, steel doors, high-tension cable, and auto spare parts, which are sent by ship.

Kargo firms pack the merchandise of a trader in large bales or in boxes, find the right airline company, and transfer it to the airport to get it rapidly to the port of delivery. But before this can happen, additional issues need to be solved. In Turkey only a legally constituted, taxpaying commercial franchise, which is in possession of an export license, can ship merchandise. A foreign trader cannot do that directly. Most African traders purchase merchandise from many sellers but ship the whole lot in one consignment, so none of their suppliers can do it for them either. Here the freight brokerage firm steps in: it becomes

for the sake of appearances the buyer of the trader's goods and then the legal exporter for the consignment. This extra part that *kargo* firms play is not only a service to the customer, but also a critical element in the *kargo* firm's profitability. By being the legal exporter, the *kargo* firm qualifies for an export subsidy (a government incentive to promote foreign sales). It is equal to the amount of sales tax that has been paid for the exported goods. The freight broker gathers the invoices for the goods included in the shipment and at the end of the year receives the total for sales tax indicated on them as a return. These sums form a major part of *kargo* firms' revenue, and their profits depend on them.

Freight firms specialize by country or geographic region of destination. Airline companies may offer them special shipping rates, and knowledge and routine gives them an edge against competitors. Nevertheless, for firms working with African countries, competition is stiff. They are compelled to keep legions of African guides on their staff, and they try to lure the guides with the most extensive client lists.²⁶

"Being on the staff," however, has a particular meaning in this context. The migrant guides who are so labeled are not employees of the *kargo* firm and do not receive a salary from it. Their benefit from the relationship is that they receive a commission from the business that they bring to the firm. But a migrant guide has to commit to working with only one brokerage firm at a time. Vis-à-vis their African customers, both the brokerage firms and the guides themselves go out of their way to make it look as if the latter were employees or partners of the firm. A firm's business cards are individualized for each guide on the staff, with his name printed on it. Guides also use their freight firm as their base, spending most of their free time in its office, which often teems with people and with merchandise about to be shipped. I encountered situations where an African guide/interpreter had genuinely become a partner of the freight firm, but those are special cases.

Guide/interpreters earn most of their income from two sets of commissions. They receive one set from the stores where they take the traders they lead. These have been standardized in the clothing business and are often calculated as a set fee per sale item (for example, 10 liras per shirt sold). They also receive, as already mentioned, a percentage of the shipping charge that the *kargo* firm billed their customer. In addition to these commission payments, which are standard in this line of business but of which, I was assured time and again with a warning not to betray my respondents, the visiting traders are not aware or at least remain cloudy, the traders pay their guides "gifts" when they are happy with their experience. I detected a trend toward professionalization: some Senegalese guides have now set day rates for their services. Ferrying the trader around, especially if the guide has been able to finesse a driver's license and has a car, can bring additional fees. Some of the best-established guides live in roomy, nicely furnished, upper-floor flats, where they can offer lodging and board to visiting traders.

The most successful sub-Saharan migrant entrepreneurs in Istanbul are owners of their own freight brokerage firm. Most of these are Nigerian businessmen. In these enterprises, they also provide employment to other Africans, some of whom were brought to Turkey for this purpose. To own such a business, they need to possess an export license, which in turn requires a work permit. One way of achieving this is establishing a partnership with a Turkish national. The Turkish person is sometimes not an active associate but simply a front for the migrant. I am not sure of the arrangement between the two parties in such cases. Migrant businessmen entered such partnerships not only for the freight business, but also to establish clothing stores, which normally conduct most of their business with visiting African traders. There were a few such stores that designed their own fashions and had them produced by clothing manufacturers, among the export stores in the Osmanbey business area. One

store was owned by Cameroonian woman. An alternative, and more common, way for a migrant to start a business in Turkey is to marry a Turkish citizen and be naturalized.

Local Marriage: Deliverance or Perdition?

