

Transit Migration: A Blurred and Politicised Concept

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ABSTRACT

This article examines first the emergence and construction of the concept of transit migration and the political framework and discourses that brought about this concept. It goes on analysing how this reinforces the EU's efforts to externalise its migration policy and integrate non-EU countries into a comprehensive migration control policy. Second, it critically surveys the state of the art, analyses causes and conditions of transit migration, identifies its geography and discusses some methodological and analytical pitfalls and difficulties of researching transit migration. Finally, in the conclusions a structuralist approach is taken and it is suggested that a clear-cut typology could be developed by rigid comparison. Copyright © 2010 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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'Twenty Kurds from Turkey, Iraqis and Pakistanis were arrested in Kiev [on their way] to Slovakia and then to Germany' (Prima News Agency, 2004).

'Mohammed . . . started a journey, that lasted more than two years and spanned countries like Senegal, Mali, Guinea Bissau, Niger, Mauritania and Algeria. . . [He was] caught by Moroccan police while trying to scale the . . . fence between Morocco and Ceuta' (UNHCR, 2006a).

Since the early 1990s, migrants and refugees from distant countries have been noted in countries neighbouring the European Union (EU), such as Morocco, Turkey and Ukraine. It is assumed that many head west. Others are heading East and travel through Central Asian and Caucasian countries, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan or Azerbaijan, in order to get to Russia. Some seem increasingly willing to risk hazardous journeys and to follow dangerous paths to reach another country. Almost on a daily basis can media reports be received about 'boat people' (migrants and refugees irregularly crossing the sea by boat) who are detected in Italian or Greek waters or about 'illegal immigrants' apprehended in the Carpathian mountains between Ukraine and Hungary or Slovakia. Some of these people travel a couple of weeks or months whilst others take years until they reach an EU country. In policy documents and academic publications, these migrants are often dubbed 'transit migrants'. This raises considerable concerns from human rights and migration policy perspectives. International organisations, EU agencies and national governments aim to stop what is politically denoted as 'unwanted migration' (Boswell, 2003). They put pressure on the countries just outside the borders of the EU to prevent migrants from crossing their territories on their way north and west. This policy has become known as the internationalisation or externalisation of EU migration policies (Düvell, 2002; McKeever *et al.*, 2005). Intergovernmental organisations sometimes engage in improving legal and social conditions in the EU's neighbourhood countries so that these are made safe and that refugees can be expected to stay in the non-EU country, or they promote and facilitate return (e.g. IOM, 1995b). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) instead argue that refugees who turn to dangerous routes or who are trapped or stranded in third countries are a direct consequence of EU immigration restrictions and call for these to be lifted so that

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refugees can reach a safe country (ECRE, 2007; Dowd, 2008). Within this contested environment the concept of transit migration was introduced and popularised.

This article concentrates on two issues. First, it examines the emergence and construction of transit migration and the political frameworks and discourses that brought about this concept. It goes on analysing how this reinforces the EU's efforts to externalise migration control and integrate non-EU countries into a comprehensive migration policy. Second, it critically surveys the state of the art, sketches causes and conditions of transit migration, identifies its geography and discusses some methodological and analytical pitfalls and difficulties of researching transit migration. Finally, conclusions for directions of further research are drawn.

THE POLITICS OF TRANSIT MIGRATION

The migration of citizens from distant countries who cross several other countries before they arrive at the external borders of and finally in the EU has become of increasing concern for all countries affected. This phenomenon became known as 'transit migration' and since the early 1990s numerous conferences and policy documents have addressed the issue. Unfortunately, despite widespread use of the concept no adequate or commonly agreed definition was developed. Instead, the emergence of the concept is closely related to political motivations; indeed the concept is often negatively connoted and highly politicised. In discourse analysis it would probably be considered a threat frame similar to that of 'illegal migration'. The way it is applied by some supranational, international and inter-governmental organisations is often grossly simplified and misleading.

