

MIGRATIONS FROM THE “GLOBAL SOUTH” AND THE INFORMAL
ECONOMY IN TURKEY: *LAISSEZ PASSER, LAISSEZ FAIRE?*

*MIGRACIONES DESDE EL “SUR GLOBAL” Y LA ECONOMÍA
INFORMAL EN TURQUÍA: ¿LAISSEZ PASSER, LAISSEZ FAIRE?*

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Recibido: agosto de 2005; aceptado: abril de 2006

ABSTRACT

In terms of migratory movements from the “Global South”, Turkey is a receiving, transit and sending country all at the same time. The paper analyzes these self-organized flows through the concept of the “autonomy of migration”.

The paper starts off by outlining the defining impact of Turkish nationalist ideology on migratory movements. Next, the economy of transit migration that sustains contemporary flows is analyzed, given ever stricter border controls implemented as part of the Turkey’s process of EU *acquis*. Next labour emigration to European and the Middle Eastern countries is reviewed. Lastly, the differential access of migrants to informal employment in Turkey is examined in light of recent research findings. Gender, ethnicity and social networks are identified as factors that frame migrant agency.

Keywords: Migration; Turkey; Informal economy.

RESUMEN

En términos de movimientos migratorios desde el “Sur Global”, Turquía es a un tiempo país receptor, de tránsito y emisor. Este trabajo analiza estos flujos auto-organizados a través del concepto de la “autonomía de la migración”.

El trabajo comienza por delinear el impacto de la ideología nacionalista turca en los movimientos migratorios. A continuación, se estudia la economía de las migraciones de tránsito que sostiene los flujos contemporáneos, dados los controles en frontera, más estrictos que nunca, impuestos como parte del proceso de acceso de Turquía a la UE. Seguidamente, se estudia la emigración laboral a países europeos y de Oriente Medio. Finalmente, se examina el acceso diferencial de los migrantes al empleo informal en Turquía, a la luz de resultados de investigación recientes. Se identifican el género, la etnicidad y las redes sociales como factores que enmarcan las migraciones.

Palabras clave: Migración; Turquía; Economía informal.

JEL Classification: F22; O15; O17; O52; O53.

1. INTRODUCTION¹

The “autonomy of migration”, that is the self-organised transnational mobility, in which migrants take advantage of fissures in theoretically impermeable border regimes, is increasingly being recognized as a key characteristic of current migration flows (Boutang 2002; Mezzadra 2005; Karakayalı/Tsianos 2005). Inhabitants of the “Global South” devise and realize migration strategies to counter the economic and social disempowerment they experience through the hegemonic order of globality (Escobar 2004). Discussing the failure of European migration policies, Castles 2004 similarly concludes that „The formal power of governments and bureaucracies is being subverted by the human agency embodied in migration networks and transnational communities.“ (878).

Turkey is a middle-income country with substantial levels of poverty and unemployment. Yet, considerable numbers of people from Asia and Africa transit Turkey undocumented on their way to Europe and migrants from Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries use tourist visas to engage in informal cross border trade and to seek employment opportunities in Turkey (İçduygu 2003). Do these stylized facts point to a “laissez passer, laissez faire” approach in Turkish migration policy? The paper analyzes the economic and political processes that sustain current transnational migratory flows from the “Global South” to and through Turkey. It makes the case that the permeability of Turkey’s borders and labour markets for irregular migrants are symptomatic of the “autonomy of migration” rather than of a liberal “laissez passer, laissez faire” approach.

The paper also contextualizes the analysis of current migration flows by drawing attention to similarities with and differences to historical pendants. Thus, Section 2 reminds us of the formative impact that nationalist ideology

¹ I would like to thank Bob Sutcliffe, Didem Daniş and two anonymous referees for many insightful comments. I would also like to thank Bilgin Ayata, Ildiko Beller-Hann, Bülent Küçük, Özlem Onaran, Şemsa Özar and Ceren Özselçuk for their generosity in providing access to materials that were difficult to locate. The usual caveat applies.

has had on migratory movements and humanitarian assistance. Section 3 discusses the informal economy sustained through transit migration from the “Global South” to Western European countries. Section 4 examines patterns of labour emigration. Drawing on recent research findings, Section 5 analyzes migrants’ access to informal economic structures in trade and employment in Turkey. Section 6 draws some conclusions and points to directions for further research.

2. NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY AND MIGRATORY FLOWS

2.1. THE OTTOMAN LEGACY

The decline of the Ottoman Empire generated migratory movements, which dramatically affected the ethnic composition of modern Turkey and thus had a formative effect on Turkish national identity. Earlier on, in 1857 a liberal Immigration Code had been introduced with the aim of attracting European settlers, albeit with little success (Akgündüz 1998). Nonetheless, various inflows of labour migration ensued in the course of the Empire’s incorporation into world markets (Keyder 1987). For example, European contract workers were hired to work at railway construction projects in Ottoman territories. Similarly, the development of agriculture as an export industry spurred labour migration from Greece and the Black Sea region to Western Anatolia. The extent of clandestine labour migration at the time can only be guessed:

“... on 11 June 1909 several hundred Muslim workers crossed the border to Greece illegally (without passports) with the intention of working only 20 days in Thessaly and then coming back again.”²

Yet, it is the forced displacement of Ottoman subjects rather than labour migration that accounts for the vast share of migratory movements in the late Ottoman period. The political turmoil accompanying the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire led to massive expulsions based on ethnic and religious affiliations. Between the mid 19th century and the early 1920s, close to four million Turks, Tatars and Circassians were forced to migrate from the Caucasus and Crimean regions to the Ottoman heartland (Akgündüz 1998: 98-99). Large parts of the local Turkish and/or Muslim populations from the Balkans were also resettled during the course of nation building across Southern Europe in the late 19th - early 20th centuries. During the early 1920s, over one million Anatolian Greeks fled the war between the Turkish and Greek armies in Western Anatolia. The displacement was further consolidated through the 1923 compulsory population exchange agreed between Greece and Turkey, which also affected a part of the Turkish communities in Greece (around 350,000 people) (Hirschon 2003)³. The exchange constituted one of the first

² Akgündüz 1998, p.107.

³ See also “Passing Drama”, a documentary film by Angela Melitopoulos 2002.

treaties in which the international diplomatic community endorsed 'unmixing peoples' for reasons of security and political stability (Barutciski 2003).

The most tragic incidence of forced migration remains the deportation and murder of more than one million Armenian Ottoman subjects from 1915 onwards (Birikim 2005; Akçam 2004; Cohen 1997: 42-55). The pogroms of 1894-1895 and of 1909, during which over 300,000 Armenians were killed can be read as a precursor to later developments (Insel 2005) – just as the mass emigration of Armenian and Syrian Christian Ottoman subjects to the Americas, involving around 800,000 people between 1860 and 1914 (Akgündüz 1998). But the 1915 order of deportation to Syria and Palestine was unique in the sense that it was a planned and systematically implemented strategy of ethnic cleansing, reflecting the desire of the nascent Turkish nationalist elite to consolidate state power under an ethnically and religiously homogeneous populace of Turkish/Islamic identity. Hence, the deportation ("*tehcir*") was directly aimed at displacing the Armenian people from their Anatolian homeland and to eliminate large sections of this ethnic group in the process. Within a few years' time a tenth of the entire Anatolian population was wiped out. Even today, the traumatic traces of the nationalist project keep hold over Turkey, as society persists in a state of collective amnesia and an insistent refusal to acknowledge the true dimensions of what happened (Akçam 2005).

2.2. ETHNIC NATIONALISM AND MIGRATION IN THE REPUBLICAN ERA

The forced displacement and death of Christian Ottoman subjects and the inflow of Muslim refugees in the first quarter of the twentieth century significantly changed the ethnic and religious composition of Turkish society. Between 1913 and 1923, the share of the Christian population in the area that today constitutes Turkey declined from 20 per cent to 2.5 per cent (Keyder 2003:43). Consequently, the nation building process that followed the declaration of the Turkish Republic in 1923 was heavily biased towards "Turkishness" as a constitutive characteristic of national belonging. Even though Armenians, Greeks and Jews had been recognized as minorities in the Lausanne Treaty of 1924, a significant discrepancy emerged between the formally civic and substantively ethnic/religious definitions of citizenship in Turkey (Kirişçi 2000). Turkish Jews for example, were temporarily subjected to a discriminatory wealth tax during WWII and those unable to pay were detained (Levi 1998). The Greek population of Istanbul, although exempt from the population exchange, diminished from 110,000 in 1923 to 2,500 in 2003 through emigration caused by discrimination and sporadic violence (Oran 2003). A large proportion of other indigenous non-Muslim populations, such as Süryanis, Chaldeans and Yezidis also left (Danış 2004:219). The ethnicized practices of citizenship also affected the Kurdish population. They were subjected to a series of forced resettlement policies and to policies of cultural and political othering (Yeğen 1999). During the 1990s, many villages were depopulated and over one million Kurdish people internally displaced in

the struggles between Kurdish insurgents and state security forces in south-eastern Turkey (Erdem/Özevin/Özselçuk 2003; TESEV 2005; Ayata/Yükseker 2005).