Talk of marriage opens a window on the deepest drives of migrant action. Several Nigerian and Senegalese migrant men in Istanbul had married women who were Turkish citizens. A subset of these was contract marriages, which is a different story, but both men and women migrants also engaged in genuine, love-based marriage relationships. The most prosperous and respected members of the migrant communities were among them. For men, next to spouses who were ethnically Turkish there were also foreign-born women who had been naturalized thanks to an earlier marriage to a Turkish man followed by divorce. Mixed couples existed with an African husband and a wife of Moldovan, Ukrainian, Russian, or Filipino origin who held Turkish citizenship. Two marriages involved a Nigerian man and a Nigerian woman who had been naturalized Turkish in the same way. In both, the women actively engaged in commerce, and the pattern may be different from the rest in at least one of them, where the woman seemed to be the guiding light, operating a series of hair salons for separate clienteles (Turkish and African), while the husband (who had started as an international student and spent most of his years in Turkey) acted as her manager.

Mixed marriage is a contentious issue for the migrants, and the reservations they express point to the deep yearning that from the very start channels the actions of many of them. Some African men confided that they found non-African women desirable as romance partners, but they had doubts about marrying them. It implied for them giving up on the idea of making a return to Africa one day. This is because of the

widespread perception that Turkish women, or white women in general, would refuse to live in Africa and would not follow their husband there. Also it would be hard to wrest the children from an estranged Turkish wife to take them to Africa. Either such marriages then would turn completely fruitless, or the alternative was life as a migrant in perpetuity. As a matter of fact, there already were wealthy members of the Nigerian migrant community who had married an East European wife in Turkey and had relocated to Nigeria (turning over the Istanbul enterprise to younger relatives). Another example was a Turkish woman who had followed her physician husband to Ghana and was happily married there. There were also many contrasting cases, however, failed mixed marriages among migrants of more modest financial achievement (with the dreaded "loss of children" outcome). Migrant men in the entourage of the successful returnees were not persuaded by their example; for them the jury was still out, and they waited to see how long the foreign wife would endure life in Africa.

These concerns reveal something crucial about the disposition of the migrants, beyond personal preferences in domestic arrangement. Sub-Saharan migrants remain enmeshed in a web of sentimental and social relations with their community of origin, their relatives, friends, and acquaintances there. These relations and the values and norms that they support guide the migrants' entire course of action. Even after years of life abroad, they cannot toss them away. Their foreign adventure is a temporary contrivance; a bold act, but only instrumental for the design of eventual return to the community of birth and the prospect of shining with exemplary success. West African migration does not draw its subjects out of their native milieu, it only gives them the means to accomplish its ideals.

Migration for Self-Employment as World-Altering Circumstance

Michel Peraldi (2009: 43), an experienced observer of Mediterranean immigration, called the buzz of commercial activity in export that exists in cities such as Istanbul “pariah capitalism.” An arresting expression, but does it not underrate the aggregate result of this commerce? It also remains indifferent to the movement of African economies, the rise in income and consumer spending, and the house-building boom. The axis of world trade has changed, and nostalgia for the good old solid pattern of regulated big-business exchange is no help. Maybe we will end up there again, but for now we need caution on another count as well. West and Central African migrants of Istanbul are not “pariahs.” They issue from the urban, trade, civil service, or white-collar government job stratum of their respective countries. They are relatively well educated, and many national communities include a disproportionate number of college students or alumni. West and Central African migration is largely a “middle class” affair, if the proportion of income disparity between the countries of the world that Milanovic (2011) brings to our attention is kept in mind. The migrants extract themselves from their middling position to fulfill dreams of self-betterment, and make a small fortune to serve as capital for a project back at home, as they also send remittances to family and dependents. What makes the “pariah” qualifier seem apt is the debasement of the trans-border experience, which changes migrants from being respectable members of their community to a racialized lower class in abject conditions. This is an effect of the international regime of migration, but for the aspiring migrants a calculated risk. They embark on their migration saga aware of the hardship awaiting them, sometimes with amazing optimism and cheerfulness, and spend their resources, often all their life’s savings, to make a success of it. They take the deprivations and insults

stoically with eyes set on the future. Some achieve more and some less, but the sum total of migrant efforts supplies in our day a good quotient of the willpower that is changing our collective circumstances.

