This book presents the transit experiences of migrants from Sub-Saharan African countries in the Turkish metropolis of Istanbul. On the basis of ethnographic fieldwork, the peculiarities of a state of transit and its impact on everyday life are presented. These issues are discussed with the aid of the theoretical perspectives of social networks analysis on the one hand and migration and mobility on the other. Insecurity, uncertainty and an overall precariousness crystallise as constitutive of the state of transit. The thesis highlights the processual nature of mobility and immobility strategies. The issue of migrant capital, conceptualised as local knowledge with a particular focus on the migrant experience, is found to be a crucial aspect accounting for immobility in transit. The thesis further identifies a pattern of social stratification based on immobility intersected with legal status and migrant capital. It argues that this stratification is produced by transit movements and, in turn, that it reproduces transit movements. Related to this social stratification is the presentation of Istanbul as the socio-economic context offering conditions for both establishment in situ and for establishment in mobility.
This doctoral thesis has been produced within the research and research studies framework at REMESO, Department of Social and Welfare Studies, Linköping University. It is also a product of research at MIM, Malmö University, and the close collaboration between REMESO and MIM.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents the transit experiences of migrants from Sub-Saharan African countries in the Turkish metropolis of Istanbul. Although the narratives of the individuals met in the course of fieldwork in Istanbul are the primary focus, the thesis also outlines the larger macro-structural conditions faced. The overarching goal of this thesis is thus, through the experiences of the migrants themselves, to critically approach and discuss the concept of transit with the aid of the theoretical perspectives of social networks analysis and mobility.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork and an explorative design, this thesis investigates the ‘black-box’ that the state of transit has hitherto often represented in the literature by focusing on migrants’ experiences of mobility, immobility and social networks. Insecurity, uncertainty, and an overall precariousness constitute the state of transit. Light is shed on questions relating to the peculiarities of a state of transit and its impact on everyday life. The thesis highlights the processual nature of mobility and immobility strategies. The issue of migrant capital (conceptualised as local knowledge, with a particular focus on the migrant experience) is found to be a crucial aspect of immobility in transit. The thesis further identifies a pattern of social stratification based on immobility intersected with legal status and migrant capital, and argues that this stratification is produced by transit movements and, in turn, reproduces transit movements. Related to social stratification is the presentation of Istanbul as the socio-economic context that offers prerequisites for establishment in situ and establishment in mobility.
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Swedish World: Holders of a Swedish passport have visa free access to the countries shaded in green

Nigerian World: Holders of a Nigerian passport have visa free access to the countries shaded in pink

Sources: Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008; Swiss Embassy Abuja, 2008
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation presents the experiences of individuals of Sub-Saharan African origin in the Turkish metropolis of Istanbul. Sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey have gained in numbers in the past decade (Brewer & Yükseker, 2006) and are generally perceived to transit the country (İçduygu, 2000; 2003; 2005). In our conversations, their past and their hoped-for future were contrasted with the circumstances in which they still found themselves or with those in which they had found ways of making a relatively stable living – often paired with tactics to improve their bodily safety and maintain their mental sanity.

Three overarching themes crystallised from the fieldwork: the conditions of transit, the mobilisation of support and the trajectories of (im)mobility. In this thesis I will show how for Sub-Saharan Africans in Istanbul, a location of transit for many, but by no means all, these themes are highly interrelated. Inherent to a common understanding of transit is the anticipation of further mobility preceded by a short period of immobility. In this situation of transit, which is conditioned by marginalisation and precariousness, social networks are of the utmost importance for general well-being and prospective onward mobility. Trajectories of mobility from or in a location of transit are, in turn, interrelated to local and translocal social relations. The overarching goal of this thesis is thus to critically approach and discuss the concept of transit as experienced by the migrants themselves with the aid of social networks analysis and the theoretical perspectives of migration and mobility.
Contextualising the study

“I haven’t seen Amel for a while, do you know anything about her?” – “Oh, Amel, yes, she has travelled; she is in Greece now.”

Hanging out at any one of the support organisations for migrants in Istanbul, I would often overhear conversations like the one above. In the initial stages of my research, the migrants’ use of the term ‘travelling’ struck me as rather awkward. Having read countless newspaper articles and books about African people’s strenuous, perilous journeys to countries in the north, having seen the official statistics of more than 18,000 documented lost lives in and around the Mediterranean since 1988 (Fortress Europe, 2012) and having heard politicians promise to increase the financial budget to “combat illegal immigration”, the term ‘travelling’ seemed very odd to me. Yet, much more than the simple use of the term, the casual way in which it was used during the conversations astonished me. What I (naively) expected was more of an outcry. An outrage over the inferiority – assigned from the outside – of their position in a global landscape. Later, in conversations, I would sometimes find the outcry and the clear-stated political consciousness I had anticipated. During the course of my fieldwork I came to understand the use of the term ‘travel’ as an expression of how Europe’s unwanted migrants resist the subordinate position to which they have been ascribed. It is a sign of the autonomy of migration: people have always moved, and people will always move – no matter how many obstacles richer countries want to and do erect. To me, the term ‘travelling’, and the normality with which it is used, signifies the agency of these people – people who, embedded in specific social circumstances, took their destiny into their own hands and left their countries for better lives for themselves and their loved ones.

Although the thesis is primarily anchored in the narratives of the individuals I met in the course of my fieldwork in Istanbul, it also looks at the larger macro-structural conditions. For most of the world’s population – especially at the peripheries of global economic power – the structural context is far beyond their reach of influence. Sarah J. Mahler (1995:7), emphasises that: “(…) while many people – even immigrants themselves – mythologize migration as individuals’ search for a ‘Promised Land’, migrations are stimulated and

1 The actual number is estimated to be much higher.
orchestrated by socioeconomic forces much greater than the whims and desires of individuals and their families.” Without neglecting the impact of human agency, Mahler draws attention to the fact that human agency is largely conditioned by macro-structural forces that exceed an individual’s power. This is reflected in the words of one Nigerian interlocutor telling me about his trip from Turkey to Greece in a rubber boat. On recalling his sudden and powerful realisation of the absurdity of the danger of this way of travelling, he has come to understand the following: “You don’t make the situation, the situation makes you!” (Victor, 7 October 2008)

Therefore, even though I am dedicated to telling my interlocutors’ stories, blindly taking their narratives as the only benchmark for their situation would be a questionable research undertaking. The term ‘travelling’ thus has to be contrasted with what it actually is: an unauthorised movement across borders that is dangerous and potentially life threatening and undertaken at substantial multiple costs compared to the equivalent of an authorised movement. The barriers erected to keep the category of unwanted migrants out of the European Union have, in fact, led to the death of migrants on an almost daily basis – both at borders and on the way to them (Fortress Europe, 2011). Irregular migration is a product of the contemporary migration management that selects some migrants and simultaneously excludes others. The grounds for this selection are to a great extent derived from the economic demands of countries in the north (Geiger & Pécoud, 2010; Kalm, 2010), as well as the shifting nature of the political discourse on immigration in each country.

This development largely occurred in conjunction with a renewed EU-Africa relationship at the Lisbon Summit in 2007, which is formulated to be a ‘partnership of equals’ with a vision of – among other things – a mutually beneficial migration management (Hansen & Jonsson, 2011:262). Despite the change of vocabulary since 2005 from “prevention” and “control” to “management” and “partnership”, Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson (2011) critically conclude that for the vast majority of African nationals no legal entry into the EU is foreseen. This rather gloomy account is paralleled by a humanitarian approach – with the 1951 Refugee Convention and its protocols as the main instrument – that does not admit entry but announces protection upon entry to individuals who, if deemed trustworthy,
From transit migration to transit
Transit migration as a field of scholarly concern emerged in the early 1990s, when the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) published a number of reports on countries bordering or in close proximity to the EU (such as Turkey, Ukraine, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, the Czech Republic and the Russian Federation).2

The concept of transit migration that is now included in many policy-makers’ and academic debates is far from clear-cut, however (Düvell, 2006; 2010; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008b). Franck Düvell (2006; 2008a; 2008b; 2010) provides us with a thorough account of the emergence and development of the concept. He highlights the vagueness and the political nature of the term, and warns against its uncritical application. The careless use of the term has led to many studies – both at governmental level as well as in academia – in which a heterogeneous group of migrants are lumped together “around a limited series of largely undefined commonalities involving illegality, high risk, lack of control and above all an assumed desire to reach European territory” (Collyer, Düvell & de Haas, 2010:411). Aspasia Papadoupoulou-Kourkoula (2008b:6) points out that while transit migration may often overlap with irregular migration, this is not always the case. Transit migration may also include asylum seekers, students and other state-documented migrant categories. For example, in Turkey, the phenomenon includes both

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2 A report on Azerbaijan was added in 2003.
regular (asylum seekers and refugees) and irregular (undocumented) migrants (İçduygu, 2005:7). As the current Turkish asylum system does not foresee any settlement and integration of individuals originating from countries outside Europe, refugees are usually resettled after they have been recognised by the UNHCR (as will be explained in detail in Chapter 4).

The term transit migration has a ring of Eurocentrism to it, in that it commonly departs from the assumption that an EU country is the intended destination (Düvell, 2006). This leads to a number of biases. Firstly, usually only countries at the fringes of Europe (such as Turkey, Ukraine or Morocco) are labelled as transit countries. However, research on migrants within the Schengen area has shown that many migrants either remain mobile or move to a different country even after reaching a so-called destination, and, even after gaining a residence permit or citizenship (Moret, Baglioni, & Efion-ayi-Mäder, 2006; Moret, 2012; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008b; Schapendonk, 2011). Secondly, transit migrants are not the concern of policymakers because it is assumed that they will leave without impinging on the general resident population. This of course impacts many of the so-called transit migrants who stay in one location for a long time or even settle down (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008b). By the same token, for many Sub-Saharan African migrants, North African countries (especially Libya and Morocco) have in fact been countries of destination (Collyer, 2007; Collyer & de Haas, 2010). Irrespective of the time these people spend in any location, they consume, have educational and medical needs and have relations to the majority population (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008b); above all to the police, landlords and employers, but also – if staying longer – to the rest of the society.

In an attempt to explain and theorise the phenomenon of transit migration, scholars in the field realise the importance of geographical proximity (e.g. İçduygu, 2003; 2005), the pivotal role of social networks (Cassarino & Fargues, 2006; Papadopoulou, 2004) and the role of the wider policy framework (Cassarino & Fargues, 2006; Düvell, 2006; Hess, 2010) and class (Van Hear, 2006). Despite the lack of a common definition, many scholars seem to agree on two key ingredients of transit migration: firstly, the migrants’ intention to move on, and secondly, the temporariness of the tran-

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3 Before the overthrow of the Ghaddafi regime in 2011.
sit stay (see, e.g., for example Cassarino & Fargues, 2006; Düvell, 2006; 2008b; Içduygu, 2000; 2003; 2005). Based on my fieldwork, my view is that these key elements pose problems that in fact more recent studies have actually started to address. The most comprehensive of these studies are those conducted by Aspasia Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008b) on Kurds in Greece and also Joris Schapendonk’s (2011) study on the multi-linear movement of Sub-Saharan African migrants between their places of origin, North Africa, Turkey and various European countries. Both authors have conducted lengthy fieldwork and present accounts of transit migration that highlight a series of structural and individual factors as decisive for onward migration. By stressing migrants’ multiple motivations for migration, showing their ambivalence in different phases and paying attention to shifting scenarios, Schapendonk (2011:195) has been able to show that “it is not only migrants who are on the move – so too are their aspirations.” He thereby renders the argument of ‘intention’ a poor one, inasmuch as it implies that intentions are static and fixed. As this thesis will show, the role of information and the role of opportunities (here operationalised as policy changes, access to social networks and luck) cannot be neglected either. My study witnesses that, human agency notwithstanding, neither the power of macro-structural forces nor social relations at a meso-level should be underestimated (see also Mahler, 1995).

Turning to the second key condition, temporariness of stay, a look at the literature shows that the scholarly community has not been able to agree on a clear-cut liminal definition of time as a constitution of transit migration. Düvell’s (2008b) suggestion to draw the boundary between transit and temporary migration in a stay of less than three months seems highly technocratic and does not do justice to the complexity of this phenomenon. However, empirical work shows that some individuals transit a location in a short time, while others stay longer – and come to perceive this stay as voluntary or involuntary. By exploring their agency, by asking about reasons for their mobility or immobility as this thesis does, it becomes clear that notwithstanding the centrality of time in a migrant’s biography, the concept is not useful for establishing a ‘transit migrant’ category.

Despite the vague and politicised concept of transit migration, a growing collection of empirical material (apart from this thesis see also Alioua, 2003; 2008; Chatelard, 2002; Danış, 2006; Danış,
Pérouse & Taraghi, 2006; Danış, 2010; Kastner, 2010; Schapendonk, 2011; Stock, 2011; Streiff-Fénart & Poutignat, 2008) shows that a ‘typical’ transit migrant can be constructed posteriori, inasmuch as a lot of individuals pass through different countries and cities on their way to an imagined livelihood that offers some kind of stability and improvement in living conditions via settlement. Empirical research shows that some migrants stay in a transit location for a longer time than others. In view of this, the following questions are important: What kind of factors impact on further mobility or immobility in a transit location? To what extent is transit different from immigration? What results from the fact that in the minds of many Istanbul constitutes a location of transit? I appreciate Schapendonk’s (2011) observation that transit should be treated as a mental condition rather than a technocratic category, thereby locating the migrant as an important actor. However, this observation seems to neglect the very tangible impact the wider structures have on a person’s existence that go far beyond a mental condition or an individual’s subjective impressions. I instead lean towards Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008b:7, 87), who locates transit migration as the period between emigration and settlement. The very contribution of this definition lies in the option of settling down in a location of transit: settlement therefore does not necessarily require additional physical movement. The fine line between transit and settlement is again not constituted by duration, but by a stabilisation of living and working conditions in the particular place, by a migrant’s engagement with the structures and opportunities of the receiving society, and by a perceived diminishing of insecurity and uncertainty. Thus, insecurity, uncertainty and an overall precariousness and rightlessness seem to crystallise as constitutive of the state of transit (not ‘transit migrant’ as a migrant category, but of transit as a condition). The chapters that follow will shed light on the peculiarities of a state of transit and its impact on everyday life by means of an integrated, interdisciplinary approach; one that has become increasingly popular in migration studies (see Audebert & Kamel Doraï, 2010; King, 2002; King, 2012).

The three themes of transit, social networks and mobility – handled here as analytical variables – are highly interdependent and to some extent mutually constitutive. Although social networks exist in most situations of life, what is the specific twist to them in tran-
sit? Also, what effect do these networks – their composition and their functions – have on people’s onward mobility or immobility? Furthermore, much has been written about mobility and migration in order to explain people’s physical movement, but how are trajectories of mobility conditioned in transit? Finally, transit seems to be the key here; the one variable that we – through the available literature – have an inkling about but are still not really able to grasp. This interrelation between transit and social networks as well as between transit and mobility ultimately guides and forms my main research question, which is: How can we understand the transit condition in relation to trajectories of migration and mobility and social network dynamics?

Mobility and power
At the core of the issue of transit is a new distinctiveness of undocumented migration which lies in the increased gap between those “with access to international mobility and those without” (Collyer, 2007:671). Or, to use the words of Josefina Syssner and Khalid Khayati (2010:40, my translation): “Voluntary mobility is a privilege bestowed to a relatively small section of the world’s population.” The opening juxtaposition of maps in my frontispiece illustrates this statement. In the last few decades there has been an increased inequality in terms of access to legal mobility. This inequality is particularly manifest in the trajectories of people making single legs of their migratory journey in an ever increasing period of time, facing ever increasing dangers on their way and paying an ever increasing amount of money to arrive at the next leg. Schapendonk (forthcoming) noted that “(...) the most profound critique on the African position in the world order today, does not come from anti-globalist networks or critical politicians, but from these young men and women knocking on Europe’s door.” Also, Boris Nieswand (2011:5) sees the migration of African individuals to Western Europe as an intrinsic part of the economic globalisation from above. Finally, Vilna Francine Bashi (2007:252), who conducted in-depth research on West Indian immigrant networks in the United States, notes that “geographical mobility is a major first step in a global strategy for social and economic mobility.” The following passage comes from one of my discussions with a Nigerian interlocutor,
Victor, in Istanbul. He expresses a similar perspective as the scholars mentioned above:

“Africa is still behind. We are behind. And we are not saying we are not.” – “So you are kind of on an individual development mission” – “Bridging the gap! And if like one million of us like me, or 500,000 like us can do this, look at the massive impact that we have back home. At the same time, we don’t want to destroy anything, just want to get and go back home, OK, that is why I am here, Brigitte.” – “OK” – “We are behind, we are not cave men or something, no, Africa is developed, OK? We have airports, we have everything, we are developed, but we are behind. Everybody knows this. The only thing we can do is we accept the facts and try to get us back on the map.”
(Victor, 19 March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Outline of the thesis
This thesis has four major rationales. Firstly, by anchoring my focus on individuals, the migrants’ own understanding of and reasoning about their situation and their own agency is revealed. Through this, I hope to contribute to a process of de-exotification and de-construction of essentialist notions of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa who undertake the journey to a European country in order to improve their lives in spite of the unwelcoming formal framework. This thesis is inspired by the ethics of cosmopolitanism after Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006), who sees the principle of his philosophy in the integration of commonly held distinctions between “the West and the Rest; between locals and moderns; between a bloodless ethic of profit and a bloody ethic of identity; between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (2006:xxi). For a scholar, this can be achieved by showing an interest in lives that are different from one’s own, including paying attention to the practices and beliefs that render them meaningful to those who live them (see Appiah, 2006:xv). Apart from Appiah’s appeal to my personal conviction and world view, I believe that given the current climate against foreigners in many European countries, which sadly excels itself in increased xenophobic and fear of “the stranger”, the ethics of cosmopolitanism is more important than ever. My methodological approach enables us to grasp the phenomenon beyond the popular dichotomies of ‘good and bad migrants’ in
that it takes individuals seriously and informs the reader about their situation in their own words. In other words, it helps us to understand our common humanity, my collocutors’ precarious situation notwithstanding.

Secondly, my thesis contributes to the literature on step-wise migration and ‘transit migration’ without succumbing to the conceptual challenges nestled within the latter. By listening to the migrants’ anticipations of their trajectories, by following the actual patterns of movement and by providing an in-depth analysis on social and economic structures in the location of transit, aspects of the transit situation are revealed that have hitherto remained largely concealed in the existing scholarly literature on this topic. This thesis contributes by carving out the specificities of a transit situation, highlighting what I term the logic of transit and analysing how it impacts on the migrants’ social relations and trajectories of mobility.

Thirdly, by the same token, the thesis recognises the overall importance of social networks and highlights their formation, function and working in transit – something that has hardly been delved into in the scholarly literature on transit. By paying attention to why individuals develop social ties with each other, by observing how these ties develop over time, and by asking what gains (or losses) can be derived from such network ties, this thesis offers an in-depth insight into social networks of marginalised individuals experiencing the conditions of transit.

Fourthly, this thesis contributes knowledge about international migration in Turkey. Although Turkey has long been considered a country of emigration, the literature on modern Turkish history notes several larger movements of immigration in the years following the foundation of the republic, as well as later during the Balkan War and during the political turmoil in Soviet and post-Soviet countries in the early 1990s. Transit movements through Turkey have found their way into scholarly articles around the same time. The group of scholars addressing migration to Turkey (rather than migration from Turkey) is rather small (see for example Brewer & Yükseker, 2006; Danış et al., 2006; Danış, 2010; Içduyguyu, 2000; Içduygu & Biehl, 2008; Içduygu & Sert, 2011; Keough, 2006; Parla, 2007; Piart, 2012; Yükseker, 2004), but is steadily growing.

I would like to emphasise the material-driven nature of the thesis, and urge the reader to conceive and evaluate it as such. Empiri-
cal priority is not only underlined by the large volume of material presented, but also through one particular narrative, Peter’s story, presented in Chapter 2, which serves as an entry point for the reader to the field, and consequently to this thesis. Peter’s story, which depicts his arrival in Istanbul and his consequent exploration and meaning-making of his situation, is presented as it was told to me in the field.

Chapter 3 begins by arguing for the benefits of ethnography as a method that facilitates the portrayal of a very complex, socio-economic picture and simultaneously anchors it in the position of the individual, in this case the migrant. A description of migrants’ own perceptions is vital, as they largely steer and navigate their actions. What is more, it reveals our common human wishes, hopes and concerns. The chapter, which discusses the challenges encountered during the fieldwork and the solutions that were arrived at, speaks in a reflexive way about positionalities and how they have affected my material. It also describes my handling of the cornerstones of this thesis: the narrative and fieldwork material.

Chapter 4 introduces the reader to Turkey and to Istanbul, and provides a description of the geopolitical, economic and social issues that contribute to a high social, religious, ethnic and economic diversity in this global city at the Bosporus. The second section looks at the city’s migrant landscape, while the third looks into boundary-making issues along mainly racial and ethnic lines. Various intersections of other social categories are acknowledged and an analysis offered of how situated positions play out in specific contexts. This section largely ‘returns the gaze’ and does not only talk about Sub-Saharan African migrants’ experiences with the police and other segments of the Turkish public, but also how Turkish ethnicity has been perceived and reasoned by the migrants themselves. Finally, the fourth section touches on the small but nevertheless existing rooms of manoeuvre for increased safety and indicates how the employment of stereotypes may grant a certain protection from mistreatment in public spaces. Furthermore, the very vital issue of self-identification is discussed.

Chapter 5 looks at how trajectories of mobility are impacted by transit. Transit can be conceptualised as a crossroads of mobilities. From a situation of transit, humans move onward (as the term presupposes) as well as in reverse (return movement, often to the coun-
try of origin). Furthermore, and this is one of the main findings of this thesis, transit, at least in the case of Istanbul, also offers pathways to social mobility. The presence of traders from African countries opens up opportunities for irregular migrants from these countries to engage in trade and eventually to regain (circular) mobility sanctioned by legal provisions. An approach to livelihood that takes movement rather than place into account enables us to see that. On the other hand, access to citizenship, as limited as it is in Turkey, constitutes a crucial aspect of social advancement and opens up for relative economic and social stability. However, these various trajectories of mobility notwithstanding, a number of individuals still find themselves immobile in physical, social and existential terms. For them, the stay in transit, as indefinite as it is, presents a severe challenge to their social, economic and mental well-being.

Consequently, Chapter 6 deals with the impact of transit on social network formations, maintenance and functions. The manifold scarcity of resources not only leads to exploitation in the (informal) labour market and to increased competition over potential assets (information, contacts, work, customers), but also to intra-network cunning and exploitation. This results in a high level of distrust among the migrants. Thus, social networks that develop in transit are fragile, highly unstable and can often only provide very limited access to the receiving society, which often tend to be in the areas of labour market and accommodation (and more rarely marriage partners). In a situation of constant fluctuation, the immobility of people appears as a trust-inducing mechanism, which has direct consequences for the social position an individual occupies in the locally formed social grid of power. The chapter discusses the modes of accumulation of social and cultural capital and identifies them as two of the main stratifiers of social relations among the people who find themselves in the condition of transit in Istanbul.

Chapter 7 synthesises the two previous chapters and looks at how conditions of transit impact on the trajectories of mobility and social networks. It presents one of my main findings, namely a pattern of social stratification along the node of immobility, legal status and migrant capital (a form of cultural capital). This stratification, I argue, is both produced by transit movements and reproduces it. Just like other big cities in general – and a transit city in particular –
Istanbul has to be seen as enabling pathways to various trajectories of migrant life. Istanbul does not only have conditions that enable and almost encourage transit movement, it also offers conditions for establishment *in situ* and for establishment in mobility.

The last section provides a summary of the main findings and makes suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER 2: PETER’S ISTANBUL: FROM INSECURITY TO ROUTINE

This is Peter’s story. Peter was one of the first Sub-Saharan migrants I met in autumn 2007, just one month after his arrival in the city. Over the course of weeks and months he became one of my main interlocutors. Being sharp-minded and forward-looking, he often offered information and his own analyses. The following pages will take the reader through Peter’s gradual adaptation to his situation in Istanbul; from his time of arrival and insecurity to practices of routine and prospects of upward mobility. The story that is reproduced here makes use of his narratives and my fieldwork observations, without scientific analysis and references. The material was collected in situations of ‘booked’ conversations, as well as in the course of the activities in which I participated. Several parts of the story are repeated later in the thesis where they are, together with other material, discussed and analysed. Peter’s narrative is told in the present tense to create a sense of immediacy. Except for some specific events and considerations, Peter’s story is far from unique. It does, however, provide a deeper insight into the situation of (Nigerian) undocumented migrants in the Turkish metropolis. I have included it at the beginning of the thesis in order to stress both the centrality of the narrative material I collected and the inductive nature of my work. In addition, I want the reader to come closer to the material. As such, it follows an understanding derived from ethnography that the material can make different points depending on the way it is presented. Presenting Peter’s story in a lengthy form like this is in line with the anthropological quest that ethnographic material should not be trivialised by only using it to illustrate theories or arguments (Marcus, 1998:12).
Early trajectories of mobility
If his father had had fewer children, he might have been able to complete his schooling. That would have given him the chance to make a good living now. Instead, he had to finance the last three years of his schooling himself. Going to school during the day and working at night. He is used to struggle, used to being creative to make ends meet. He is the eldest son of his mother’s six children and his mother, the third wife of his father, the king of peace, a respected man in the village. After leaving school he started trading – small items for everyday use, like clothes, pots, candles, soaps. Started to leave Nigeria for months at a time and tried his luck in the neighbouring countries of Benin, Togo, Cameroon and Gabon. During this time Peter learned French, and made a living. The business went well, but at the end it was hardly enough to sustain the family. He explained that bad governance in these West African states led to a business situation in which he did not manage to get anywhere, and added: “They [the politicians] put everything in their own pockets” (21 November 2007). It was frustrating. All the energy invested, all the strategies applied, but no improvement, no result that would lead his family out of the modest conditions in which they lived. As he expressed months later at one of our appointments in Sentantunan Church, on Istiklal Street: “If I went back I would have to become a gangster, there is nothing else. There are no opportunities in Nigeria. You cannot blame the people for becoming gangsters and getting involved in the drug business” (18 December 2007).

These are some of the paving stones that led to Peter’s decision to try his luck in Europe; a place where life seemed prosperous, where job opportunities seemed to exist, an organised place, “the place of the whites”.

Peter’s start in Istanbul
At dawn on a late October day in 2007, flight TK-1124 touches down in Istanbul’s busy international Atatürk Airport. Peter’s emotions play with him – he is afraid of the unknown and at the same time excited at the prospect of exploring it – but his mind is sharp. The transit visa gives him a legal stay of 72 hours in Turkey. During this time he plans to gain as much information as possible about the continuation of his trip. A taxi driver takes him to a cheap hotel in Aksaray, a bustling multi-ethnic neighbourhood at the heart of
Istanbul. “I first checked into the hotel and went out again to look for other blacks. You know, a black helps another black – at least in the beginning. They take you in and look for an available person from the same tribe.⁴ They make the contacts for you and then take care of you” (21 November, 2007). The first black man he meets on the street is Cameroonian, and Peter gladly uses his French. The man hosts him for two days, shows him an Internet café and connects him with other Nigerians. Finally, he moves in into a shabby, humid and cold ground-level flat in the central neighbourhood of Tarlabası, across the Golden Horn.

In the discussions with fellow Nigerians he has to face the fact that his original – seemingly smooth – plan of continuing to a Schengen country is impossible, and that he has been cheated by his agent back home. For the moment, Peter is stuck in Istanbul. The Turkish metropolis is a place that Peter does not know anything about. He knew some people back home who had been to European countries, but Peter had never heard of anyone who had been to Turkey. In fact, he hardly knew that this country existed. “Turkey is not a country that people back home talk about; instead they talk about Germany, Belgium and the UK, but never Turkey.” From the “old ones”, i.e. the fellow nationals that have been in Turkey longer than he has, he gradually learns about the city in which he finds himself as well as options for further travel.

⁴ Peter uses the term “tribe” interchangeably for nationality as well as for ethnic group.
gerians he meets have a university degree; they are graduates who are unable to find a job back home or are dissatisfied with the meagre salaries on offer and they make this journey with the goal of continuing their education in Europe. They have qualifications in sociology, business administration or agricultural science. He learns about their numerous failed attempts to secure a place at a European or American university and to obtain a visa for study purposes from the respective embassies. “People here,” he explains, “want to elevate their lives, this is why they are here. When they do not get what they want, when they cannot find anything that elevates their life, they will move on, they will continue” (21 November 2007).

These same people, “the old ones”, also tell him about his status as an “illegal immigrant”. From them, Peter also learns about his options: he can stay here and try to make an honest living with petty jobs, start an import/export business, or breach his strong moral codes and get into the drug business. The remaining option is to leave the country and travel to Greece illegally, either on foot or by boat. However, travelling by boat is costly, and unlike other migrants, Peter does not have relatives or friends back home or abroad who are able to send money. He therefore feels compelled to staying in the Turkish metropolis and do anything he can to make money. “I would do anything except steal or kill,” he says several times. His prospects look gloomy, and he is aware of that. He often touches his temples, indicating his restless mind. Searching for a solution permeates his life. And like a mantra he repeats over and over again in our many conversations: “I rely on God. What else can I do? If He wants it, something will come my way.”