The Emergence of A Blurred Concept

Initially, concerns over irregular migration to the European Union were targeting countries to the south of the EU suspected for being lax on migration and letting in migrants and refugees that would then move to countries in the North, which were seen as the prime destinations. Notably Spain, Italy and Greece were perceived as the 'soft-underbelly' of the EU (e.g. Hollifield, 1994); this metaphor was used with the intention

to expose lack of compliance with EU expectations and policy requirements. Meanwhile, the southern EU member states have stepped up controls and attention was shifted further south and east to non-EU countries. With this shift a new concept was brought into play: 'transit migration'. From a United Nations (UN) conference it seems to have entered the migration policy discourse during the early 1990s (UN/ECE, 1993). Since then, it has become increasingly popular. In 1994, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) urged its member states through a series of papers to recognise transit migration as an important matter in international migration and in particular in irregular and asylum migration (IOM, 1994a, b, c, d). Widgren (1995), director of the intergovernmental International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD, Vienna), at the height of the European asylum panic, warned that most asylum seekers were transiting Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. In 1998, a strategy paper of the then Austrian presidency of the Council of the European Union (1998) emphasised the importance of 'transit migration' and 'transit countries'. This was followed by six action plans on Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Albania, Somalia and Morocco, drafted by the High Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration in 1999. In 2001, the Ministerial Conference of the 5+5 Dialogue on Migration in the Western Mediterranean (2001) reiterated the necessity of 'joint management of the phenomenon'. Moreover, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2001), alerted national authorities about the then emerging phenomenon of transit migration in post-conflict Balkan countries. The Council of Europe (CoE) emphasised that 'perhaps the most salient migration phenomenon currently affecting Central and Eastern Europe is that of transit migrants' (CoE, European Committee on Migration 2002: part 1). This was followed by a regional conference on 'Migrants in Transit Countries' that raised attention and encouraged national authorities to take according measures (CoE, 2004). Meanwhile, in 2003, the 'Söderköping process', a 'Cross-Border Co-Operation Process' on migration matters, was launched under the auspices of the Swedish government, bringing together the eastern EU countries and its non-EU neighbours. The process targets Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova in order to

'tackle the problems of irregular transit migration and asylum problems' (General Directors' Immigration Service Conference, GDISC, 2001). Finally, entire countries that were crossed by migrants were labelled 'transit countries' (Bulletin Quotidien Europe, 2006).

This discourse has not yet brought about a single definition for transit migration in international policy or international law. Instead, there are many and these have entered into political discourse by custom, so it seems. One of the earliest definitions was offered by UN/ECE (1993: 7) whereby transit migration is 'migration in one country with the intention of seeking the possibility there to emigrate to another country as the country of final destination'. The Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union in Geneva (2005: 4) assures that 'the international community has a universally accepted definition of migrants in transit, which reads: "transit migrants are defined as aliens who stay in the country for some period of time while seeking to migrate permanently to another country"'. The only evidence, however, given for the alleged 'universal acceptance' is an IOM publication. Other sources define transit migrants as 'people who enter the territory of a state in order to travel on to another' (Council of Europe, European Committee on Migration, 2002: part 1), 'a short-term temporary stay of a migrant on his/her way from a country of origin to a country of destination' (Ivakhniouk, 2004: 6), or 'the stage between emigration and settlement' (Papadopoulou, 2005: 2). Icduygu (2005) and IOM (1995a) emphasise the intention of transit migrants that lies in the continuation of their journey. Most of these interpretations and definitions are either particular narrow or rather vague and they are as confusing as incoherent. Neither is length of time defined or indicated how intention can be established, nor is it made clear how one can be sure what a final destination country is.

Further confusing is that transit migration is often identified with irregular migration and with human smuggling, trafficking and organised crime. Several sources insist that transit migration is often irregular or illegal. For example, a UN publication identifies transit migration with 'flows of irregular and illegal migrants from the Third World and from East European countries' UN/ECE (1993: 7) and stresses that transit migrants reach their destination 'by means that are partially, if not fully,

illegal'. The parliamentary assembly of the CoE, Parliamentary Assembly (2001, para. 3) too emphasises that 'the two major characteristics of transit migration are its illicit nature and an elaborate criminal organisation'. Typical expressions are 'illegal migration routes' (Bulletin Quotidien Europe, 2006) and 'illegal transit migration' (Sipavicieno and Kanopiene, 1997: 9) and descriptions such as 'in general, transit migrants travel in groups and use the services of traffickers' (*ibid.*) or that 'the phenomenon of transit migration is mostly irregular' ICMPD (2005a: 1). Some sources even label entire countries as 'transit country for traffickers, smugglers and irregular migrants' (Zvizdovica, 2001: 1). The 'Dialog on Mediterranean Transit Migration' is indeed contextualised in the wider aim to 'prevent irregular migration' (ICMPD, 2005b). Sometimes, the debate over transit migration overlaps with the discourse on human trafficking (e.g. Stulhofer and Raboteg-Saric, 2001).