NOTES

- 1 Much of this pioneering literature is in Turkish and has been reviewed in a Turkish-language publication (Şaul 2013). The tide of the “transit migration to Europe” framework seems to be turning in the literature produced by younger scholars. Most contributions to the recent collection of articles on sub-Saharan migration to Turkey (Büdel 2013; Fait 2013; De Clerck 2013) present radical critics of the concept. Düvell (2013) and Collyer, Düvell, and de Haas (2012) have published sustained theoretical arguments against it. As to the “refugee” issue, despite all the clamor about them in the migration literature there are few political asylum seekers from West and Central Africa in Turkey. The vast majority of asylum seekers in Turkey come from four countries only: Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, and Somalia; in 2010 the figure for “Other” that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees provided, which included besides the applicants from all of West and Central Africa also those from several other countries, was only 1,000. This can be set against the rough estimate I make in the text of about 70,000 migrants from all sub-Saharan countries. *Türkiye’de UNHCR: Gerçekler ve Rakamlar*, no. 3, p. 25, Tables 5 ve 6. January 2011. <http://www.unhcr.org.tr/?content=178>.
- 2 My main field research during 2010-2011 was supported by grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the University of Illinois Research Board, while on sabbatical leave from the University of Illinois. The summer 2012 research trip was made possible by a faculty exchange grant of the Swiss National Science Foundation in conjunction with the University of Zurich, Ethnologisches Seminar.
- 3 Of my 169 main interlocutors, 44% were from Nigeria, overrepresenting their proportion among Istanbul sub-Saharan migrants. The overrepresentation was due to my greater familiarity with the neighborhoods where Nigerians lived and worked, and to my decision to attend the small Pentecostal churches. The Senegalese, who are overwhelmingly Muslim, made up 33% of my interlocu-

tors, and the Cameroonians and the Congolese about 7% each. I interacted with people hailing from 19 countries, including a few from Tanzania, Kenya, Sudan, and Eritrea, countries that I had decided not to include in my research. Twenty-seven percent of my interlocutors were women, again an overrepresentation (women are a smaller minority among sub-Saharan migrants); this time the disproportion was deliberate, because I wanted to achieve a more balanced number of contacts with women within my respondent group. I had more Senegalese women than Nigerian women interlocutors, and I suspect this reveals their higher proportion in their national migrant community as well, not only the larger group of Senegalese nationals.

- 4 In the last four years, the Turkish president Abdullah Gül made official visits to Ghana, Gabon, Kenya, Tanzania, DR Congo, Cameroon, and Nigeria; prime minister Tayyip Erdoğan had a well-advertised trip to Somalia in 2011 (the first of any government head since the collapse of the Somali state apparatus), and another one in January 2013 to Gabon, Niger, and Senegal. During these visits a bloated delegation (including politicians, members of the Islamically oriented businessmen and industrialists confederation TUSKON, journalists, even singers and TV show hosts) escorts the leader. Agreements are signed, the Islamic Humanitarian Relief Foundation IHH finds some local cause, and (if there is not already one) a new Gülen school is established. Often the Gülen schools have been in the forefront of the impulse, breaking new ground in Africa as elsewhere, paving the way for diplomacy, trade, and investment. Trade summits with African countries have also been organized in Istanbul, and in May 2011 Turkey hosted the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries. The Gülen school network is worldwide; for example, as of 2012 in the U.S. alone there were 135 Gülen establishments, including charter schools: <http://turkishinvitations.weebly.com/list-of-us-schools.html>.
- 5 For example, Gadzala (2011), Light and Bonacich (1988), Min (1988), Purcell (1965). For Chinese in Africa, Haugen and Carling (2005); Bortoncello and Bredeloup (2009).
- 6 Sub-Saharan Africans were present in Istanbul in historical times, and included traders and scholars as well as slaves employed in both low and high positions. These historical topics, and Ottoman links to West Africa especially, are very much neglected, and even the specialists remark upon them rarely. These early ties to Africa lasted until the dawn of the twentieth century. Their trace is starting

to be recognized only now that an Afro-Turk community has manifested itself publicly, and African migrants are taking cognizance of it. This vast topic is obviously beyond the scope of the present article.