The discriminatory practices of citizenship also found reflection in the republic's immigration policies. The 1934 Law on Settlement for example, restricted the right to immigration to persons of "Turkish descent and culture". As Kirişçi notes, immigration practice had a strong religious overtone:

"Unlike the Ottoman Empire, Turkey has in public emphasized Turkish language and ethnic affiliation in respect to its immigration policies and remained silent in respect to religion. Yet, the actual practice reveals a striking preference for admitting immigrants with a Sunni and Hanefi religious background. ...

Though Turkey has been willing to extend asylum to a broad range of people, it has restricted full refugee status only to people who qualify as potential immigrants."⁴

Through this selective immigration policy, over 825,000 Muslim Balkan refugees (Turks, Pomaks, Roma, Tatars, Circassians, Bosnians, Albanians) settled in Turkey between 1923 and 1939⁵, while "Christian Orthodox Gagauz Turks and Shi'a Azeris, in spite of their explicit reference to Turkish descent, appear to have been denied the possibility to migrate to Turkey."⁶ The emigration of Turks from Western Thrace in Greece (the other group exempted from the "population exchange") on the other hand, was discouraged by Turkish authorities with the nationalistic aim of maintaining a Turkish presence in the region (Kirişçi 2000).

Under the Law on Settlement, a further 860,000 people from Balkan countries migrated to Turkey between 1940 and 1995. Migrants from Yugoslavia made up 22 per cent, but the vast majority consisted of Pomaks and Turks from Bulgaria. There were two large waves of immigration: the first one in 1950-51 when 154,000 people arrived in Turkey, and again in 1989 when 310,000 crossed the border. Around 40,000 more people migrated to Turkey on the basis of family unification in the 1970s (Kirişçi 2000).

The 1989 emigration wave followed renewed measures taken by Bulgarian authorities to forcefully assimilate Turkish speaking communities (9.5 per cent of the population). When the freedom to travel was granted in May 1989, many people took the chance to emigrate to Turkey. The social integration of Bulgarian migrants was facilitated by bi-national kinship networks sustained by earlier migrants, general societal acceptance and substantial support from NGOs, the government and international organisations. Still, disappointed with the lack of employment opportunities in Turkey and encouraged by the regime change in Bulgaria, around 40 per cent of émigrés chose to return to Bulgaria in the early 1990s. Although the ethnicisation of conflicts over access to resources in Bulgaria continues to pose a challenge, the possibility

⁴ Kirişçi (2000), p.3.

⁵ Kirişçi (2000), p.7-8 and Table 1, p.8.

⁶ Kirişçi (2000), p.14

of emigration to Turkey substantially strengthens their fall back position (Van Hear 1998; Vasileva 2005).

While Turkey's ethnically defined immigration policy allowed for the settlement of Bulgarians and Yugoslavs, its own citizens had to seek asylum in Western (and to a limited extent Eastern) European countries. After democracy and human rights had been suspended by the coup d'état in September 1980, around 240,000 Turkish citizens filed asylum claims in Europe⁷. The number of asylum claims by Kurds with Turkish citizenship soared in the 1990s. As the struggle between the Turkish armed forces and Kurdish guerrillas led to massive human rights violations and internal displacement, over 424,000 asylum applications were filed in the 1990-2002 period (Table 1).

TABLE 1: ASYLUM APPLICATIONS BY TURKISH CITIZENS IN EUROPE, 1980-2002

	Number of claims filed
1980-1984	90,046
1985-1989	152,469
1990-1994	183,007
1995-1999	154,392
2000-2002	86,822

Source: UNHCR (2001), Tables I.18, II.20, III.27, IV.42 and UNHCR (2003a), Table 8.

2.3. THE POLICY OF DE FACTO PROTECTION TOWARDS NON-TURKIC REFUGEES

On a number of occasions, Turkey extended de facto protection to various groups of refugees. During WWII, Turkey provided refuge to 800 German Jewish professionals and allowed many others to transit the country. Turkey also became a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention, but applies a geographical reservation that restricts eligibility for refugee status to European citizens. During the Cold War, around 8,100 asylum claims by CEE nationals were filed with Turkish authorities. These refugees were largely resettled in third countries by the UNHCR or the International Catholic Migration Commission (Kirişçi 2000:11).

Still, this humanitarian policy has been circumscribed by ethnically defined security concerns. While Iraqi Turkomans were recognized as refugees and granted immigrant status in Turkey, Arab and Kurdish refugees from Middle Eastern countries had to accept a less secure status. For example, 50,000 Kurdish Iraqis who fled to Turkey in 1988 were only granted temporary asylum for fear of a stronger Kurdish presence within Turkey. Again during the Gulf crisis in 1990-91, more than 460,000 Iraqi Kurds fled to Southern Turkey, and were hosted in temporary shelters in the vicinity of the border. Through diplomatic and military intervention at UN level, a "safe haven" was created in northern Iraq and the vast majority of refugees were rapidly repatriated

⁷ UNHCR (2001), Tables I.18, II.20, III.27, IV.42.

to Iraq⁸. Around 60,000 labour migrants from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, who had been working in Iraq and Kuwait, were repatriated to their countries of origin via Turkey. As Kirişçi 2000 remarks, the differences in Turkey's policies towards the Bulgarian Turkish and Pomak refugees in 1989 on the one hand and the Kurdish refugees in 1991 on the other, reflect the ethnic bias in Turkish refugee policy: As outlined in the previous section, the borders were quickly opened to Bulgarian refugees and a national effort was launched to socially and economically integrate the refugees, including rapid access to Turkish citizenship. The humanitarian help offered to Iraqi Kurds in contrast, was geared towards rapid repatriation. The Kurds did not have access to the labour market in Turkey, either formally or informally. Meanwhile, around 50,000 Turkoman Iraqis were resettled in central Anatolia and were subsequently granted permanent residence⁹.

During the war in Bosnia in the early 1990s, around 25,000 Bosnians were granted refuge in Turkey, but were not officially recognized as refugees by the authorities. Most of them stayed with Turkish relatives of Bosnian descent, and around 2,500-3,000 of them were settled in a UNHCR supported camp near the Bulgarian border (Kümbetoğlu 2003:246). Compared to the Bulgarian migrants of 1989, the Bosnian refugees also experienced substantial discrimination, both on the labour market and in accessing social services. Their "temporary guest" status did not entitle them to work permits. As a result, many skilled refugees were forced to take up low paid jobs in the informal economy. The economic hardship motivated most refugees to return to Bosnia after the Dayton agreement of 1995, or to seek asylum and settle in a third country (Kirişçi 2000; 2003). A small minority stayed on and 3,000 persons eventually obtained Turkish citizenship. Similarly, 20,000 Kosovo Albanians temporarily sought refuge in Turkey during the crisis in 1999. They also mostly returned to Kosovo or engage in circular migration between the two countries (İçduygu 2003: 23; Kirişçi 2003)

Beside these cases of de facto protection, asylum claims filed in Turkey also increased in the 1990s (Table 2), mainly from Iranians and Iraqis (UNHCR 2003b:346). Turkish authorities process these applications in cooperation with the UNHCR (Kirişçi 2003:64-65; Corliss 2003), but the geographical reservation to the Geneva Convention implies that non-European refugees continue to be resettled in third countries, mostly in North America and Australia¹⁰.

⁸ Kirişçi (2000), p.12-13.

⁹ Kirişçi (2000), p.13-14.

¹⁰ www.egm.gov.tr/yabancilar

TABLE 2: ASYLUM APPLICATIONS IN TURKEY, 1970-2003

	Number of applications filed
1970-1974	300
1975-1979	371
1980-1984	4,232
1985-1989	12,024
1990-1994	24,386
1995-1999	26,458
2000-2003	18,473

Source: UNHCR (2001), Tables I.15, II.17, III.22, IV.34, VI.15, VI.22 and UNHCR (2003b), Table A, p.346.