Developing routines
He spends the first four weeks in the city in the house, inside the flat, alone, feeling insecure. Months later, he reflects on that time: “It is a bad system. As a newcomer you don’t know anything. They put you in a house, frighten you by telling you terrible stories about the Turkish police, so that you don’t dare to leave the house.” He shakes his head and adds: “They only do that when you have money. You don’t even dare to buy groceries. Then they take your money and go and buy groceries for you for double the price. They try to make money out of you in any way they can.”
After three long weeks more newcomers arrive. Little by little, they discover their new city. Not together though, at least not in daylight, in order not to attract attention. At night, they dare to go out, “two-two,” not more. Bigger groups of Africans attract too much attention, they are told. They get to know different Nigerian churches, the Catholic Church in central Beyoğlu, as well as the Blessing and Prosperity Church and the Rosary Church – two Nigerian-run Pentecostal congregations, both located close to Taksim Square, and close to their house. Peter decides to attend the Blessing and Prosperity Church. It suits his religious beliefs and traditions, and moreover, it is run by the Nigerian man who rents the flat in his name and who collects money, the rent plus a one-time entrance fee, from all new tenants. Six months later, during a fierce discussion about “the Nigerian system”, Peter mentions, that he does not attend that church anymore. He refuses to tell me what happened. He only says that it doesn’t exist anymore. He makes use of an Igbo proverb to describe the situation: “If you cannot serve people, you cannot serve God.” It is impossible to get more information from him. He just says slowly, knowingly: “I have seen many things here,” and leaves the subject open.

Even though life is reported to be better on the European side of the border, Peter stays, feels forced to stay, and commences to lead a life of survival, a life of adaptation. He starts to develop routines, learns how to handle the system, and improves.

Every Saturday morning at eleven o’clock he goes to the soup kitchen in the Greek church near Taksim Square. As far as he understands it, the food that is prepared and cooked at the Greek patriarchate in another area of the city and transported to the Greek Church at Taksim Square comes from the UN. Usually between 15 and 30 migrants gather there to receive portions of food, and by far the majority are Nigerian men. A couple of them usually work alongside the volunteers to pack the food in portions and divide it equally among the waiting crowd. These mornings are generally peaceful; the men gather and wait for the meals, some sing songs as they divide the food into portions and other join in as they seal the food boxes. At first Peter only went there to get food. During the week, he only eats once a day – “this life forces you” (21 November
2007) – and he welcomes an additional meal. However, these Saturday mornings gradually become more important as a meeting place; a place where information is exchanged about the whereabouts of friends, the undertakings of acquaintances, the arrival of newcomers and the possibilities of new connections. At the beginning of December 2007, there are more people than in the months before. People cannot travel now, it is too dangerous because of the weather conditions, the coordinator of the soup kitchen explains. The atmosphere is tense. “Newcomers,” Peter points to some men, “they just found out that their agents back home cheated them. These guys are scared, they are desperate. Some of them are completely broke and see their dreams shattered.” More than once he intervenes in an argument that has turned aggressive and physical. And more than once the bread and oranges that could not be divided evenly are fought over so that they end up in pieces on the floor.

The soup kitchen in the Greek Church near Taksim. Photos by the author, April 2008

I meet Peter for the first time at the soup kitchen. He stands apart from the others, dressed in tight jeans, a leather jacket and a baseball cap. His movements are slow and his manner is cool. I see him standing at the side watching the crowd, see him talking to the others (whom I know are Igbos) in their language while conversing in French with me. In our first conversation he tells me that he is from [country]. One week later we drink tea together at Simit Sarayi, a Turkish café-cum-bakery chain and eat traditional simit (circular bread with sesame seeds). We both order a small cup of tea in small

5 Two days later, on 10 December 2007, a boat with a total of 90 people on board sank outside Didim, and most of the people on board, women, men and children, died. It is one of the biggest accidents in terms of lives lost off the Turkish coast (Fortress Europe, 2012).
6 For the use of languages, see Chapter 3.
7 The name of the country is concealed so as to not to reveal this tactic of protection.
tulip-formed glasses. After conversing in French for a while he says: “I have to tell you a secret. I am a Nigerian, I am not from [country]” (21 November 2007). He has chosen a [country] cover up, a country that the majority of people connect with war and misery, and plans to use this when dealing with the police or later in Europe when claiming asylum. He knows that there was a war in the past and can name the capital. But he does not expect Turkish police officers to be more knowledgeable. He is surprised to hear that European immigration boards in fact possess a vast amount of information about different countries, including African countries, and feels compelled to relinquish the idea of claiming asylum in Europe with a made-up story from [country]. As he is sitting opposite me, his mind is working. After a while he shrugs, “risks have to be taken, what can you do,” and smiles. He is not searching for pity, he is not a victim. He is just defining the limits of his normality, of his reality. In his understanding, very few of the people here are refugees, the others “just do not see any possibility of improving their life back home” (21 November 2007).

During our first conversation, he tells me that he is looking for a job. He needs money. “The kinds of job blacks can do in Istanbul are small jobs,” he explains. These petty jobs include polishing and painting wooden furniture in a small workshop, carpentry, painting walls, tearing down walls, sorting rubbish, and the like. The employers are usually Turkish, and if Peter gets the chance he is prepared to work very hard to impress them. “Anything,” he says, “I’ll do anything for a stable job.” He knows that Turkish skills will improve his chances of obtaining work. He shows me the Turkish-English dictionary that he found in the flat when I visit him the following week. But it is written for Turks who want to learn English, and Peter doesn’t get much from it. “I am not used to books,” he sighs, “I do business.”

**Entering Tarlabası**

The following week, on a Saturday after the soup kitchen, Peter takes me aside. “I have decided to help you with your project,” he says, “come along with me.” I do as I am told and follow him, inquisitively. We cross Tarlabası Bulvar and enter the neighbourhood of Tarlabası. I do not know what he has in mind, and I do
not ask. After a while he tells me he will show me some places that I might find interesting. We stop at restaurants, Internet cafés and call shops, all run by Africans. As we are leaving one Internet café he points to two Asian women with two children who are just about to disappear round the corner. “They are new, from the Philippines, they probably just came from Syria.” I give him a questioning look. He raises his eyebrows and says reprimandingly: “Didn’t you see how exhausted and scared they looked? Sharpen up, you have to use your brains!”

The phone rings and he utters a few words. The newly arrived Nigerian at the other end of the line arrived in town yesterday. Someone gave him Peter’s number and he tells Peter that he has no money and needs a place to stay. Peter agrees to meet him at McDonalds in Taksim Square in half-an-hour. It is sunny, so we sit outside a café and wait for the man to arrive. In front of us, in Cumhurriyet Street, buses, taxis and cars drive steadily and endlessly by. They slow down and stop because of the traffic, accelerate again and continue. The air is filled with exhaust fumes. People pass by, curious tourists who have just arrived from the airport, simitçiler (simit sellers), elegant middle-class women and men in suits waiting for the buses to Istanbul’s northern neighbourhoods, Şişli, Kurtuluş, Ertiler, Mecidieköy. We order tea, share a simit bread, and wait. An African man walks by and Peter greets him with a nod. “That’s the Cameroonian who helped me at the beginning,” he explains.

Time passes but the “new guy” does not arrive, so we get up, cross the street and enter Tarlabası again. We take the steep road down, pass some steps and follow a road that is only half asphalted. We are inside the infamous neighbourhood in the city centre. We are not in the safety of larger streets, but at the heart of Tarlabası, with its narrow streets, washing hanging out over the street, children playing with bony hens, seemingly bored people staring at us as we walk by. Everything looks tatty and poor, plaster is flaking off the wall, paint is fading. Some streets are not much different from those in better areas, while others are heavily littered, with thin crackly plastic bags everywhere. The streets are smelly and muddy. A big fat chicken comes running round the corner, cackling furiously, chased by a little boy. There is a certain resemblance to life in a village, as can be discovered in many parts of Istanbul, but this is the middle of
the “TBS”, as Nigerians often call it. Small convenience stores display their vegetables on stands on the pavement, selling basic household necessities such as rice, noodles, detergent, nappies, vegetables, biscuits, milk and tea. Most of the inhabitants are Kurdish or Romani, along with some migrants from African countries, often Nigerians. The official employment rate is low, and many Istanbulians would never set foot in this neighbourhood.

Peter knows his way around and we walk quickly. It is a neighbourhood where sauntering and stopping to admire is out of place. Instead people walk purposefully and quickly through. On the way to his “house” (flat), Peter tells me that three new men arrived a few days ago. “They will be at the flat now, they have nothing else to do,” he informs me. He also tells me how to talk to them, how to ask my questions. “Don’t ask them directly about Greece. Ask them instead about the human rights situation in Turkey and the prospect of becoming a member of the European Union. I promise you, they will tell you everything you want to know. Just don’t rush.” He repeats his strategy a few times to make sure I have understood, and then we enter the flat.

Meeting the newcomers

The flat is at ground level, behind a thin iron door and its cold draught. It is unheated, and the men are wearing their jackets. Three young men, all of them around 25 year of age, are sitting on the sofa facing the door, looking inquisitively at me. The man in the beige-coloured artificial fur coat – which causes me to jokingly call him ‘Catman’ – gets up to offer me his place on the sofa. He smiles and tells me that he bought the jacket in Nigeria before leaving, because he heard that it would be cold in Europe. From the empty aluminium forms on the table I can tell that they have been to the soup kitchen. The Catman, the Prince-of-Belarus and the Guy-with-the-gloves (nicknames that I privately assign to them) all arrived together from Syria a few days ago. They are still exhausted and obviously not at ease. The atmosphere is calm yet clouded.

Peter is rather like their boss, their “chairman” as he calls himself; he is the oldest and has been here for a while. “They look up to me and turn to me for advice,” he explains. He speaks French to me so that nobody else will understand him. Like all the others, the three newcomers need money, and like all the others, they tell me how dif-
ficult it is to get this in Istanbul. The Prince-of-Belarus, for example, brought 3,000 US dollars with him to cover the entire trip to Greece. But policemen at the Syrian-Turkish border relieved him of most of his money, and he also gave some dollars to people who were in need. “Now I am broke,” he says quietly. “They will call home to their people and try to get some more money,” Peter tells me later. But today is Saturday, and they hang around the house, because they do not dare to go outside. They cannot look for work at weekends, and they feel uncomfortable in their new neighbourhood. They sit there and try to keep themselves warm, keep quiet for a while and are grateful for some distraction. I discover that the Prince-of-Belarus is a writer, and used to write film scripts in Nigeria. No-one has bought them yet though, but this is how he spent his time before he came here. One of his latest scripts is called ‘The Prince of Belarus’. He has been to the country, he says. We exchange a few Russian sentences and he smiles, but he does not want to delve further into that. He has not written anything about Istanbul yet, or the trip as a whole. “I cannot,” he says, “my brain won’t allow me. I am not rested, I cannot concentrate.” He puts his hands on his temples, shakes his head and looks sad. They all agree: “we have to trust in God, what else can we do?”

Once I reveal my country of residence, the Catman breaks into a howl, “Sweeeeeeden! Oh, Sweeeden, I love that country!” The previously quiet, introverted, shy man suddenly changes into someone who speaks magical words. One of his cousins is studying at a Swedish university, and from the stories his cousin passes on to him, the country must be a wonderful place. “There are jobs there, right?” he asks me with glowing eyes. I shrug: “I guess.” – “Yeah, come on, you guys, you have jobs. Now I just have to go to Greece. From there, my cousin will pick me up.” He has an intensive lyrical look in his eyes, and whispers the last few words as though he was conjuring up treasure. Until the Prince-of-Belarus says dryly, rationally and tiredly: “How would you know that, you have never been there!” Peter blinks at me, and says: “Voilà, je t’ai dit! Tu faut être calme et patience. Si tu ne demandes pas des questions directement, ils vont te dire tout.” He seems to enjoy the fact that we have a secret language together – an underlining of a position of power towards the others.

8 See, I told you so. I told you that if you are patient and friendly, and if you don’t ask direct questions, they will tell you everything.
The two rooms are functionally and provisionally furnished. There is a worn-out sofa, a table and three plastic chairs in the first room, and a big mattress in the other room. Condensation drops down the blue-painted walls. Apart from the Turkish-English dictionary, there are no books. A radio with a CD player stands on the table, but the CD player is broken, and the radio is very seldom on, because the broadcasts are all in Turkish, a language that is not understood inside these four walls. The rent is 300 YTL plus 150 to 200 YTL for electricity. This is a lot and they are careful to turn off the lights to keep the electricity costs down. It is humid and cold. The men sit with their hands in their pockets and the collars of the jackets drawn up to their faces. They talk Igbo and Pidgin-English to each other, and when addressing me they change to English. At one point, Peter leaves the house and returns after a short while with a tetra pack of cherry juice, which he pours into a glass for me. “Aren’t you drinking?” I ask them. – “No, juice is for ladies, men drink beer,” Peter declines, the others nod in agreement. “You know,” the ‘Belarusian’ takes up the topic again after a while, “nobody wants to be here. We just come here because Turkey has a border with a Schengen country, that’s all. Once we are inside Schengen, it will be easy.”

We are interrupted by a tap on the window. Willis, a young Nigerian man who has been living in Istanbul for a while, comes in. I know him from the soup kitchen and we greet each other. With him is Pastor Isaiah, who is around 35 and also living at Peter’s place, in the company of – much to my surprise – a white man. “This is the new guy,” Peter informs me in French, “the person we were waiting for at Taksim earlier today.” He is Nigerian – and he is albino. He disappears with Peter and Pastor Isaiah into the other room, apparently to solve some money issues and discuss onward travel. Months later, Peter recalls how they always made the albino walk ten metres behind the others in Istanbul and justifies their strategy: “You know, in the eyes of the police, one white man together with black men looks suspicious.”

At this point in time, at the beginning of December 2007, Peter shares this flat with five other people: the Catman, the Guy-with-the-gloves, the Prince-of-Belarus, Pastor Isaiah and the Albino. Victor arrives one week later, eager to continue to Greece as soon as possible. The day before Christmas, they attempt to cross the land

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9 In December 2007, 500 YTL amounted to about 3,000 SEK or 300 Euro.
border into Greece together. In the meantime, the Guy-with-the-gloves, the Albino and the Prince-of-Belarus have received money from their families back home; Pastor Isaiah had his own money. As Victor has money with him, he pays for the Catman’s and Peter’s trip as well. “I like the guy (Catman), you know,” he explains later, “I saw him crying on the phone because his family couldn’t send him money and told him not to come back empty-handed. I felt pity,” he says. “And Peter, I just paid for him as well.” In Peter’s version, Victor pays his trip because Victor is strongly visibly impaired, especially at night, and did not bring his glasses on the trip. “I was his eyes,” Peter explains. In a longer conversation with Victor months later, he tells me the story of his missing glasses: Victor was in Lagos city centre when the agent called him to say that he would be leaving that same evening. “There were only a few hours left until departure, you know, so I called my mother and asked her to pack my bag and have the driver deliver it to me at the airport.” As the glasses were at the opticians at that time, she could not find them. “She thought I had worn them that day,” he explains. “There was no time to prepare properly, everything happened so fast. This is how these things work,” he rounds off the discussion. That is the reason why Victor, who worked in a white-collar job in the capital Abuja arrived in his suit, carrying some professional journals and a few items of casual clothing – but without his glasses.

The trip is a disaster, partly because the guide does not know the way. Peter later analyses their failings and the fact that after a while they had to continue on their own. It is cold and icy. They have to sleep on the cold ground, with only a small fire to warm them. Victor and Peter decide to return to Edirne, the border town, and with the rest of Victor’s money they check in to a hotel. The hotel owner is unsure whether to accept two Africans with kimlik and calls the police. The police arrive, check the documents and wish them a nice stay. Victor laughs as he recalls the story some months later. In the meantime, the rest of the group make their way to the bordering River Evros, only to find it covered in ice. “Can you imagine the frustration,” Victor tells me in a high-pitched voice, “after all this trouble the river is frozen and the group are unable to cross with the rubber boat they bought.” Instead, the police arrive and arrest them

10 Peter and Victor presented a 23-belgesi, an official document that requests its holder to leave the country within a certain period of time.
all. After two weeks the Catman and the other Nigerians are set free on a 23-belgesi.\textsuperscript{11} It is more difficult for the Albino, because the police believe that he is white, and consider deporting him over the border to Iran. “It was the flickering in his eyes, something with the pupils that albinos have, that convinced them that he is African,” laughs Peter. “It was actually better for the blacks, they could all go, and most of the whites were deported.”

**Back in Istanbul**

After the attempt to enter Greece fails, Peter and Victor arrive back in Istanbul, tired, dirty and broke. Victor contacts his family back home for some money and receives 1,000 US dollars a few days later. “I am so ashamed to ask them,” he confesses. Both men continue to look for work in Istanbul, and Peter – who cannot count on any financial support from his family – soon finds some petty jobs. The failed attempt is a sign for Peter to accept the fact that he is now in Istanbul. “I have to try to live here and to establish myself,” he says.

In February 2008, Peter moves into his own place, his own ‘ghetto’, as he calls it. Located in the same neighbourhood of Tarlabası, it is a simple room in the basement of a run-down block of flats. Peter takes it over from another Nigerian man who has just travelled to Greece. “I just needed some privacy, I cannot be with the others all the time,” he says and puts his fingertips on his temples to indicate the stress connected with staying in an over-crowded place. A ‘ghetto’, as he calls it, is a room or small flat that people share because they cannot afford anything else. Peter’s room is simply decorated. A big mattress on the floor, some hangers covered with clothes, some pots, plates, glasses and cutlery and a chair. An electric hotplate is used to cook and to heat up water for the cup of coffee that he offers me – a sweet cappuccino from a little packet. A blanket covers the small window and makes the room dark. In the corner are a used TV and an old DVD player. The TV reception is not good down here, which is why Peter mostly uses it to listen to music.

\textsuperscript{11} The 23-belgesi is a document given to migrants when they are released from detention that requires the holder to leave Turkey within a certain period of time, often three months.
The Turkish-Greek border: The River Evros. Photos by the author, October 2008
Sometimes, “the guys” come over to watch a game of football. Galatasaray vs. Liverpool, for example, or, as in the summer of 2008, the European Championships.

**Peter’s shelter**

Peter does not only use his place for his own privacy; he also provides a shelter for some of the newcomers – mostly men originating from the same area in Nigeria. However, on one occasion I also meet two men from Cameroon – young men around 20 years of age, who seemed shy and somewhat suspicious. “I took them in,” Peter explains, “because they have nobody. They arrived yesterday from Syria, where they were robbed of all their money. Their families back home have no money to send to them, which is why nobody is interested in them.” He exchanges a few words with them in rapid French. Later he tells me that he made a connection for them with some Cameroonian, and they were finally able to live there.

Peter runs all kinds of errands for the newcomers; shows them the churches, the food distribution on Saturdays, tries to get jobs for them and takes his passport to collect the money their families send. When I ask how much they pay him for his services he says: “Just a little bit if they have it, otherwise it is OK. I don’t do it for money.” At first he simply says that he helps them because they are his “younger ones”, meaning that they come from the same village and are younger in age, which – coupled with his amount of experience of life in Istanbul – gives him an natural authority over them. Later, however, he explains in more depth that his support system is not based on money and repeats that he detests “the system here,” meaning the way in which Nigerians who have been in Istanbul for a longer period of time support/exploit newcomers for money. “It is a stupid system that tries to make money out of people who are already at the bottom. We squeeze the ones that do not have anything anyway.” His move to another place is also based on his hatred of this system, and is an attempt to create some distance and save some energy. His system is rather based on gratitude. “When they are in Greece or Spain or even back in Nigeria, they will be grateful to me all their life because without me they would not be what they are now.” Sometimes, he confesses, he even gives them a little money to go to Greece, about 200 or 300 US dollars. For him, this is well

Peter tells me about an additional component to the system. When the tales of Peter’s good deeds in Istanbul reach the village from which he and his protégées originate, this will have a beneficial effect for his mother. “The families of the other guys will go to my mother’s house and pay their respects,” Peter reveals with a smile, “they might even take flowers or food or other small things.” Another possibility is to sponsor Nigerians who would like to come to Turkey. That has the advantage, he adds, “that he would always be their master.” “Investing in humans” is the term Peter uses.

It is end of February 2008, and Istanbul is just recovering from a heavy snowfall. In the four months of his stay in Istanbul, Peter reckons that he has gone from 100 per cent insecurity to 95 per cent insecurity. But still, he states, he is thinking too much in general. He finds himself unable to lean back and relax about his situation: he is constantly thinking about possibilities and loopholes in order to improve his life. Thinking permeates his life. His persistent repetition of “If God wants, I will make it. I trust in God, what else can I do?” and “I will make it, one day I will be rich, you cannot change the destiny of a person, only postpone it” is like a mantra; a mantra to keep himself emotionally on the surface. He says it with determination, as if to reassure himself. During a phone call he expresses his gratefulness to me “for being a companion when I needed it the most.” This companionship, he says, has helped him remember who he really is. Not just a poor and needy person who does not possess anything, but a person, “a man that can have it all.” A person who will succeed.

Surviving
Peter works *cabuk* and takes care of a few newcomers. In April 2008 he has a job sorting refuse. He made contact with the owner in (very) broken Turkish, and always takes his old and new protégés along. Some of them travel, and new ones arrive. Victor, on the other hand, leaves for a tourist resort along the Aegean coast in late March. He has also been trying to get some *cabuk* jobs, but abstains from most of them for health reasons. “It is crazy, in these

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12 The Turkish idiom for “petty jobs” adopted by the migrants engaged in it. A literal translation in English is “quick”.

43
workshops you work ten hours a day, and all the time you breathe in paint or lacquer. It is unhealthy.” He has been accepted to work at a hotel in the south, and leaves for the tourist city with his small bag of belongings: his elegant suit, the boots he bought for the trip in December and the few shirts and trousers he owns.

Peter explains to me that he manages to survive but has nothing left at the end of the month. He pays his rent and for electricity and water. At the weekends he even allows himself a couple of beers, “because a man has to be a man.” The desire to go to Europe has become dominant again. He is looking for a way to travel there, but finds it difficult. “You cannot earn anything here, only 15 YTL a day, it is not good. Here in Istanbul,” he says, “the only big money is in drugs.” Apparently, his roommates who travelled to Greece in January (Pastor Isaiah, Catman, the Prince-of-Belarus, the Guy-with-the-gloves and the Albino) already make money. “One of the guys already bought four plots13 of land back home for 12,000 dollars. And the guy who was in the camp14 got 200 Euro when they let him go. They sell CDs for 25 Euro a day.15 Greece is better!” It is the first time since the failed attempt to cross in December that he speaks about Europe. After a few months in Istanbul, he finds it hard to make ends meet. In addition to that, his friends tell him stories about financial success in Athens. In his mind, Greece moves to the forefront again.

At the end of April 2008, he asks me a question about NSK passports. Apparently, a fellow Nigerian has offered to sell him a NSK passport for the princely sum of 2,000 US dollars. It has something to do with Slovenia, and Peter is told that some EU countries allow a NSK passport holder to enter the country and work. He asks me to investigate. The information I find on the Internet states that NSK passports are part of an art project in which a virtual state without physical territory emerged.16 As the NSK information centre explicitly states, the passport is useless for physical border crossings. The popular Nigerian Internet forum Nairaland17 hosts several threads with entries of NSK passport applicants, alleged successful emigra-

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13 According to Peter’s estimations, a plot is about 100x50 metres
14 Reception camp for asylum seekers.
15 A CD is sold for 5 Euro.
16 For more on this see Chapter 6.
tion stories of holders of NDS passports and the occasional warning by others not to be fooled. Peter looks at me as I am speaking, and is sharp and concentrated. He seems disillusioned about what he hears. Apparently, another female friend of his has already told him the same thing, but just to be on the safe side he wanted to ask me as well. “Hopes are shattered,” he says a bit theatrically, and looks tired. He tells me that he already has thought about how to get the entry stamp for Turkey in his NSK passport and about how he has been trying to find solutions for that. The man who is keen to sell him the passport wants Peter to pay 300 US dollars in advance, for the registration fee and the rest on reception. The man also listed all the countries to which the passport allows visa-free entry. “Slovenia,” Peter repeats, sighing. A few months later, he tells me in an msn-chat that a friend, one of his younger ones, bought such a passport for 300 US dollars. “But not for crossing borders,” Peter assures me, “just because it might be easier to find work with it.” Some hopes die slowly.

Concrete plans to leave
One month later, at the end of May 2008, I bump into Peter by chance in Istiklal Street. It is 4 o’clock in the morning, and he is on the way home from a club. We walk a few metres together. “Je dois bouger,” he says intensely. He uses French so that nobody in the vicinity will understand. The words splutter from his lips: “Je dois bouger.” It is too hard here, I want to be free! I want to be able to lead my life the way I want to!”

Early the next afternoon we drink tea beside the Bosporus. It is Sunday and we are surrounded by Turkish families; grandparents, grandchildren, sons and daughters. “I have to go,” says Peter and repeats the words he uttered the night before. “I work here for 10 hours a day and get 15 YTL for it. This is unrefined slavery!” Unrefined slavery is even more than slavery, he explains disgruntled. He summarises his seven months in Istanbul, says that he has tried everything, everything that is legal – and nothing works. Working in a tourist resort is not for him, he says, and waves aside my suggestion. The salary is too low, and he says, does not feel comfortable

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18 See Chapter 6 for more details.
19 I have to move.
20 Roughly about 9 Euro
“entertaining whites.” Never in his life has he worked so hard, and all that outside, in temperatures of 30 degrees Celsius. He looks careworn, with distress engraved in his face. He finishes his tea and orders two new ones. “If I had money,” he continues, “I would leave today.”

He tells me that he has contacted an old friend, a Nigerian, who is currently located in South Africa. This friend said that he might be able to send the money, but due to the political situation in the country, he is unable to leave the house. Peter tells me the story with doubt in his voice. When I confirm that black non-nationals in South Africa are experiencing severe xenophobic attacks at the moment, he listens intently. He did not know about this. There is a chance, however, that the money might arrive soon, he continues after my input, and that is why he has not paid the rent for June yet. “This is why the landlord calls me all the time,” Peter laughs and points to his mobile phone: “Because if I leave in a week, I don’t want to pay for the whole month. Then my brother can move in and pay the rest.” As if to prove Peter right, his phone rings a little later. It is the landlord, asking for the rent. “Ben geliyor” (I will come), Peter says in broken Turkish and laughs, and the landlord laughs as well. But the landlord’s much longer message is too much for Peter’s limited Turkish.

*Tea salon at the Bosporus. Photo by the author, September 2011*
By the end of May 2008 it is clear to Peter that he has to move. After seven months in Istanbul, he concludes: “There is only one thing for me: suppress the shame of how I have to live here and make it to Greece; there everything will be better.”

**A new phase**

Much to my surprise, when I return to Istanbul in September 2008, Peter is still here. He went down to Izmir during the summer, wanting to finally make his plans a reality and travel to Greece. But the big boat never came, and he was scared to take the smaller one. After only a few days he returned to Istanbul. He does not provide much information either about the trip, or about his motivation to return to Istanbul. “I am afraid of water,” is all that he offers.

**Istanbul’s advantages...**

In any case, the Peter I meet in September seems much more relaxed and roguish than in the previous months. Instead of painting the picture of Istanbul as a hostile environment, he praises the advantages of being in the city. “Istanbul is OK, it is better to be here without papers than in Europe. It is even safer without papers here than in many African cities.” Almost one year after our first meeting, one year after he fearfully refused to pass the police station in Tarlabası, he states: “Now I pass by the police often. I have come to recognise some of them, so sometimes I go and shake their hands. Every day I pass by the police station. They don’t do anything to me because they know that I am clean.” After all the stories about the abusive behaviour of members of the Turkish police force, I am surprised to hear Peter’s changed view. According to him, the police are only after those involved in drugs, or those who forge documents in order to start up in business. “I can move freely here, no problem.” Linger ing in İstiklal Street, his movements are slow and self-assured. He admits that there are limits to this safety: “For example, you cannot wear expensive clothes. If you do that the police will molest you. But if you dress according to their expectations – shabbily – they leave you alone.”

**...and disadvantages**

There are still problems, though. Money is one example. Peter has recently started to send goods to Africa; clothes and other items. He
sues that money comes in, but very little. He continues with petty jobs, but has a new strategy to avoid exploitation: “I don’t have a steady job, but I always insist that I get paid the same day, otherwise I don’t come back the next day.” He still only works for little money, often 20 YTL for 10 hours. But he seems to have built up a small yet fragile network. The employers call him when they need him. “Istanbul is OK,” he repeats, “but you only notice this after you have been here a while. Because as a newcomer you are exploited, they give you the wrong orientation; that is the problem.” He has made contact with many people, Nigerian, Turkish and others. But there is no one he would call a friend, at least not in terms of sharing feelings. “That’s impossible here,” he explains, “it can easily be the case that you tell something to somebody and then it will be used against you. There is no trust here.”