- 7 Öcal (2005: 20-22, 39-40) presents recollections from among the oldest established African migrants in Istanbul, conveying the climate of this coterie of students in the 1990s.
- 8 West African migration to Latin America seems to be significant, but the literature is sparse. See Maffia (2010), Marcellino and Cerutti (2012). Zubrzycki (2012: 88) reports that most Senegalese in Argentina entered the country through Brazil.
- 9 In 2007, Suter (2012: 40) was told by Nigerian migrants that when the Turkish police held migrants under custody, they kept for deportation those who had arrived from Asian countries by crossing the land borders with Iran or Syria in the east, but released the sub-Saharan Africans. What needs to be considered here is that deporting sub-Saharan migrants involves the purchase of an airplane ticket.
- 10 See as illustration the "first day in Istanbul" account that Suter (2012: 30) reports from one of her principal Nigerian respondents: "The first black man he meets on the street is Cameroonian.... The man hosts him for two days, shows him an Internet café and connects him with other Nigerians."
- 11 Knight (2011: 131) explains that in the Tarlabası neighborhood, where many migrants lived at the time of his fieldwork in 2004 and 2005, many buildings had uncertain ownership and the apartments were often rented out by squatters. Most of these buildings had been the property of Greek families who had been pressured to leave Turkey in the 1960s without an opportunity to sell or transfer their real estate. By 2011, the dilapidated buildings of Tarlabası were mostly abandoned and few Nigerians and other West Africans lived there, as a major municipal government urban renewal project was in the offing. The Cihangir neighborhood nearby, on the opposite side of Taksim Square, which had also housed sub-Saharan migrants when Knight conducted his fieldwork, had already been gentrified by private initiative and market forces, to become one of the expensive bohemian-chic neighborhoods of center town housing a sizable floating foreign-expatriate population, but no sub-Saharan migrants.
- 12 In an article focusing on East European (not African) migrants İçduygu (2006: 8) writes: "Istanbul and Ankara have 'markets' for foreign labour where employers arrive in the morning and select

workers who meet their needs for work by the day in construction or domestic work." He mentions Eyüp and Aksaray districts in Istanbul and Maltepe and Ulus districts in Ankara as the locations of these "markets."

- 13 Sports migration and the presence of significant numbers of footballers among the casual migrants workers of Istanbul are only starting to be discussed in the small volume of literature on sub-Saharan migration to Turkey. Öcal's thesis (1995) mentioned their presence and provided some first person accounts. So does Knight (2011: 98-99).
- 14 This directly contradicts what Büdel (2013: 12) was told. We need to consider here that the migrants do not say the same things to researchers who present themselves as European and as Turkish (although my own case was not simple). I encounter similar kinds of discrepancies in the migrant statements reported by Suter (2012). More generally, migrants' declarations cannot be treated as unproblematic and transparent. They need to be interpreted critically, in relation to other contextual and verbal elements, and knowing that migrants, like the rest of us, do not always hold totally firm and considered opinions; they muddle through and they can entertain different thoughts at different moments. Some of the "transit" migration reporting may be a mirage due to neglecting this viewpoint.
- 15 <http://www.afrikaulkeleri.net/2010/10/afrikal-futbolcular-turkiyedeki.html>.
- 16 Büdel (2013: 7) writes that some footballers he met came to Turkey on invitation of a club in one of the high divisions of the country, but were rejected after a trial period. Others were brought to Turkey by agents who provide the necessary facilities against payment by the players themselves. Quite a few footballers who are not successfully signed up within their visa period return home to continue their career there. Others make the decision to stay in Turkey, as their journey was paid for by family members and friends who invested many expectations in them.
- 17 These lunches are philanthropy of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, coordinated by the Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program (IIMP), an ecumenical project of Christian churches in the city led by the Global Ministries Board. The IIMP provides services to refugees and migrants, including food, clothing, health care, counseling, voluntary repatriation, and emergency shelter subsidies.
- 18 Actually, most teams include a mix of players hailing from different sub-Saharan countries, because the migrant footballers do not