3. TURKEY AS A COUNTRY OF TRANSIT MIGRATION

In the post WWII period, Turkey has served as a transit country for Iranian and Syrian Jews en route to Israel (Kirişçi 2000). Overall, up to 1.5 million Iranian citizens are estimated to have arrived in Turkey en route to Europe and North America since the Islamic regime came to power in 1979. Until recently, they were legally permitted to enter the country without a visa¹¹, and many overstay the allowed 90 days until they have arranged a transit route to join one of the established Iranian communities abroad (İçduygu 2003; Kirişçi 2000:11). Iraqi Chaldeans are known to follow a similar strategy of transit migration (Danış 2004:223).

The major novelty for Turkey, lies in the substantial flows of transit migration from the "Global South", primarily the Middle East, Asia and Africa to Western countries. These self-organised migration flows have been ascribed to two major factors. First, as EU member states dismantled much of their asylum systems and tightened border regimes at the peripheries of the EU, Turkey was most conveniently placed to serve as an alternative transit route to enter Europe without documents. Secondly, wars and political turmoil in the Middle East, Asia and Africa have increased the inflow of refugees and transit migrants from these regions (İçduygu 2003:18-19).

Does this make Turkey a country with a "*laissez passer*" policy? Yes and no. İçduygu estimates "the annual number of transit migrants in an irregular situation in Turkey ... to be around 200,000." (İçduygu 2003: 8). These figures suggest that Turkey has followed a fairly liberal policy towards transit migration. However, in the last few years, an increasing number of undocumented foreign nationals have been intercepted by Turkish police authorities¹². The policy change is closely related to the pressure to comply with the EU border regime as a condition of the EU *acquis*. To this end, Turkey has taken several steps

¹¹ On February 11, 2005 the foreign minister Abdullah Gül announced that in line with the EU *acquis*, a visa requirement was being introduced for Iranian citizens. (Radikal, February 11, 2005)

¹² The figures are 94,000 persons in 2000, 84,000 in 2002 and 54,000 in 2003. Migrants from over 160 countries were intercepted, but most of them were nationals of Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Moldavia and Pakistan (İçduygu 2004:8; Terzioğlu 2004).

to intensify border controls, to harmonize Turkish visa policy with Schengen practice, to combat the trafficking and smuggling of persons, and to regularize the processing of asylum claims (Kirişçi 2003). The 2005 National Action Plan on Asylum and Migration introduced the fast-track processing of asylum applications. The establishment of several “reception centres” for asylum seekers and detention centres for deporting apprehended undocumented migrants is planned¹³. Readmission agreements are being negotiated with several sending countries in collaboration with international organisations such as IOM and UNHCR (Içduygu 2003; Terzioğlu 2004; European Commission 2004b). From the European Commission’s perspective:

... during the pre-accession period the fight against illegal migration should be strengthened by improved exchange of information, statistics and risk management between the current Member states and Turkey, the development of public information campaigns, liaison concerning the repatriation of illegal migrants to their countries of origin and co-operation on dismantling networks of migrants’ smugglers and traffickers¹⁴.

The European Commission’s statement makes it clear that as well as introducing legislative changes, Turkey is expected both to end a “laissez passer” practice towards transit migration and to criminalize undocumented migrants through public “information” campaigns that highlight the “illegality” of irregular migrants. There is some parallel here with the United States, as described by De Genova (2002: 436):

“Overstaying a visa – the rather discrete act by which very significant numbers of people become undocumented migrants – is, after all, not terribly dramatic. Hence, it is precisely “the Border” that provides the exemplary theater for staging the spectacle of “the illegal alien” that the law produces. The elusiveness of the law, and its relative invisibility in producing “illegality”, requires the spectacle of “enforcement” at the U.S.-Mexico border that renders a racialized migrant “illegality” visible and lends it the commonsensical air of a “natural” fact.”

It appears that similar efforts have already started in Turkey. Increased media coverage of security forces’ apprehension of migrants circulates visual images of border enforcement and simultaneously generates the impression of a massive and continuous inflow of “illegal foreigners”. To give an example, Turkish Daily News featured several articles on the topic within a short period of time:

“Acting on a tip, the Tatvan gendarmerie in the eastern Anatolian province of Bitlis yesterday apprehended 67 people who entered the country illegally. ... A gendarmerie spokesman said they would be deported following interrogation. The Anatolia news agency said the illegal migrants were mostly Pakistani nationals.”¹⁵ (*May 25, 2005*)

¹³ <http://www.amnesty-turkiye.org>

¹⁴ European Commission (2004a), p.42.

¹⁵ <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=14099>

"Security forces captured a total of 56 illegal migrants in the western port city of Izmir and in the northwestern province of Edirne just before the groups attempted to cross the Greek border. ... During a routine patrol carried out by Edirne gendarmerie teams, 51 migrants from Iraq, Pakistan and Mauritania were apprehended and sent to the Edirne police department. Meanwhile, five other Mauritanian citizens who entered Turkey illegally were rescued and detained near the Dikili region of Izmir. Greek Coast Guard boats reportedly left the migrants in the sea with life jackets."¹⁶ (*June 8, 2005*)

"Acting on a tip off gendarmerie teams captured 64 immigrants on a small island near Foça, Izmir, trying to sneak into Greece. The gendarmerie said that among the illegal immigrants were Mauritanian, Somalian and Palestinian nationals. The illegal immigrants said human traffickers had taken them to Orak island and told them that the island was in Greek territory. A group of 66 illegal immigrants were captured in Manisa. The immigrants from Iraq, Palestine, Sudan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Kenya and Ethiopia all tried to enter Greece from Turkey."¹⁷ (*June 11, 2005*)

These news articles are indicative of the autonomy of migratory flows despite border controls. Yaghmaian 2005 gives a moving account of transit migrants' lives at different points of their journey to the West. He extensively narrates their diverse motives for migration, their resourcefulness, but also the precariousness, hardship and despair experienced by those who are unable to move on. Indeed, migrants with no access to legal routes of migration to Western countries have to rely on smugglers to cross the borders undocumented - a situation that generates an informal economy of its own. In Turkey, transit routes established in the late 1980s to facilitate Kurdish asylum in Europe, have now been adapted to smuggle Asian, Middle Eastern and African migrants through Turkey. These have been coordinated with traditional networks for smuggling goods at the eastern borders of Turkey. Accordingly, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Cyprus constitute the main entry points for undocumented transit migrants¹⁸. The main departure points out of Turkey are the borders with Bulgaria and Greece as well as the Mediterranean coast, particularly towns that are in proximity to the Greek islands in the Aegean Sea.

Looked at from the perspective of the local population in eastern Turkey, more than two decades of armed struggle between the Turkish army forces and Kurdish insurgents have further damaged an economically disadvantaged region - destroying the animal husbandry sector and reinforcing the image of smuggling as an ethnically distinct livelihood strategy. One Kurdish smuggler informant of İçduygu 2003 is worth citing at length in this context:

"Smuggling is the basis of the region's economy. Everything you can imagine travels over the border... In a system like this, it makes no difference if we are

¹⁶ <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=15214>

¹⁷ <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=15517>

¹⁸ www.egm.gov.tr/yabancilar/birincisf.htm

carrying spare car parts, diesel fuel or people. The fundamental rule of capitalism operates here; it is a matter of supply and demand. On the thousand years old Silk Road, whatever item is needed is smuggled. At that time, the borders were did not exist. Travelling that route was not considered smuggling. There were only different taxes at different stops. But now ... it is illegal to cross without notification. My relatives on the other side of the border are larger in number than the ones on this side of the border... This kind of a relationship is an advantage for all sorts of smuggling... It works like an insurance."¹⁹

Based on interviews with smugglers, Içduygu 2003 concludes that in Turkey, the illegal entry and transit of migrants is organised not by an international mafia, but rather through a loose, flexible network of locally based persons who financially benefit from involvement in people smuggling. To give an example, a local guide may help migrants cross the border into eastern Turkey, another person will accompany them to a destination in the western part of the country, a middleman takes them to the person who will arrange the passage from Turkey, yet another person will accompany the migrants on the border crossing and so on. Depending on the situation, the network is augmented through different local intermediaries²⁰. Içduygu also reports of a Turkish garment subcontractor who employed Afghan and Iraqi transit migrants "because they were cheaper". Approached by his employees to act as a safeguard for the smugglers' fee until they reached their destination, he eventually came to specialize in smuggling transit migrants (92). Hence Içduygu's conclusion that:

"... our impression is that of a loosely cast network, consisting of hundreds of independent smaller units which cooperate along the way. It is the flexibility and adaptability offered by these that ensures the continuing activity and success of the larger operation, since, even if one link along the chain should break, it can be immediately replaced without risking the disintegration of the whole."²¹

Despite the flexible nature of the network, transit migration remains a dangerous endeavour for the migrants. The death toll continues to be tragically high, as a selection of recent newspaper reports document:

"At the Turkish coast of the Aegean Sea, a ship with refugees from Somalia and Iran capsized on Sunday. One person was killed. Twelve other refugees were rescued by the Turkish coast guard, one refugee and the captain are still missing. The occupants wanted to get illegally to the Greek island of Lesbos."²²

"Two migrants from Mauritania and Tunisia were killed as they stepped on landmines while trying to cross the border from Turkey to Greece. A third person was rescued wounded by the Greek border patrol. The death toll through Greek landmines dating from the 1940s has risen to 72 within two years."²³

¹⁹ Içduygu 2003, p.79. See also the films *A Time for Drunken Horses* and *Marooned in Iraq* by director Bahman Ghobadi for informal trade relations on the Iran-Iraq border.