In October 2008, shortly before I leave, Peter summarises his situation: “I advanced in one year, I have learned so much! Life in Africa and Europe is so different, maybe Turkey is somewhere in-between.” He has not only learned about the system in Istanbul, the way to handle the Turkish police, Turkish people and employers and the way to deal with other Nigerians and with foreign employers and researchers, but has also learned a lot about Europe. “Mostly through you,” he says and points at me. Nevertheless, he does not have concrete plans to move to Europe at the moment. He wants to see whether he can succeed in business, and establish himself through that, and perhaps even bring one of his brothers over later on to assist him. He has also improved his Turkish language skills, and has learned everything from the street. “I am usually quick at learning languages,” he states, “but here I don’t have the mind space for that. I could be better.” Also, he wants to move to a bigger place in a better neighbourhood. But at the moment he cannot afford a bigger place. The money comes in, but not steadily.

**Moving up the ladder**

Peter has finally moved. Just a few weeks before I meet him in March 2009, he had moved from Tarlabaşı into a two-room flat uptown. The neighbourhood is predominantly Turkish, rather poor, and his flat is run-down, but clean, and definitively a step up the social mobility ladder. A lot can be done to improve the place, and Peter has concrete plans to do so.
Epilogue
Out of the seven men who shared a room in Tarlabası in December 2007 – Peter, Victor, the Catman, the Prince-of-Belarus, the Guy-with-the-gloves, the Albino and Pastor Isaiah – three are in Greece, two in Norway and one in Belgium. Peter is the only one who has not travelled further (yet). Since autumn 2009 he has been impossible to reach. Common acquaintances report that he is missing. Nobody knows his whereabouts.
CHAPTER 3: FIELD REALITIES

Ethnography

My work has been guided by the understanding that social phenomena always emerge within a specific context, and that without a deeper understanding of that context, social phenomena cannot be properly explained. Ethnography is able to “capture the complexities of (...) social realities” (Hage, 2005:474) pertaining to issues of globalisation, migration and mobility due to this methodology’s aim at grasping the imagined and lived reality of the persons central to the study, especially of those we know little about. Ethnography involves direct and sustained contact with human agents within the context of their daily lives. It relies on a variety of methods, including observation, informal conversations and formal interviews. While it uses methods that are very close to how people make sense of the world in their everyday lives, it goes beyond common sense inasmuch as it is “scientifically rigorous and systematic at the same time” (O’Reilly, 2005:1). Fieldwork, in James Spradley’s (1980:3) terms, “involves the disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think and act in ways that are different. Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people [italics in the original].”

This chapter gives an overview of how the information in this dissertation was collected, and how the various insights were reached. Furthermore, it attempts to account for and analyse the challenges involved in the process of fieldwork, in that it offers a transparent
account of how I grappled with them: in accessing interlocutors, in building up a relationship with various interlocutors over a longer period of time, in dealing with the multi-faceted inequalities between the researcher and research participants resulting from gender, race and legal status. In general, this chapter explains what it was like to conduct fieldwork on (irregular) migrants in the formally very unreceptive (though informally more receptive) environment of Istanbul. A further point elaborated in this chapter is related to emotions in the field. In migration research in general, I find that there is a basic lack of accounting of intuition and emotions guiding or at least impacting a research process. This, in my view, is an important omission, and one that I have tried to remedy here.

Furthermore, attention is been paid to the larger power structures permeating the research setting. Power structures play out glocally and reflect the global in the local (hence the term glocal) while retaining a specific local touch. Power structures are also inherent in (perceived) social categories, such as gender, race, ethnic belonging, age, religion and so forth, and in this chapter consideration is given as to how these structures intersect, produce lived experience in the field and provide research-informing meaning.

A richly written account – Geertz’s (1973) ‘thick description’ – is central to ethnography. So too is the acknowledgement of the researcher’s own central role that counters positivist views on science and acknowledges the “situated gaze” (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Thus, the writing up of the process and the way of presenting the material are both important aspects of ethnographic work. In view of this, considerable attention has been paid to the material-driven nature of this study, while theoretical perspectives have been used to make sense of the material. This implies a research design that is iterative-inductive (O’Reilly, 2005:3). The field material and theoretical considerations therefore interact and are interwoven in a way that offers an insight into the social realities of the research subjects and of the researcher, and thereby helps the reader to understand the field of study.

Creating the field

“Typically, an anthropologist attempts to immerse himself in a way of life which is not his own. (…) He is one individual among

21 The term ‘interlocutor’ is close to the German term ‘Gesprächspartner’, and indicates that the material, i.e. the information and the insights, have emerged from discussions by means of inter-subjective meaning-making.
other individuals whose life and outlook he is studying. They are necessarily aware that he is there, and so he becomes temporarily a part of the context within which they are acting. (...) The anthropologist has to deal with people in whose way of life he is interested in such a way that they give him as much access as possible to ‘real life’ situations or their near substitutes while at the same time he attempts to minimize the possibility that he influences their behavior away from representativity. There is a need for some flexibility on his part in finding a *modus vivendi* in relation to the community under study; implicitly or explicitly, he must negotiate the most feasible research strategy with its people” (Hannerz, 1969:201).

Creating the field is a crucial step in ethnography and one that can be a real challenge, especially – as Ulf Hannerz describes above – in a study of individuals who are generally perceived as different from the researcher and her/his socio-economic and sociocultural background, and even more so when the people involved in the study live in marginalised and precarious conditions, as is the case here. According to Vered Amit (2000:6), the relationships and activities that constitute the field are separate from the fieldwork through which they are discovered and defined. On creating the field the ethnographer largely depends on personal “conceptual, professional, financial and relational opportunities and resources” (Amit, 2000:6).

When I arrived in Istanbul in June 2007, and again for a longer period in September of the same year, I began encircling the field by collecting and connecting the already existing information by contacting Turkish\(^{22}\) and other international scholars as well as creative artists based in Istanbul, whose work and interest touched on similar issues.\(^{23}\) I had several plans for the creation of the field; one of which involved attending Sunday morning mass at a Catholic church in Beyoğlu, a central district of Istanbul. The sermons were held in English and usually attracted a diverse crowd in terms of nationalities, including many African nationals. Establishing con-

\(^{22}\) Throughout the thesis I have tried to avoid the term ‘Turk’ and instead apply the term ‘Turkish’ or alternatively ‘Turkish national’ or ‘Turkish people,’ in order to include all Turkish citizens irrespective of their ethnic identification.

\(^{23}\) Some of these people include senior scholars working on migration issues in Istanbul, such as Ahmet Içduyuğu, Deniz Yüksel, Kelly Brewer, Didem Danış, other researchers such as Zeynep Kaslı, Ceren Oztürk, and Kristen Biehl, and creative artists like Berke Baş, Bikem Ekberzade and Agata Skowronek.
tact with Africans did not prove difficult in these settings. The main difficulty was explaining what I was doing in Istanbul. I later met some people (all of them men) in order to conduct interviews, but often made little headway, as we clearly had different perceptions of what these meetings were about. In other words, I found it impossible in these settings to be taken seriously in the role of the (female) researcher (see also Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995:94). Dissatisfied with the amount of information they were willing to share, I realised early on that I had to find another access to potential interlocutors; one that was ideally part of a more formally institutionalised framework. Nevertheless, as futile as those small pieces of material seemed to me at the beginning, I later realised that they fitted very nicely into the bigger picture that I was attempting to present and that was materialising before my eyes.

I then began to contact organisations supporting migrants, and after a while started volunteering for three of them. “Gatekeeping agencies” (Liamputtong, 2007:52), in this case migrant support organisations, proved to be a point of access to a more general understanding and a location of encounter and trust building. One of the organisations I got involved with was the Refugee Advocacy and Support Programme (hereafter referred as RASP) of the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly (hCa), located in central Beyoğlu.24 One condition for my engagement was that I would not conduct interviews for my thesis directly with the clients of RASP. Therefore, none of the empirical material used in this dissertation is directly based on a migrant’s story as it was told to me in my function as a volunteer at RASP. However, engagement with the organisation did provide me with a broad knowledge of and deep insights into the social and legal situation of migrants in the asylum process, and increased the thickness of description of the context in which my field is located.

Another occasion for meeting migrants in some kind of formalised framework was the mothers and toddlers group that took place once a week and was organised by one of the Christian church congregations in Beyoğlu. I was usually present to involve the children in activities, and used the opportunity get to know some of the women attending. After telling them why I was in Istanbul some of the women agreed to meet me in their home or in a more neutral place,

24 More information about this and the organisations can be found in Chapter 4 in the section relating to the migrant landscape in Istanbul.
while others preferred to talk to me in the Moms and Tots venues. Usually, these conversations in the latter venues were much more chaotic and either interrupted by the children or a scheduled activity. On the positive side, some of the discussions involved several women and almost took the form of group discussions.

A third way of meeting migrants was to volunteer at the soup kitchen on Saturday mornings (mentioned in Chapter 2). This was mostly attended by Nigerian men, but on some occasions there were also some Nigerian women, and even families. On very rare occasions, men from other African countries appeared. After a few Saturdays I started to recognise some of them. In the same way that these meetings were a chance for Nigerian men to find out who had travelled and who was new, they also allowed me to observe contacts between people and get an update on people’s whereabouts – something which was very helpful for later discussions and conversations with my interlocutors. Also here I would explain my project to some of the attendants, and meet up with them on different occasions if they agreed to an interview. As noted in Chapter 2, I established contact with Peter, one of my main interlocutors, in the soup kitchen.

Last but not least, other formalised settings enabled me to establish contact with migrants. For example, I would often be present in the courtyard of a house centrally located in Beyoğlu, where the migrant support organisation Istanbul Interparish Migrant Programme (hereafter referred as IIMP) had an open office two days a week. The courtyard in which IIMP receives its clients is used by migrants as a meeting place, and people often spend several hours chatting while the children play tag or climb the jungle gym in the small playground. Usually I would be at IIMP for a couple of hours in order to meet people and have time to chat; not necessarily to conduct interviews, but to at least indicate my presence and be in regular contact with people without necessarily always focusing on my project. I also regularly attended the weekly Bible group meetings of a Christian church. This church was basically run by migrants (expats) and mostly frequented by people from a variety of countries. Some of the Nigerians, Sudanese, Eritreans and Ethiopians I met there provided me with material for this study. Attending the group also allowed me to become something of an insider and to conduct
my conversations with some air of normality. Sharing experiences in that church also served as a common basis for discussion. Finally, I visited four other church congregations on a couple of occasion in response to invitations from interlocutors. One of these was the East-African church, where I took part in various festivities. The other two other were Nigerian Pentecostal churches; one of them located in the vicinity of Taksim Square and the other in Kurtuluş. Both these churches were mostly frequented by Nigerians and other West African nationals. The fourth was an evangelical church in Şişli led by a Turkish family, which attracted a large number of foreign nationals, the majority of whom were Africans. Especially in the latter church, my attendance made a substantial impact on my research, in that people who had previously been reluctant to talk to me lowered their guards and embraced me as a new member of their church. Perceiving me as “one of them”, several people openly talked about their experiences in Istanbul and told me their life stories. While this was certainly positive for my project, it required a delicate balancing of a range of expectations, such as participating fully in the lengthy services and attending them regularly. For various reasons, both these expectations were difficult for me to fulfil, which compelled me to negotiate my role as a researcher both in and outside the church on a number of different occasions. Also, in and around the various churches, many people made vivid and persistent efforts to convert me to their particular branch of Christianity.

Trust is a key issue in this kind of research. After the initial contact, I would often try to use the snowball technique to find more conversation partners. It seemed to be the most appropriate method, given the irregular (vulnerable) position of most of the interviewees (Liamputtong, 2007:52). However, I was soon confronted with a lack of trust, not only towards outsiders like myself, but also – and almost more so – towards their fellow countrymen, which on many occasions resulted in the method falling short. Peter, for example, declared his willingness to help me with my project at our second meeting and after that regularly invited me to his house, frequently passed news on to me. He also covertly showed me and some “African places” (because he did not want to be seen in these places with me). This high level of distrust does not only apply to
migrants in transit, however. I rather see it as an understandable outcome of people struggling over limited resources, such as money, jobs and contacts. It compelled me to develop a wide network of interlocutors and to try to build up trust with almost every single research participant from scratch. My prolonged presence in the field naturally made this easier. In fact, the rapport that I developed with many people over a longer period of time (see the list of the main conversation partners later in this chapter) – between autumn 2007 and spring 2009 – differentiates this study substantially from research projects where the researcher and the interlocutor only meet once. The prolonged time period of this study thus makes the material that is presented here qualitatively more valid and therefore more valuable.

Most of the interviews and conversations were held in English, and a small number in French. For me as a Swiss with German as my mother tongue, English has come to be my main working language. I learned French at secondary school. For my interlocutors, their relationship to the English language varied. As countries such as Nigeria and Kenya experienced a period of British colonisation, most of the interviewees from these countries were fluent in English. Nevertheless, many Nigerians spoke Igbo, Yoruba or Pidgin English with each other and very few research participants from urban, educated, middle-class families regarded English as their mother tongue. Also, for the interviewees from Liberia – a country founded in 1847 by freed slaves in the United States – English was the main language of conversation. For Ethiopians and Eritreans, with no history of British domination, English is rather a sign of education and identification as members of the global community. When I took part in the festivities at the East-African church, and during my work for RLAP/RASP, I encountered a number of Eritreans and Ethiopians with limited English skills. I decided to work without an interpreter for practical and ethical reasons. Relying on another person (assistant) from the same country (or area) as the research interlocutors often runs the risk of “transgressing political, social or economic fault-lines” of which the researcher might not be aware (see Jacobsen & Landau, 2003:193). Working with people who are not only subject to arbitrary police behaviour, but who also live in an environment that is characterised by a high level
of distrust, I found it easier to develop a rapport based on my own character and personality. My access to the field – indeed my creation of the field in Istanbul – was therefore directed towards people with moderate to fluent English or French.

**Interlocutors and periods of research**

This study has been informed by the inter-subjective meaning-making between the researcher and the interlocutors with whom I met on a regular basis during my fieldwork. The informants were nationals from Nigeria, Kenya, Liberia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Burundi, Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); the 19 most influential of which are described in more detail below. I met some of the interlocutors when they arrived in the city, and had the privilege of following them through some of the stages of their adaptation process in Istanbul. I met others who had already spent a couple of years in the city. Conversations with these people revealed different insights, which complemented those shared by the people who had only just arrived.

As indicated above, I created a relationship with 19 migrants which allowed for meetings on a regular basis. The duration of this relationship was in some cases impacted by my limited physical presence in Istanbul and by theirs. Nevertheless, with some people the contact continued with the aid of various modes of communication, such as the telephone, email and Internet chat. Many of the conversations that took place in Istanbul were ‘booked’ conversations, although some also emerged spontaneously during the course of my fieldwork. The audio-taped and transcribed notes and the written notes have been saved on my computers at home and at the university. For reasons of confidentiality and security, all the names of the respondents have been changed and details have been omitted that could lead to their identification.

After the initial field trip in June 2007, I spent about three-and-a-half months in Istanbul in autumn 2007, and about the same amount of time in spring 2008. I returned once more for about six weeks in autumn 2008, which also included a ten-day visit to Athens. In March 2009 I returned for a few days. The fieldwork ended officially in September 2011, with another few days in the Turkish metropolis.
### Main interlocutors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age, Gender, Nationality</th>
<th>Arrival Information</th>
<th>Employment/Activity Details</th>
<th>Length of Conversations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tina, 29, female, Liberia</td>
<td>Arrived in Istanbul with her son Dany in 2006 from Lebanon. Their asylum claim was refused. Lengthy conversations on three occasions in April, May and October 2008, with updates in-between.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruth, 35, female, Kenya</td>
<td>In Istanbul since 2004. Her daughter, Nicky, was born in Istanbul. Has worked in a hotel in a tourist resort during the summer season since 2008, and moves to Istanbul during the winter months. 27 lengthy conversations since November 2007.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benjamin, around 40, male, Sudan</td>
<td>Arrived in Istanbul more than a decade ago. Was deported to Turkey after living in Greece for some years. Asylum claim pending/unclear. Six long conversations between April 2008 and March 2009. Updates on many occasions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edward, 35, male, Burundi</td>
<td>In Istanbul for more than a decade. Two long conversations in April and May 2008.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Etienne, 23, male, DRC</td>
<td>Arrived in Turkey in 2005 on a Turkish Scholarship. Studies at Istanbul University. Two long conversations in November and December 2007. Updates on many occasions throughout and after fieldwork.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary, 37, female, Kenya</td>
<td>Arrived in Istanbul in 2005 from Syria, where she worked in a household. Call from God to go to Bible School in Istanbul. Seven lengthy conversations between April and September 2008. Updates on a few occasions.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Sally, around 30, female, Kenya

Has travelled to Turkey for some years, working in the tourist sector. Her daughter, Favour, was born in 2007 in Istanbul.

Three longer conversations between December 2007 and October 2008. Updates on many occasions throughout and after fieldwork.

Eddy, around 30, male, Eritrea

Arrived in Istanbul in December 2007. Worked for a support organisation. Travelled to Greece in summer 2008 and continued to an EU country six months later, where he received refugee status.

Two long conversations in February and October 2008. Updates in-between and after.

Michael, around 30, male, Eritrea

A soft-spoken, friendly man who arrived in Istanbul in 2004 with a highly esteemed position in the East-African church. He is one of the central characters in the social network of Ethiopians and Eritreans. His asylum claim has been recognised and he is awaiting resettlement.

Short and long conversations five times between November 2007 and October 2008.

Nicole, around 40, female, Nigeria


Vivienne, around 45, female, Nigeria

Arrived in Istanbul in the late 1990s. Restaurant owner. Engaged in trade between Nigeria and Turkey. Has Turkish citizenship.

One long conversation in May 2008. Updates on some occasions.

Lawrence, 25, male, Nigeria


Steve, around 30, male, Kenya

Arrived in Istanbul in 2005 with the intention of travelling to Greece. Stayed in Istanbul, survived with petty jobs. After three years, started export business with Kenya. Legalised his stay.


Catman, 25, male, Nigeria

Arrived in Istanbul in November 2007. Stayed in Peter’s apartment. In Greece since spring 2008 where he was able to legalise his stay.

Two shorter conversations between December 2007 and October 2008.

Gloria, around 45, female, Nigeria

Arrived in Istanbul 10 years ago. Husband and one teenage child. Engaged in trading activities. Attempts to legalise her stay.

Three longer conversations, various updates in-between, spring 2008.
Fieldwork techniques
The first conversation with an interlocutor was usually formal in nature, and if they agreed, the conversation was either taped or notes were taken. In actual fact only a few people agreed to the conversations being taped, and when they were the recordings amount to between two and eight hours with each person. Using the tape recorder and taking notes provided a touch of formality that made some people feel more at ease. However, the vast majority of my interlocutors did not want to be taped or documented at all during our conversations, although they were fully aware of the fact that I would – later – write down what they told me. For example, in my first formal interview with Peter, one of my main interlocutors, I took notes. Peter clearly stated that he did not want our conversations to be taped, and taking notes felt strange to him. He said that he would feel more relaxed if he could talk naturally, without the presence of a tape recorder or paper and pen. I agreed to this and consequently wrote down our conversations from memory afterwards. As Hannerz (1969:206) states, the quotations derived through this technique should “not be made a basis of a precise linguistic analysis”, but that “they are not very far from the original, for with a reasonably good memory which one is consciously straining to capacity (…) it is possible to reproduce even rather complex statements and exchanges with a fair degree of accuracy.” In fact, I developed my own kind of method for dealing with this technique. Setting aside my initial panic at missing many valuable points, I forced myself during the conversations to fully comprehend what the conversation partner was talking about by repeating – in the flow of the discussion – some of the main points to counter-check my understanding of the story. I came to realise that I usually remembered all the points made, and with each conversation I became more relaxed. However, I discovered that it is crucial to restrict the daily conversations to one, maximum two, and not to converse for more than two or three hours in order to allow my brain to remember as much as possible. Notwithstanding the fact that my memory works as a filter for preconceived assumptions and rankings, it is my strong belief that this method should not be dismissed, especially if it is the only realistic – pragmatic – choice in the field. I also tried to triangulate the data as often as possible. For
example, when something arose during a conversation that I had not come across earlier, I would try to counter-check this in further conversations with other interlocutors.

**Ethical issues**

Taking every precaution that the relationship is as voluntary and as informed as possible for the people involved is crucial for guaranteeing accurate and academically sound research results. There were times where I found myself in a situation similar to the one described by Hannerz (1969:204) in his study of community life in a black ghetto of Chicago: “At times I was a little concerned over the clarity of my anthropological identification.” Due to the informal setting of many encounters, and especially the absence of a tape recorder and notebook, as well as the complicity emerging between some people and myself, some of my interlocutors tended to forget about my actual project. I would then remind them about it by talking casually about my book, my university, my professors and other related things. Also, in situations similar to those described by Hannerz, such as being introduced by an interlocutor to someone else without my professional purpose being mentioned, I would try to introduce the subject into the discussion as casually as possible without interrupting the flow of the discussion. Therefore I found it vitally important to remind my conversation partners of my role (and implicitly theirs). In addition, I would also often remind them that they did not need to share details if they did not want to.

I was careful to let the respondents speak and guide the conversation in the direction of their choice. I also tried to avoid behaving in an over-ambitious way. As Cindy Horst (2006) confirms an essential ingredient in building trust is to sense when people do not want to talk about a certain issue and respect that. After a few months of regular meetings, I would sometimes ask people why they did not want to talk about certain things, and their answers proved to be very insightful. While some people provided me with evasive answers on particular topics, others told stories that were not necessarily true. Also there, I did not want to confront my respondents with open suspicion. My strategy was rather to keep the story in mind and, if possible, come back to that at a later stage in a different context, or just leave it as it was. Here, the importance of extend-
ed fieldwork should again be pointed to, since this is necessary for obtaining empirical material of high quality.

During the fieldwork I also encountered practical difficulties, such as the lack of money for basic things like accommodation, food and medical expenses. After a while in the field I discovered that journalists, for example, often pay a small sum of money for the interviews they conduct with migrants on the streets of Kumkapı or Laleli. Other researchers gave money on occasions, while a researcher conducting time-limited semi-structured interviews paid her/his interlocutors per interview to compensate them for their time invested (oral communication by a researcher in Istanbul). It was clear for me that I would not be able to pay my interlocutors on a regular basis. I strongly believe that participation in ethnographic research should not be paid. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, participants should be willing to share their time, information, knowledge and insights on the basis of personal rapport rather than a financial contract. Secondly, as ethnographic material consists of a totality of the context in which encounters take place, the amount of payment is impossible to calculate. Thirdly, and directly related to this, paying a research participant for one piece of information but not another could lead to the wrong signals being given about what the actual material constitutes for the researcher. There is thus a danger that paying interlocutors in ethnographic research may distort the information being imparted and the relationships being formed. Fourthly, not all researchers are in a position to pay for research material.

However, this does not mean that I have never supported the people I interviewed financially or materially. Especially when children were involved, I was sometimes agreeable to buying food and nappies. Nevertheless, I was careful to not make it a habit or an expectation that if a person talked to me they would receive a gift. On a few occasions people stated – in the course of our conversation – that they had not eaten that day or for the past two or three days, in which case I usually suggested that we continue our conversation over a meal in one of the nearby restaurants. I often had to talk them into it. If people did not mention hunger or any other lack of basic supplies, I would offer to buy them a cup of tea during the conversation. Furthermore, if people invited me to their homes for an interview/discussion, I would take a small gift of chocolates,
sweets or a toy for the children with me. Finally, one of my main interlocutors insisted on paying for any expenses in connection with our conversations. As a man, he said, he would have felt ashamed if I had paid. However, given my knowledge of his financial situation, I would usually accept a cup of tea, but would never admit to being hungry. Also, in one case I was able to remunerate an interlocutor for providing a service. I met with the woman a few times over the course of a year and knew a lot about her very difficult situation. As she was making a small income by styling African women’s hair, I asked her to style my hair – and consciously paid double the price.

It is fair to say that the people who took part in my study did so for a variety of reasons and that financial reward was not a motivating factor. Given the difficult situations that most people found themselves in – not only in relation to their irregular status but above all in relation to their immediate ethnic network and the atmosphere of general distrust – talking to a researcher (an outsider) provided an opportunity to share stories, concerns and hopes with someone who obviously had no interest in spreading gossip or starting intrigues. On several occasions, people told me that they could relax when talking to me. Benjamin from Sudan, a man with a long history of social and psychological misery, stated that he liked my “soft” approach. Quite tellingly, over the months his way of talking gradually changed from soft, fast and uncoordinated to more postured, organised and self-assured.

Clearly, with regard to the current migration and asylum policies in Turkey and in the European Union as a whole, it is very easy to harm people in question by carelessly publishing sensitive details. However, striving towards a broader recognition of their overall life circumstances, breaches of rights and uncertainties coupled with the quest for de-exotifying and de-essentialising, requires the weighing of these issues against each other. In methodological and ethical discussions, voices have been raised that regard research with marginalised groups as unethical (see Liamputtong, 2007:31). I share Morse’s (2000:545, in Liamputtong, 2007:31) opposite opinion that it would be “immoral” not to do so. Although Morse’s work has mainly focused on people who are terminally ill, I agree with the conviction that “qualitative research can provide insights into their
experiences, their discomforts, and their needs.” An improvement of their situation can also be applied to research with illegalised migrants.

Nevertheless, their precarious condition requires the researcher to proceed very carefully with the material. As Dickson-Swift (2005, in Liamputtong, 2007:32) writes, “sensitive researchers must be more cautious about the confidentiality, privacy and anonymity of their participants.” I have therefore chosen to change the names of the people presented in this study – even those who explicitly stated that I could use their real name. Furthermore, I have changed the names of the churches and restaurants mentioned, and have only hinted at their location. The names of the support organisations are provided in full, as are the neighbourhoods and streets in which research has been conducted.

**Transparency and reflexivity**

Transparency and reflexivity are crucial pillars in producing academically sound material, because they account for how the researcher is “shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995:16), and how this affects the gathering and interpretation of the material. It is important to understand that the claims of truths and the knowledge that ethnographers are able to produce cannot be separated from the relational space in which the production of a study is embedded. Social relations, such as rapport, are fluid, highly non-static processes that are not only created and altered during the research period, but that – importantly – also form and inform the path a (ethnographic) study takes (Gustavson & Cytrynbaum, 2003). Following from this, there is a no neutral-ly observable “truth” ‘out there’ to discover that is independent of the researcher and his or her relationships (see Amit, 2000). Or, as James Clifford (1986:7) phrases it: “Ethnographic truths are (...) inherently *partial* – committed and incomplete.” Thus, documented reflexivity is essential, as it contributes to an increased trustworthiness of the researcher’s written account and analysis of the material. I also see it as indispensable for a qualitatively sound piece of academic knowledge production. The contemporary qualitative paradigms of critical theory – constructivism, postmodernism and feminism – all depart from the ontological assumption that reality
and science are socially constructed and that researchers are part of their research settings. Furthermore, they stress the categorical need for reflexivity and self-criticism, and aim to problematise hidden realities in order to initiate a discussion and incite social change (Holliday, 2007:16). As such, political orientation is acknowledged as an ideological standing guiding the research process from the formulation of a problem to the interpretation of the material.

Finally, in the discipline of anthropology and its long historical tradition of ‘writing culture’ of the ‘exotified other’ within a colonial and post-colonial framework of thinking, reflexivity is ultimately about acknowledging the asymmetrical power relations inherent in the research process. Research tasks such as formulating a problem, choosing a setting, asking questions, interpreting answers, writing up the study and eventually disseminating the results, all imply power differentials.25 Throughout this chapter, reflective accounts of the research setting are presented, with a specific concentration in the paragraph on “positionalities in effect”.

Emotions

“Feminist research not only involves thinking, but also feeling,” and as such researchers are urged to be openly reflexive about their identities, including their “values, beliefs, and emotions” (Liamputtong, 2007:12). In a research setting like mine, these issues may influence the outcome of the study to a great extent.

The quality of fieldwork depends on the researcher’s ability to make contacts. It is not only about social skills, but also includes the researcher’s ability to deal with various obstacles to creating contacts, such as personal dislike, “cultural shocks”, or fears. Apart from scholars of postmodern and feminist orientation, in my view, the very personal and emotional concepts of gut feeling and energy level have clearly not been given the status they deserve in methodological discussions (for a similar argument see Liamputtong, 2007:82). In view of this, I have devoted some space to a discussion about emotions in research.