represent all the nations in Africa. The African migrant organizers selected the names of some “nations” for the teams’ names by political consideration. For example, “South Africa” was one of the teams, although there were no footballers and few migrants altogether from that nation. Knight (2011: 166-171) provides a discussion of the 2004 tournament.

- 19 The case reported at the end of OFFSIDE came to be known in the media as “the Festus Okey trial” and turned into a cause célèbre for pro-migrant activists because the court dragged on the proceedings for four years. After stirring much public outcry, the trial ended in December 2011 with a guilty verdict for the officer who had been charged with manslaughter. The legal case and the public reactions are chronicled in Usanmaz and Güven (2013).
- 20 The principal sub-Saharan character in this series was somewhat stereotypical rather than true to life (a Nigerian street vendor), but depicted with sympathy and as a vehicle against prejudice. The series received favorable newspaper reviews (also mired, however, in clichés of “refugee”), but was taken off the air after a few months.
- 21 In the fall of 2012, the government passed an amnesty that offered irregular migrants the possibility of an exit visa after payment of reduced fines, so that they could then apply for a regular entry visa. Several Senegalese and some other West Africans took advantage of this provision to visit their family for the first time in many years. The extent to which this amnesty resulted in regularizing African migration, its officially stated purpose, needs to be investigated.
- 22 In the Beyoğlu district, a few formal nightclubs draw some African customers, but local and expatriate whites also patronize them and these clubs have Turkish managers (although two of them were started many years ago by a former student from Sudan who had turned businessman and had an impact on the entertainment landscape of the city).
- 23 The goods that sub-Saharan traders source from Turkey make a long list: women’s, men’s, and children’s clothing; dress accessories; footwear; natural and synthetic leather goods; plastic goods; kitchenware; pots and pans; ceramic tiles, sinks, bathtubs, and toilet bowls; dress and upholstery fabrics; rebar (steel for reinforced concrete); steel doors; auto and motorcycle spare parts; water pumps; furniture; machines and equipment; copper high-tension power lines; electrical fixtures and other electrical supplies; generators; pharmaceuticals; perfumery and aftershave; house-cleaning products; baby products; glassware; macaroni and packaged baked

- goods; and fruit juice. Much of this is shipped as canvas parcels of 100 to 200 kilograms each, and for larger loads in freight containers.
- 24 A few people also mentioned Senegalese women who brought two sacks of mangoes on their way to Istanbul and in one instance coconuts. Knight (2011: 144) refers to a Ghanaian woman who had craft items for sale sent to her from Ghana.
- 25 Visiting traders operating at the low end of the scale may simply take advantage of the generous special baggage allowances that some airline companies offer to frequent trader travelers (up to 130 pounds per person) and, in the prototypical "suitcase trade" manner, carry their purchases with them as baggage. But the vast majority has heavier loads and cannot do without the services of a freight broker, which they also need to carry out the customs procedures.
- 26 Competition can take other forms. *Kargo* firm bosses (and clothing store managers doing much business with Africa) establish personal ties with their African customers, undertake extended tours in Africa to visit them, attend customers' children's weddings, etc. A few of the most agile bosses had picked up enough Wolof or Lingala from their customers to conduct their business in those languages. It was also rumored that some firms enhanced their allure to visiting women traders by hiring handsome male employees and encouraging them to take the customers out after hours.

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