Over the course of time, transit migration became a discursive frame and a code for 'illegal immigration'. This frame includes asylum seekers who are perceived ineligible and who are supposed to make their claim in the first safe country instead of moving on (see Dublin Convention below). Accordingly, countries found to be transited by migrants are thought of as problematic (GDISC, 2006). Some publications presented transit migration as yet another threat to Europe. For example, the IOM (1994a) report on transit migration in Hungary alleged that up to two million migrants who are living in Central Europe in fact wanted to move to the West and that their number is continuing to grow. The following year Turkey was identified as a transit country: 'transit migration through Turkey can be viewed as one of the most common of all recently established mobility flows between Africa and Asia and countries of Europe; . . . thousands of migrants from the developing world who enter Europe are using Turkey as a transit area on their way to their preferred destinations' (IOM, 1995a: 4). Transit migration has also been associated with CEE countries and the Baltic republics (since 1994), with the Balkans (since 1999), and some Caucasus republics (Azerbaijan, 2003). Most recently, some northern African countries, notably Morocco and Libya, were targeted (see Collyer, 2006; de Haas, 2007).

As this map illustrates (Fig. 1), almost all neighbouring countries of the EU at some point

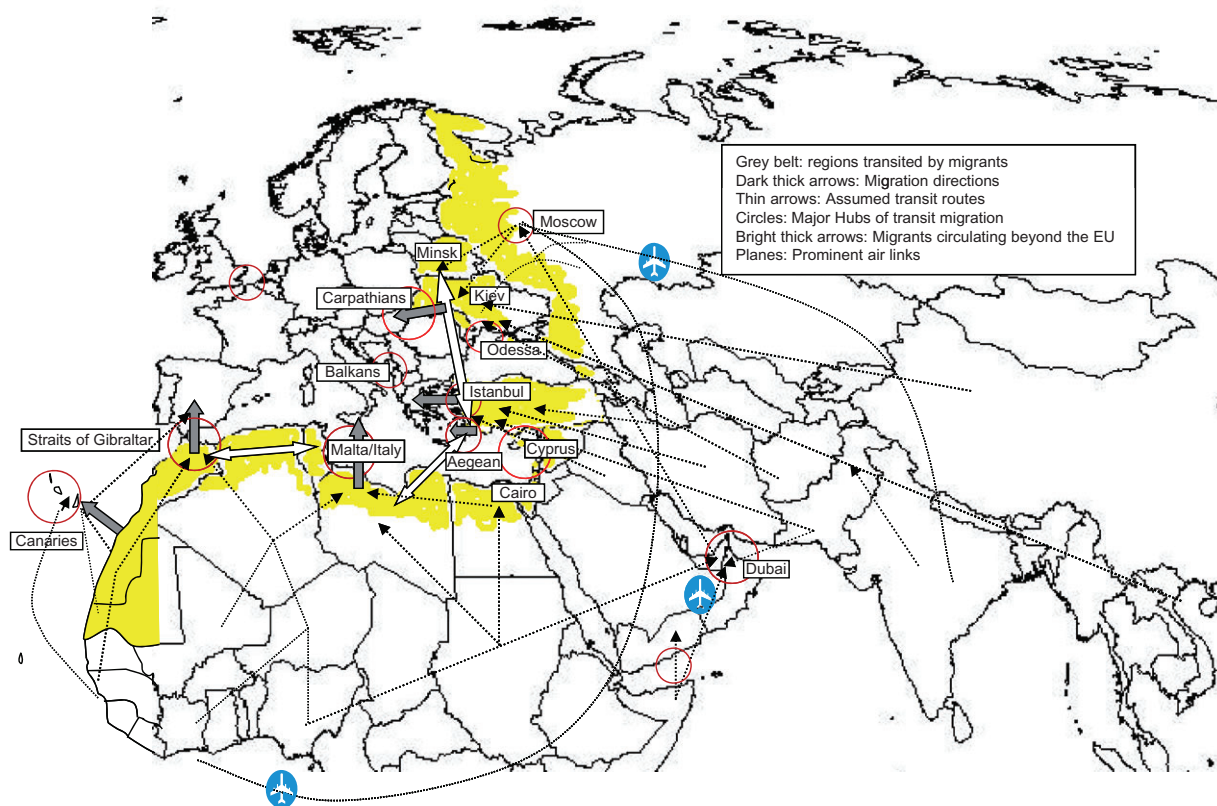


Figure 1. Illustration of transit migration to European Union, as it occurs from the literature.

have been identified with transit migration and labelled accordingly. The expression 'transit migration' almost became a war cry directed at countries that are expected by EU states to keep unwanted migration off its territory. It is worth noting that no EU country, for example, Poland, Austria, Italy or France has been labelled a transit country despite significant flows through these countries. This demonstrates the biased manner in which this term is used.