In my own research emotions have been essential, because they have led me to accept some invitations by interlocutors and not others, to be open to information on most occasions but not all and

25 Feminism has been particularly active in uncovering stratifications of power in social fields. For example, Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland (2002:118) emphasise the need for reflexivity and see any interpretation done by the researcher on her/his material as a political and intellectual process that makes sense of the relationship between researcher and interlocutor.
to give my telephone number to some potential interlocutors but not to others. Not surprisingly, there were moments when I was overwhelmed by the feeling that all the research participants were trying to take advantage of me in one way or another: in terms of a relationship, obtaining a passport, receiving money, an invitation letter for a visa to the EU, or some other purpose. Attempting to take advantage of a European researcher is quite understandable given the unequal relationship in which we met but when my energy levels were down these things haunted me. Even a compliment appeared as another calculating strategy for reciprocity at a later stage. On these few occasions I took the liberty of leaving the field for a couple of days and even turned off my telephone. Meeting and conversing with marginalised and rights-deprived migrants in precarious living situations is emotional “hard work” (Liamputtong, 2007:83). It was more difficult when children were involved – children born into illegality, children who communicated an immense hunger to learn and (depending on their age) a high degree of frustration at not being able to attend school, children who responded wildly and sometimes violently at the Moms and Tots group as a result of being confined to their homes out of fear of the police. Other emotional moments were conversations and encounters with individuals whose hopes had been shattered by the massive bureaucratic machinery of the asylum system. Witnessing a human being’s broken spirit has been a painful experience, and a reminder of why this thesis – hopefully – matters. Importantly, and this is one of the main points I would like to make here, these emotions have been reflected upon and incorporated as material.

It belongs to the challenges of ethnographic fieldwork among people in a precarious situation to neither put oneself in danger nor become emotionally exhausted. The dividing line is vague and may be difficult to identify or accept – especially when the researcher is new to the field and eager to generate knowledge. I see it as crucial (and at the same time as a relief) to understand that ethnographers dealing with the complexity of human experience never can – and especially not in this kind of field – ‘know everything’. White spots on the research map have to be accepted. Once this understanding is reached and accepted, it serves as an additional tool in the constant negotiation of closeness and distance between the researcher and the
people s/he writes about. Admittedly, research on irregular migrants in the conditions of transit requires that the researcher remains in settings that are not necessarily comfortable. The balance, I believe, is up to each individual and it depends solely on the way the researcher creates her/his field.

Positionalities in effect

My phone rings. It is 8 o’clock in the morning. It is the man whose acquaintance I made the day before. I was telling him about my project and left my phone number with him so that we would be able to meet later this week.


Ethnographic fieldwork often implies going beyond one’s own narrow social borders (Whyte, 1993:281). This has certainly been the case for me in this research project. The following section will address this issue in depth.

In qualitative research, an interview has to be seen as a temporary relationship, and in ethnographic research this is probably taken to its peak. It is in such a situation that the positionalities of researcher and interlocutor play out to their fullest. As Joan Anderson (1991:116) states, “the life of the other that we try to understand is not a life that is ‘just there’ waiting to be described; the experience of the other is also shaped by the encounter with us.” Or, as Maja Povrzanović Frykman (2005:195) states: “fieldwork is an intersubjective mode of objectivisation.” Reflecting on and understanding the positionalities of the people involved in the research process are crucial for the production of academically valid material. Positionality refers to the interplay between social positions constituted by gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, age etc. Floya Anthias (2005:44) defines this as the “intersubjectively and experientially constituted placing that the individual makes in specific contexts.” As such, the term also refers to the fluidity of positions in different contexts and the agency of individuals to negotiate their positions in different contexts.
A number of positional factors have influenced my fieldwork. The first and most obvious is the meaning ascribed (by all the involved actors) to my presence and the presence of the research participants in Istanbul, including their racial appearance and mine, their nationality and mine, and our different gender. The second are the structurally conditioned issues at different levels, such as police behaviour, the precarious living conditions of my interlocutors. The conflicts and distrust among the migrants also had a great impact on the applicability and the results of the methods chosen. It became very obvious that these factors did not only have an impact on the outcome of the research, but also on the safety of everyone involved – including mine.

Most of my interlocutors were in a precarious position. Very few of them had legal residence papers, in that most of them had either entered Turkey irregularly from Syria or overstayed their transit visa. In Istanbul, the police frequently control people on the street and my interlocutors’ physical appearance made them likely targets for such controls. Caught without valid documents, migrants run the risk of being detained for anything from two to twelve months. The police also regularly control for drugs as well as for official documents (residence permits, visas, passports), and are reported by many migrants to have stolen money and other valuables from them – irrespective of the outcome of the control. I was also told that if they do not comply, the police sometimes plant drugs on the migrants and put them in prison for possession. In addition, my interlocutors – irrespective of their legal status – stated that they experienced racism on a daily basis; from people on the street, landlords, the police as well as from temporary employers. They were called zenci (an offensive term for black Africans), laughed at, touched, provoked and mistreated. Female interlocutors talked about being “embarrassed” on the street, indicating verbal sexual insults.

In contrast, I was a white European woman doing research on Africans in Istanbul and was clearly in an outsider position with regard to race, nationality and the privileges these implied (the privilege of being able to travel freely being the most prominent in this context). Yet, despite these differences, there were certain individual points where I could bridge the differences with the people I
met, such as knowledge of a common language, education, gender, religion, or a common experience. Furthermore, the effect of the fact that I am (perceived to be) heterosexual cannot be denied (see also Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995:93) – especially given the occurrence of (often very) negative opinions about LGBT-individuals throughout the world and especially in Africa. The interview situations were impacted by the meanings of race and gender, and I would agree with Ann Phoenix’s (in: Twine, 2000:13) statement that “‘race’ and gender positions, and hence the power positions they entail, enter into the interview situation, but they do not do so in any unitary or essential way.” Surely, talking to a European (female) researcher can be seen as a strategy, either for direct survival in Istanbul or also for a later contact once in the EU (see also Schapendonk 2008; Liempt 2008). The majority of my interlocutors were men, and I found this difficult at some points. In addition to proposals of marriage (as indicated in the anecdote at the beginning of this section) (see also Bilger & Liempt, 2007) and sexual advancements, at one point rumours and intrigues started to emerge. Quite simply, to these men who have left their lives and families behind to find “greener pastures”, as they say,26 in Europe, a white woman is often perceived as a ticket to a better life.

An Example: Encounter with the civil police
The following example from a day early on in the fieldwork illustrates much of what has been described above.

On a chilly Saturday in December 2007, I accompany Peter as he runs errands after the soup kitchen. We walk from Taksim Square through the streets of Tarlabası and down to the Dolapdere bulvar, a heavily trafficked street. Peter’s errand for today is to collect the money that a woman called Fatima has promised him for knocking down some the walls in her house. From Dolapdere bulvar we walk into the neighbourhood of Dolapdere on our right and start to climb its hilly streets. We enter a neighbourhood that is very different in character. Here, the houses are low, spread out, run-down, and in general the neighbourhood does not give an impression of being well cared for. But what contributes most to the change in atmosphere is the large num-

26 The term “greener pastures” has often been used by Nigerians to designate a place with better living conditions.
ber of young men hanging out on the street corners, all eyes on us. They are not friendly or curious gazes either. The men stop talking to each other, and instead they spit words at us. “Zenci”\textsuperscript{27} is the only one I understand. They stare at us in a hostile and capricious way. Amazed that an atmosphere can change so quickly, and feeling rather uncomfortable, I force myself to focus on the conversation with Peter, whose smile has now become thin and feels as forced as mine. “You see now?” he says, “you hear now?” – “Yes”. He forces himself to keep on walking in the slow, comfortable pace we had before, but covers the rear pocket of his jeans with both hands in order to protect his wallet. After some time we stand in front of Fatima’s house. We wait outside, together with some of the young men who have been following us. Fatima comes out of the house. Even today her answer is “\textit{para yok}” (no money). Peter smiles and forces himself to be as polite as possible. “OK”, he says, “no problem, \textit{yarrn} (tomorrow).” A little girl emerges from the house, curiously staring at us. “Hello, how are you?” Peter tries to make conversation. – “Hello, how are you?” The girl gives him a smirk and everybody around us laughs. Peter and I make attempts to leave. A little boy blocks our way, grins at me, and points at Peter “Zenci”. The others are still laughing at us, imitating Peter and pointing their fingers at him. The uncomfortable feeling creeping up my spine intensifies. The air is thick with hostility and disrespect. Peter keeps forcing himself to smile and to stay polite.

Then everything speeds up. A car screeches to a halt and a man rushes out with a radio transmitter, asking for our passports. Even though we can both show him some documents, the two policemen force us into their car and drive us away. They stop every now and then at the side of the road, talk to some other men with radio units, and accelerate away again. They drive into a yard, stop, talk to other men, and drive out again. Peter mumbles “[\textit{country}], UN” over and over again, but is silent apart from that. My heart beats madly, but I am mostly angry, and demand in very broken Turkish to know what is going on. “\textit{Büyük problem} (big problem)”, says the policemen with a flirty twinkle. I sit back in my seat. At one point, they take Peter out of the car and search his clothes, and go through every single item

\textsuperscript{27} Zenci is a derogative Turkish term for a person with black skin colour.
in my bag. It is only when they roll back the sleeves of my jacket that I understand they are looking for drugs, and drug related evidence. In short, the men who most likely belong to the civil police are – unsuccessfully – looking for drugs. When they drop us off at Dolapdere bulvar, Peter and I both laughed hysterically. (Field notes, December 2007)

The story is an expression of the meanings of race and gender in the context of Istanbul – both from the Turkish police’s point of view as well as from the Nigerian migrants’ position. Peter’s immediate interpretation of the event is to believe that in the minds of the police, a white woman and a black man together automatically implies the involvement of drugs. A week later, however, he indicates that other Nigerians may have called the police and set us up, because, as he explains, they are under the impression that we are a couple. “You know,” Peter clarifies, “a lot of guys have been here longer than me, and already they think I have a white girlfriend. They don’t like that, they are jealous. People are talking, you know!”

The two scenarios that Peter highlights have one thing in common: in both events race is seen as the predominant principle guiding people’s expected behaviour. In the first scenario, the police assumed that a connection between a black man and a white woman immediately implied drugs. I also heard about this stereotyped picture of mixed black man/white person (not necessarily a woman) on other occasions.28 In the second scenario, from the Nigerian perspective, a white woman accompanied by one of their fellow nationals can only mean an intimate relationship. This is due to the following assumptions, namely that black male migrants all want a white woman (for passport reasons), that white women are ‘loose’ and easily pleased by compliments, and that apart from that, blacks and whites do not have any business together.

It also occurred to me that if Peter had been in the possession of drugs I would probably have experienced serious trouble, which apart from anything else would have endangered my research project. After the incident Peter advised me to pay attention to where I walked and with whom, and be careful about giving my telephone number to people. This might have been overprotective or even paranoid, but it is a clear example of how my presence influenced the

28 As mentioned, when the Albino moved into Peter’s flat, his room-mates usually made him walk ten meters in front or behind them in order to maximise their safety on the street.
behaviour of people under research, my own safety and my interlocutors’ safety, and thus to a great extent impacted on the outcome of my research.

For a while, I had serious doubts about whether it was possible to continue to use interlocutors, to be seen in public with them or to visit their homes. This incident thus revealed a serious obstacle to further participant observation. After a few days, when my personal paranoia had abated, I decided that the best thing to do would be to include my interlocutors in decisions about how and where we could meet. Consequently, I told many of them what had happened and asked them for their reflections on this incident. I said that if they deemed it safe, I would continue to visit them in their homes, but if not I would meet them in busy public places, such as McDonalds and its Turkish equivalents (or wherever they deemed safe). I fully agree with the various researchers cited in Pranee Liamputtong’s (2007:37) thorough and comprehensive publication on research conducted with vulnerable populations, that “the researchers have a duty to ensure that no harm comes to their subjects, (...), as a result of their agreement to participate in research.” Having said that, I also share Schapendonk’s (2008b:12) concern that a research approach that is too protective in nature runs the risk of becoming patronising. Taking a decision to protect the research participants without pondering on the issue with them would, indeed, have been patronising.

Interestingly, a few weeks later into fieldwork, during a visit to a flat where Kenyans lived, the civil police knocked on the door, demanded entry, asked for passports and visas, and inquired about my presence. I let Ruth, a Kenyan woman around the age of 35 speak for me, partly because I was too nervous to remember my Turkish vocabulary, but mainly because she handled the situation with nonchalance and aplomb. Although this was the first time (of many to follow) that the police actually forced themselves into the flat, none of the inhabitants – all of whom were familiar with the challenges of being undocumented in Istanbul – connected it with my presence. This encouraged me to pursue my strategy.

Power relations in the field
Both emic and etic affiliations with social categories are central components in the constitution of power (de los Reyes & Mulinari,
Crucially, in most cases they are not simply a matter of choice.

My interlocutors belong to many social categories: among other things they are sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, singles and spouses, opticians, lawyers, traders and authors, irregular/illegal migrants and victims in need of protection, travellers, adventurers, heroes, “Africans” and cosmopolitans, rightless and empowered. This long list implies that there is a multiplicity of angles to depart from and a multiplicity of positions to integrate them into – none of which comprehensively grasps the “truth”. In this dissertation I am the one who tells their stories, and who – based on my own theoretical, political and social position – chooses one theoretical lens over the other in order to account for their situation. This is one aspect of the asymmetric power relations embedded in research projects, and one that feminist politics have been highlighting by urging the researcher to reflect on the production of academic knowledge and to consider the inequalities between researcher and interlocutor. Furthermore, even though researchers cannot determine which interpretations will be made from their material, feminist politics anyway urges them to consider which assumptions can be made and which categories to use and not to use (Ramazanoglou & Holland, 2002:117).

In my view, one quality-enhancing criterion for qualitative research is to make these asymmetric power relations visible. A further criterion is to reduce the inequalities as much as possible. Joan Anderson (1991) describes a research relationship in which the researcher not only asks questions and analyses them later on his or her own, but answers questions related or non-related to the research field. According to Anderson (1991:117) this “could be seen as a move towards a more equitable distribution of power in the relationship.” I answered questions in the field on a number of occasions. For example, people – rightly – wanted my opinion on African migrants’ aspirations to reach Europe. They were also interested in my family life. Apart from that, people absorbed every piece of information about different European countries, from asylum systems to labour

29 French literature often uses the term “aventuriers” (adventurers) for the African migrants passing through the Sahara in order to reach the Southern Mediterranean countries (see for example Bredeloupe & Pliez, 2005; Streiff-Fénart & Poutignat, 2006; 2008).
markets and possibilities for masters and PhD courses at institutions of tertiary education. One Kenyan woman, Sally, also asked me to contact her after my trip to Athens. “People always say that life is better there, but maybe they just say so because they cannot come back here,” she pondered. She deemed my reporting about the situation to be much more trustworthy (24 September 2008). I did contact her afterwards and shared my impressions of the city. However, I was at pains to tell her that I was not in a position to advise her about going to Greece or not.

Another way of reducing inequalities in the field was to deliberately repeat what my conversation partners had just said in order to give the interlocutors a chance to comment on, confirm or modify their stories. I also consciously allowed people to direct our conversations in their chosen directions. However, my initial questions about their lives in Istanbul and the description of my project gave our conversations – at least in the beginning – an initial anchor point. Importantly, I also consciously talked to a number of people on several occasions in order to represent them more holistically than is possible after only one interview. Despite my awareness of these issues, the power relation remained. Furthermore, when it comes to the writing up stage, one way of reducing any inequalities is firstly to present as much fieldwork material as possible, and secondly, to elaborate richly on the context.

With regard to the need to reflect critically on the terms and concepts used to describe and analyse the material, a number of terms in this study could evoke specific associations and assumptions among contemporary European readers. As stated elsewhere (Suter, 2010), a responsible social research has to be aware of the implications of a certain term and its usage. Given that migration and migration-related topics have become highly politicised, and more often than not are debated in an increasingly polarised climate, the term ‘migrant’ certainly needs some clarification. According to UN definitions, a long-term migrant is anyone who has been living outside her/his country of origin for more than a year, while short-term migrant describes individuals who have spent between three months and one year outside their country of origin. Of course, while this rather technical classification serves a purpose in the general work
of the United Nations, in other contexts, such as this research project, it can appear unnecessarily narrow. Moreover, in general conversations and – more alarmingly – in academic research, the term migrant does not tend to overlap with the legal definition, but refers exclusively to people with a low(er) socio-economic status and who exhibit some kind of “difference” (e.g. culture, religion, race). This has been observed in many European countries where “[a]lthough statistics show that in many areas of Europe other European migrants still predominate, the word migrant is generally used to signify non-Europeans” (Agustín, 2007:19). In the context of this study, it is important to bear this in mind. Given that the term migrant has a rather disempowering connotation – especially when combined with the adjective irregular or illegal – I have tried to limit its use when describing the people included in this thesis. Instead, terms such as “person”, “people”, “individuals”, “African nationals” and similar formulations have been consciously chosen.30

The use of narrative material

Finally, a few words about the narratives included in the ethnographic material, and my way of handling and interpreting them in the writing up and analysis stages.

Ethnographic fieldwork results in a large number of narrative and personal accounts through which certain structures arise and in relation to which theories or modifications of existent theories can be promoted. Narrative analysis “gives prominence to human agency and imagination, [and] it is well suited to studies of subjectivity and identity” (Riessman, 1993:4). That is why in my “storying the life of others” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), anecdotal accounts, conversation snippets, excerpts from interviews and observations deserve prominence in their own right.

Narrative analysis concerns the representation of experience that has already been interpreted by the people who narrated it. “Narratives are interpretive and, in turn, require interpretation” (Riessman, 1993:22). Thus, the stories derived from and produced in conversations with interlocutors are ‘truths of their experiences’, which can only be properly understood by contextualising their creation (in Riessman, 1993:22) – something that lies at the core of ethnography.

30 For a more thorough discussion on the discursive construction of migrants, see Tesfahuney (1998).
The chapters that follow include lengthy excerpts of conversations that took place in the field. This is in line with Catherine K. Riessman’s (1993:4) quest that researchers should “preserve narratives and not fracture them, as they constitute essential meaning-making structures.” As stated above, much of my material is more of a recollection of a narrative than a transcription of the recorded narrations. However, any way of recording – tape-recording, videoing, taking notes or rewriting from memory – is in itself a reduction of the lived experience (Riessman, 1993:11). In this thesis, the material based on my recollections of a conversation has been treated and analysed in the same way. In other words, the interpretations of my interlocutors’ experiences and their self-representations have been situated in their relevant and personal contexts. Finally, as Marita Eastmond (2007:251) points out, the stories of refugees ought to be analysed differently from the stories of other people, since: “[R]efugees are in the midst of the story they are telling, and uncertainty and liminality, rather than progression and conclusion, are the order of the day.” This, I believe, is also the case for many of the migrants I talked to. In view of all this, I was very conscious that the political and social circumstances form the conversation partners’ perceptions, decisions, aspirations and interpretations throughout the time of fieldwork.

Finally, it is important to point out that the narrative material analysed in this thesis does not only consist of the recorded and retold narrations of the people I met in the field, but also includes my own narration – in the form of an anecdotalisation (see Michael, 2012) of the situations and meetings I experienced in the field. My anecdotes are not intended to be mere “exemplars of, or analytic fodder in, this or that conceptual framework”, but operate in ways that “disrupt such frameworks and precipitate methodological and theoretical re-orientation” (Michael, 2012:29). Indeed, the anecdotes I have chosen to share illustrate the crucial moments of my discoveries of, or deepened insights into, the issues that were later revisited in research and that eventually emerged as vital for the understanding of life in transit. The fieldwork anecdotes clarify how I got to know about issues that people hinted at, and that I could only delve more deeply into by being exposed to, or immersed in, a specific situation. At the same time, the anecdotes in this text make my presence in the field transparent. In other words, they represent my interactions with the
people about whom I am writing, and allow the “happenings of the social” that are richly described in this thesis to become “convertible into public (social scientific) good that can be put into circulation” (Michael, 2012:28).

In conclusion
In qualitative in-depth research in general – and especially in research settings dealing with personal experiences of marginality, insecurity and precariousness – I regard it as essential to engage in fieldwork over an extended period of time in order to capture the ambivalence and ambiguity of people’s statements and actions. Long-term fieldwork also helps to avoid the reductive dichotomist representations on the one hand, and the exotifying and essentialising ones on the other. Instead, it allows both the researcher, and later also the reader, to comprehend the research participants as independent actors constrained by larger or smaller structural obstacles and in social contexts marked by an interplay of local, national and global factors.

Further, reflexivity is indispensable in presenting a trustworthy account of the research setting embedded in multi-facetted power asymmetries between the researcher and his or her interlocutors. However, these power relations should not be seen as a binary and static understanding of power location. Social interactions are highly dynamic, and have to be accounted for as an aspect of reality comprehending a fluidity of positions in the course of fieldwork.

Finally, in the European Union, illegalised migration and asylum migration belong to the highly politicised field of policy-making. For example, the EU aquis for Turkey requires that Turkey improves its efforts to hinder migrants transiting the country into the EU. Furthermore, Turkey’s adoption of the Dublin agreement is another condition for Turkish membership – a condition that would place a very unequal burden on Turkey in terms of providing minimum standards for asylum seekers and refugees in the country. The bottom line here is that, given the political context in which this dissertation will be received, there can never be a complete safeguard against individuals who may – willingly or unwillingly – misinterpret the content of this work and see it as ‘proof’ for strengthening border controls. Therefore, I urge the reader to be critical, and to judge and use this work for its intention to present the migrants’
own interpretations of their experiences in the context of their struggle to realise their hopes and intentions; a struggle that is affected by the passport they (do not) hold.
CHAPTER 4: BEING IN ISTANBUL

“The migrant community here in Istanbul, the asylum seekers and refugees, it is a kind of volcano, because (it is) always in movement. We still have people coming in and then a few days, weeks, months later on, you may never see those people again, they try to go to Western countries. Some of the people when they try many times and they fail to go, some they try to go home. But only a few accept the situation and go home because they couldn’t do it, they couldn’t reach Europe.”

(Edward, 8 April 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

This quote fittingly draws attention to the constant movement of the migrant population in Istanbul. However, before looking in more detail at what this constant movement implies for migrants, and how it affects their living situation, perceptions and decision-making, this chapter will take a step back and present some of the issues of migration and asylum in the Turkish context that to some extent shape movements to and through the country. Furthermore, the chapter provides information about the global city of Istanbul, with its high levels of ethnic, economic and religious diversity. The chapter also discusses how concepts and perceptions of race and ethnicity are constructed and played out in everyday life in the city. Finally, attention is paid to the small but nevertheless existing rooms for manoeuvre that allow (irregularised) migrants from Sub-Saharan African countries to increase their physical safety and mental well-being. The chapter ends with the conclusion that while these rooms of agency exist, practices of increased safety are, at best, arbitrary.
On migration in Turkey

Turkey – the successor state to the Ottoman Empire – was founded in 1923 by General Mustafa Kemal Paşa, commonly referred to as ‘Atatürk’, the Father of the Turks. The country is situated between Europe and West Asia, with a small part of it geographically in Europe. It is surrounded by Bulgaria and Greece to the West, and Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq and Syria to the East.

Map of Turkey. Source: CIA (2009)

Turkey as a transit country

Turkey has experienced transit movements of foreigners since the 1980s (Koser Akcapar, 2004:30), and in the recent couple of decades, more and more scholarly attention has been paid to Turkey as a transit country for West, Central and South Asian nationals and for African nationals seeking protection and/or opportunities in European countries. Ahmet Içduygu (2000:360) estimates that the first large group of foreigners arriving in Turkey in order to proceed westwards consisted of Iranians fleeing the revolutionary outbreak in 1979. Turkey’s geographical location, its economic prosperity, and the European legislative framework concerning immigration offered conditions for such a development (Içduygu, 2005). Transit migration is often perceived as connected to irregular migration (Düvell, 2006; Içduygu, 2003), but in Turkey many migrants either arrive with valid documents or are in possession of documents dur-
ing their stay in the country (see for example İçduygü, 2000; Koser Akcapar, 2004). As the majority of all individuals accepted as refugees in Turkey are resettled to another country (to be explained later in this chapter), asylum seekers and refugees can also be looked upon as transiting the country (İçduygu, 2005).

Due to the nature of these migratory movements, reliable statistics are absent. Most studies on the subject (see İçduygu, 2003, 2005, 2006; İçduygu & Yükseker, 2010) look elsewhere for figures and cite the number of asylum seekers compiled by the UNHCR and the number of apprehended irregular migrants compiled by the Directorate of General Security of the Ministry of the Interior. An example is a research report conducted by Turkish security forces (Today’s Zaman, 7 May 2008) that estimated the number of arrested migrants without documents in the years between 2000 and 2007 to more than half a million. The vast majority of all arrested migrants stemmed from neighbouring countries and countries experiencing political conflicts. Estimations based on these numbers – such as those made by İçduygu (2005) with regard to the number of ‘transit migrants’ and the fluctuations in these numbers over the years – should therefore be treated with caution. Apart from the missing information about the means and resources of border and police controls, the phenomenon of transit movement has still not been fathomed. In this respect, speculations are little more than a mathematical exercise.

Under the pressure of the European Union, Turkey has introduced a number of measures to make it more difficult to enter and leave Turkey irregularly. They include co-operation with the EU border agency Frontex on so-called ‘missions’ in the Aegean Sea and the land border between Turkey and Greece. According to the Frontex annual report for 2007 (Frontex, 2007), the Greek-Turkish land and sea borders were particularly “heavily exposed to illegal migration.” On a number of occasions Frontex has been accused by NGOs (such as Migreurope in France or ProAsyl in Germany) and members of the European Parliament (Keller, Lunacek & Lochbihler, 2011) of violating international human rights law.
Legal issues in the field of migration and asylum

At present no single legislation accounts for the fields of migration and asylum. Immigration is regulated by the Law on Settlement dating from 1934 (İçduygu, 2003; Kaya, 2008). The law stipulates who has the right to enter and settle and who can to apply for asylum. Furthermore, the Passport Law (Law 5682) is applicable for governing the entry to and departure from Turkey (see İçduygu, 2003; Kaya, 2008).31

Asylum is regulated by the 1994 Asylum Regulation and the 2006 Circular (prepared by the General Directorate of Security at MOI) (Kaya, 2009:23). In March 2005, Turkey adopted a National Action Plan on Asylum and Migration (NAP), which spells out the changes that are necessary and the challenges involved in a harmonisation of asylum and migration policy between Turkey and the EU (or rather adaptation to EU standards). Among others, apart from the need to draft and implement an Asylum Law, it is pointed out that a single administrative unit is to be established in order to deal with asylum issues. Accordingly, a body of appeal has to be installed as well. Furthermore, for the integration of recognised refugees, collaboration with NGOs and local authorities is planned (Kaya, 2009:23). Obviously, the geographical limitation – which only grants the right to apply for asylum to nationals from European countries (as will be explained below) – is the main challenge to the harmonisation process. The EU insists that for a full membership this geographical limitation must be lifted (Kaya, 2009:23).

The Turkish asylum system

Turkey is one of the original signatories of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Additional Protocol. Unlike most of the other signatories, though, it understands protection to only apply to refugees originating from European countries.32 The refugee status determination process for the vast majority of asylum seekers originating from non-European countries falls under the mandate of the UNHCR. However, with the implementation of the 1994 Asylum Regulation, the Turkish Government has established a certain control over the process.

31 For a more detailed overview of the legal framework governing all aspects of immigration and irregular migration, see Kaya (2008).
32 Only Morocco, Congo, Monaco, Madagascar and Turkey have such geographical limitations in place (Reynolds & Muggeridge, 2008:66). Generally, member states of the Council of Europe are defined as ‘European’ (Durukan, 2007).
With the new regulation in 1994, a so-called two-tiered system was created that required non-European asylum seekers to file two asylum claims; one with the UNHCR and one with the Turkish Government. The Turkish police is gather the asylum claims and the Foreigners Borders and Asylum Division of the General Directorate of Security under the Ministry of Interior determines whether an asylum seeker has ‘genuine’ reasons for applying for refugee status. If this is deemed to be the case, the applicant receives ‘temporary asylum’, i.e. a temporary residence permit that is valid for the period of time it takes for the UNHCR to determine the status. Parallel to that, the UNHCR processes the applicant’s claim according to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, and – in case of recognition – is in charge of the resettlement to third countries. In other words, while the UNHCR conducts a full-fledged refugee status determination under the 1951 Refugee Convention, the Turkish government’s ‘temporary asylum’ grants the right to refugee status determination by the UNHCR as spelled out in the Convention as well as in the 1994 Asylum Regulation. In that sense, there is a strong cooperation between the Turkish Government and the UNHCR\(^3\) (Kirişçi, 1996:305). As integration into Turkey is not foreseen, resettlement to third countries – along with repatriation – is the only durable solution available for non-European asylum applicants in Turkey (Durukan, 2007:1). At the same time, third countries are under no legal obligation to accept refugees for resettlement. In addition, they are free to apply their own criteria for selection (Reynolds & Mugggeridge, 2008:66).\(^4\)

Typically, applicants first lodge an asylum application with the UNHCR in Ankara. There they find out in which of the 28 so-called “satellite cities” they have to register with the police. These satellite cities, which are dispersed throughout the country, are the locations to which asylum seekers and refugees are assigned to await the UNHCR’s and the third country’s decisions. The UNHCR may abstain from processing their claim if the applicants do not register with the police. These people are required to make regular contact with the police and have to seek regular contact with the police. People who have proved to be innocent still have police record, which means that they, too, fall under the category of “non-resettable” (or difficult to resettle).