²⁰ Içduygu 2003, p.45.

²¹ Içduygu 2003, p.49.

²² own translation. *die tageszeitung*, January 3, 2005

²³ own translation. *Radikal*, April 6, 2005

"Turkish gendarmes chasing a bus with 36 illegal immigrants from Afghanistan opened fire, killing one person, wounding three others. It was reported that the security forces in Muradiye, near Lake Van in Eastern Turkey fired at the bus because the driver did not want to stop and tried to flee."²⁴

4. TRAJECTORIES OF LABOUR EMIGRATION

4.1. LABOUR EMIGRATION TO EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

During the "golden age of capitalism" Turkey, alongside with other Southern European countries, became a country of significant labour emigration to Western Europe. An interlocking economic regime characterised by macroeconomic stability, Fordist mass industrial production, the Bretton-Woods monetary system, institutionalized wage setting and welfare state expansion sustained rapid economic growth in Europe during the 1950s and 1960s (Marglin/Schor 1990; Armstrong/Glyn/Harrison 1991). With unemployment running at three per cent or less²⁵, European countries responded to the persistent excess demand on the labour market with a massive drive to recruit migrant workers (Castles/Kosack 1973).

In this context, Turkey signed labour migration agreements with Germany (1961), Netherlands (1964), Belgium (1965), France (1967) and Sweden (1967)²⁶. The "golden age" thus opened up novel employment opportunities for the Turkish labour force at the international level. Between 1961 and 1973, a total of 790,000 migrant workers, around a quarter of them women, were placed in jobs in Western Europe (Table 3). Another 120,000-150,000 people are thought to have self-organised their labour migration²⁷.

TABLE 3: MAJOR COUNTRIES OF LABOUR EMIGRATION FROM TURKEY, 1961-1973

	Total number of recruited migrant workers
Germany	648,029
France	45,366
Austria	34,459
Netherlands	23,359
Belgium	15,309

Source: Martin (1991), Table 1, p.22-23.

For purposes of illustration, let us focus on Germany, the major recipient of migrants from Turkey. The German migration regime instituted a hierarchy of social, political and economic rights based on nationality (Karakayalı/Tsianos 2002). At the economic level, the migration regime reflected the corporatist compromise between trade unions and German capital. The "Inländerprimat"

²⁴ own translation. die tageszeitung, April 16/17, 2005.

²⁵ Glyn *et al.* 1990: Table 2.6, p.47.

²⁶ <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/history/migration/chapter9.html>, Chapter 2.1.

²⁷ Martin (1991), Table 1, p.22 and p.3, p.25.

regulation gave German workers priority access to vacant jobs, while allowing employers to draw on an international supply of labour. Since migrant workers were explicitly recruited for jobs that could not be filled through recourse to the domestic labour market, migrants' distribution across occupations and sectors was highly uneven. In 1973 for instance, 74 per cent of female migrants and 88 per cent of male migrants worked in industry²⁸; the vast majority held low-skill jobs²⁹. On the other hand, trade [unions] efforts to prevent wage competition ensured that migrant workers were paid the same wages and benefits as set in collective bargaining agreements for their domestic counterparts in the same skill category.

However, after the oil shock of 1973 the labour migration programme was terminated. Deindustrialization and a more stringent implementation of the "Inländerprimat" led to a rapid increase in the migrant rate of unemployment (Dohse 1981; Erdem/Mattes 2003). Nonetheless, migration continued through family reunification and a process of settlement started. Today, the economic pressure to emigrate from Turkey remains intense, as the income effect of a series of IMF structural adjustment programs has largely been negative (Balkan and Savran 2004). The transnational networks established in the 1960s and 1970s sustain the process of Turkish migration to Europe, reinforcing the existing spatial pattern of Turkish citizenship across Europe (Ünalın 2003:146-149). By the year 2001, the population of Turkish origin in Europe exceeded 3.3 million (including naturalized persons), with migrant communities in Germany, the Netherlands and France accounting for the highest share (Table 4).

TABLE 4: MIGRANTS FROM TURKEY IN EUROPE: TURKISH AND NATURALISED CITIZENS, 2001

	Stock of Turkish citizens 2001 (thousands)	Persons who acquired host country nationality 1992-2001 (thousands)
Austria	127.2	56.7
Belgium	45.9	75.8
Denmark	33.4	15.0
France*	208	39.9
Germany	1947.9	406.3
Netherlands	100.3	167.2
Sweden	13.9	22.5
Switzerland	79.5	17.5
Total	2,556.1	800.9

*) France: 1999.

Source: OECD (2004), SOPEMI. Tables B.1.5 and B.1.6; Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration (2004), Table 3.

²⁸ Own calculations based on ANBA Arbeitsstatistik 1973 – Jahreszahlen, Übersicht 10, pp.26-29.

²⁹ König/Schultze/Wessel 1986, Tab. 55/1, p. 85 and Tab. 59, p.95

At the political level, there is great variation in migrants' rights across Europe, with Germany probably implementing one of the most restrictive regimes. The Aliens' Act ("*Ausländergesetz*"), which was operative until 2005, codified practices of institutional discrimination. Despite the very presence of migrants, policymakers upheld the motto that "Germany is not a country of immigration" for decades. Hence, virtually no steps were taken to ensure migrants' access to full social, economic or political citizenship. The Citizenship Act was only changed in the year 2000 to allow (to a limited extent) for the acquisition of citizenship based on *ius soli*³⁰. The first Immigration Act (officially named the Act to Restrict and Manage Immigration) was put into practice in 2005. While the Act acknowledges immigration as a fact, it puts the burden on immigrants to prove that they deserve being granted full legal equality (Karakayalı/Tsianos 2005). This shift in the migration regime finds reflection in current debates on the failure of migrant "integration" and their alleged refusal/inability to internalize European values (Erdem 2006).

4.2. LABOUR MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTRACT WORK

While the situation of the Turkish diaspora in Europe continues to be hotly debated in the wake of Turkey's EU candidacy, much less attention has been paid to migratory flows to the Middle East. The oil shock of 1973 had terminated the European labour migration programmes, but opened up the doors of Middle Eastern countries for Turkish migrants. In the 1974-1987 period, around 395,000 contract workers were recruited for jobs in the construction sector in Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iraq (Table 5)³¹.

TABLE 5: MAJOR COUNTRIES OF LABOUR MIGRATION FROM TURKEY, 1974-1987

	Total number of recruited migrant workers
Saudi Arabia	185,613
Libya	174,559
Iraq	34,667
Europe	33,397

Source: Martin (1991), Table 1, p.22-23.