Various NGOs (e.g. European Council of Refugees and Exiles/ECRE and Oxfam) also respond to the challenge though they are more concerned with the consequences of the introduction of what was dubbed 'Fortress Europe' than with fears that Europe could be flooded by migrants entering from transit countries. For instance, some studies portrayed transit migrants as 'stranded' in their 'involuntary waiting room' (FFM, 1996: 7; FFM, 1997). Other research raises

concerns about the adverse effect of increased migration controls on refugees, suffering from corrupt police and border guards and the lack of adequate provisions for refugees (e.g. Düvell, 2008). Two problems are often inherent to such practices, either they uncritically accept transit migration as given or they introduce another discursive frame that portrays (transit) migrants only as victims. The full picture of the lives of people on the move or in a situation of continuous or repeated migration, as well as their agency then remains left in the dark.

Transit Migration and the Externalization of EU Migration Control

Over the course of time, 'transit migration' was addressed within diverse policy arenas. These include manifold multilateral and bilateral

processes such as: the EU accession processes, European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the Soderköping process, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the Barcelona process, the Mediterranean 5+5 Dialogue; the inter-governmental Dialogue on Transit Migration; and the Transit and Irregular Migration Management in Libya project facilitated by IOM. Diverse governmental, intergovernmental and multilateral agencies such as IOM, ICMPD, UNHCR and the US State Department, have responded to the perceived challenges of transit migration.

As already suggested, it was the IOM, an inter-governmental, non-UN organization, which played a crucial role in pushing transit migration onto the international policy agenda. By its mandate, IOM acts on behalf of its members who are national governments but also increasingly uses its discretion and engages in pro-active policy initiatives (Düvell, 2005: 39). Whilst some reports on 'transit migration' have been funded by receiving countries, as for example, the Netherlands funded the report on Azerbaijan others have been triggered by the organisation's own concerns (IOM, 1995a: 4). With its many field offices and their Migration Information Programme (MIP), defined in one of their publications as having a 'migration alert' function (IOM, 1995b: 1) IOM is at the pulse of international migration movements. It sometimes interprets its role and tasks as 'gathering information that will help government officials . . . to strengthen their efforts to monitor and manage migration processes' (IOM, 2003: 11). These ambitions have been put into practice through a series of country reports within the IOM's MIPs and sometimes high and alarmist figures were published. For instance, in 1993, IOM claimed that 100,000 to 140,000 transit migrants had entered Czech Republic, 100,000 Poland (UPI, 1994, according to IOM information), and another 60,000 Romania (IOM, 1993: 8). This was understood as a migrant wave 'soaring' on the eastern borders of the European Union (UPI, 1994). The following year, IOM claimed that a 'wave of Afghan migrants was heading for western Europe' (IOM, 1995b: 2), whilst reports on Turkey (IOM, 1995a: 5) refer to 'masses from the South and East'. And whilst earlier ICMPD (2004: 8) figures suggested Mediterranean transit migration to be a moderate 35,000 sub-Saharan Africans annually IOM suggests there are up to one million migrants who

are aiming to move north (Laurence Hart, IOM representative in Libya, quoted in BBC, 2007). Such claims confuse labour immigrants in Libya with transit migrants; they appear to be based on the assumption that non-nationals who are residing in a medium income country such as Libya cannot be labour immigrants but must be transit migrants on their way to Europe.

Another important European intergovernmental agency involved in policing transit migration is the ICMPD set up by the Swiss and Austrian governments in 1993. Following the success of the Budapest process, a policy process coordinating efforts to improve borders controls, the Mediterranean Transit Migration Dialogue was set up in 2003. Concerned governments are invited to enhance the 'fight against illegal migration' transiting the EU's Mediterranean neighbours (see ICMPD, 2005b). The initiative is concerned with operational matters and intelligence aspects: routes and criminal activities are identified, intelligence exchanged, training provided and technical equipment shared amongst participants. This trend towards intelligence work and engaging in enforcement matters was recently reinforced by setting up a joint ICMPD/Europol/Frontex programme (ICMPD, 2008).