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\(^3\) According to Article 7 of the regulation.

\(^4\) One ‘rumour’ for which I was not able to find any official confirmation is that resettlement states do not usually accept recognised refugees with a police record in the transit country. Also, states do not pay attention to the reasons for such a police record and to the methods used by the police. People who have proved to be innocent still have police record, which means that they, too, fall under the category of “non-resettable” (or difficult to resettle).
permission from the police if they wish to leave the city, for example in order to go to Ankara for matters relating to their asylum claim (Durukan, 2007).

The whole asylum process with the UNHCR takes between two and five years on average. During this time, the Turkish Government provides little material or financial support. In fact, an official document (‘The 2006 Circular’) clearly states that the government does not have any obligation to provide shelter, healthcare or any other assistance (Durukan, 2007). The government instead refers to the Social Solidarity and Assistance Foundations organised under the provincial governorates, although their target groups are inhabitants of the respective province and not just asylum seekers (Durukan, 2007). Likewise, the UNHCR has very limited financial resources available, and these are granted to the refugees who are regarded as being most vulnerable, such as women with children. Asylum seekers and recognised refugees are required to pay a residence fee to the Turkish authorities in order to obtain a residence permit. These fees are, as Durukan (2007) criticises, “often prohibitively high”. The NGO staff members that I met mentioned sums up to 800 YTL per person every 6 months. The UK Refugee Council (2008:67) reports the sum of 300 US dollars every six months. The inability to pay not only prevents many applicants from applying for a work permit, but also from access to public institutions and services, including medical care, social assistance and education (Durukan, 2007, quoting from ‘the 2006 Circular’).

Turkey-EU relations

Turkey’s path towards becoming a candidate country to join the European Union has been both long and bumpy, and – as the former Swedish General Consul in Istanbul Ingmar Karlsson (2007:81) puts it – “strewn with thorns.” The application filed in 1987 to the EEC was dismissed two years later on the grounds of a very unstable political and economic situation in Turkey. It took another ten years, until 1999, for Turkey to be declared a potential candidate at the EU summit in Helsinki, with the stipulation that it met the Copenhagen criteria, i.e. the economic, political and legal conditions (Karlsson, 2007:8; Turkish Ministry for EU Affairs, 2011). When the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) came into power in 2002,

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35 On 1 March 2008, 800 YTL corresponded to roughly 4,300 SEK or 450 Euro (Forex, 2009).
an accelerated access to EU membership was one of the party’s declared goals (Der Spiegel, 2004). In October 2004, the European Commission found that Turkey did meet the Copenhagen criteria to a sufficient degree (Kirişçi, 2007:1). One year later, on 3 October 2005, Turkey started the full negotiation process with the EU for accession (Karlsson, 2007:89; Turkish Ministry for EU Affairs, 2011). Since then, negotiations about the different accession chapters have been on-going (Turkish Ministry for EU Affairs, 2011).

The field of asylum and immigration is one of the debated fields in the EU policy area of “freedom, security and justice”, which accounts for Chapter 24 of the EU Accession Partnership Strategy. The main points of negotiation include the lifting of Turkey’s geographical limitation to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the adoption of EU guidelines on asylum including a national status determination system, and the application of the Schengen visa policy (Kirişçi, 2007:8). In March 2004, Turkey adopted an ‘Action Plan on Asylum and Migration’, and in March 2006, a ‘National Action Plan towards the Implementation of Turkey’s Integrated Border Management Strategy’ (Kirişçi, 2007:9). The lifting of the geographical limitation is indeed foreseen, but there are fears from the Turkish side that EU membership could be denied, despite the adaptation to the Schengen system (Kirişçi, 2007:17). There is a rather widespread and well-founded fear among Turkish Government officials and academics that the lifting would lead to Turkey becoming a dumping ground for unwanted migrants (see for example Brewer & Yükseler, 2006; Kirişçi, 2007). Therefore, Turkey is actively advocating a system of “burden shifting” (Kirişçi, 2007:36).

Turkey-Africa relations
Over the last few decades, Turkey has claimed the status of a regional economic and political power, with a dominant position in the economic and political affairs of the Mediterranean Basin, the Black Sea and the Middle East. With its position straddling continents, it is a place of entry and exit for the massive growth in global trade with Europe, the Middle East and, increasingly, Africa.

The long history of Ottoman relations with Africa, spanning centuries, waned somewhat after the formation of the Republic in 1923. During the Ottoman reign, relations with African countries mainly concerned countries in the north of the continent. After the
foundation of the republic, Turkish interest in Africa was instead transferred to the West, in that economic and political interests were directed towards Europe and North America. However, beginning with the adoption of the Africa Action Plan in 1998, political and economic relations between Turkey and Sub-Saharan African countries increased in volume. This was seen as a consequence of the EU’s decision to not accept Turkey as a candidate country at the summit in 1997 (Özkan & Akgün, 2010). Due to the long years of stagnation, “Africa is known in Turkey only from TV images of hunger, poverty, AIDS and other negative elements,” as Mehmet Özkan and Birol Akgün (2010) state. But about a decade ago, African nations again began to appear in Turkish foreign and economic policy, e.g. with 2005 appearing as ‘the Year of Africa’, the hosting of the first Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit under the theme of “Solidarity and Partnership for a Common Future” taking place in 2008,36 and the conference on Least Developed Countries in Istanbul in spring 2011 (see Özkan, 2008). The coming into power of the conservative AKP-party in 2002 is widely seen as a decisive turn in Turkey’s multi-dimensional foreign policy, including increased relations with African countries (Özkan & Akgün, 2010:528).

The contemporary Turkish discourse on Turkish-African relations basically revolve around three main messages: firstly, the emphasis on the former presence of the Ottoman Empire on African soil; secondly, the emphasis that Turkey has never been a colonising force on the continent; and thirdly, a reference to Turkish support for African countries’ struggle for independence throughout the past century (Bolou, 2011:90). Indeed, in order to gain entrance to African markets and politics, Turkey emphasises the historical relations between the Ottoman Empire and African countries (Bolou, 2011:89). Parts of Turkey’s Africa strategy involve the opening of embassies,37 the distribution of scholarships to Turkish universities38 as well as the sending of development aid39 (Bolou, 2011). This aid is unconditional, in that it is not bound to any economic or political reforms.40

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36 The second Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit is planned for 2013 (Bolou, 2011:114).
37 Between 2008 and 2010, Turkey opened eight embassies on the continent, and thus maintains a total of fifteen embassies in Sub-Saharan Africa.
38 For the academic year 2010-11, Turkey issued 319 scholarships for foreign students from African countries (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011).
39 In 2006, the sum spent by Turkey on African countries’ development was 25 million US dollars (Bolou, 2011:60).
40 Just as China, Turkey does not interfere with internal affairs; something that the official
Turkey has mainly imported gold and natural gas from the African continent, while its exports to African countries mainly consist of metal devices for the construction sector (United Nations, 2010:35). In the decade 1997 to 2008, exports to Sub-Saharan nations increased from around 253 million to 3.2 billion US dollars, while imports from those countries increased from 385 million to 2.3 billion US dollars (see Özkan & Akgün, 2010:534). Key trading countries include South Africa, Nigeria, Sudan, Kenya and Angola, and in 2010, 355 Turkish companies were investing in African countries ( Özkan & Akgün, 2010:536). Nevertheless, compared with Turkey’s overall trade volume of almost 300 billion US dollars in 2008, trade with Sub-Saharan African nations remains insignificant (Özkan & Akgün, 2010:534). Finally, since autumn 2011, Turkish Airlines has operated regular flights to nine Sub-Saharan African cities: Nairobi, Lagos, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Addis Ababa, Dakar, Accra, Entebbe and Dar Es Salam (Turkish Airlines, 2012). Only five years previously, the company did not connect Turkey with any Sub-Saharan African country. The first flights to African countries, starting in 2006, were the routes Istanbul-Khartoum-Nairobi and Istanbul-Lagos (Bolou, 2011:91, 118).

Turkey is a rather new player in current relations with African countries, and – with regard to the strong influence of European countries and the increased presence of China – has chosen a middle way between the North-South and the South-South models of cooperation (Bolou, 2011:79). Turkey mainly sees African countries as new markets for its products, as well as new sources of energy and raw materials (United Nations, 2010:83). However, another stated rationale is to secure the voices of African countries in the international arena (Bolou, 2011:106; Özkan & Akgün, 2010:543). In fact, in 2008, Turkey received 51 out of 53 African votes for a non-permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council for the period 2009-10, where Turkey promised to lobby for African interests (Özkan, 2008:7). According to a spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responsible for East Africa, the country will again be a candidate for the period 2015-16, and until then lead a political strategy to secure all African votes (Bolou, 2011:106).

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New visibility of Africa in the Istanbulian public space, albeit pertaining to stereotypical images: Turkish Red Crescent advertisement in the metro. Photo by the author, September 2011

On the meaning of Istanbul
As noted above, asylum seekers and refugees are expected to remain in the designated satellite cities during the asylum process. Importantly, Istanbul and Ankara are not satellite cities: asylum seekers and refugees can only obtain the right to reside in Istanbul under specific circumstances. They are often deemed ‘vulnerable’ by the UNHCR, and it is usually women with children and people with mental or physical disabilities who are identified as such. Despite this, many asylum seekers and refugees reside in Istanbul. One migrant who has spent more than a decade in the city explains the attraction of Istanbul in the following way:
“So, you probably know about the satellite cities (...). So many people they go, now they go, but in the beginning, two, three years ago, people were afraid to go to these cities, because they didn’t know what was waiting for them. Because Turkey .... How can I say that? They did not know about migrants, except of course Istanbul people, they knew migrants, they see us a lot, but outside Istanbul they didn’t know us. For example in Konya, you think: ‘How am I going to survive? How am I going to be helped?’ So people were afraid, and then slowly, slowly when people go there, they see that they can cope with life, they find small jobs, they can manage to get some small job and then they can manage to survive.

But of course there are a lot of people who don’t go, like the people who have a permanent work here, they don’t want to lose that kind of opportunity. Of course they could go, but if you go there for like two years and then you hear from UNHCR that your case was denied, then you think of the two, three years you stayed outside Istanbul, you lost your small work you had there, then, what to do else?

So people think like that: when they stay in Istanbul and then their case gets rejected, they always have the possibility to get what we call connection people, to go to Western countries! But when you stay there outside, you don’t have good job, and then you are not in Istanbul and after three years the foreign police comes and ask you to leave the country, and then you don’t have enough contacts here in Istanbul so you find you yourself in trouble.”

(Edward, April 2008, taped conversation)

As indicated in the above quote, Edward, a long-term migrant to the city, portrays Istanbul as relatively migrant-friendly compared to other Turkish cities. It is a city with inhabitants who are used to seeing the dark skin of African nationals, a city where jobs are available and where employers are actually willing to employ dark-skinned migrants. Edward talks about Istanbul’s possibilities and opportunities – opportunities to find a job, the ease of contacts, possibilities
of making travel arrangements etc. In the case of a rejected asylum application,\textsuperscript{41} that always has to be taken into account. Istanbul offers possible directions, whereas other cities are portrayed as dead ends.

Istanbul has a long history of diversity. The metropolis that has been the imperial capital of the Western Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empire remained “a truly cosmopolitan centre with its multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious composition” for about 16 centuries (Içduygu & Biehl, 2008). Being a key trading node – Istanbul is on the Silk Road – the city has been one of the most important commercial centres in the region.

With the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Republic in 1923, Istanbul gradually lost a lot of its cosmopolitan lifestyle and, above all, its dominant position as a centre of commerce. Mainly due to a strong spirit of nationalism in the course of nation-building, many non-Muslim and minority groups who formed the commercial bourgeoisie began to leave the city (Içduygu & Biehl, 2008). Furthermore, in the new Republic, Ankara was declared the new capital. As Ahmet Içduygu and Kristen Biehl (2008:3) point out, “the cosmopolitan and imperialist grandeur of Istanbul became a relic of the Ottoman past, coming to symbolise a decaying Empire and its entrenchment in Islam, while Ankara, located at the heart of Turkish Anatolia, came to represent the nation, secularism and enlightenment.”

Up to the 1950s, Istanbul’s population remained more or less stable in number – accounting for around 1 million inhabitants – despite the immigration of ethnic Turks and other Muslims from the Balkans and the migration of non-Muslim minorities. However, the growing industrialisation at the beginning of the 1950s radically changed Istanbul’s urban demography. In their search for work, rural Anatolians from the central and eastern part of the country started to migrate to urban spaces, and over a period of fifty years the city experienced a tenfold population increase (see Istanbul Met-

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\textsuperscript{41} To facilitate an understanding of UNHCR’s Turkey office’s workload: In 2005, the UNHCR’s population of concern counted 2,399 recognised refugees and 4,872 asylum seekers. Of the latter, 3,914 applied for asylum in 2005, the remaining 1,000 individuals (ca 25 per cent) applied in the years prior to this. Throughout the year, 1,368 people received refugee status, while 1,262 were resettled to a third country (UNHCR, 2005). One year later, about 4,500 new applications were made. In 2007, 7,600 new claims were lodged, while one year later the number increased to 13,000 claims, making the UNHCR Turkey office the second-largest receiver of asylum claims after Malaysia, with 17,000 new claims. In 2009, the number of new asylum claims decreased to 7,800 asylum claims and increased again to 9,200 in the following year (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2011).
Istanbul in the 21st century

21st century Istanbul is a bustling centre of trade, a popular attraction for tourists – with around 6.5 million arriving in 2007 (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 2009). This global city is a key strategic node in the movement of goods, capital and people between the East-West and the North-South axes (Sassen, 2012:203). The majority of the 19,000 foreign firms registered in Turkey in 2007 have their headquarters in Istanbul (Sassen, 2012:204). Textile constitutes a major share of Turkey’s export products: in 2001 Turkey was the world’s seventh largest exporter of clothing and the fifteenth largest exporter of textiles. As far as the EU is concerned, Turkey is the largest exporter of textiles and the second largest exporter of clothing (Tan, 2001:11). Apart from formal trade relations, Istanbul provides room for informal trade manoeuvres, thereby reminding us of Zoran Slavnic’s (2010) argument that informal economic practices cannot be separated from the formal economy. Especially in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, many nationals from post-Soviet countries – colloquially called “the Russians” (Peraldi, 1998) – found opportunities in informal trading between Istanbul and their countries that created circular migratory movements.42 The Turkish Treasury estimates that suitcase trade to post-Soviet countries amounted to for 8.8 billion US dollars in 1996, and 1.7 billion US dollars in 199943 after the rouble crisis (in: Tan, 2001:11). Openly heavily criticised by the EU for its liberal visa policy, some Turkish officials argue that it is exactly the country’s visa policy that provided these nationals with a means of survival – thereby relieving the European Union of a large number of potential asylum seekers (Kirişçi, 2003:98).

The phenomenon known as suitcase trade (buval ticareti) has been given some attention in the scholarly literature. As Çağlar Keyder

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42 Indeed, the presence of groups of Central Asian women in their fifties with large amounts of goods packed in strong plastic bags and wallpaper is common at Istanbul Atatürk Airport (author’s observation).

43 In comparison: The official number of Turkish textile and clothing exports was 8.7 billion US dollars in 1996 and 9.8 billion US dollars in 1999 (Tan, 2001:13).
(1999:178) describes, informal trading relations with former Soviet countries emerged informally on a small-scale basis “with tourists arriving in buses, filling their plastic sacks and suitcases with textiles to sell at the retail market back home.” Many of them were from Bulgaria and Moldova, but also from Russia, Uzbekistan, Romania, Turkmenistan and other countries, and engaged in circular migration. The trade volume increased quickly, which in turn led to the professionalisation of Laleli, a central district of Istanbul, as a destination place. Signs were increasingly written in Cyrillic letters, while hotel, shop and cargo owners became more organised by hiring Russian, Bulgarian, and Romanian speaking staff and offering package deals. In the middle of the 1990s, the number of North Africans engaged in suitcase trade also increased. The increasingly restrictive Schengen visa policies, as well as the high unemployment rate in their countries of origin, are often named as underlying reasons for their presence in Istanbul (Delos, 2003; Peraldi, 1998). The discrete but nevertheless dynamic presence of Maghrebi informal traders transforms the market places in the Istanbul districts of Laleli and Beyazit. Here the signs in Cyrillic letters are accompanied by signs in Arabic letters, cargo destinations in Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia are advertised, and shop owners pick up Arabic and French or hired personnel with the appropriate language skills, thereby providing job opportunities for Maghrebis as well as Turkish citizens from the southeast (Peraldi, 1998). At the beginning of the 21st century, traders from Sub-Saharan African countries started to arrive (as will be elaborated on in Chapter 7).

In socio-cultural terms, Istanbul exhibits its rich, ancient, historical relics as naturally as its features of modernity. The tourist districts of Sultan Ahmet and Fatih reflect the historic past with the Spice Bazaar and the Grand Bazaar, the Blue Mosque and the famous Hagya Sophia, while modern Beyoğlu hosts art performances by internationally renowned artists and plays the latest Afro beats next to a traditional fastl evi – a place in which traditional Turkish music with a Romani influence is played. Taksim meydanesi (Taksim Square) is one the main nodes of transportation in the city. With the Atatürk Kültür Merkezi (Atatürk Cultural Centre) and the five-star hotel Marmara overlooking the square, many buses and dolmuş (minibuses) depart from here, as well as the metro to the upper class.
Istiklal Street. Photos by the author, September 2011
commercial district of Levent, and the funiküler (fernicular) down to Kabataş, on the shores of the Bosporus. Airport buses arrive here and international and Turkish fast food chains serve commuters and other travellers. Istanbul is a city of constant traffic jams; a city of kalabalık (chaos, disorder), an expression that Istanbulians often use to describe the conditions in their city. The mighty, straight-lined Istiklal Caddesi (Istiklal Street) stretches between Taksim Square and the historical Galata tower; the (almost) traffic-free broad pedestrian street described as the “cultural hub of the city” (Islam, 2009:51). International brands, such as Topshop and Benetton, McDonalds, Starbucks and Wagamama display their products in shiny shop windows, while eager ice-cream sellers swing the traditional ice cream through the air. One old woman sitting in the same spot on her little chair every day sells herbs from a plastic bag in front of her, while the middle-aged man next to her tries to direct attention to the leather jacket he wants to sell. What is most characteristic for the street, however, are the masses of people that pass here every day, mostly starting after noon – a dark-dressed stream of people between Tünel and Taksim Square. Strolling tourists, high spirited primary school children, middle-aged women in traditional (religiously inspired) coats and headscarves, groups of young men with the same hip hair cut, sauntering along the street, disappearing into the maze of small alleys crossing Istiklal to relax in a tea salon, visit the fish market, or proceed to the adjacent neighbourhoods of Çiçekpaşa, Çukurkuma, Tebebaşi and Tarlabas. In-between them, the old tramway connects Taksim Square with Tünel Square at the end of Istiklal, and constantly ringing bells chase people off the tracks. Schoolboys have fun hopping on and off the footboard of the moving tram. Especially on Friday and Saturday nights, the street is like a big public festival. Also, along with the entertainment seekers, at weekend nights the (Kurdish) midye dolma street vendors offer their delicacy (stuffed mussels with rice, cinnamon and a slice of lemon) at every corner.

Istanbul still has multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan features. In addition to some 3,000 mosques, the city has 40 (registered) churches and 16 synagogues (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, 2009). Of the almost 40 public and foundation universities and the numer-
ous high schools, the majority offer tuition in a foreign language (English, French) (The Council of Higher Education). Furthermore, the countless Western Union branches and the numerous Internet cafés and call shops – often decorated with a large number of predominantly Asian and African flags – indicate the (dominant) presence of foreigners in the city.

The neighbourhoods of Tarlabası, Aksaray and Osmanbey
A lot of my research was carried out in the district of Beyoğlu. All the support organisations were located around Istiklal Street, in the heart of Beyoğlu. I spent a considerable amount of time in the neighbourhood of Tarlabası, also located in Beyoğlu. Aksaray, Laleli and Kumkapı are neighbourhoods across the Golden Horn from Galata, in the old part of the city on the European side. Towards the end of my project I started to spend more time around the textile shops in Osmanbey. In the next few pages I will dig more deeply into these urban neighbourhoods with their rather distinct historical and social features/structures of welcoming, hosting and integrating, or, alternatively, rejecting and alienating foreigners.

Tarlabaşı was a residential area for minority groups up to the 1950s. However, due to a number of hostile events between 1923, at the time of the foundation of the Republic, and 1974, when the Cyprus Operation took place, non-Muslim minority groups, Armenians, Greeks and Jews left the city in great numbers. Now, the area has gradually become home for the displaced rural immigrants from Eastern Turkey, and has changed from a middle-class residential neighbourhood to a quarter dominated by social deprivation, poverty and destitution. By the mid-1970s, Tarlabası had become a location for “the destitute, the repressed and exploited” (Saybaşılı, 2006). Based on a population census, the number of inhabitants in 2000 was around 31,000. In Turkish cinema topography, Tarlabası often features as the merciless living space of the unfortunates (Saybaşılı, 2006). Today, many inhabitants of the metropolis regard Tarlabası as dangerous, and its name has been highly stigmatised (Islam, 2009:51). In the last couple of decades, the mix of inhabitants has diversified. In the 1990s, Kurds who were displaced by the civil war in south-eastern Turkey started to settle in Tarlabası, meeting the Roma who moved there a decade earlier, as well as transsexuals and transvestites (Islam, 2009:51). They were all later joined by groups of Africans from different countries.
Street view in Tarlabası. Photo by the author, October 2008
Tarlabaşı is in the middle of the city centre, separated from the more glamorous life of İstiklal by the big and busy Tarlabası bulvar (Tarlabaşı Boulevard) running parallel to İstiklal, connecting the Atatürk Bridge with Taksim Square. This street is a frontier. Interestingly, my fieldwork has shown that for Nigerians, Tarlabası – or ‘TBS’ as they call it – is usually the first stop on arrival in the city. Individuals who manage to establish themselves in İstanbul often move to better neighbourhoods, such as Beşiktaş or Tarabiya. This finding strengthens Yaghmaian’s (2005/2007) view of Tarlabası as a ‘refugee camp’. Many of the Nigerians and Kenyans who participated in my study lived in Tarlabası.

Aksaray can be described as an “urban collage” (Yaghmaian, 2005/2007:205); a buzzing neighbourhood in the centre of the metropolis. It is a vibrant trading neighbourhood with shop signs in Russian, Arabic and Persian. The countless shops in the neighbourhood specialise in textile that, just as in Osmanbey, can often only be bought en gros. Aksaray is also a neighbourhood in which many migrants find shelter. Many “safe houses” are located in the neighbourhood, where migrants arriving from the south or the east stay until they find a connection to Greece. They often stay there for up

Street view in Tarlabasi. Photo by the author, October 2008
to two months, and during that time many of them hardly dare to leave the house – constantly afraid that the police will put an end to their plan of advancing to Europe. Many “disappear to the West” (Yaghmaian, 2005/2007:205), while others see themselves forced to stay in Istanbul. In this case they move out of the safe house and try to establish contact with their compatriots, looking for networks to survive. Tina from Liberia, who features rather prominently in this dissertation, has been in this situation. Towards the neighbourhood of Kumkapı the numbers of call centres and Internet cafés increases, displaying numerous African and West Asian flags and advertising cheap call rates to countries in Asia and Africa.

Located about one kilometre north of Taksim Square, towards Şişli, is the small middle-class neighbourhood of Osmanbey. The narrow, tidy streets are lined with trees, giving the area an air of lightness. Many shops display colourful and classy clothes, and display signs in their windows indicating their need for both English and Russian speaking personnel. From the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Osmanbey hosted some of the most famous international brands of clothing, and was a place where people could purchase chic and high quality garments. However, since the recession of the 1990s, the neighbourhood’s character has changed, and although garments are still sold, these are mainly for the foreign market and in wholesale quantities. In fact, now only 15 per cent of the textile goods produced in Osmanbey is for the national market, and many of these do not represent local trends. Since the early 2000s, African traders have arrived to purchase their goods in the Osmanbey textile market, following the Arabs who arrived in the 1980s, and people from Turkic as well as post-Soviet republics who arrived in the 1990s (Sezgin, 2011). The arrival of African traders has provided African nationals with job opportunities;44 some of the people I talked to guided the co-national traders around and usually received a small fee for their services from both shop owners and traders. Others were hired by the Turkish shop owners to serve their African clientele and to advise shop owners about ‘African taste’.

44 The same happened to Maghrebis in the 1990s in the districts of Beyazit and Laleli: the increased presence of Maghrebi traders created an employment niche for Maghrebi (Algerian) nationals (Peraldi, 1998).
The photo shows a sign advertising for staff with Arabic, English and Russian skills.

The photo shows a sign in a display window advocating wholesale goods.

Advertisement for a fashion show in Lagos, Nigeria, in the window of a textile shop in the district of Osmanbey. Photo by the author, September 2011.
Streets in Osmanbey. Photos by the author, September 2011
The migrant landscape in Istanbul

In 2007, slightly over 42,000 foreign nationals had registered with addresses in Istanbul, out of a population of almost 13 million (Turkish Statistical Institute – TurkStat, 2007). Due to the absence of official statistics, it is impossible to give a proper account of the ethnic composition of Istanbul’s foreign population. Yet, individuals from all over the world make the city their short- or long-term place of residence. Among the officially registered immigrants in Turkey, nationals from Germany prevail, followed by Bulgarians and Turkish Cypriots (Turkish Statistical Institute – TurkStat, 2012). It is highly likely that they reside in one of the big cities, i.e. Istanbul, Ankara or Izmir. The number of Erasmus students to Turkey has steadily increased from roughly 800 in 2005/06 to almost 2,900 in 2009/10 (European Commission, 2012). Again, many of the Turkish universities connected to the Erasmus programme are located in Istanbul. As mentioned above, many traders and employees of foreign companies arrive in Istanbul from African, Asian (including the Gulf countries) or European countries (including Eastern Europe and Russia). In 2006, 7 million foreign managers and professionals, together with another 1.1 million in the secondary service professions, travelled to Turkey for work (Sassen, 2012:208). Furthermore, Istanbul is a place of residence for asylum seekers, refugees and other migrants who lack official status. During the fieldwork in 2007/08, many of these came from Somalia, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and DRC, but also from Syria, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Georgia, Chechnya and China. In 2007, 7,600 individuals registered as asylum seekers with the UNHCR in Turkey (see a.o. UNHCR, 2007; UNHCR, 2008; UNHCR, 2009).

African migrants

Due to the lack of official figures, the number of African nationals has to be guessed and triangulated. According to a Nigerian pastor I talked to in Istanbul, the estimated number of Nigerian nationals in Istanbul is 350, while the Nigerian newspaper Leadership estimated the number at around 3,000 for the whole country (Okojie, 2011). Many African nationals are business people, students, tourists, asylum seekers and refugees with a valid residence permit and visa. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons, a number of African nationals...
live in Istanbul without a proper residence permit. People of other nationalities, age groups (including children) and socio-economic backgrounds also find themselves in a similar situation. The following section attempts to shed light on some of the characteristics of these residents, with a particular focus on gender and generation.

Stereotypes and prejudices among African nationals
As can be seen throughout the text, African nationals are subject to stereotyping and prejudice. Above all, these prejudices have been uttered against Nigerians. Not only do they constitute a large proportion of African nationals in Istanbul, they also stem from the most populous country on the African continent, which may account for some of the attitudes towards them. Olukoya Ogen and Sola Akinrinade (2009:4) formulate it like this: “It is an indisputable fact that Nigerians resident abroad now constitute the lion’s share of the membership of the new African diaspora” and further: “the huge size of the Nigerian diaspora has also to do with Nigeria’s high population figure of over 140 million inhabitants as well as the aggressive and resilient nature of Nigerians to tap into any available opportunity anywhere in the world.”46 When Edward from Burundi recalled the failed project to start an African organisation in Istanbul (see Chapter 6), he pointed to the fact that the choice of a Nigerian for the position of chairman was not supported by many non-Nigerians, because, in Edward’s words, they were not considered ‘neutral’. Many of the Nigerians interlocutors praised their compatriots’ intelligence, cleverness, entrepreneurial skills and good looks – irrespective of how much they lamented their compatriots’ incapacity to cooperate and engage in trusting relations. Victor, a Nigerian national around 30 years of age, talked about the bad reputation of Nigerians, or the “stigma”, as he called it: “We should be proud to be Nigerians, but we are not, we have a very bad international name.” However, in the next sentence he puts things into perspective by adding: “OK, they know we are very good footballers here, and if you meet a good-looking African it is usually a Nigerian” (March 2008). Mary from Kenya, who was engaged to a Nigerian, commented on the difference between Kenyans and Nigerians: “Compared to the Nigerians there is real solidarity among

46 Especially the last statement on ‘the resilient and aggressive nature of Nigerians’ – in all its heavy essentialist weight notion – has been uttered by many of my interlocutors as well.
us Kenyans. We are not like them, there is no lying, no fishy-fishy, no jealousy. You cannot trust them, and they don’t even trust each other. But not only here, it is the same in their country. That is just their culture! That’s what my fiancé tells me” (May 2008).