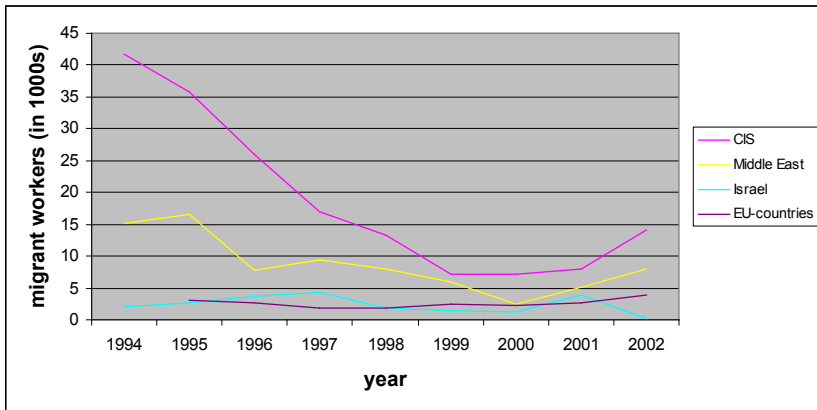
Since the 1990s, the overall figures have been much lower due to the end of the boom in infrastructural investment in Middle Eastern countries (Figure 1). However, new destination countries have emerged, among them Israel and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Erder 2003:160). Turkish workers have also benefited from the contract worker programs introduced by the European Union, particularly in Germany. Yet, contract work in CIS countries

³⁰ *ius soli* refers to the right to citizenship deriving from birth on that nation state's territory. Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration (2005).

³¹ Martin (1991), Table 1, p.23

has fluctuated due to economic instability in Russia (OECD 2000: 262). On the other hand, political instability in Israel has resulted in the withdrawal of many firms, reportedly allowing a single Turkish company to capture the market for Israeli contract work. This company benefits from an off-set agreement, according to which the sale of military equipment to Israel is paid in the form of contracts to the aforementioned Turkish company³². The extent to which these new flows of labour migration may generate new settled communities, particularly in the Middle East, constitutes an important question that calls for further research³³.

FIGURE 1: LABOUR EMIGRATION FROM TURKEY BY DESTINATION, 1994-2002



Source: OECD, SOPEMI- Trends in International Migration, various issues.

5. IRREGULAR MIGRATION TO TURKEY AND THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

As outline above, Turkey has been a country of labour emigration from the 1960s onwards. Yet beginning with the 1990s Turkey, along with other Southern European countries, has witnessed the phenomenon of clandestine labour immigration. Rising unemployment and poverty following the disintegration of the Soviet Union have led many Eastern Europeans to turn to neighbouring Turkey for income generating activities. Transit migrants and asylum seekers also seek out employment opportunities on the Turkish labour market in order to secure their livelihood and to save up for the next leg of their journey.

The precarious legal status of migrants leaves informality as their only option for economic participation. But does the Turkish labour market have the flexibility to accommodate migrant workers? And how are migrants positioned in informal economic structures? The argument could be made that informality

³² Radikal, April 2, 2006.

³³ I am grateful to Didem Daniş for drawing my attention to this point.

does not put migrants at disadvantage per se, since the informal economy constitutes an important reference point for the domestic labour force as well. The widespread nature of informality could thus be hypothesized as an enabling factor for migrants to secure their livelihood. No doubt, the Turkish labour market does not correspond to the open economy model. But if it were the case that migrants can participate in the Turkish economy irrespective of their legal status, could the argument be made that a *de facto* "laissez faire" policy towards labour migration prevails in Turkey? Below, we reflect on this hypothesis in light of empirical research findings available so far on migrant economic activities in Turkey.

Before engaging with the empirical evidence however, let us briefly outline the structure of employment in Turkey. In 2004, agriculture accounted for 34 per cent of total employment; the respective shares of industry and services were 23 per cent and 43 per cent³⁴. Table 6 disaggregates employment by sector and gender:

TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT IN TURKEY BY SECTOR AND GENDER, 2004 (%)

	Men	Women
Agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing	25.6	57.2
Mining and quarrying	0.6	0.0
Manufacturing	18.8	13.5
Electricity, gas and water	0.5	0.1
Construction	6.3	0.5
Wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels	22.9	8.7
Transportation, communication and storage	6.5	1.1
Finance, insurance, real estate and business services	3.6	3.7
Community, social and personal services	15.2	15.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: own calculations based on DIE (2004), Tab. 10.4, p.152.

OECD estimates suggest that in Turkey the informal economy accounts for roughly half of total employment and for more than a third of non-agricultural employment (OECD 2004: 187). At this point, let us also clarify the definition of informality used in this paper. Rather than limit our discussion to the informal sector (narrowly defined as employment in informal sector enterprises), we employ the concept of "informal employment". The latter takes into account diverse forms of precarious work, thus allowing for the analysis of production, distribution and employment relations along a continuum ranging from the formal to the informal (Husmanns 2004). In this sense informal employment refers to "... all forms of ... employment without contracts (i.e. covered by labour legislation), worker benefits or social protection – both inside and outside

³⁴ DIE (2004), Tab. 10.4, p.152.

informal enterprises.” (Chen 2005: 7) This broader definition is particularly relevant for an analysis of the Turkish labour market, where the OECD identifies three different forms of informality:

“*i*) entire companies fail to register as legal entities; *ii*) registered companies employ undeclared workers; and *iii*) registered companies declare lower wages than those actually paid to their registered workers.” (OECD 2004: 42)

In the non-agricultural sector, informality occurs in the form of dependent employment (58 per cent), own account work (30 per cent) and unpaid family work (12 per cent) (TÜSIAD 2004: 36). Although informality has been an issue for a long time, the size of the informal economy has grown rapidly since the 1980s. The development paradigm centred on a state led import substitution regime³⁵ had reached its limits by the 1970s and was unable to generate sufficient regular employment (Pamuk 2003). As population growth and the mechanization of agriculture impoverished large sections of the peasantry, rural to urban migration accelerated. Informal economic structures in trade and production developed, catering not only to the ever growing number of shanty town residents but also to local industries. Moreover, the 1980 coup d'état dramatically shifted the balance between capital and labour (Öngen 2003). Trade union activity was first banned, and then strictly circumscribed. Consequently, real wages declined by 40 per cent in the 1980-1988 period (Özar/Ercan 2004). As the economy was liberalized under a series of structural adjustment programs, employers were able to further informalize employment relations (Boratav/Yeldan/Köse 2000; Ercan 2004; Özar/Ercan 2004). From 1990 to 2003, the share of informal employment in non-agricultural employment increased from 25 per cent to 31.5 per cent, accounting for 47 per cent of job growth outside of agriculture³⁶. Experts observed “increased subcontracting, home-working, contract labour and temporary forms of employment.” (Peker 1996: 9) Informality is particularly widespread in small enterprises with low productivity and human capital, but larger enterprises also engage in underreporting in order to save on labour costs and to avoid taxes and regulatory responsibilities.

Yet, the degree of informality varies substantially across sectors. In 2003, apart from agriculture, the share of not registered workers was particularly high in manufacturing (30.7 per cent), construction (63.8 per cent), trade, hotels and restaurants (42.2 per cent) and in transport, communication and storage (43.9 per cent). Industries with a strong tradition of unionisation or public sector involvement such as mining, utilities, finance or community social and personal services on the other hand, showed much lower rates of informality (OECD 2004: 188, Table 4.6). On average, wages of informal workers were half as high as those of their formally employed colleagues (TÜSIAD 2004: 38-39,

³⁵ According to Aktar 2003, the public sector had to take on a defining role to modernize and nationalize the economy after the expulsion and massacre of the Ottoman entrepreneurial and merchant classes, consisting largely of Greeks and Armenians, during the post WW I period. See also Keyder 1987.

46). Interestingly enough, no significant gender gap could be found in terms of the degree of informality or the earnings gap between formal and informal employment (44).

Given the centrality of informal economic activity in Turkey, it is not surprising that the degree of formal labour market integration remains even low among nonnationals with proper documentation such as spouses of Turkish citizens, EU citizens of Turkish origin and descendants of West European immigrants to the Ottoman Empire (Italian, French, Portuguese traders, Jewish refugees)³⁷. They are often pushed into the informal economy because work permits are bureaucratically cumbersome to obtain, they are employer specific (meaning that they have to be renewed with each new job contract) and many employers are simply reluctant to offer formally binding employment contracts (Kaiser 2003; Erder/Kaska 2003:40). Hence, official statistics on the employment of non-nationals are highly biased towards professionals: they record that 40 per cent work in managerial positions or as business partners, and another 33 per cent are employed as consultants or managing directors of companies' marketing departments (Lordoğlu 2005: 117, Table 6).

Empirical research findings on irregular migrants presented below show that the economic activities of migrant women from CEE countries constitute a distinct profile, characterized by occupational crowding in market niches such as informal transnational trading, domestic work and sex work. However, the overall economic presence of undocumented migrants in informal employment remains surprisingly weak. Informal labour markets obviously do not clear, rendering migrants' incorporation into the Turkish economic landscape conditional upon a multiplicity of factors such as access to informal economy networks, gender, ethnicity, skills, financial resources and legal status. To substantiate this argument, let us examine migrants' economic profiles in detail.