European governments and EU agencies have included measures targeting transit migration in a range of policies. Concerns have been associated with candidate countries (Turkey and Croatia) and those that meanwhile became member states (Baltic republics, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Czech Republic, Slovenia, Malta, Cyprus, Romania and Bulgaria). For example, the Romanian government, in order to satisfy EU policy expectations, claimed 'a significant reduction of transit migration from third countries through Romanian territory' (Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1999). Equally, Malta since it became a full EU member states shields the mainland and intercepts 'boat people' on their way from Tunisia and Libya to Italy (Mainwaring, 2008). 'Combating' irregular migration, often of nationals from distant countries who are transiting Mediterranean countries is at the forefront of the EMP and the Barcelona process (Lutterbeck, 2006: 70). Notably, measures like the Frontex (EU border agency) operations Hera and Minerva that aim to prevent the arrival of 'boat people' on the Canary Islands and mainland in Spain reflect this trend. The fact that the

migrants who depart from Morocco, Mauritania and even Senegal are often sub-Saharan migrants, illustrate that such measures basically target 'transit migrants' aiming to leave the 'transit country'. As a consequence, the control of land and sea borders is increasingly 'militarised' (*ibid.*: 64) as observed between Morocco and Spain, Turkey and Greece, Italy and Albania, Libya and Italy and Malta, where armed and naval forces are regularly deployed in border controls. Several of these politics are jointly arranged by EU agencies and funded by the EU's Argo programme and the European Refugee Fund. Libya is another country integrated into such policies. In 2006, the EU considered Libya for its ENP and drafted according action plans to formalize such practices. ENPs aim at improving the EU neighbouring states' capacity to control and restrict migration to and in particular through these countries (see Guild, 2005). Negotiations have also been conducted with Moldova, Morocco, Tunisia and Ukraine (Azerbaijan and Georgia are also on the list). For example, the EU-Ukraine Action Plan on Justice and Home Affairs in 2001 and the EU-Ukraine Action Plan of 2004 aim at improvements in such affairs (see Zhyznomirskaya, 2006). And in 2009, Italy reached agreements with Libya about joint sea patrols.

The transit migration discourse coincides with EU efforts to negotiate return and deportation policies with many non-EU neighbours and various sending countries (e.g. Commission of the European Union, 2002). Notably, the Dublin Convention which was agreed in 1990 immediately after the fall of the Iron Curtain but only came into force in 1997 obliges refugees to apply for asylum and stay in the first safe country, often a transit country, in which they arrive, given this is safe. It obliges countries transited by refugees to readmit these from countries to which they continued their journeys. In autumn 2004, the Italian authorities in a dramatic move returned more than one thousand irregular migrants from various African countries back to Libya (see Andrijasevic, 2006). It was a panic response executed in the absence of an adequate policy framework and criticised by a European Parliament's committee as 'refoulement', a breach of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention. Similar instances were reported from Ukraine (2008), Greece and again Italy (2009). Also so-called readmission agreements are introduced with countries such

as Senegal and Mali that seek to establish collaboration of transit and sending countries.

Bosbach (2006), a leading figure of the conservative party in Germany Christlich Demokratische Union (CDU) confirms that, 'we must also integrate countries of origin and transit. They must help to contain refugee flows and they must be obliged to readmit their own nationals. There is no other way than putting pressure on these countries. And money'. Apap *et al.* (2004: 19) confirm that countries as Turkey 'came under massive pressure from a number of EU member countries to curb . . . transit migration'. All these measures represent cornerstones of a policy of containing migration flows. As a consequence, responsibility for preventing migrants unwanted in the EU from entering its territory has been shifted towards non-EU countries. This process is facilitated through EU candidate and membership procedures, various stability pacts (e.g. Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe), regional fora (e.g. MARRI – Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative, Balkans), neighbourhood and the politics of 'burden sharing' in refugee protecting. These facilitate exchange of knowledge, techniques, provision of equipment, seconding of staff and joint operations. Sometimes, however, it is criticised that EU countries simply 'dump' politically unwanted immigrants at their neighbours' territories, e.g. through migration containment and return policies, instead of recognising their international obligations towards refugees (Watson, 2003). Therefore, some argue the EU's 'burden sharing' policy is a euphemism for 'shifting the burden' to its neighbouring countries who are held responsible for keeping unwanted immigrants off EU territory and who could therefore become a 'buffer zone' for migrants not wanted in the EU (Kirisci, 2006). On the other hand, some non-EU governments also play a 'transit migration' card in their negotiation with the EU, for example, to divert attention from irregular migration of their own citizens (e.g. see de Haas, 2007 on Morocco) or to exchange improved border controls for eased visa regulations for their own citizens (as in the case of Ukraine).