Among the English-speaking African nationalities, Nigerians had both negative and positive reputations. One day, at the Kenya house,\(^47\) two Nigerian men arrived, knocked on the door, entered and sat down on the sofa. One of the two men had arranged work for three absent Kenyans in a coastal town and had now come to inquire whether they were satisfied with it. He also had job contacts in Istanbul, and Ruth used the occasion to inform him about her need for a job. He nodded and replied that he would take care of that. When they left, Ruth smiled happily. “Nigerians seem to have a lot of contacts,” I said. – “Yes,” confirmed Ruth, “you ask them for a job and you go to them when you want to travel to Greece. They are sharp, you know!” She also added: “And apart from that, they are many!” (1 May 2008). When I visited the Kenya house in early 2008, Sally was there with her newborn baby. She said that she was obsessed with her child, and tenderly called her “Kenyan girl” and “Nigerian girl”.\(^48\) Four other people were sitting on the sofa in the living room, watching a Nigerian ‘Nollywood’ film about a woman who fell in love with a man whose financial situation was precarious. Despite this she felt forced to marry a rich man whom she did not love. Her lover started to work as a gardener at the rich man’s house, and they both tried – unsuccessfully – to control their emotions. The woman solicited the help of a witch doctor, who provided her with an elixir that would make her husband fall asleep when mixed with his food. This worked well for a while, until the husband found out, leaving the movie to end without a happy end. All the Kenyans in the room were visibly engaged in the film and laughed and commented on the unfortunate lovers’ undertakings. Many of them had a favorite Nollywood actor. As no Kenyan films are available in Istanbul, they often watch Nigerian film that they have borrowed from other Nigerians (2 March 2008).

The Nigerian presence is clearly noticeable in Istanbul. Although most of the Nigerian interlocutors expressed their awareness of their internationally bad reputation, it seemed that among Sub-Saharan

\(^47\) The Kenya house is a small two-roomed flat that provides shelter for Kenyans who are new to the city as well as to any other Kenyan who does not have any place to live.

\(^48\) The father of the little girl was from Nigeria.
Africans in Istanbul, they were both loved and hated for their significant presence, their contacts and their cultural influence. Nigerians, on the other hand, despite expressing a deep distrust of many of their compatriots, often reproduced the alleged Nigerian superiority over other African nations.

**Gender aspects**

Some of the scholarly literature refers to an increased feminisation of migration (Castles & Miller, 1998:9). Among the migrants from African countries, the gender ratio is very different. Once again, Edward provided me with an overview, this time related to the relative presence of men and women among the migrants from African countries.

(I) “It is interesting what you say about families, do you think that there are more women migrating now to Istanbul?” – “No, it is up to the community. Like if we speak about some communities, only women are here, and in other communities only men. When you talk about Ethiopia and Eritrea, you see more women. Why? Because most of the Eritrean and Ethiopian women who are here don’t come straight from Africa. They are women who were somehow trafficked somewhere to Lebanon or Syria, and then they stayed there for some years and then they see that the promise they were given in the beginning from Africa are wrong, and then they decided to come here. So when they come here, they have two aims, they come from Syria and Lebanon, they want to work here in Istanbul, that’s the first aim, the second aim is to pass here to go to Greece. It is only when they reach here that sometimes they get information about UNHCR. And then they can apply and decide to stay here while they are waiting for the decision. Most of them coming from Lebanon and Syria and few of them from Sudan. We have many few men from Eritrea or Ethiopia.

Somali, we have both men and women. Sudanese, we have more men than women. Congolese and Nigeria, we have more men than women. Ghana people we have more men of course. Except those four African countries that are well known providers for Lebanon and Syria, the four countries are Ethiopia, Eritrea, Nigeria and Ghana. Those four countries are well-
known, there are some kind of agencies, to recruit women to work in houses in Lebanon and Syria. These agencies only exist in these four countries within Africa. Why, we don’t know. We know that these women and girls face troubles in these countries, some of them are killed. Some of them are used in the nightclubs, sex industry, but it seems that whenever African Governments talk about these issues, it seems that they know that those girls work and they bring money home, or they go to school. In Asia there are so many countries doing that, like the Philippines, but in Africa only these four countries.”

(Edward, April 2008, taped conversation)

From Edward’s statement, it seems that the reasons for the emigration of Ethiopian, Eritrean, Nigerian and Ghanaian women are mainly to connected to the international (and particularly Middle Eastern) demand for cheap female labour and the prevalence of recruitment agencies. Indeed, some scholars (for instance Sales, 2007) have pointed to recruitment agencies as an important player in the field of migration studies, accounting for reasons of out-migration.

In recent decades, the structural changes in the countries of origin have contributed to an increased feminisation of poverty, which leads large numbers of women into transnational migration for low-wage jobs stereotyped as ‘female’ (see for example Sassen, 1998). By and large these jobs are in the care, health, entertainment and cleaning sectors and in prostitution, and women end up working as nannies, domestic workers and sex workers, entertainers or cleaners, irrespective of the level of education they acquired in the country of origin (Lutz, 2008a). Overall, the feminisation of migration is a development that is rooted in structural changes in both the sending and receiving countries, as well as the social legitimacy of gendered emigration and immigration (see Oishi, 2005; and Sales, 2007). According to Içduygu (2006:6), migrant women outnumber men in the informal labour market in Istanbul, and are generally

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49 Sassen (1998) points to the consequences of the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the IMF and World Bank on women in developing countries. The eradication of traditional businesses and employment possibilities (women being mostly engaged in traditional settings, either paid or unpaid) leads to women becoming unemployed, especially as there are few employment possibilities in the ‘adjusted’ rural parts of the country. Thus, women are more likely to feel forced to look for employment in other parts of the country (urban), on the continent or in other parts of the globe (international). Nana Oishi (2005) observed that internal rural-urban migration is in many countries a catalyst for international migration.
employed in domestic work, entertainment, the sex industry and the textile, restaurant and food-processing industries. Thus, the claim that the individual migrant in Istanbul is usually a single young man (for example in Danış, 2010:217) only applies to some nationalities. For others, as we can be seen above, women dominate in number.

Michael, a soft-spoken, friendly man who arrived in Istanbul in 2004, is one of the central characters in the social network of Ethiopians and Eritreans surrounding the East African church. He confirmed Edward’s observation of the gender ratio among Eritreans and Ethiopian nationals. “There are more women here, I think, but most of them don’t come from Eritrea or Ethiopia directly, they come from Syria, Lebanon, and few from Sudan. They cannot get visas from Eritrea to Turkey, and it is very difficult to come here directly. They used to go from Eritrea to Sudan, then from there to Libya, and then to Turkey by boat; it is a long way. But most of the women who work in Syria or Lubnan [Lebanon].” – “And were they working there in the house [as domestic servants]? Why do they come to Turkey?” – “It’s hard for them there: they pay them 100, 150, 200 dollars, which is not a lot of money and they are often now allowed out. They keep them in the house. The Arabs are very strict and treat them badly in their house. They either escape or leave after the contract has ended. Most of them have a contract for two or three years. Then they come here.” Like in other Southern European countries, in Turkey the increasing participation of native women in the labour market, coupled with the absence of a redistribution of traditional female tasks, leads to an externalisation of these areas of re-distribution of work, which are often filled with Turkish women from the east as well and, increasingly, immigrant women (Kaska, 2006; Keough, 2006).

In Istanbul, Michael told me, women have an advantage because there is a great demand for domestic services, whereas “men, they don’t have a chance to work here in Turkey, it is very difficult – especially if they don’t know the language.” The few Eritrean and Ethiopian men I met did translation work for the support organisations or for the UNHCR. Others were involved in the East-African church. The East-African church attracts Ethiopians and Eritreans, most of who have either applied for asylum or have the strong intention of continuing to Greece. Only a handful of members possess a
work permit; all are women. The following discussion took place in November 2007, at the beginning of my fieldwork, and is part of a general portrayal of the Eritreans and Ethiopians in the city.

(I): “Do any of them [who work here] have work permits?” – “Yes, some of them have work permits, some of them do not, but very few actually have one, it is difficult. In the church we have 4 or 5 women who have work permits.” – “Do you have to apply in your home country? Or can you come and apply here?” – “No, no, it is tricky (laughs). They get marriage contracts with a Turkish man, and then they get passport. Three years ago we could get passports in one or two months, but now you have to wait two to three years. But you have a residence permit during this time. (…) They ask them for a lot of money. It depends on the person, 3000, 4000 dollars. Some of them have work permits, they come from Ethiopia, and they work here with exports. But they have a trade visa for which they applied in Ethiopia. But this is very rare. And these people, they go back again to Ethiopia.” – “Do also men marry Turkish women?” – “Yes, but it is very difficult, they ask a lot of money. (…) It is easier for women to get married to Turkish men. And then finally they divorce and …. Yes, that’s the system.” (Michael, November 2007, tape-recorded conversation)

Portraying marriage as a contract in order to get a passport clearly underlines the functional nature of this practice. As Michael states, apart from the labour market, Ethiopian and Eritrean women also seem to move forward more easily on the marriage market than their male counterparts.

Kenyans are another nationality where women are overrepresented in Istanbul. On a Sunday in April 2008, the informal head of the Kenyan organisation – Steve – and his wife made a list of all the Kenyans living in Istanbul. The purpose of the list was to see how many Kenyans might be able to contribute to the for the Kenya house for the following month. Including those working in the tourist resorts along the Mediterranean, the list amounted to only twenty names, two-thirds of which were female. Kenyan women either work in Istanbul in the domestic services, in textile shops, in restaurants and cafés, or in tourism along the Mediterranean coast.

However, among the Nigerian nationals in Istanbul, women are in
the minority, and all the male interlocutors unanimously shared the view that “life in Istanbul is not suitable for Nigerian women”. Peter observed that: “When a woman arrives on her own and is handicapped, a man will take her in as his girlfriend.” – “Handicapped?” I exclaimed. – “Yes,” he replied, “if she doesn’t have money he will take her in, give her a house, a roof and food, she cooks and gives sexual favours also. He helps her, she helps him. Of course, it is not good for the women, but both are helped that way,” he concluded.

In spite of this gloomy picture of Nigerian women in Turkey, Peter observed that women do have one advantage. Like Michael, he understands that it is easier to marry a Turkish man than a Turkish woman – whether for love or for money. Many of the Nigerians who have spent more than five years in this country are women. A few of them have acquired Turkish citizenship, which gives them a special position in their own national network. Not only can they start a legal business, negotiate with Turkish officials and file a court case, they can also re-marry within the (national or African) network and secure a residence permit for their future husbands. These women are usually rather entrepreneurial. As will be seen in more detail in Chapter 7, they start up in business, trade items that sell profitably in Nigeria and import African goods.

Children
Most of the African migrants in Istanbul travel on their own. Some have a spouse and children in their home country. However, I also encountered a few individuals travelling with families; some women have given birth to children during their stay in Istanbul or in the countries in which they had lived previously. Some of these women were single mothers, with the father of the child(ren) being absent for various reasons, ranging from separation to deportation and onward migration.

Tina’s child was born during her stay in Lebanon, shortly after the child’s father was deported back to the West African country of origin. Ruth gave birth to a baby while in a relationship with a Nigerian man in Istanbul. The couple separated and Ruth now has sole responsibility for the girl. Sally from Kenya also became pregnant during a brief relationship with a Nigerian man. The couple split up, and the man returned to his country of origin, occasionally supporting Sally and their child financially. Grace from Nigeria used
to work with her husband in Lebanon, where the first two children were born. Now, the whole family lives in Istanbul, the birthplace of their third child. Amaka also gave birth to her child during her time in Lebanon. Her husband is already in Spain, and Amaka and their child are in Istanbul and hoping to join him soon.

Generally, Turkish people are regarded as being fond of children. The above-mentioned Tina, Ruth and Sally – all parents of small children between the age of six months and four years – have first-hand experience of this. “They don’t like us blacks,” Sally said, “but they love our babies.” Tina stated that she only left the house with her son, and never went out alone. “If I go with him, people don’t stare at me, and the police leave me alone. He speaks Turkish to them, and they like him.” As Tina’s statement reveals, migrant children are usually fluent in Turkish, and often translate for their mothers navigating their way in the city. In a longer conversation about safety and police behaviour in the city, Tina made the explicit point of her child as her protection. “Yes,” she stated, “the police, they also make controls in this neighbourhood, but they have never checked me,” and pointed at her child sitting next to her on the couch. “He is my protection” (1 October 2008). Kristin Kastner (2010:22ff) described a similar situation among Nigerian female migrants in Morocco, who understood that their born and unborn babies increased their safety both during their stay in Morocco and on their arrival in Spain.

All the (single) mothers with whom I had discussions expressed their concern for their children’s well-being in their situation of irregularity. For many, the lack of schooling was particularly worrying. In my conversations with women, the scarcity of day-care facilities – and above all the high costs of their services – was identified as the most prominent reason for their unemployment and, therefore, their financial and social vulnerability. The following is an excerpt from my conversation with Tina, in which she explained that there were job possibilities as domestic workers in Istanbul, but that she could not accept them because she did not have anyone who could take care of her child.

50 Importantly, the term husband does not necessarily refer to a marriage with certification. Often, the terms husband or wife are used to describe a long-lasting family relationship (including a child) (see also Kastner, 2010 on this term among Nigerian migrants in Morocco and Spain).
“(...) If you go to the French Embassy you find a job, I find a job, maybe three times, but where can I take her [child]? (...) They needed someone who speaks French. And cook French food. This is what I was doing in Lebanon. So I went there, the first job was 1,000 Euro, but the woman said: ‘You cannot bring the baby! She would be in the room the whole day.’ You know, they have a villa and downstairs I have my room and everything there, and the baby would have to stay in the house the whole day, which is not good. So she did not want that.” – (…) “So did you work there?” – “No. The husband is from France, but the wife is Turkish. They have two kids of school age and both the husband and the woman work. So I would be alone in the house, maybe cooking, cleaning. (…) And the other job was the man from Belgium and the woman from Italy and they were married. But they didn’t have kids.” – “And you also found it though the French Embassy?” – “Yea, a different job, I went there twice” – “But you never worked” – “No, (...) because of my condition [baby] they cannot accept (...). And nobody can take care of the baby, everybody is looking for that” – “Did you ask around if someone could take care of your baby?” – “I went to this Turkish place [day-care centre], they told me that it would cost 300 million [300 YTL] to take care of my baby, from 7 am to 5 pm. Per month. That is a lot for me. And the job that I am going to find, if the job is stay in the house then you cannot go home, you only go home on a Friday night and on Sunday morning you go back to the job. It is not a job that allows you to come and go.” (Tina, April 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Ruth confirms Tina’s analysis of the problem. Ruth, who has been struggling to find a job during much of my period of fieldwork, said that it was very easy to find a job in an Istanbulian household – as long as one does not have a child to take care of, she sighs. “But you know, I love her very much, and I always feel very good when I am with her,” she said reassuringly, looking at her little daughter who is making clicking noises and trying (successfully) to charm me.

Migrant mothers – especially when single – can also profit from beneficial treatment by support organisations and sometimes also during and after the asylum process. For example, while migrants
have to travel to the UNHCR in Ankara for asylum-related procedures, applicants identified as ‘vulnerable’ are able to process their applications from Istanbul. Also, two of the support organisations said that they prioritise the most vulnerable, whom they identified as women with small children or pregnant women. Finally, many women with children who were interviewed in this study stated that they had actively chosen to remain in Istanbul, because they regarded the cheaper connection to Greece by sea (around 1,300 US dollars) as too dangerous to undertake with their children. Tina even has already set a foot on the boat when she panic-stricken took her child and jumped out of the boat again. “No, I cannot do that with my baby,” she states, “I cannot.”

Grace, whom I met for the first time in May 2008, recounted a similar story. I first noticed her large, almond-shaped eyes, which set her apart from the other Nigerian women in the IIMP courtyard. She had arrived three weeks ago, she said, with her husband and two children, from Lebanon. She told me that they had walked across the Syrian-Turkish border; her husband with the luggage, she with the almost two-year-old boy on her back and their five-year-old daughter holding her hand. It was terrible, she said, not that expensive, but terrible. “I never want to do this again,” she said with effort. “We left Lebanon to go to Greece, but I will not cross any border illegally anymore! The water is too dangerous; it is no option for children. There is a safe connection by car over the land border, for about 2,500 dollars per adult.” But, she said, for 5,000 US dollars she would prefer to go back to Nigeria with her family. When I met here again in September of the same year, the journey again came up.

“My son was 19 months old, I carried him on my back, holding my daughter’s hand. He asked me all the time: ‘Mommie, where are we going? Mommie, where are we going?’ He asked again and again, and I didn’t know what to answer him.”

(Grace, 29 September 2008)

Her eyes filled with tears. She turned away to dry them, visibly making an effort to suppress sobs. Her son was sitting next to her, showing her a toy that he had found in the toy box, and – alarmed by his mother tears – clings to her arm. She patted his head lovingly and

As stated above, UNHCR often identified women with children as vulnerable.
admired at the toy. She found a tissue in her pocket, dried her tears and continued her story – even though she said that she no longer wanted to think about this particular period of her life.

“It was simply horrible. I would never advise anyone to do this journey. On this journey, many migrants get robbed. They rob the men and beat them, sometimes they rape the women, and sometimes they even kill them. When we were hiking, I saw human bones lying in a bush; that was not an animal that was a human being, can you imagine?! Nothing happened to me; I had one child on my back, the other holding my hand, that was some kind of protection, you know. My husband carried all the luggage, clothes and stuff. Many are abused by the police and border guards, especially in Syria. They have big dogs at the border, big like that (she indicates with her hand a dog the size of a calf). When we approached the border, one dog like that came to me. But he only sniffed. Then he went again.” – “Oh, you are so lucky!” – “Yes, I consider myself a lucky woman. After three days and nights we came to a farmer’s house. I asked for water to wash the children, but also to drink. They demanded 50 dollars!! It is a bad game, and it is a big game. It is not good. I don’t want to think back.”

(Grace, 29 September 2008)

Like Tina, Grace perceived the presence of her children as protective. Once in Istanbul, the family travelled down to Izmir to take the boat to Greece. The goal was Spain. A friend of hers lives there and told her that it was good there. There are jobs and schools for the children. But, like Tina, when faced with the small rubber boat, the family decided not to risk the trip. “If I had been alone, I would have done it, but not with the children.” More composed, she said that she no longer wanted to travel, but was instead contemplating going back to Nigeria. “At least, the children can go to school there.”

Despite the stories of migrant boats capsizing, and the tales of women and families refusing to risk the trip in a small rubber boat, some parents do make the trip with their children. When Victor crossed from the Turkish coast to a Greek island by rubber boat, several small children were on the boat. Victor recalled the following:
“All the adults sat on the brink, the children were in the middle. We were about 25 people from Sudan, Somalia, Pakistan, Bangladesh and three Nigerians. There were children, Brigitte, how pathetic! I almost cried when I saw that. I asked myself: must we really go to Europe?”
(Victor, 23 September 2008)

A family perspective has often been missing in research on step-wise migration (Kastner, 2010; Stock, 2011). Previous research has seldom acknowledged migrant women or migrant mothers as autonomous subjects of the researcher’s gaze (Stock, 2011). Often, such research has emphasised women’s dependency on men and exploitation through prostitution and trafficking. This, Inka Stock (2011) indicates, has reified the dominant picture of women as passive and suppressed victims who are devoid of agency. In a similar line of reasoning, Kastner (2010) highlights the helplessness of female migrants in terms of gendered violence, and emphasises these women’s knowledge about movement and reaching their migratory project, in spite of the obstacles. The presence of family migration among Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco indicates a variety of occurrences behind the migratory formations of a couple with children or of single mothers (Kastner, 2010; Stock, 2011). Although only a few families migrate together from the country of origin to the points of transit and final destination, many women either become pregnant in Morocco or on the long and hazardous journey to this country. This journey often coincides with rape – or sexual intercourse as a form of exchange for money and other daily necessities – both by co-migrants as well as border guards and police. My research did not reveal any cases of rape – but I never asked the specific question. However, some studies do report the occurrence of physical violence and sexual abuse against (Somali and Ethiopian) migrant women in Istanbul (Jureidini, 2010:10-1).

Support organisations
There are a relatively small number of migrant support organisations in Istanbul. The following section presents them, their target groups and scope of work.

The Refugee Advocacy and Support Programme (hereafter referred as RASP) of the Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly (hCa) (in
2007/08) provided legal advice to migrants in their asylum process with the UNHCR in Ankara and with the Turkish state, and assisted and advised recognised refugees in the resettlement process. Their sub-projects included gathering information about detention conditions, the treatment of queer migrants, and some particular cases in local courts, as well as assisting the unaccompanied.

The Istanbul Inter-parish Migrant Programme (IIMP), centrally located in Beyoğlu, had open office two days a week. IIMP is a project carried by seven Christian churches in Istanbul providing material support for migrants in need, i.e. medical assistance, food assistance, and counselling. A board member indicated that: “Usually they [migrants] need this emergency money when they are new here. After that they find their own people and make friendships and find solutions themselves.” In some cases, the IIMP also helps to repatriate people to their country of origin. However, the organisation’s budget is limited and situations arise every now and then where the cost of treatment exceeds the organisation’s budget. In May 2008, the organisation tried to find a sponsor for a West African national suffering from a kidney problem and needing weekly dialysis. “It would not be the first one that we leave to die,” a member of the organisation stated, dryly. In February 2008, IIMP met with almost 220 clients from more than 20 countries for some 400 consultations. The majority of the clients came from Nigeria (54), followed by Iran (26), Sri Lanka and Ghana (19 each), Eritrea (16), Ethiopia and Sudan (10 each), DRC and the Philippines (9 each), Kenya (7) and a couple of other Asian and African countries. Fifteen of the female clients were pregnant (IIMP, 2009).

The Moms and Tots group, which meets once a week, also provides a venue for support, as well as the formation of social ties. Organised by a Christian church congregation in Beyoğlu, its target group is migrant women with small children and pregnant women. In addition to serving a hot meal, the group tries to secure the services of a doctor, a nurse or a midwife in order to provide basic general health care and pre- and post-natal check-ups. There are toys for the children, and organised gatherings with singing and other social and educational activities. During my fieldwork period the group was usually frequented by around 15 children up to the age of ten, their mothers as well as pregnant women.
Race and ethnicity in the field

The above sections have dealt with the more practical aspects of Sub-Saharan Africans lives in Istanbul. In this section I will consider issues of identity and explore the question of what it means to have black skin in the specific context of the Turkish metropolis. The section will first present theoretical perspectives of race and ethnicity, and show how boundary- and meaning making along these lines play out in everyday life in Istanbul from the perspective of Sub-Saharan Africans. As in the rest of this thesis, consideration is given to the experiences and understandings of the research participants, both in relation to a specific segment of the Turkish public – the police – and to the people they meet in the public space. Furthermore, the section looks at negotiations of safety. Here practices of deception and ‘blending in’ are presented, through which migrants increase their safety. Finally, the section highlights individual struggles against imposed categorisations that are sometimes perceived as an overwhelming force presenting a serious challenge to a migrant’s own sense of self.

Let us first of all take a brief look at the societal context in which my interlocutors’ perceptions of themselves and those of the receiving

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52 See Suter (2012b) for the same discussion including gender aspects.
society have been shaped. As Murat Ergin (2008) has pointed out, the racial framework applied in contemporary Turkish society is intrinsically linked to the European and North American discourse on race, which was heavily drawn upon in the construction of Turkishness after the foundation of the Republic. In this development, while stressing Turkish identity’s affiliation to whiteness, “images of Africa and the Arab World have been successfully associated with darkness, backwardness and disorganisation” (Ergin, 2008:844). History textbooks reveal “prejudiced views against minorities, ethnocentrism and xenophobia” (2008:841), while some newspaper journalists – “losing any kind of inhibition” – depict Africans in particular in very offensive ways (2008:844). Considering this, the Turkish racial framework seems to be deeply rooted in nation building and, thus, intrinsically linked to national identity. Migration in general and migration from African countries in particular have not entered the political public discourse in Turkey (Doğan, 2007:441). Migrants are often portrayed as criminals (İçduygu & Biehl, 2008:46). What is more, the stereotyping of migrants – and of African migrants as drug dealers – has been openly spread, both by the daily newspapers and by government officials (İçduygu & Biehl, 2008:46-7). The public picture of Africa is vague, and when it has been presented at all, Africa has mostly been portrayed on Turkish television in terms of poverty, conflict and disease (Özkan & Akgün, 2010:532). Studies among the Turkish TV audience indicate that there is a certain tendency to sympathise with Africans as victims of European colonisation, as well as victims of poverty (Doğan, 2007:441). As the following section shows, African migrants in Istanbul and other places in Turkey feel the effects of this one-sided image with which their states of origin are commonly portrayed.

The concepts of ethnicity and race
Here I will briefly go through the concepts of ethnicity and race before applying them to the material. Ethnicity and race are concepts that are used to account for differences between groups of people and to justify the boundaries drawn between them. Rather than following the primordial views of race and ethnicity, i.e. understanding ethnicity as something given and static, in this thesis the use of the term ethnicity adheres to the scholarship that sees ethnicity as socially constructed, thereby receiving and altering its meaning in
different contexts. The basis of ethnic identity formation lies in the perception of a common descent (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007:16), or in other words: “the social construction of an origin” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1993:4). What matters is therefore not what there is, but what is being perceived (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007:17). Furthermore, ethnicity designates the identity of a group in relation to another group of people that is perceived and perceives itself as culturally distinct (Eriksen, 1993:13). The formation of an ethnic identity is usually perceived to be a self-conscious process in which choice prevails. However, Cornell & Hartmann (2007:20) point to the impact of external labelling. Especially in majority-minority relations, and in cases of visible physical differences, ethnic identity formation is subjected to external labelling and ceases to be a matter of choice (Waters, 2001, in: Osanami Törngren, 2011:42). Ethnic identity formation can be highly fluid, as it is created in encounters with groups that are perceived to be “different”. What constitutes difference or commonality is established in relations and may be highly situational and context-dependent (see Barth, 1969). Thus, in every social interaction, differences and commonalities intersect and create an interplay of priorities in “master and subordinate positions” (Hughes, 1945). The disposition of the hierarchies shifts depending on context, thus impacting the expressions of ethnicity.

The division between the concepts of race and ethnicity is not clear-cut, and in fact, some scholars do not recognise any divide. While Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1993:14) refrains from distinguishing race relations and ethnicity, and instead treats race relations as one layer of ethnicity inasmuch as it is used as a boundary to designate “us” from “them”, Cornell & Hartmann (2007:28ff) convincingly list several good reasons for not doing so. Their argumentation is based on the European and North American historical development of ethnic relations, and addresses the exercises of power and domination stemming from the categorisation of people into racial groups.53 In this thesis, race is treated as “socially constructed ideas about different individuals and groups based on their visible differences” (Osanami Törngren, 2011:16). The fact that they are constructed does not prevent people assigned to different racial categories from experiencing their real consequences (ergo race matters).

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53 However, there are situations in which ethnicity and race overlap, e.g. when racial identification is claimed by the group itself.
Like ethnicity, the concept of race can help to organise networks on the basis of a common self-understanding and an internal and external identification of race, as shown in the material gathered through fieldwork.

The dynamics of boundary-making

Expressions of self-identification and identification in general have been widespread in all my conversations in the field – even though identity aspects have never been at the core of our conversations.

Despite their common regional geographical origin (Sub-Saharan Africa) and religion (Christianity), my interlocutors were not a homogeneous group of people. In fact, although they often presented themselves as such (a homogeneous group) in relation to the whites, to Turkish people, to Europeans, to Arabs and to Muslims, in other situations they were very careful to point out the social differences between them. Boundaries were then constituted in narration along the lines of nationality, region and village of origin, socio-economic background, gender, age, family constellation, cultural capital or religious affiliation (such as Catholic, Protestant, Evangelical). Furthermore, the concepts used by my interlocutors to account for their understanding of ethnic relations in Istanbul had shifting meanings, depending on the interlocutor and the situation the person was dealing with or referring to. How can we make sense of these shifting meanings in the analysis? Firstly, the chosen branch of ethnicity theories suggests the acknowledgment of the social context, the relational nature as well as the social construction and the non-static, fluid nature of identity formations. Secondly, the intersectional perspective (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005) enables us to see a social field in which power structures are not hierarchical and static, but shifting.

Turkish nationals were usually identified as ‘white’ by the migrants I met. However, ‘white’ had various meanings that could quickly change and even be counter-posed. For example, at times, ‘white’ signified ‘Europe’, which in turn came to imply ‘human rights and jobs’. In these instances, this was usually contrasted to Turkish people who were then seen as ‘non-white’. In Istanbul, tales of the benefits of reaching Europe were often evoked when trying to make
sense of the legal protection and the economic shortcomings they encountered in the city. At other times, though, ‘white’ was contrasted with black skin, and included Turkey as well.