5.1. TRANSNATIONAL CIRCULAR MIGRATION

Circular migration by Eastern European petty traders started in the 1980s, with Polish traders buying goods in Turkey and selling these in the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, it developed into a major transnational informal economy involving traders from Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Georgia, Armenia, Bulgaria and Azerbaijan, whose trade was estimated in 2001 at \$3 billion³⁸.

The term "suitcase trader" or "chelnok" denotes small scale, informal entrepreneurs who operate in market niches of international trade (Yükseker 2003). They predominantly belong to low income groups who make a living by taking advantage of international differentials in prices, tariffs and exchange rates. Suitcase trading is a gendered occupation in the sense that gender discrimination on CEE labour markets in the "transition period" led many

³⁷ Kaiser (2003: 271-272). Merely 14 per cent of documented nonnationals held work permits in 2001 (Erder 2003: 163).

³⁸ Yüksekser (2003), Table 1.1, p.15.

women to take up cross border trade. Travelling on tourist visas³⁹, suitcase traders buy garments, footwear and leather goods in Turkey, transport these as “passenger luggage” to their home country⁴⁰, and sell them on local markets – often using undocumented migrants (for instance, Ukrainians and White Russians in Moscow) as salespersons. In this way, the suitcase trade directly links the informal economies of transition economies to that of Turkey (Yükseker 2003).

The suitcase trade is concentrated in the Laleli district in the historic centre of Istanbul. It is akin to an industrial district in that it interacts with a whole variety of industries through backward and forward linkages: wholesale and retail trade; small scale manufacturers (and their subcontractors) in clothing, footwear, leather goods; freight transportation to the airport; hotels, restaurants, night clubs, travel agencies catering to suitcase traders. Trade and garment manufacturing in particular involve chains of informal economic activities; business relations between retailers and suitcase traders also remain unrecorded. The evasion of tax at the point of sale (VAT) and at the border (tariffs) is tolerated by the authorities due to the high value of exports generated. While the overall volume of trade may be high, competition among traders and the weak purchasing power of the Eastern European clientele keep profit margins of suitcase traders low, thus preventing rapid capital accumulation.

Yükseker 2003 observes that Laleli links not only the informal economies of Eastern Europe and Turkey but also the socially and/or economically marginalized populations in these countries. In the 1980s, Turkish citizens of Bosnian descent were the first to open shops catering to suitcase traders, followed by Turkish citizens of Arab ethnicity. In the 1990s, internal displacement increased the Kurdish presence in Laleli. Today, Turkish migrants from Bulgaria dominate among the employees, while Kurds constitute the majority among the business owners. Bosnian refugees, Bulgarian Turks, Azeris, Moldavians and Ukrainians can also find work as sales staff, translators and travel agents in Laleli due to their Russian language skills; oftentimes they hope to save enough money to start suitcase trading themselves.

While Laleli clearly dominates suitcase trading, ever since the Turkey-Georgia border crossing reopened in 1989, the Black Sea coast of Turkey has constituted a lesser centre where circular migration and trade intersect. In contrast to chelnoks who frequent Laleli exclusively to purchase goods, traders from Georgia and Armenia act both as sellers and buyers on the markets along the Black Sea coast. The complexity of chelnoks’ self-organised trade networks is exemplified in Yüksekser’s account of Linda, an Armenian-Polish chelnok:

³⁹ Currently, Bulgarian citizens are exempt from the visa obligation on trips up to 90 days. Migrants from Albania and CIS may, depending on nationality, obtain tourist visas for between 15 and 60 days at the border. (<http://www.egm.gov.tr/duyurular>) Even if they overstay, they often re-enter after paying a fine.

⁴⁰ The goods are declared under the category of passenger luggage, but in fact the freight is carried on separate cargo planes or busses.

"Linda travels to Konya in central Turkey to buy cheap footwear and garments, and to Urfa and Kilis in Eastern Turkey to buy Chinese porcelain and viscose silk cloth. She sells these goods on the market in Ordu, the Black sea town of Turkey, where she has been living for three years. She goes to Georgia once a month to renew her visa, takes garments with her on this trip and sells them in Georgia. While in Georgia, she buys Indian garments from a chelnok commuting between India and Georgia, and sells them in Ordu in Turkey."⁴¹

Operating as sellers on Turkish markets, these petty traders compete with local traders and may incur their hostility. On the other hand, some local retailers use the opportunity to establish new supplier networks with the migrants, thus expanding their customer base transnationally (Hann and Beller-Hann 1998: 249). While some migrants succeed in making a living in this way, there are a number of factors that impede suitcase trading in the region. First, armed conflicts in the Caucasian republics negatively influence trade. Secondly, female migrant traders in north-eastern Turkey often experience ethnicised stigmatization and sexual harassment from the local population (Hann and Beller-Hann 1998). Thirdly, the Black Sea region fails to compete with Laleli in terms of either the price and quality of goods or the availability of complementary services such as transportation. Circular migrants, who despite these factors concentrate their activities in the Black Sea region, are to a large extent, more economically disadvantaged than the traders frequenting Laleli.

To sum up, as an informal economic activity transnational petty trade provides a living for migrants from CEE countries and it supports the informal economy in Turkey, particularly garment, leather and footwear manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, hotels, restaurants and transportation sectors. Migrant petty traders' economic involvement in Turkey is largely confined to their role as purchasers of goods, which means that they do not seek employment in the Turkish labour market. The lack of extensive regulation in the suitcase trade is tolerated by the authorities due to the significant magnitude of export revenue and local employment that it generates. The practice of declaring goods as "passenger luggage", whereas they are in fact transported on separate cargo planes is indicative of the extent of official support for the "suitcase business". In this context, the "autonomy of migration" refers to the room for manoeuvring that migrants have in order to devise their own strategies of trading and border crossing.

5.2. THE SEX INDUSTRY

Young women from Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Azerbaijan and Ukraine occupy a visible niche in the sex industry in Turkey (Erder and Kaska 2003; İçduygu 2003). They enter the country on short-term tourist visas, and then overstay. Employment in the sex industry involves participation in a chain of informal business relations that include female recruiting agents in the home

⁴¹ Own translation. Yükksekler 2003, p.187.

country, local pimps, drivers, hotel owners and so on. Not only is the market for sex work gendered, but racial stereotyping significantly affects earnings chances of migrant women engaged in prostitution. As Beller-Hann 1995 observed in her field work in the Black Sea region, “the local population of the eastern coast of the Black Sea created its own moral geography of the former Soviet Union, and also a gendered race hierarchy”⁴². According to this “moral geography”, Russian women are constructed as white, “exotic, exciting, clean and refined, superior in beauty and culture” in contrast to Georgians, “who are stereotyped as dark and vulgar.”⁴³ Although Georgian women still have access to sex work, their social and economic standing as sex workers substantially differs from that of Russian women.

There is considerable debate about the extent of forced prostitution in Europe (Andrijasevic 2003). Yüксеker 2003 guesses that some women earn the starting capital for suitcase trading through sex work. A study by Erder and Kaska 2003 also supports the view that most migrant sex workers in Turkey consciously engage in prostitution for economic reasons. Upon arrival in Turkey however, they may encounter unexpectedly adverse working conditions resulting “... in being forced to work long hours, in passports being confiscated, lack of freedom of movement and wages that are either reduced or withheld altogether.” (71) Exploited sex workers often do not contact the authorities for fear that they may be deported and that restrictions may be imposed on their freedom to travel (62). In 2002, Turkey adopted specific legislation to combat trafficking in women and forced prostitution more effectively (27). In May 2005 the International Migration Organisation (IOM) and the Turkish government launched a major campaign to help victims of trafficking through the distribution of informational leaflets at key border crossings, the introduction of a helpline and the provision of “training for law enforcement and medical, psychological and direct assistance to trafficked individuals.”⁴⁴ Since then, reports on the plight of forced prostitutes and on rescue operations have started to appear frequently in the media ⁴⁵.

However, foreign nationals engaged in prostitution remain subject to deportation – although not on the grounds of prostitution as such (which is legal in licensed brothels), but for lack of a valid residence and/or work permit (47). In 2001, over 30 per cent of deportations of Eastern European citizens (particularly Romanian, Moldavian and Georgian women) were due to participation in prostitution and/or testing positive for sexually transmitted diseases⁴⁶. In recent years, some migrant sex workers entered marriages of convenience to attain Turkish citizenship and thus avoid deportation. In response, Turkish citizenship laws were changed in June 2003, introducing

⁴² Beller-Hann (1995), p. 222.