The plethora of initiatives and the many actors engaged in 'combating' transit migration demonstrates that this has become a top policy aim. The policy goals are perfectly illustrated by an IOM (1995b: 48 and 47) document stating that transit countries shall either 'pay attention to specific

needs . . . of refugees' and thereby prevent them from being prompted to move on; or they shall 'return them . . . to their country of origin'. In other words, transit migration policies aim to identify and intercept potential transit migrants, prevent them from moving on to western Europe, and either enable them to stay in their transit country, for example by improving asylum procedures, or to return them to their country of origin. Finally, these measures not only target unwanted migration from migrants and refugees from distant countries but also of citizens from the neighbouring countries.

RESEARCHING TRANSIT MIGRATION

Critical Survey of Some Academic Studies

Migration historians and others identified patterns of 'transit migration' long before it was called transit or became politicised, as Treibel (1990: 24) referring to 'migration in stages' or Hoerder and Nagler's (1995) publication on 'people in transit' studying historical German emigration whilst development and urban studies have long been acutely aware of the link between rural-urban, hence internal migration, and international migration. In the recent past, there have been an increasing number of case studies conducted on transit migration focusing on Iranians (Kaytaz, 2006), Iraqis (Danis *et al.*, 2006) and West Africans (Brewer and Yüксеker, 2005) in Turkey (Icduygu, 2005; Yaghmaian, 2005), Kurds in Greece (Papadopoulou, 2005), Somalis and Sudanese in Egypt (Roman, 2006), migrants of various nationalities in Morocco (de Haas, 2005; Collyer, 2006) and Ukraine (Düvell, 2007).

Kaytaz studied a group of Iranian Christian refugees who fled to Turkey where they were awaiting UNHCR decision and final resettlement to another country. Turkey applies the original geographical limitation of the 1951 Refugee Convention whereby refugees from non-European countries cannot be accepted in Turkey but must be resettled. Further to this, refugee status determination can take anything between 6 months to 3 years, resulting in an unintended and long stay in Turkey. Her sample reveals a specific pattern whereby refugees are kept in transit by law and subsequently moved under state supervision. However, worldwide, only a fraction of the 15

million refugees who are assisted by UNHCR are moved to their final destination through such programmes (2003: 29,098, see UNHCR 2006b). Meanwhile, rejected asylum seekers too often do not return but try irregular strategies to leave the country to the west. For economic migrants from developing countries, it is next to impossible to obtain permission to work or a legal status. Thus, for legal, but also for social reasons, Turkey represents a hostile environment for refugees and migrants. As a consequence, non-nationals departing from Turkey to the EU not only do so on initial intention to transit the country but also in response to unviable conditions and after a longer stay. On the other hand, Danis *et al.* (2006) find that even under the most adverse conditions Iraqi, Afghan and Maghrebi migrants in Istanbul who would conventionally be considered as in transit instead managed some 'unofficial integration' and are in fact at least temporary immigrants. Brewer and Yüксеker (2005: 8) found that some only became (transit) migrants by accident because they were abandoned by human smugglers who were supposed to take them directly to Greece or Italy. Whilst in the early 1990s Africans spent an average of 13 months in Turkey before moving on (IOM, 1995a) the average stay of African refugees in Turkey, before being considered for resettlement, has increased to 2–3 years (Brewer and Yüксеker, 2005). The length of stay in a country of transit is determined by politics (the prolonged stays are related to tightened border control regimes in the EU), but also depends on social capital and help by networks and NGOs and on the migrants' success in accumulating funds to pay for the often clandestine passage to Europe. Success seems to differ by ethnic group and Africans in general and East Africans in particular seem to face the greatest difficulties, indeed they can get 'stuck' (*ibid.*: 16).

In a study on Egypt, Roman (2006) interprets refugees who were staying in Egypt for 10 or 12 years, and who, because of emerging difficulties, have developed aspirations to move to Europe or the US as transit migrants. This is hardly plausible and such movements must instead be understood as a separate trajectory and a form of on-migration (also see de Haas, 2007). Roman (2006) also identifies Egypt a transit country for Sudanese even though only a very small proportion of the arriving migrants move on whilst the majority stays in Sudan. In a similar fashion,

Boubakri (2004) calls Libya a transit country but whilst Libya hosts 1.2–1.8 million mainly labour migrants from sub-Saharan countries only a small proportion transited the country to Europe. For example, in 2004, only 11,000 migrants arriving in Malta and Italy departed from Libya (Cuttitta 2005), with some coming also from Turkey and Tunisia. Thus, labelling countries that are predominantly immigration countries as transit countries is misleading. It is also noted that in some countries, such as, Czech Republic, 'the period of transit migration is definitely the song of the past' (Topinka, 2005: 5). Other CEE countries that were previously transited by refugees, have meanwhile adopted adequate policies and consequently turned into refugees hosting countries (Druke, 2004: 120). Thus, what was initially perceived as transit migration turns out to be immigration, thus former transit countries are becoming immigration countries.