Racial identification was often implied and sometimes emphasised by my interlocutors when recalling how they were mistreated by the police or by the general public. In such situations they would talk about themselves and other Africans as ‘black’ and as ‘blacks’ – almost with a capital B, i.e. not only referring to black as the skin colour but as an imagined community sharing a similar culture, thereby basically insinuating a social category. In many statements there were traits of essentialising, both on Blackness and on Whiteness. In other situations, when discussing issues not directly related to Turkish society, such as the solidarity among African nationals, the social identification of my interlocutors shifted towards other social categories. Victor, for example, would often stress his Nigerian origin when discussing other African nationalities, such as the Somali. He would also stress his Igbo ethnic belonging when discussing intra-Nigerian ethnic tensions, and would stress his middle-class background (i.e. the urban upbringing, the high education, as well the monogamous marriage of his parents) to explain his feeling of being different from most of the other Igbos in Istanbul.

Importantly, the images of blackness (and whiteness) were shaped long before their arrival in Istanbul. My research participants’ understandings of global discourses of blackness and the global dispersion of Western and to some degree African culture have shaped their perceptions. How blackness is lived and expressed in Istanbul and in the wider Turkish context thus has to be seen as a glocal version of particular racial and cultural relations, i.e. a version that is shaped locally but deeply influenced by global (historical) factors (see also Listerborn, 2012).

On treatment by the general Turkish public
The following two sub-sections provide accounts of how Sub-Saharan African migrants are treated by the Turkish general public and by some individuals in institutionalised roles, such as the police and landlords.

The accounts I collected about Sub-Saharan Africans’ contacts with Turkish nationals are rather diverse. Albeit expressed in different ways, there is a clear emphasis on boundary-making – from
looks to verbal insults to mistreatment – that designates difference (and fills it with meaning). My interlocutors perceived their skin colour to be an issue, in that it seemed to trigger conscious or unconscious associations with Africans as a threat, as uncivilised, as overly sexualised, and with Africa as a continent that was war-torn and poor. Many research participants complained about open disrespect – including uninhibited curiosity.

Etienne, a Congolese student who had spent several years in Istanbul and who spoke Turkish fluently said: “People on the street come up to me, they touch me, my arm, my skin, my hair. They are curious, but in a bad way. And they call us: aşağı, zenci, yamyam (slaves, niggers, cannibals).” He explained: “This is why all the African students always have headphones on; always listening to music, so we don’t have to listen to the people on the street. Turkish people think black people are just good for sports and music. When they see a Chinese, they say ‘Jackie Chan’, they say ‘slave’ to us. Do you know what the biggest difference is between a Turk and a French man? The French man doesn’t ask me whether I sleep on the street, they know that we are humans” (16 and 17 November 2007).

His friend Stan added: “I met my [European] girlfriend at the hotel in the coastal town in which I worked during summer. We fell in love and shortly afterwards she came to visit me in Istanbul. When we were walking in the streets, sometimes cars stopped, and people shouted stuff at us. My girlfriend was really shocked and asked ‘why are these people behaving like this?’ – I just said ‘welcome to my world’” (19 November 2007).

A Nigerian football player, Tony, whom I came into contact with at a call shop in Laleli, shared his own experiences: “They don’t want to see a black guy with a white girl. I was on the bus once talking to a Turkish girl and an old guy came up and threatened to kill me. The girl was forced to move away from me. I did not do anything, it is just because of this”, he said, pointing to his skin (14 May 2008).

Both men and women experienced degrading treatment by people on the street, and both men and women noticed a certain sexual interest in them. Many men told me that they were often asked by Turkish men to arrange a meeting with a black woman, while many women, such as Sally, experienced (verbal) sexual harassment on the street.
Relations with the police
On a Saturday morning in May 2008, I bumped into Ruth and Nicky (18 months old) in Taksim Square. It was a warm and sunny morning, and Ruth had decided to take Nicky outside. We sat on the small fence surrounding the Atatürk Memorial, while Nicky played in the little square. She chased some pigeons and giggled happily. Pedestrians stopped, looked at her, started to talk to her and were visibly captivated by her charm. A young police officer stopped as well and playfully tried to catch Nicky’s attention. “Your baby?” He asked in Turkish, pointing at Ruth. – “Benim bebek,” she confirmed in broken Turkish. He was curious about her whereabouts, and apologised for his poor English.

This rather warm encounter between an African family and a Turkish police officer coexisted with another harsh reality. In the accounts of meetings with the majority society, and in conversations among the Africans I overheard, the police usually featured very prominently. Newcomers were especially fearful. The vast majority of people I talked to stated that police behaviour in Turkey towards Africans was problematic. In August 2007, the human rights association Helsinki Citizen’s Assembly (hCa) declared in a press release that there had been an increase in complaints concerning police behaviour against Africans in connection with the murder of Nigerian asylum-seeker Festus Okey.54

Racism and discrimination against immigrants in Turkey were also prominent in my conversations with Edward. Being a long-term resident of the Turkish metropolis, he was able to account for some of the developments relating to these issues:

54 Festus Okey was arrested on 20 August 2007 in the district of Beyoğlu, allegedly for possession of drugs. A few hours later he was shot dead at the Beyoğlu police station with a police bullet. The police officer claimed self-defence; something that the majority of the people I talked to vehemently dismissed. In November 2007, the case was sent to a higher court, the Beyoğlu Heavy Penal Court, because the Beyoğlu Court of First Instance decreed that the possibility of “intentional killing” could not be ruled out (Korkut, 2007). In December 2011, the police officer was sentenced to four years and two months imprisonment on charges of “negligence killing” (CNN Türk, 2011). The trial was heavily criticised by human rights organisations and the verdict was seen as an evidence of the discrimination against immigrants in the country (Dogan, 2011). The Nigerian Embassy did not act on the case.
“Is racism different now compared to 1991?” – “Every society probably evolves: Turkey is more familiar with us now and friendlier towards us. In 1991, 1992 and 1993, in that era, we were really in constant trouble, probably, as I said, due to society’s attitude towards us. For example, at that time you were always being asked for documentation, if you couldn’t produce it you were illegal, and could be beaten up or have your money stolen. You might also be detained and detention at that time meant being taken to the police station. You never knew when you would be released again; you could stay there for an-
ything from one week to three or four months. So sometimes the brothers, friends, would raise money and go to the police station to negotiate, so you needed your friends.” – “How much money for example?” – “Oh, in those days it was like 500 dollars, or 200 or 300 dollars. So all those things were related to black people and Asian people (…). Nowadays, we see that you can walk the streets without fear of being arrested or so, we have a better life now, you can be friends with the police. There have been changes, and now in Istanbul you can see that Turkish people and foreigners are getting together. As for the police, they don’t harass you in the same way as before.” – “But I hear that they still do harass people on the street.” – “Yes, they still do, but it is not as common as it was, they are not as harsh as they used to be. Of course there are always exceptions, but before, during those years, you might find two or three good policemen out of 100, but now it is the opposite (laughs).”

(Edward, 15 April 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Edward thus perceived an improvement in the way the police behaved towards (Sub-Saharan African) migrants. Already at the beginning of the 1990s, the presence of undocumented migrants constituted a source of income for many members of the police force. As many interlocutors stated, and as a report released by Helsinki Citizen’s Assembly (2007) confirmed, many undocumented migrants in Turkey are subjected to arbitrary and often unlawful detention for an indefinite amount of time.55

On a day in May 2008 I arrived at Nicole’s call shop in Laleli in order to meet a Nigerian acquaintance. Our conversation was semi-public, in that some of the other customers listened to what we were saying. After a while, Tony, a young Nigerian man waiting for a phone call raised his voice. Visibly enraged, he gave me some examples of police behaviour:

“Two months ago I was in a call shop in Kurtuluş, there were about fourteen people there. Then, all of sudden, the police came on motorbikes, the red and black ones [uniform]. They did not

55 Both sources witness to the unsatisfactory conditions in these centres, ranging from malnutrition, hostile treatment including beating, little or no access to medical treatment as well as little or no access to a (immigration) solicitor.
ask for passports, and they did not ask for *kimlik*, no, they asked for money! So, their question was not: ‘Where is your passport’, their question was: ‘How much money do you have?’ They threatened to plant drugs on the people who refused to give them money, and then arrest them. (…) That day, the police collected about 700 dollars from them.”

(Tony, 14 May 2008)

He also told the story of a Nigerian man who was stopped by the police in Tarlabası. The police shouted: “Hey you, come here! Your clothes look expensive!” They began calculating the costs of his shoes, trousers and shirt. They came to the conclusion: “You have too much money, give it to us.” When he refused to do so, they shot him in the leg. As it turned out, the same man has also played football with Festus Okey, the Nigerian who was shot dead in August 2007 while in police custody. He gave me his version of the story. “Festus also played in the Africa Cup, I used to play together with him. After that morning’s training session the police went to his house and asked for money. As he refused to give them anything he was taken to the police station, where he was beaten to death. After that they put a bullet in his head just to cover up the crime.” The man was visibly enraged when talking about these events. He also gave me several examples of how the police abused their power.

The motorcycled police teams that Tony and other interlocutors mentioned are colloquially called ‘the Dolphines’ (*yunuşlar*). They consist of special teams, established in 1993, whose main task is to deal with public disorder and terror incidents on the busy streets of Istanbul. Members of this team are usually new graduates from the police schools (see Berksoy, 2007:127ff). Biriz Berksoy (2007:130) interprets the formation of such teams as just one aspect of the Turkish state’s more profound politics of neo-liberalism since the coup d’état in 1980 – a development that goes hand in hand with increased control and coercion. Importantly, a couple of Turkish academics pointed out to me that police harassment and brutality in Turkey are not particularly directed at migrants. As one scholar from a local university clarified in oral communication, there is a certain culture within the police corps and other public institutions

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56 *Kimlik* translates as identity card.
57 The Africa Cup in Istanbul is an annual football tournament in which Africans play in national teams against each other. Many of them hope to secure a contracted position in a club.
that has always given vulnerable groups in Turkey a hard time. Serving the citizens is not part of this culture, despite having been trained in human rights.

At the beginning, Peter feared the police so much that he did not dare to leave the flat during his first four weeks in Istanbul. “I was told by the “old ones” [the more seasoned co-migrants] that the police would arrest me directly,” he explained six months later. “They put fear in me.” Two months upon arrival, he accompanies me to Tarlabası bulvar, but obviously feels uneasy: there is a police station some hundred meters away.

Aversion to the police seemed to be more pronounced among the Nigerians than among other people I met. During a visit to the flat of my Kenyan interlocutors in early March 2008, I saw – again – three civil policemen standing outside the building. Only a week prior to that they had entered the Kenyans’ flat, demanded to see everybody’s passports and visas and inquired about my presence. Already then, Ruth and the other Kenyans present had impressed me with their friendly, joking attitude vis-à-vis the policemen. “Çay istiyor musunuz? [Would you like some tea?],” Rose asked teasingly when they entered. The policemen laughed heartily at her boldness, and pinched Ruth’s child playfully on her cheek. They inquired about her father, “Afrika’da [in Africa],” Ruth replied. “But why in Africa, there are no jobs there, only war,” one police man joked, and his colleagues joined him in laughter. “I don’t fear them, you know,” Ruth explained afterwards, “if they want to take me they take me. We also tell them: ‘Afrika savaş’ [Africa war], most of them are nice.”

When I visit the house in March the policemen are again standing outside the house, talking into their radios. I enter the apartment and find Ruth and three other women sitting there, stoic and calm as usual. I tell them about the presence of the police outside their window and door, and Ruth says, “Yes, I know they are here. I don’t know what they are doing.” Nobody seems to pay particular attention to what is going on outside their flat. In the course of the next two hours, someone knocks on the door three times. Every time my heart pounds. As I am closest to the door I open it, but before opening the door I always ask whether I should open it. The
answer I unilaterally get is: “Of course you should open, [after all] somebody knocked!” On all three occasions it was another Kenyan paying a visit (2 March 2008).

Perceptions of Turkish ethnicity
This sub-section shows how Sub-Saharan African migrants look upon their stay in Istanbul, with an explicit focus on ethnicity, race and religion. The examples that follow reflect these migrants’ imposed and chosen position in Turkish society. Given the stated overall focus of my fieldwork on migrants in transit, discussions about Europe, whiteness and job opportunities were very frequent and hardly surprising. What is interesting, however, is how the statements about notions of geographical places and expressions of hope and hopelessness, of “good and bad”, were intersected with the categories of ethnicity, race, religion and gender.

In early April 2008 I became acquainted with Mary at the Kenya house, and shortly afterwards accepted her invitation to visit her at the textile shop in Osmanbey where she was employed. She told me about the difficulties she was experiencing in prolonging her visa, whereupon Paul unleashed a tirade of harsh words, ranting about Turkey, its people and their mentality. “And you know, they even think they are white!” he exclaimed. “They will never be able to join the European Union!” – “Arabs are better,” Mary endorsed his point by drawing on her experiences of Syria, where she stayed before arriving in Turkey. “But the Turks are neither Arabs nor Europeans, so what are they then?” Mary gave us a questioning look. “They have to be something,” she pondered. “They are confused people,” Paul, her fiancé, summarised, after his anger had dissipated. “Yes,” Mary agreed, “they want Africans to have papers, but when we go and apply for them they refuse. They are stupid, the Turks. If we had papers we would pay taxes. But, you know, the people see our skin colour and think that we are poor” (16 April 2008).

The above anecdote aptly directs attention to the question of Turkish ethnicity as seen from my interlocutors’ points of view. Obviously, whiteness here is understood as something positive, but something that neither Paul nor Mary think that Turkish people can qualify for. Furthermore, European versus Arab origin was often put into social categories with contrasting meanings. Depending on
the person, the value-setting shifted from negative to neutral to po-
sitive, and was largely connected to previous experiences of life in
an Arab country.

Unlike Mary, Caroline viewed Turkish people as belonging to the
Arabs, pointing to the food as one indication of this. Caroline, a
Nigerian woman in her forties who had lived in Lebanon for a cou-
ples of years prior to the war in 2006, concluded after two years in
Istanbul that Lebanon and Turkey were very similar. “The Arabs
are the same everywhere, the food is the same here also, OK, but
that is because they are all Arabs. I cannot say which place is better;
both here and there people are toiling. Both here and in Beirut, they
are exploited and not paid for their work. The biggest difference
is that it is easier to find a job in Lebanon. Here it is difficult, very
difficult” (27 September 2008).

As already mentioned, all my interlocutors were Christians, and
the fact that Turkey was a Muslim country was often one of the
first statements about their (new) place of dwelling against which
they perceived their identity. The Muslim aspect of their ‘host
country’ was – whenever mentioned – used to make sense of the
negative aspects of their lives. In fact, as the next example of Eddy
shows, it sometimes served as an explanatory factor to make sense
of the drawbacks of life in Turkey and, above all, the violation of
human rights.

Eddy, an Eritrean man in his late twenties who left his country
due to state persecution on religious grounds, spent much of his time
praying and reading the Bible, both alone and in a group. In late
April 2008 I went to the East-African church to celebrate orthodox
Eastern. At dinner, Eddy told us that he had to go to Izmir to regis-
ter, as the coastal town had been assigned to him as his satellite city58
during the asylum process. Eddy would have preferred to stay in
Istanbul, where he had a part-time job and where he was taking part
in the activities of the East-African church. He took the opportunity
to ask the invited guest, the South African pastor of an officially
recognised church in Istanbul, whether he could write a statement to
the police requesting his stay in the city. When the pastor told him
apologetically that previous attempts had not produced any positive
results, Eddy sighed: “Yeah, you know, they are Muslims” (27 April

58 See Chapter 4 on the Turkish asylum system.
Six months later, I met Eddy again in Athens. I asked him about the differences between Istanbul and Athens, and he replied: “Maybe it is more difficult to get a job here, but spiritually I feel much better here. I cannot explain it really. Maybe because this is a Christian country, or maybe because it is already Europe” (9 October 2008).

Eddy was not the only one to use Turkey’s official religion as an explanation for all kinds of negative experiences in the country; this was in fact very common. Many people I met would end their sentences with a shrug, a sigh and resignation: “They are Muslims, you know!” However, for some, the question of religion was not that simple. Like Mary, when Victor pondered on Turkish identity, he arrived at more questions than answers:

“Turkey is not in the EU, which is a big problem. They don’t respect human rights. And then it is Islamic, a confused Islamic community, because of [secularism], so they don’t go to the mosque. They are neither Christian nor Muslim, I wonder what they are.” (April 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Thus, as with religion, the fact that Turkey was not (yet) a member of the European Union was used to account for the negativities of their everyday lives. For example, when Mary tried to make sense of her co-nationals’ onward movement to Greece and other European countries, she said that:

“And when these people are going to Greece, they tell you it is better. And when you stay there for some time sometimes they give you papers, they have human rights! If you stay here there are no human rights. And the police here, they put you to jail and keep you there for two months, you come out with nightmares. This is why they are going and they are dying in the sea. They go and they work, even if only for little money, but they have some kind of salary and papers in Europe: they pay because they are humans. But here, when you are walking and you are black ... like you are walking on the road and somebody is throwing stones at you, they can pour water from above, anything they can throw, just because you are black.” (Mary, April 2008, tape-recorded conversation)
Here, Europe is contrasted to Turkey and depicted as a place in which people are seen as ‘human’. This implies safety from harassment on racial grounds, the payment of a salary for work, and a place where human rights are guaranteed.

Nevertheless, the perceptions of Europe are far from uniform. For some interview partners, as the following example will show, Europe – this time including Turkey – is criticised for the social relations between generations.

On a Sunday afternoon, Peter and I walked along Istiklal Street towards Taksim. At the corner of the Galatasaray Lisesi, we saw an old Turkish woman painstakingly picking up litter. I had seen the woman on a number of occasions and she seemed to be a hard worker who had little contact with passers-by. Peter looked at her and turned to me in disbelief: “You Europeans! Sometimes I really want to cry when I see how you treat elderly people! You, you just take care for yourself. It is different for us: I have the responsibility for my younger siblings and this is exactly why I am here.” My initial confusion at his outburst added an additional slant to our different perceptions of boundaries.

A prominent point of criticism was Europe’s colonial past. Several of the people I met believed that Europe owed them something, while others simply pointed to Europe’s impact on Africa’s problematic situation today. Victor was one of the young Nigerians who made a very pronounced statement on this matter:

“The way the white man came to Nigeria, they came through our local chiefs, offering gifts, offering mirrors, our forefathers had never seen mirrors before, they gave mirrors and in exchange they accessed the whole village and started slavery. And this is what is still happening now, you guys use what you have, your technology, your sciences, your ... whatever things you have, you still use it to exploit us even now.”

(Victor, 17 March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Shifting boundaries in a Turkish context

Below are two examples of situations that allowed the markers of difference to shift in a direction that was more advantageous for my interlocutors. Etienne, a Congolese student at one of Istanbul’s universities, told me how he, at the beginning of his studies, tried to negotiate his racial identity in Istanbul:
“Sometimes I used to tell people that I am from France. Because then they did not see me as a black, but as a European. People treated me differently that way. Even though there are a lot of prejudices against Europeans here too. People say they are uncultured and have lost their dignity, but if you are a black, especially from Africa, it is worse, because then you are not even seen as a human being.” (Etienne, 17 November 2007, tape-recorded conversation)

The next quote from Tony illustrates the context-dependency of these boundaries of difference:

“The Turks distinguish between two sorts of black people: as a football player, they love you in this country. But when they don’t know that I am a fotboler,59 they treat me badly. As soon as they know, they apologise and shake my hand and want to be my friends” (14 May 2008).

Both the above examples show how the understanding of race in Turkey is intersected with other categories. In Etienne’s case, it is the perceived hierarchy between different parts of the world, namely Europe and Africa. This allows Etienne to shift the markers of difference from race to ethnic belonging and to present himself as someone with a European background, rather than as a national of a Sub-Saharan African country. In the case of Tony, while the colour of his skin seems to evoke the negative racialised stereotype of an “African”, his occupation is positively valued in a Turkish context and becomes the master position (Hughes, 1945). For individuals from African countries, their stay in Turkey is subjected to a constant negotiation of these boundaries, which, as shown through the examples above, are rather fluid, unstable and context-dependent. My research has shown that a number of individuals have found ways of adapting, deceiving or resisting, and have thus managed to shift the boundaries or weaken the impact on their life in Istanbul.

**Negotiating safety**

Dark-skinned African migrants are not only targets of curiosity and occasional hassle in the street, but are also often exposed to police harassment through robbing and beating, threats of detention and deportation and occasionally even assaults resulting in death. In ad-

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59 The Turkish term for football player.
dition, the Nigerians among them have become well aware of their nationality’s bad reputation, almost “a stigma”, as Victor put it. In a context characterised by a high level of precariousness, uncertainty and lack of safety, everyday practices of ensuing safety are of the utmost importance. Practices of deception, along with practices of ‘blending in’ and not arousing suspicion, permeate the everyday life of African migrants, above all for those whose immigration status has not been legalised. Many of these tactical manoeuvres require a substantial, and often individually, carved knowledge of social hierarchies in the context.

While the previous section has given space to the “returning of the gaze”,60 here the practices of the subjects of the majority gaze are discussed in relation to safety. The following examples show how identities are negotiated. In the process, migrants are aware of their position stemming from the intersection of different social markers, and also recognise their own room for manoeuvre.

This section presents accounts of the behaviour of the police and Turkish people in public spaces, and the practices of protection and safety migrants have at their disposal. Furthermore, the section exemplifies how migrants struggle with their self-identification. Finally, it offers an analytic description of one person’s on-going struggle with his self-identification.

The social position of an individual in a local hierarchy of power is a product – fluid at times – of the intertwined, simultaneous representations that are both historically embedded as well as context-dependent (de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005:24). In some situations certain identifications are felt and expressed as ‘thick’, while in other situations the same aspect of one’s identification might be experienced as ‘thin’ and only marginally important (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007:81ff). Visible physical differences as well as the meaning thereof in a certain context are beyond the individual’s influence, and the same goes for sex (and therefore gender). On the other hand, ethnic origin, socio-economic background and legal status may allow for a slightly bigger manoeuvring space, but can ultimately be similarly fixed and beyond the control or influence of a single individual. For example, a female from Nigeria may well be

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60 ‘Returning of the gaze’ – or ‘talking back’ – refers to Himani Bannerji’s (1993) term of the voicing (of) marginalised populations from a self-authorised position.
successful in downplaying her irregular status, her low socio-economic background and her Igbo ancestry, but will not be able to escape the consequences of what it means to be dark-skinned and female in her place of residence.

Tactics for protection
“(...) [A] tactic is an art of the weak,” noted Michel de Certeau (1984:37). For the weak – or the marginalised and subordinated – the only ‘weapon’ left is the individual’s body and knowledge about how to use it while negotiating for safety. This thereby ascribes migrants’ agency. Tactical negotiation of identities involves their instrumentalisation. In social psychology this is termed ‘impression management’, and described as individuals’ attempts to “control the image that others form of us” (Snyder, 1977:116). What makes impression management necessary is the quest for social approval from a position of powerlessness.

Particularly, people who experience stigmatisation are aware of the potential benefits; they may even feel ‘forced’ play their role as stigmatised in order to reap the benefits. For example, they may do this in situations where charity is distributed, e.g. among the disabled as in Snyder’s (1977:127) example or among the migrants who are in contact with support organisations. For example, when (undocumented) migrants in Istanbul encounter the police or hostile local gangs, the tactic of deception is directed towards upholding the existing stereotype that signals dependency, passivity and thus harmlessness. Some of the Africans I met in Istanbul have seemingly embodied these stereotypes in their encounters with the Turkish police and other Turkish people, by stressing or inventing their economically poor background, their war-ridden past, and in some cases by acting on racist understandings of subjects with expressions of inferior intelligence. In other situations, where a certain stigma is negative in the sense that no benefits can be derived from it, an individual may find it tactical to conceal the stigma (if possible), and thus deceive the observers’ images of them.

The following sub-sections describe some of tactics that account for individuals’ awareness of the existing stereotypes and their agency in creating room for manoeuvre.
The ‘poor African’
The notion of ‘the poor African’ has been adopted and used by many interlocutors. Victor, for instance, recalled his first (of many) encounter with the police.

“You know, in Tarlabası, there are police everywhere. When you pass them they stop you and ask you many questions. ‘Where are you from’, ‘how did you come here’, ‘where is your house’. They ask all this, even in English sometimes. But it is better not to start a conversation with them. So I pretend not to speak English, and to be deaf and dumb. I make a dumb face, look at them with big eyes, and keep my mouth shut.”

(Victor, 1 March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

This tactic is also employed against the “local mafia” – another actor feared by the migrants. In this context, Victor spoke about harassment on the streets:

“Well sometimes the local mafia, they have rounds, you cannot fight them, some of them have guns, try to point it at you.” – “Did it happen to you?” – “Yeah, but I smiled my way out of it. But sometimes you have to be diplomatic about these things, you know, power is not always might, might is not always power, OK? ‘Gimme your turkcell [mobile]’! Then you give him the ‘I am dumb look’,” Victor laughs, and demonstrates the look. – “Oh, the crazy look,” I laugh, “and, does it work?” – “Yeah, sometimes. Sometimes it doesn’t.” Then his face turns serious, and he sharply analyses his situation: “See, you can’t go everywhere you can’t walk with everybody. I have no rights! It is like living in a prison: you have no rights which means you have no freedom, and without freedom, you are in prison!”

(20 March 2008, tape-recorded conversation).

Benjamin, from Sudan, employed a similar tactic:

“Sometimes people come and harass me. They say things like zenci, they laugh at me, point at me and make jokes about me. In these situations I just pretend to be old and stupid. I do that often when I don’t wanna talk to people”

(6 March 2008).
When the people quoted above found themselves in a situation beyond their control, they tried to evoke an impression of themselves that promised the best relative protection. In Erving Goffman’s (1959:15-6) words, the act of self-presentation, “when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interest to convey.” It should be noted that an individual’s position in a local hierarchy – which is partly derived from legal status and connected to rightlessness – severely impacts the room for manoeuvre that Goffman refers to.

After a while in Istanbul, however, a couple of conversation partners offered a more differentiated picture of their safety in the city. After one year in Istanbul, Peter regarded Istanbul as safer than many African cities. However, he admitted that his safety had limits. For example:

“You cannot wear expensive clothes. If you do that the police will molest you. But if you dress according to their expectations – poorly – they leave you alone.” He calculates the value of his clothes for me: his fake Dolce and Gabbana shirt, not more than 15 YTL (100 SEK), his Jeans about 45 YTL (300 SEK). “You see, I have nothing to be afraid of,” he smiles. (Peter, Oct 2008)

Again, the stereotypical image of the ‘poor African’ renders/offers a (limited) space of safety in an otherwise rather hostile environment.

A number of other Nigerian interlocutors told me the same thing. Gloria, a Nigerian woman I met at a migrant support organisation, usually frequented the organisation once a week. Most of the time she sat on her own, keeping herself to herself, with a stoic yet empty look in her eyes, and was dressed in clothes of decent quality but far from fancy. As I had appeared at her church the previous Sunday, her attitude towards me had swung from complete disinterest and reservation to a more open posture. “You know, we are not as poor as we appear,” was one of the first things she told me when we were sitting at Burger King. While her child was busy with the ice cream I had just bought, Gloria and I sipped our Fanta. She said: “Rich people do the best not to show it. You never see rich people in nice clothes, except for special occasions, like weddings and going
to church. Also if the police see us in nice clothes, they get suspicious or jealous because we have more money than them and then they create problems. Most people only walk around with simple clothes on” (April 2008).

Gloria’s and Peter’s statements reveal the acquisition of local knowledge⁶¹ which can be seen as an important determinant in the size of an individual’s room for manoeuvre. Both Peter and Gloria act in relation to the stereotype of Africans they encountered in Turkey. Africans that do not correspond to it would be perceived as provocative, they said, and would be more likely to experience various kinds of harassment.

“Capitalising pity”

Many undocumented Sub-Saharan Africans migrants employ active verbal cover-up in order to negotiate their way out of prison, or, as Victor describes above, the condition of complete rightlessness.

When Peter and I were forced to sit in the back of a (civil) police car (described in Chapter 3), he became into ‘the poor African stemming from a war-torn country’. The two police officers who interrogated us in Turkish about our origins, our addresses, our relation to each other, and our meeting place, were faced with the coulisse of a poor African with a steadfast face who, unable to capture in detail what they are asking us, kept repeating “UN, UN, UN” every now and again, occasionally interrupted by “[country], [country]” (a country experiencing war and conflict is often named) in order “to capitalise pity”, as Victor put it. However, more than that in Victor’s opinion, the absence of those countries’ embassies in Turkey renders it impossible to deport anyone claiming to be their national.