⁴³ Beller-Hann (1995), p. 222.

⁴⁴ <http://iom.int/en/news/pbn310505.shtml>

⁴⁵ For instance, see several news stories in Radikal in March 2006

⁴⁶ Erder/Kaska (2003), Tables 9-11, p. 19-21

a three year residential qualifying period⁴⁷. According to the Ministry of the Interior, marriages between citizens from CEE countries and Turkey declined dramatically after the legislative change was introduced. Within a year, the number of marriages between Azerbaijani and Turkish citizens declined from 919 to 22. For Romanians and Moldavians a similar decline could be observed: from 434 to 32 and from 902 to 14 respectively⁴⁸.

In more conservative parts of Turkey, such as the Black Sea region, the appearance of Georgian and Russian migrant sex workers has seriously challenged the moral fabric of society - while economically boosting the hotel, restaurant and entertainment industries. Local women particularly feel victimised by their husbands' attraction to women who are regarded as "different" (Beller-Hann 1995: 219). Secondly, the substantial sums of money men spend on entertainment by sex workers constitute a strain on families' economic resources. From the local women's perspective, the appearance of sex workers has led to a redistribution of family income towards their husbands' recreational desires, and thus to the migrant women. The economic dependency of women (many of whom do not engage in paid work or do not control the money they earn) exacerbates the economic urgency of the situation.

With time, local women have developed a variety of discursive and practical resistance strategies, which in turn affects the viability of sex work as an economic option for migrant women. Some local women have opened their own bank accounts to control family finances, while others have entered paid work to gain a degree of economic independence. Women have also pressurized kin to enforce family values with the aim of preventing their husbands from spending kin controlled economic resources such as inheritance on migrant prostitutes⁴⁹. Middle class townswomen and the religious right, on the other hand, have concentrated on political campaigning against the presence of migrant sex workers in the region. Their sustained public interventions have led to increased stigmatization and sexual harassment of migrant women from CIS countries, irrespective of whether they engage in sex work. Their campaigns have strengthened the unitary "Muslim-Turkish identity in an ethnically diverse region" of Turkey (Beller-Hann 1995: 230) and have caused a backlash in terms of women's rights. A more restrictive female subjectivity has been socially reinforced to the extent that, in order to avoid harassment, many women choose to visibly differentiate themselves from migrants by wearing a headscarf (Hann and Beller-Hann 1998). Some migrant "suitcase traders" have followed suit, securing police protection against sexual harassment by converting to Islam⁵⁰.

In Kars in the eastern province of Turkey, local authorities externalized the issue through a decision to relocate migrant sex workers' spaces to the periphery of the city:

⁴⁷ European Commission 2003: Chapter 24.

⁴⁸ *Hürriyet*, July 20th, 2005.

⁴⁹ Beller-Hann (1995), p.229.

⁵⁰ Yukseker (2003), p.190.

“... We decided to close down all alcohol serving restaurants frequented by Natashas. The permits [of the restaurants] had been issued by the governor. We will not renew their permits in the city centre. Space has been provided for entertainment centres to relocate outside of the city because they do not follow hygienic regulations, because they bring about a decline in morals.”⁵¹

Interestingly enough, the voices of local sex workers, who must have suffered economic disadvantage through competition from migrant women engaged in prostitution, have not been heard in this debate.

5.3. DOMESTIC WORK

A morally less contested sector of migrant employment is domestic work. In Turkey, migrant live-in domestic workers are primarily women from the Turkish speaking Gagauz ethnic group in Southern Moldova (Keough 2003). Lesser networks of migrant domestic workers are also reported for women from the Philippines, Iraq, Morocco and Ethiopia (Danış 2005; Perouse 2004:22).

Migrant domestic workers have been working in this market niche since the mid-1990s, meeting the demand of middle and upper class families for affordable and reliable live-in domestic workers. According to one estimate, their earnings are 50-60 per cent less than their Turkish counterparts (Lordoğlu 2005: 119). Until recently, migrant domestic workers used to enter the country on tourist visas and slip into illegality by overstaying. Part of their wages then went towards smuggler fees, bribes and fines for visa overstaying (Keough 2003:75). In 2003, legislation was adapted to allow for work permits to be issued to migrants for domestic work. It remains to be seen to what extent employers take advantage of this opportunity to legalize their employment relation, which inevitably would bring the obligations of a formal work contract with it (European Commission 2003:Chapter 24).

As Keough (2003) shows, the market for domestic work is not only gendered but also ethnically segmented:

“The high demand for Moldovan women in particular relies upon their reputations as upright people and good caretakers, “cleaner”, “more literate”, and “more civilised” than their Turkish villager counterparts who usually fill such roles. This perception indexes a belief in the higher class and culture of a population perceived as more “European” than the Turkish one.” (74)

Gagauz domestic workers maintain informal networks of job opportunities based on these positive ethnicised representations (Keough 2003: 75). Employers rely on these images and the recommendations they get from the Gagauz domestics, who can in this way organize a job for their acquaintances. Church communities in Istanbul in turn, often act as informal intermediaries for young Iraqi Chaldean women to work as live-in domestic workers, babysitters and cleaners in non-Muslim families. Finally, domestic workers from the Philippines rely on placement agencies who advertise in local Turkish newspapers. Their

⁵¹ Own translation. Radikal, March 3, 2006.

English language skills, work experience and the formal referral through an agency may earn them up to four times as much as domestics from CEE countries (Lordođlu 2005: 116-121).

The image of the "foreign" domestic worker is overlaid with the gendered image of the single woman in need of protection in a foreign country. Some Turkish employers may thus regard themselves as entitled to scrutinize the social lives of their employees in the name of female propriety (75). Migrant domestic workers are also often conflated with sex workers from CEE countries and subjected to sexual harassment. However,

"[t]hrough their own practices, Gagauz women resist these reputations, but they also seek to manipulate them, and thus often accommodate and confirm the constructions of migrant women workers – and Russian woman – as sexually promiscuous or as vulnerable women in need of protection. ... A flirtation may help lower the cost for a sweater for her husband, or secure a letter home, or make a local ally to rely on in the frequent police raids." (75)

5.4. OTHER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

So far, there is only scant information available on undocumented migrants' economic activities in other sectors. For instance, the Ministry of Tourism issues work permits for migrant performing artists (estimated at 10,000), the majority of whom comes from Eastern Europe. The legal employment status reduces their risk of exploitation, but the inadequate implementation of labour law undermines the formality of the employment relation, with the consequence that migrant workers may still receive only part of their wages.⁵²

Particularly large research gaps remain on the economic activities of male migrants from CEE countries, as well as migrants and refugees from Asia and Africa. Given the long time periods transit migrants spend in Turkey under precarious conditions, research in this area becomes all the more important⁵³. It is also known that many asylum seekers are pushed into informal economic activity for lack of financial resources:

"In theory, asylum seekers and refugees are entitled to work and receive social assistance in Turkey. However, in practice, acquiring a work permit is next to impossible. This often forces people to engage in illegal activity, which in turn makes them vulnerable to deportation for violation of Turkish law."⁵⁴

From the scant data available on undocumented migrants' labour market participation we know that migrant workers from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova, Georgia, Romania, Afghanistan and Iraq work in the construction industry. Other industries that employ migrant workers include textiles, leather goods, haulage and handling, small-scale chemical industries, restoration, woodworking,

⁵² Erder and Kaska (2003), p.52.

⁵³ An IOM study estimates that on average transit migrants spend three years in Turkey (cited in Içduygu 2003, p.25-26). The duration of stay may increase further as a consequence of more rigorous border enforcement.

⁵⁴ Kirişçi (2003), p.67

recycling, restaurants and retail trade (Lordođlu 2005:114; Perouse 2004:22; Içduygu2003: 28; Erder/Kaska 2003: 38). Iraqi Christian women are reported to work in garment sweatshops and housecleaning in Istanbul (Danış 2005:27). Migrant women from Moldova, Lithuania and Ukraine interviewed for a major Turkish newspaper said they worked in garment workshops in central Istanbul. They reportedly had married, acquired Turkish citizenship and settled down in Turkey, even sending for their children to join them⁵⁵. There have also been media reports of smugglers arranging seasonal work for undocumented migrants in coastal cities such as Adana, Antalya, Izmir and Bodrum⁵⁶. The study of Yaghmaian 2005 on transit migrants variously mentions work in a candle making factory, in a bag-making sweatshop, as cook for an office in a business district, as bouncer in a bar, as private tutor, as street vendor and as computer expert and translator in an international clothing factory. But overall, poverty and unemployment dominate his account on the economic situation of migrants in Turkey (11-107).