Causes and Patterns of Transit Migration

Transit migration is conventionally explained with the attractions of rich western countries hinting that these are the ultimate destination of any migrant. Some studies suggest that transit migration can be explained with the relative ease with which some countries can be entered and transited in order to reach another (Futo *et al.*, 2005). In particular 'porous borders', lax entry controls and liberal visa regulations and 'geographic position' at the crossroads between east and west are the most frequently cited preconditions for transit migration (e.g. IOM, 1995a, 2003). Thereby, it is alleged that the absence of efficient border and internal controls, or the corruption of authorities virtually invite (irregular) transit migration. Vice versa, transit migration can be explained with the limits in legal migration channels. As it becomes increasingly difficult for certain categories of people to legally migrate to the EU, those who nevertheless wish to come, either as workers, refugees or family members turn to long journeys and are driven into complex and hazardous circumventions and paths. Empirical evidence suggests that migrants who are restricted from moving to Europe legally and who therefore turn to the services of human smugglers are often taken through a range of countries (e.g. Mavris 2002; Futo *et al.*, 2005). This implies that it is the

destination countries' policies that contribute to the emergence and construction of transit migration. Thus, transit migration is a strategic response to the constantly changing control regime and part of the complex interaction between migrants' autonomy and states sovereignty.

Other research found that onward movements are also caused by lack of social, economic and legal opportunities in the first country of arrival. For instance, Jordan and Düvell (2002) found Kurdish refugees in Greece, who after struggling to survive whilst trying to obtain refugee status finally gave up hope and moved on to the UK. Roman (2006: 7) argues that refugees from Sudan and Somalia to Egypt moved on because of 'lack of local integration prospects'. In case of Africans in Istanbul, Brewer and Yüксеker (2009) conclude that hostile environments, for example, discrimination, racism, racial violence and police harassment play their part in preventing migrants from settling down and instead provoke them to move on. In Ukraine, lack of legal status, unfair asylum procedures and unviable economic conditions make it difficult for migrants and refugees to stay (Human Rights Watch, 2005). This is further facilitated by the international policy framework, notably refugee resettlement arrangements. For example, Kaytaz (2006) found that Iranian refugees in Turkey deliberately and strategically apply for asylum, await decision and count on being resettled to their final destination. This demonstrates that the conditions in immigration and refugee receiving countries contribute considerable to on-migration.

Transit movements constantly change paths, points of departure and arrival; frequently, migrants respond to new opportunities or new or increasing control policies or are blown off course. For example, during the mid 1990s it was observed that migrants from distant countries, because of increasing controls along the Polish-German borders moved south through Romania and Hungary trying to find a loophole into the EU (FFM, 1996). Equally, it was reported that new restrictive measures in Spain, initially aimed at movements across the Straits of Gibraltar, compelled would-be migrants from sub-Saharan countries to instead depart from the Moroccan Atlantic coast and cross over to the Canary Islands. Once controls were intensified there, the migrants began to use Mauritania as a stepping stone to the Canaries (German Foreign Policy,

2006). And since the EU is making coordinated efforts to stop this some boats leave from as far as Senegal crossing the western Atlantic Ocean in attempts to reach the Canary Islands (Wandler, 2006), whilst others travel from Morocco, Algeria and Mauretania to Turkey and then on to Greece (own observation). In such cases, the previous flow usually continuous though on a lower level whilst new paths emerge; hence, movements not simply shift but rather split and diversify.

Western observers sometimes only concentrate on the transit aspect of CEE and CIS countries, such as Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Czech Republic. This is dating back to the late 1980s when migrants to Eastern bloc countries – students and workers – were taken by surprise by the sudden political changes and as a consequence were deprived of their status, prevented from finishing their studies and exempted from housing and benefits (see FFM, 1996). This compelled many to migrate to other countries, notably in the West. They were then perceived as transit migrants and ever since CEE and CIS countries are labelled transit countries. Instead, Krassinets (1998: 7) suggests that in Russia, for example, only migrants from countries further away and with no cultural links with Russia tend to continue their migration whilst migrants from former Soviet republics and meanwhile independent countries tend to be immigrants. Indeed, western observers often forget that the USSR and other countries of the eastern bloc formed a specific system of international relations with other socialist countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. For many decades, this facilitated immigration of students, labour migrants and military personnel, which partially continues until today.

Further to this, issues of social class also play a role in transit migration. Travellers to the EU must normally prove that they are *bona fide* tourists or businessmen. Tourists must convince immigration officers in the visa offices or at the borders of their honest intentions, that they have the means to subsidise themselves and have jobs, houses, and families to which they will return whilst labour migrants must meet immigration criteria that are increasingly based on secondary and tertiary education and high skills. Both categories must then be able to simply book a flight to their final destination. Those who have some funds but are unable to obtain a visa, for example,

because they lack the required education or skills, may instead fly to a country close to their final destination, for example, from Nigeria to Kyiv and then try to move on. But those with little or no resources, who can only afford the cheapest transportation, need to travel on trains, busses, lorries or even walk through a range of countries toward their intended destination and can only go 'as far as their money would take them' (VanHear, 2004). Some migrants need to work and earn money in order to finance their next step. Hence, it seems plausible to suggest that the poorer the migrants the higher the tendency to migrate overland; and the poorer they are the more likely it is they must stay in countries en route to work, hence the longer they will stay in the transit country.

Finally, transit movements often display the same characteristics as migration in general. Transit migrants originate from neighbouring countries; they often have knowledge of the (transit) countries' language and access to some networks [see e.g. the IOM (2003) report on Azerbaijan]. Another report on Turkey (IOM, 1995a) found that the majority of supposed transit migrants were from neighbouring Iran and Iraq (often of Kurdish or ethnic Turkish background), two-thirds were Muslim, more than a third spoke either Turkish or Kurdish, and 20%, respectively 33% referred to family or friends. And in Ukraine Armenians, Chechens and Moldovans share language, history and culture. In these cases, transit migration is facilitated by migration systems, network effects and even 'ethnic corridors' (Mosneaga, 2008). Other movements, however, such as that of Bengalis through Turkey or Pakistani through Ukraine seem to lack such relations and must be explained with opportunity structures and the role the migration industry plays in the movement of people.

CONCLUSION

This article illustrates the sometimes inappropriate use of the concept of 'transit migration', 'transit migrants' and 'transit countries'. It demonstrates, first, that what is considered 'transit migration' often is not or is a simplified, biased, and misleading expression of the types of migration at stake. Second, also the countries which experience migrants travelling through and/or temporarily staying on their territory can hardly

be labelled 'transit countries' as it is usually other forms of migration – immigration and/or emigration – that characterises the experience of these countries and determine their function within the global migration order. Third, this article illustrates the sometimes difficult and challenging conditions under which migration research is conducted and the biases and stereotypes that researchers faces. Certain conclusions and consequences can be drawn from this.

The politicised nature of the discourse and concept of transit migration severely impedes scientific dealing with this phenomenon. Research is sometimes policy driven and prone to fall for the political nature of such concepts. Sometimes, claims that certain migrants are transit migrants and that migration is transit migration are taken for granted instead of properly controlling these claims for their validity and plausibility; sometimes research even seems to be expected to produce certain convenient results. For these reasons, some researchers have abstained from studying the issue altogether, whilst others suggest discarding the concept as inappropriate. This would be justified if there would be no such migration pattern as transit migration. Research, however, conducted by the author (Düvell, 2007) in the countries on the fringes of Europe came across migrants from distant countries, such as Algerians in Turkey or Somalis in Ukraine who enter these countries with the clear intention (i.e. efforts are made to leave the country) to only stay for a limited period of time before moving on to an EU member state. If they succeed – hence emigrating from one country and travelling through other countries, without staying there for long, without integrating into the countries' social systems and with the intention of immigration to another country – this specific form of migration can certainly be understood as transit migration. In the same countries, however, migrants are found who stay there for longer periods of time, up to several years, who only after considering their situation conclude, for example because there is a lack of opportunities, that they better move to another country. Other migrants entered, for instance, Ukraine with the intention of staying but find conditions frustrating and decide to move to another country. Because they lack intention from the outset they differ from the first case and represent a different pattern. Therefore, this can hardly be understood

as transit migration but instead must be considered a separate trajectory. Finally, there are migrants who intend to only transit certain countries but fail to do so, for example, because border controls are insurmountable or because they fear the risks of clandestine border crossings and stay; hence, whilst their intention was transit they *de facto* become (involuntary) immigrants and represent yet again another type. These are just a few of the many patterns found in the field; they shall be sufficient, however, to illustrate the complexity and variety of the types found in research. These kinds of dynamic migrations can be subsumed under the umbrella typology of on-migration of which transit migration would be a sub-category. In sum, it is suggested to take a structuralist perspective and develop a clear-cut typology derived from rigid comparison of various patterns of migration and migrants' strategies.

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