Migrants have further been reported to be working in agriculture in the Black Sea region and Western Anatolia (Içduygu 2003: 17; Lordođlu 2005: 114). This means that they compete with Kurdish seasonal workers who travel the country following the harvest calendar of crops. According to one account, seasonal labourers start off in Urfa in South-eastern Anatolia in the spring, then work in the sugar beet, lentil and chick pea harvests in Central Anatolia, in the nut harvest in the Black Sea region and finally in the grape and cotton harvests in the western regions⁵⁷.

The unevenness in the production of knowledge on the economic practices of different migrant groups may reflect differences in economic visibility or bias in research interests. Certainly, it points to difficulties in conducting empirical research in this area. It can also be taken as indicative of the difficulties migrants encounter in accessing employment, despite the informality of employment structures. Given the widespread nature of informal employment relations in Turkey and low institutional barriers to entry (in the sense that no work permit is required), one might expect undocumented migrants to easily gain access to informal employment. But an important factor that hinders migrants from finding jobs on the informal labour market is the high level of unemployment in Turkey. The official unemployment rate stood at 10.5 per cent in 2003. But the employment rate of merely 43.2 per cent, in combination with a poverty rate of 27 per cent suggest that competition among the non-employed is substantially higher than the unemployment rate implies⁵⁸. Therefore, the situation of undocumented migrants on the Turkish labour market differs from that in other Southern European countries, where a high level of unemployment coexists with a high demand for migrants' cheap labour in sectors such as agriculture,

⁵⁵ Hürriyet, 3. January 2005.

⁵⁶ Postexpress, August 2001.

⁵⁷ Postexpress, October 2004.

⁵⁸ OECD 2004, p. 46, Table 1.2 and p.60, Table 2.4. The poverty rate refers to the year 2002, the employment rate has been calculated on the basis of data for 2003.

construction, hotels/catering and domestic work (Baldwin-Edwards 2002). Consequently, there is no evidence that the populist statement made by the Minister of Labour and Social Solidarity Yaşar Okuyan in 2001 that "There are more than one million illegal workers in Turkey. Every day, one million loaves of bread are being stolen from my people"⁵⁹ bears any relation to the actual significance of migrant employment in Turkey (İçduygu 2004:7).

On the contrary, empirical evidence suggests that the demand for migrant labour remains quite limited. There is no evidence that pressure from Turkish authorities prevents the employment of migrant workers in the informal economy. In this sense, we can speak of a "laissez faire" policy. However, empirical research on the informal economy in Turkey underlines the importance of kinship, ethnic and diasporic networks in accessing employment. Migrants from rural areas often rely on other persons originating from the same village or town ("hemşeri") to find a job in the city and that these extended kinship networks control particular lines of occupation (Peker 1996). Lacking such networks puts migrants at a serious economic disadvantage. The pressure they exert on the labour supply is not decisive in generating employment opportunities for them. Rather, it appears that their chances on the labour market are largely confined to those niches in which they have succeeded in creating their own ethnically defined networks.

Migrants are particularly vulnerable to "decent work deficits" in the informal economy: They have to rely on informal contracts that they cannot enforce legally or through social networks; they have no social or economic security; they lack opportunities for skill development and protection against occupational injuries; they have little or no access to benefits (International Labour Conference 2002:3-4). Fear of arrest socially isolates and economically marginalizes many undocumented migrants (Danış 2005; İçduygu 2003). The labour market discrimination experienced even by migrants with access to citizenship rights and social networks, such as Bulgarians and internally displaced Kurds, point to a wider prevalence of ethnic discrimination in the labour market (Kümbetoğlu 2003; Vasileva 2005: 349; Erdem/Özevin/Özselçuk 2003). African transit migrants in particular, are known to face serious problems of racism, poverty and the lack of opportunities for social integration. They appear to have the poorest chances of accessing employment (Yaghmaian 2003; Çalkıvık 2003; İçduygu 2003). Onbaşı(2004) found that African migrants (particularly Senegalese) try to make a living as street vendors, porters and construction workers. Media reports of migrants from Nigeria, Indonesia, Iran, Somali and Bulgaria arrested on charges of begging provide a glimpse of the dire economic situation faced by some migrants⁶⁰. Many have to rely on aid from NGOs or church affiliated local charities such as the catholic Caritas-Turkey and the Istanbul Inter-Parish Migrants Programme. Police harassment, maltreatment

⁵⁹ Postexpress, August 2001.

⁶⁰ Radikal, 23 October 2004.

and detention are reported to be widespread⁶¹ and media discourse often reinforces popular racist sentiments (Bora 2003; Çalkıvık 2003).

Savings and financial support from relatives in countries of origin or the West and from NGOs become crucial sources of income when opportunities for paid employment are rare (İçduygu 2003). To the extent possible, migrants mobilize transnational kinship and religious networks for legal and financial assistance, jobs and social integration. Relatives who are already settled in Western countries financially assist family members during their stay in Turkey and sponsor their settlement overseas. Relatives who reside in Turkey support newcomers' adaptation to everyday life. Finally, church based networks provide opportunities for "social interaction, information sharing on housing or job opportunities, education facilities for children, provision of food, clothing or medical assistance..." (Danış 2005:8) Church officials and church affiliated organisations such as Caritas also act as intermediaries between the undocumented migrants and Turkish authorities. However, the fact that Turkey legally only recognizes Greek Orthodox Christians, Armenians and Jews as non-Muslim religious communities sets clear limits to the institutional development of church based community services for migrant groups such as Iraqi Chaldean Christians (18). Moreover, these networks insert migrants within "hierarchies of power and community control mechanisms and [create] an order of discipline and punishment in the transit period." (10). Such morally coded restrictions also hold for the Armenian community in Turkey, which means that Armenian sex workers would not be allowed to access ethnic community networks of solidarity (Erder/Kaska 2003:57).

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has deployed the concept of the "autonomy of migration", i.e. self-organized transnational mobility to discuss contemporary migration flows from the "Global South" to and transit migration through Turkey. Empirical findings suggest that migrants show substantial agency and innovation in crossing borders and in tapping in to the informal economy in order to secure their livelihoods. Women from Eastern European countries in particular, have succeeded in claiming distinct, if still precarious, social and economic spaces in occupational niches such as cross-border trade, sex work and domestic work. They may position themselves in one or more of these spaces over time, as exemplified by the case of migrant domestic workers in Istanbul:

"The Gagauz domestics acted as intimate companions to their charges, hard-working wage-earners, good wives and mothers, but also at times as merchants, and at times they had sex with men in exchange for affection,

⁶¹ The most systematic attempt to deport African migrants from Turkey took place in July 2001, when over 100 africans living in Istanbul were arrested -irrespective of their residence status- and deported to the Greek border. For days, both countries refused entry to the migrants and provided no food or humanitarian aid, resulting in the death of four migrants, several incidences of rape and at least one miscarriage. (Yaghmaian 2003:147)

favors, or money. Some of these women may participate in more than one type of work, others may not. Some consider all of these things work, others don't."⁶²

Yet, migrant agency should not be taken to imply a status of either equality or independence. Undocumented migrants suffer a variety of "decent work deficits" that derive from being forced to rely on informal economy structures. Moreover, migrant women outside of the CEE region and male migrants in general appear to face high barriers to enter informal employment relations. The high level of domestic unemployment, network hiring practices, the language barrier and xenophobia, accompanied by a discourse of "foreigners taking away jobs" constitute a drawback for these migrants, even though a work permit is not required. Further research is certainly needed to systematically identify the discriminatory mechanisms that uniquely disadvantage migrants vis-à-vis local job seekers.

The extent to which the government's recent policy initiative to curb unregistered employment will affect migrant workers' labour market chances also remains to be seen. In February 2005, the Ministry for Labour and Social Security started a campaign that aims to promote formal employment relations. The campaign spelled out the specific target of identifying 100,000 migrants working undocumented in Turkey and to replace them through Turkish workers in a registered work relation. Sanctions towards companies employing undocumented migrants include exclusion from public tenders. For more effective enforcement, a helpline to report undocumented workers will be introduced⁶³. The manner in which a campaign for workers' rights can so easily be centred on an anti-immigrant policy stance is deeply troubling.

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⁶² Keough (2003), p. 76

⁶³ Radikal, February 12, 2005

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