Furthermore, the Christian religion of the research participants is often perceived as an alienating aspect that increases their insecurity. Many therefore use a Muslim name whenever they have to deal with a Turkish person, including the police, journalists, employers or neighbours. “I am aware of that nationals of [country] do not

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⁶¹ In this thesis, the use of the notion of local knowledge (Geertz, 1983/2000) associates to the anthropological quest for looking at the particular (here, individuals’ experiences) and contextualising it in order to understand the rules concerning survival and social relations in situ as well as the shared meaning-making (here, the ‘logic of transit’ as it unfolds in Istanbul). The ‘locals’ whose knowledge and understanding of their situation, as well as of Istanbul as context, this thesis illuminates, are Sub-Saharan migrants, and not Turkish people or any other actors relevant for these migrant’s situation in Istanbul. So defined, local knowledge is a crucial aspect of what is here termed ‘migrant capital’ (see chapter 6).
have Muslim names, but the Turks, they don’t know,” Victor – also called Mohamad – assured me, “the name gives me some protection here and better treatment, sometimes I even claim to be Muslim. Once I am in Greece, I will change my name again” (17 March 2008).

Religion is thus perceived as an accommodating commonality that can increase a person’s safety during their stay in Turkey, especially for a newcomer. As the stay in Turkey is only expected to be of short duration, an alleged change of name or religion is not perceived as problematic.

The bold/unapologetic person

Sometimes, however, it is not the stereotype of the ‘poor African’ that affords safety, but exactly the opposite, namely the image of a bold person. As stated by Tony, the football player, “If you are bold, they let you go, they get scared. They only take the ones who look anxious” (14 May 2008). This Nigerian man realised that boldness helped to keep him safe in dealings with the police. In other words, his legal status facilitated his non-apologetic behaviour, but as became clear in conversation with him, it was rather his sense of unfairness and his insight into how to deal with an institutional authority such as the police that eventually triggered him to display this behaviour.

One of the first things that Nicole, originally from Nigeria and a legal resident of Istanbul for more than ten years, told me was that: “In Turkey, I learned how to defend myself!” The police knocked on her door in the early days of her stay in the city. Just as Tony, the football player, she had the required legal documents and could be bold. “I asked them if they had a warrant,” she snorted, obviously enraged, “and since they did not want to show it to me, I refused them entry. The next day I went to the police station to file a complaint. I asked them: ‘Is this really how you treat immigrants in this country?’”

Without legal documents, being bold and angry with the police means taking risks. Nevertheless, there are ways of displaying boldness without necessarily engaging in a conversation with police officers.

62 Indeed, as if to prove his point, in April 2008 Victor figured as a refugee from [country] in a newspaper article shedding light on Turkey’s refugees and asylum seeker population (Birgün, 2008).
In early December 2007, thirty minutes or so before Peter turned into the ‘poor African’ in the police car, we had been walking along Dolapdere bulvar, a heavily trafficked street in between Tarlabası and Dolapdere and chatting about various things. We saw a group of policemen in uniform standing next to a parked police car at the side of the road. Neither of us said a word about the police, but instead continued to chat about everything under the sun. I noticed that Peter continued to talk in the same high pitch and tone and walk with the same decisive step and pace. Fifty metres after we had passed the policemen he looked at me and said: “You see, I have not changed at all. You just have to pretend that you have papers,” he smiled – obviously proud of this tactic of not showing fear. Goffman (1959) calls this “impression management”. By consciously continuing to act ‘normally’, i.e. to act like a person who feels secure and has nothing to be afraid of, an impression was created that granted safety.

*Remaining polite*

Peter’s tactics, employed in order to advance in Istanbul, are to be polite to everybody for as long as possible. He made it clear on several occasions that he was not “perfect”; meaning that he would fight if he had to. He therefore tried to avoid problems with his fellow migrants as much as possible and remain polite for as long as was possible in situations of harassment from Turkish people. I witnessed this tactic in a situation described in Chapter 3, outside a woman’s house who promised to pay Peter for the work he had done the previous week. When she denied payment, Peter replied understandably that this was no problem and that he would return the next day instead. Throughout this encounter he forced himself to smile. Obviously, staying away from trouble is a tactic for increased bodily safety. He attempted to control himself and remain polite to the best of his ability, even in situations that were both degrading and provocative.

*Avoiding white people*

In general, Peter and many others tactically avoided being seen with white people. In our early meetings, Peter would often say: “When I walk with you, see how people look?” It took me a while to
understand what he meant. Among the Nigerians I have met (but not among Africans from other countries), there is an understanding that the police suspect black people of dealing in drugs when seen together with whites. The incident with the civil police described in Chapter 3 both exemplifies the anticipated police behaviour as well as the Nigerians’ interpretations of the situation. It was for the same reason that the Nigerian albino, who became one of Peter’s protégés for a couple of weeks in winter 2007, was forced to either walk ahead or behind his room-mates when they were outside (5 December 2007). Avoiding white people has also been an important tactic during the initial stay in Istanbul. Ten to fifteen months after Peter’s arrival in the city, avoiding whites was no longer an issue.

This sub-section has indicated that undocumented Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul occupy a very low rank in the local social hierarchy. It has also highlighted that there is room for manoeuvre to increase safety and protection, and has listed and analysed some of the tactics applied. Nevertheless, as Victor tellingly reminded us in the first sub-section, “might is not always power.” This very sober expression entails the recognition of the low position to which these individuals are assigned in the context of Istanbul, and the little room for negotiation that exists with regard to conditions that are stipulated from the outside. Therefore, these attempts and practices of deception can at best be seen as tactics with arbitrary outcomes.

Self-identification

Many migrants made it clear to me that experiences of hardship and derogatory treatment present a challenge to their self-identification and that they employed different tactics in order to deal with this central aspect of marginalisation. Sally, for example, would often finish her sentences with a mantra-like “this is only temporary, this is only temporary”. I felt that the message was not only addressed to me, but also to herself. Others would often make references to their lives before migration and to their status in the home country. Studies on refugee narratives have highlighted this as well, and explained it as a way of creating “a sense of continuity in who they are, linking themselves in different ways to time and place” (Eastmond, 2007:254). The time in transit, especially when it is involuntarily
prolonged, is not only permeated by uncertainty and precariousness, but is also marked by a profoundly threatening discontinuity, not at least with regard to self-identification.

Many discussions with Victor took place at a Turkish fast-food chain close to Taksim. On one occasion a black man in a business suit carrying a briefcase passed our table and proceeded towards the desk to order food. Victor’s eyes followed him for a long time. “I used to look like that. I miss my suit, I miss it so much. And I miss looking like that” (4 March 2008). Later that year, when already working in a tourist resort, in a telephone conversation he complained about the working conditions. He paused and added: “One day, I will take you to Nigeria. I will present you to everybody and you can see for yourself how important I am there. The real me. But as for now, I am not in good shape; I am so tired, and I am illegal” (August 2008). Peter had a similar train of thought. One day, shortly before I left Istanbul, as presented in Chapter 2, he thanked me “for being a companion”. This companionship, as he put it, came at the moment he really needed it and enabled him to remind himself of, and to see himself as, the person he really was: “a man, a person, who can have it all” (May 2008).

These anecdotes indicate Sally’s, Victor’s and Peter’s struggles against categorisations that are the product of collective external definitions (Jenkins, 2008:105). Peter’s comment indicated that he has come to understand the collective external definition of “them” as “the ones like him”. Such understandings may not necessarily be derived from first-hand experience, but may also be passed on through brokers of interpretation, e.g. the ‘old ones’. The comment also indicates that he not only actively struggles against the internalisation of this external identification, but also experiences how difficult this resistance can be. Furthermore, the above accounts, more so Peter’s and Victor’s than Sally’s, underline the pivotal role that legal rights play in constructing identities and shaping personalities (see Douzinas, 2002).

Loneliness and rightlessness
While the majority of my collocutors regarded loneliness and rightlessness as overwhelming, Benjamin’s account, presented below in terms of conversational anecdotes of his experiences of uncertainty, rightlessness and loneliness, is the most profound. The words of this
Sudanese man in his forties remind us that “the lack of recognition or misrecognition undermines the sense of identity, by projecting a false, inferior or defective image of self” (Douzinas, 2002:383). Most of the people I talked to stated that they did not know a single soul in Istanbul when they arrived. Benjamin’s description epitomises a profound condition of loneliness and an existential sense of forlornness:

“When I first came to Turkey, I did not know anyone, I did not understand a word. It was complete loneliness. It was very hard. It still is. But now everybody knows me because every day I walk through the streets — aimlessly and endlessly.” (Benjamin, May 2008)

I saw Benjamin a couple of times before we started to talk. I first noticed him in the soup kitchen. We were all gathered around the table where the food was packed into portions, where mandarins were peeled and the peel left on the floor, where the men exchanged news about other people coming and going in their native Igbo. But Benjamin, with a well-kept but greying beard, stood about ten metres away from this scene, patiently waiting. He seemed neither happy nor particularly unhappy. He just stood there, quietly waiting his turn. Months later, in May 2008, he talked about the many years that he had spent in the country. He had received refugee status from UNHCR but was unable to find a country that was willing to accept him for resettlement as a quota refugee.

“I am often alone and for myself. I often sit silently, very silently, trying to control my mind. I have a broken heart, but I don’t feel any pain anymore.” (May 2008)

He talked softly and quietly and I sometimes found it difficult to hear him. When I asked him to speak up a little, he told me that he was not used to talking to other people. “I should do it more often,” he smiled shyly about an hour into our conversation, “I like talking to you, you are not as aggressive as others.” One day I bumped into him on the street, and he expressed great joy at seeing me. I could not follow everything he said; the language, the words and the images he used were his own. He was used to being alone and having a conversation with himself. The people with whom he arrived in
Istanbul a long time ago had either been “deported, gone to EU countries, gone mad or drowned” (27 April 2008). He had seen many people come and go; migrants, NGO staff, researchers and journalists. But he stayed put.

The situation in Istanbul is hard. Benjamin had hardly earned any money at all during his years there. He had also been beaten up by employers who refused to pay him and by street gangs that thought he had money. He lived on the streets because he could no longer pay the rent. He also experienced the love for a woman that was brutally shattered by family traditions and immigration regulations. But that was not the worst. The worst thing was “when others don’t recognise you, because then it is hard to recognise yourself. If others don’t see me, I cannot see myself” (May 2008). His pain was tangible. But there was also something else about him. He had an air of spirituality, of a mind mastering emotions. He talked a lot about spirituality and it was something that came up regularly in our conversations. Sometimes, he said, when he heard the gospel it made him cry because it touched him so much, because he could feel it, could feel the whole significance of it. A couple of years ago he stopped eating meat, out of compassion for the animals. His soft-spoken, balanced and spiritual approach was sometimes – rarely but suddenly – interrupted by a wave of anger. He then expressed bitterness, and directed it at the legal advisors at the RASP organisation which he thought did not fight hard enough for his cause. He spat words of anger at the IIMP organisation, whose support was mainly targeted to women and children, by which he felt abandoned.

During one of our conversations in May 2008, he mentioned that he had not eaten for the past two days. After a while we decided to go to a Turkish restaurant for a simple meal. Benjamin accepted my invitation, but was not in a hurry to finish the conversation. While I devoured my portion of rice and eggplants hungrily, he showed no sign of hunger, impatience or neediness. He ate his portion of beans slowly, and continued to talk. He had not eaten for two days, but food was not what he lacked the most.

On several times he talked about the trouble that he got into, “my troubles”, but never elaborated on them. I did not insist either. “I am in a dependent situation, but I act independently,” he told me, indicating that he never begs and never asks for help. “I am free,” he
concluded, but added with a weak smile: “but what is this freedom? Last time when I went by boat from Kadıköy (Asian side) to Eminönü (European side), I imagined that the boat would fly away with me, away from Istanbul.” He spread his arms wide open, looked at me and smiled. On another occasion, he again told me that he was hungry and had not eaten that day. As I was on my way to dinner at the Bible group place, I asked him to accompany me. He had been there many times before, and was familiar with the place. But on that particular day he did not want to go, because he did not feel spiritually strong enough to meet other people. As he explained: “I am used to eating alone. If you are forgotten, you have to take care of the little you have left; your soul, your inner. That’s why I don’t want to go to places where there are too many people. They are hard, I cannot handle it. I have routines of eating alone, of being on my own, of being quiet and meditating.”

When I met him again some months later in autumn 2008, he looked much better, and spoke louder and clearer. He had been waiting for me, he said. When we met for a conversation, he talked a lot and, like earlier in May, it was difficult to interrupt him. The words just seemed to burst out of him. He touched on different topics, jumped between different periods of his life, talked about the past, about the time in the South of Sudan where he ploughed the earth, the time in the ‘no-man’s-land’ camp in the East of Turkey where he was treated like a criminal and learned Kurdish. He talked about the future in Sudan or in Greece, and returned to his situation as a stranded migrant in Istanbul, without a job and without money, and without any hope of resettlement. But something was different; there was a sparkle in him, some strength: he had a plan. He wanted to go to Greece. He has waited long enough: “you wait until you have waited enough” (3 October 2008).

I met him once more in March 2009. He had tried to go to Greece twice, but was stopped both times by the police. He looked calm and composed when we talked, and stated that he still wanted to go to Greece, but that he was not in a hurry. He recalled the past few months, recalled the people who tried to help him in some way. “I went to the Greek church in Fener.63 I talked Greek to them and they gave me money,” he said and he repeated the conversation he

63 Fener, a centrally located neighbourhood on Istanbul’s European side, is home to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and is inhabited by a large number of Greeks.
had there in Greek. I did not understand, but he did not pay any attention. After a while he changed back to English: “The people at IIMP tell me I should go home, but for me Greece is my home!” He couldn’t imagine returning to his family in South Sudan with empty pockets after twenty years in “Europe”. I asked him what he had told his family about his situation. He laughed, quietly, for a long time. “Yeah, ... that’s the thing,” he finally says evasively.  

Concluding discussion

This particular section has dealt with the awareness of many migrants of the stereotypical images of them by the majority society, and how this awareness creates room for manoeuvre for increased safety. It has been emphasised that these practices should be seen as tactics, and thereby as agency - albeit an agency that evolves in conditions that are both created and dictated by the outside. Ironically, perhaps, although the migrants’ playing-along potentially increases their safety, it also cements the stereotypes.

Secondly, this section has dealt with the issue of self-identification, which in a situation of uncertainty and marginalisation can have devastating effects on a person’s perception of his or her own identity and worth. For many migrants, the (involuntarily prolonged) stay in transit comprised a drastic rupture from their prior self-identification and many gave expression to their struggles. In narrative attempts to create continuity, people made references to their past, their country of origin and their status there (‘the real me’) as well to the future. In that sense, an attempt to create continuity was made. The most pronounced accounts of struggle for retaining self-worth came from Benjamin, a man whose tragic misfortune was to get stuck in the bureaucracy of the international asylum system. The life he led in Istanbul, marked by humiliation, deep poverty and an all-permeating uncertainty, had left deep marks on his self-identification and left him with a self that was so thin and fragile that it was hardly noticeable to him at times. Benjamin indicated that he had found ways of mentally taking care of himself, although in his accounts it was clear that had not always been the case. Benjamin’s example thus forces us to acknowledge the overarching impact of structural forces influencing migrants’ room for manoeuvre, and, ultimately, their well-being.

64 On a visit to Istanbul in September 2011 I heard that Benjamin had (finally) been resettled.
Chapter 5: Migration and Mobility in Transit

This chapter turns to perspectives on migration and mobility in transit and aims to explain how trajectories of mobility are conditioned by transit. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section engages with various theoretical perspectives on international migration and mobility that emanate from different disciplines. In the second section my fieldwork material, with an explicit focus on mobility and transit, is presented and analysed with the aid of central concepts derived from the theoretical perspectives outlined in the first section. The main findings of this chapter are summarised in the concluding discussion.

Theoretical perspectives on migration and mobility

The scholarly literature on migration and mobility deals with the geographical movements of human beings and attempts to explain them. Despite their similarity, these two terms of migration and mobility permeate the scholarly debate in distinct fields.

Migration theories have been developed in various social science disciplines (Brettell & Hollifield, 2000). Despite the relatively long tradition of researching migration, no theory captures the total complexity of human movement. This often leads to a fragmented portrayal of the migration phenomenon (Arango, 2004). Contemporary migration theories tend to explain and foresee migratory movements in terms of constraints and opportunities at macro-, micro- and meso levels, in that empirical investigations – often in a comparative framework – deal with the political conditions and socio-cultural consequences of migration. Importantly, migration theories focus
on the movement between the two countries of origin and destination, thereby implying settlement in a new country (Massey et al., 1998; Sales, 2007). There is, thus, a rather strong sedentarist bias inherent in migration theories, where the actual movement itself is largely perceived as an anomaly.

Mobility studies, on the other hand, focus on the movement of people and non-corporal items. They include all kinds of human movement, e.g. migration, tourism and transnationalism, and the circulation of cultures, objects, capital, businesses, services, diseases, media, images and information. Perspectives on mobility are thus broader in focus than migration theories inasmuch as they partly encompass and partly exceed the points made by migration theories. Thus, for the study of migrants in transit, the perspectives of mobility offers a point of departure that accommodates a complex reality in that it goes beyond the scope of migration theories. Thereby, they open up for grasping very complex and diverse migratory trajectories in the transnational space (Moret, 2012). Perspectives on mobility challenge the sedentary bias inherent in migration theories (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Rather than depicting human migration as a simple linear movement between two nodes, they also highlight the processes of interwoven “zig-zag and multidirectional lines” (Schaapendonk, 2011:195). Concretely, paying attention to other forms of movement – such as social or existential mobility – and highlighting the intrinsic link between mobility and immobility renders our understanding of transit more profound.

In this chapter I have selected the perspectives on migration and mobility that seem most relevant for my analysis and have sorted them according to the three specific aspects that I consider to be vital for understanding the material that emerged from my fieldwork. The first aspect is irregularity, which is an important part of my interlocutors’ everyday life experiences. The second aspect encompassed the motivations for out-migration, such as poverty, lack of opportunities, persecution and collective migratory aspirations. The labour market, with its role in trajectories of mobility, is specifically highlighted here. The third and final aspect is the immobility that emerges as an intrinsic aspect of migration in general and a transit situation in particular.
Irregularity
Perspectives on regular and irregular migration should be regarded as two sides of the same coin. Most scholars agree that migrants’ irregularisation is a product of structural forces rather than a ‘natural’ state of being. Jordan and Düvell (2002:7) point out that economic migration is only turned into irregular migration in the interplay with border regulations, which have political and economic justifications. De Genova (2002) clarifies that since every inclusion simultaneously creates exclusion, defining the conditions for regular migration implicitly creates irregular migration. Bimal Ghosh (1998:34-72) locates the primary reason for the occurrence of irregular migration to the mismatch of emigration pressures in the countries of origin and too few opportunities for legal entry in the countries of destination. He adds that the demand pull in the destination country (such as a high demand for cheap labour) can similarly cause such a mismatch (1998:34-72). I regard Ghosh’s (1998) approach as an advanced push-and-pull model, i.e. a refined version of the most basic and most widespread theory on migration, which largely anchors human movement in the demand and supply of labour between regions and countries (Massey et al., 1998). This model more or less corresponds with the theory of neoclassical economics, which locates the main incentive in international differences in wages and employment rates. However, the driving force behind the outward movement is seen to be located at the individual level, i.e. constituted through the migrant’s rational decision framed as a choice, rather than the impersonal push-and-pull of structural forces (Massey et al., 1998). While the push-and-pull model certainly points to some vital processes underlying migratory movements, in my opinion it fails to fully recognise the connection between the pushing and pulling forces. Scholars of globalisation have made this connection clearer by pointing to globally interrelated political and economic processes. Saskia Sassen (1998; 2003) highlights the sways of capitalism and its neoliberal expressions, and concludes that migration is ultimately produced in military headquarters and in corporate board rooms. As such migration does not just happen, but is instead produced and patterned (Sassen, 1998:56). This is in line with De Genova’s (2002:424) observation of undocumented migration as “produced and patterned”.

At the individual level, the literature on the condition of ‘illegality’ is, in my view, particularly helpful for understanding the every-
day lives of migrants. “The condition of being undocumented,” as Nando Sigona (2012:50) writes, “becomes inscribed in the lives of migrants, gradually permeating their social worlds and social and community networks.” His in-depth study on the everyday lives of undocumented migrants in Great Britain reveals that irregular status not only impacts a person’s self-identification, but also that person’s social interactions. Maja Sager (2011:235), in her thesis on undocumented migrants in Sweden, also noted how the irregular status of a person affects possibilities “on the labour market, in family life and in social relations in general.” Often, the conditions of irregularity are also closely coupled to existential conditions of impermanence and, hence, spatial mobility, inasmuch as it denies the possibility to reach a stable livelihood in the desired location.

Emigration
Poverty and the lack of opportunities in the country of origin are the most frequently addressed reasons for emigration (Ghosh, 1998). The theory of the new economics of migration partly accounts for this by seeing migration as a risk-reducing and income-diversifying strategy employed by households (Massey et al., 1998). As decisions to migrate are seen to be taken at the household level rather than by the individuals themselves, the theory nestles itself at the meso-level. Networks of people – and here much of the migration literature focuses on small units of strong ties, such as households, kinship groups or villagers (Faist, 2000) – should be addressed by meso-level approaches in order to explain the perpetuation of migration. The basic stipulation of network theory is that individuals with ties to people living abroad or with prior migration experience are more likely to migrate themselves (Massey et al., 1998). The sole existence of such networks is then seen as serving the purpose of emigration. The effects of such networks are seen as lowering the costs and the risks involved in a migratory move (Faist, 2000; Massey et al., 1998; Sales, 2007). Social networks are seen to sustain migratory movements by providing information about routes and immigration regulations, as well as basic needs upon arrival, such as accommodation, food, employment and contacts. Given that migrants in transit are in need of such assets, social networks can be vital for the transit stage as well. Earlier works on transit confirm this (Alioua, 2003; Collyer, 2007; Danış, 2010; Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008b; Schap-
endonk, 2011) without however engaging in closer explanations of how such network relations work.

Apart from the economic factors that will be discussed below, a number of other factors may drive people from their home country. Conflicts and violence of any kind obviously contribute to the outflow of people, whether for political, social, ethnic or other reasons (see, e.g., Ghosh, 1998:35). As Sales (2007:47) critically notes, theoretical approaches to migration have traditionally made a clear-cut distinction between refugee migration and economic migration, and thus neglected the fact that conflicts may also produce economic devastation. Asylum migration often starts irregularly (by leaving the home country without legal documents) and, due to visa regulations, often continues to be irregular until the asylum system is accessed in a certain country. Some underlying motivations for leaving the country may grant refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention, while others do not. The country that grants refugee status – in the EU it is commonly the first country of entrance according to the Dublin Agreement – also becomes the country of residence; at least this has so far been commonly assumed. However, my fieldwork in Turkey and other studies (e.g. Al-Sharmani, 2007) have shown that, in many cases, the migratory moves of refugees (as people who flee the country due to conflict or persecution) are not solely guided by the needs of bodily and material safety. Rather, once outside the conflict zone, people take their lives in their own hands and pursue other goals, along with safety. Motivations for so-called secondary movements include the lack of access to durable solutions, the lack of access to fair asylum procedures and secure legal status and documentation, the lack of physical safety, poor living conditions and the lack of opportunities for education and work (Moret et al., 2006:111). As mentioned above, economic migration and flight are to a large extent two sides of the same coin. Sales (2007:75) points out that as “conflicts are increasingly related to the breakdown of state structures”, economic and political reasons for emigration are strongly intertwined. Overall, it can be said that a narrow interpretation of the 1951 Convention is an additional creator of irregular migration and hidden populations (Ghosh, 1998:35).65

A number of migration scholars have recently taken up the issue of the socio-economic background of regular and irregular

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65 The term “hidden populations” refers to asylum seekers whose claims for protection have been refused and who go into hiding because they regard themselves as unable to return to their home country.
migration populations. Bimal Ghosh (1998:35) also points to the proportion of skilled and professional people taking part in irregular migration. The misery felt when confronted with dead-end job opportunities can come close to the kind of despair felt by those experiencing poverty (Ghosh, 1998:35). Olukwemi Adesina’s (2007:6) research among Nigerians aspiring to emigrate supports Ghosh’s observation and identifies the category of ‘people pursuing social satisfaction’ as skilled and professional individuals who follow in the migration paths of earlier economic migrants. Despite their material success at home, these people seek social satisfaction abroad (Adesina, 2007:1, 6). Likewise, Ogen and Akinrinade (2009:11) identified that among Nigerians, the factors leading up to outward migration are “higher incomes, improved education and access to media and information” rather than poverty. Shahram Khosravi (2010:39) also recognises the “desire for and fascination with the modern lifestyle in the industrialized world” as a powerful factor that affects an individual’s decision to migrate. However, it would be wrong to locate aspirations solely at the individual level. As Arjun Appadurai (2001:7) observes, aspirations always develop in the “thick of social life” and are therefore cultural products that are largely allocated at the middle and upper end of the socio-economic strata. Carling and Åkesson (2009) provide an example of such collectively grown and shaped aspirations in their analysis of what they call the Cape Verdian “migration ideology”.

**Labour market aspects**

Given that economic incentives are often vital to migratory movements, national labour markets and their organisation are clearly important. The formal and, important in this context, informal economies, are in constant need of cheap and flexible labour.66 The
literature on the division of housework, gender roles and ethnicity observes an increased participation of (native) women in the labour markets of industrial countries and the Middle East67 (see among many Lutz, 2008b). This development has increasingly shifted the distribution of the tasks of ‘caring, cooking and cleaning’ – that have traditionally been perceived as female – from the family sphere to the market. This is mainly the case in conservative, and to a lesser extent in liberal and social-democratic welfare states. However, like the family, the market is not gender-neutral, which means that the gender-typification of job distribution often prevails in this sphere as well (B. Anderson, 2000; Lutz, 2008a; 2008b; Sassen, 1998; 2003 to name a few). Employing migrant women has become a popular way of managing the tasks previously done by (often unsalaried) native women (Lutz, 2008c:77-8).

The demands of labour markets certainly do matter for the migration process. As Michael Piore’s (1979) segmented labour market theory points out, the labour markets of advanced economies can be seen as bifurcated along the duality of capital and labour (Massey et al., 1998). Stemming from this duality, different types of jobs can be distinguished: on the one hand capital-intensive, relatively stable and skilled jobs, and on the other, productivity-intensive, more unstable, low-skilled jobs. As people do not only work to earn money, but also to accumulate or maintain a social status, low-wage jobs are often refused by natives (Massey et al., 1998). Employers are therefore obliged to look for people who are willing to take low-paid, unstable jobs with few possibilities for upward mobility. These are, as Guy Standing (2011) stresses, exactly the characteristics of the precariat, the new class-in-the-making. In brief, the term precariat refers to the emerging type of work force for which most of the labour security68 has vanished, or rather, been taken away. This development, following the logics of global capitalism, has been “systematic, not accidental” (Standing, 2011:113). Migrants satisfy the

67 Apart from the increased participation of native women in the labour market, in the Middle East employing domestic workers is mainly considered a status symbol (Jureidini, 2011; Lutz, 2008a).

68 Standing (2011:10) lists labour market security (among others, adequate income earning opportunities), employment security (a.o. protection against arbitrary dismissal), job security (among others, opportunities for upward mobility), work security (among others, safety and health regulations, paid overtime), skill reproduction security (among others, opportunity to make use of competencies), income security (among others, assurance of adequate stable income) and representation security (right to organise collectively) as the seven forms of labour-related securities that were largely assigned to workers throughout Europe after World War II. Since the 1980s they have successively been taken away, thereby forming the precariat.
demands of developed economies and now constitute a large share of the precariat, especially so the large number of undocumented migrants.

Karakayali and Tsianos (2010), contrast the large number of undocumented migrants in European countries with policy-makers’ claims for control. Like Standing (2011), they conclude that the present situation is intended rather than accidental, and that the irregularisation of thousands of migrants serves to produce cheap, flexible and – in De Genova’s (2002) words – deportable labour. Massey et al. (1998) point out that at least in the initial stage of migration the low status that is connected with these precarious kinds of jobs does not always constitute a constraining factor. This corresponds with what Nieswand (2011:152) has come to term ‘the status paradox of migration’, which refers to the transnational status inconsistency between a migrant’s status in the country of origin with the same migrant’s status in the country of present stay.69 Practices of sending money and travelling and communicating frequently facilitate the increase (or at least the maintenance) of the social status in the country of origin.

Immobility
A lot of the migration literature attempts to explain why people move and tends to forget to examine why the majority of people stay (Arango, 2004). As transit anticipates further movement, the prolonged immobility of individuals in transit constitutes an anomaly. Therefore, I believe it is vital to shed light on processes of immobility in transit in order to understand the processes of mobility and immobility.

The few publications that focus on immobility – voluntary or involuntary – do so from the perspective of the place of origin and not from the perspective of transit (see Carling, 2002; Jonsson, 2008). In one publication, Thomas Faist (1997a) points to the crucial importance of the relational level in migratory decision-making. In another publication (Faist, 1997b), he highlights the importance of ‘local assets’, i.e. what I in Chapter 6 call local knowledge, or migrant capital, as obstacles to mobility. Furthermore, the previously mentioned transnational status inconsistency, where a migrant may have

69 Importantly, Nieswand (2011:2ff, 152ff), who conducted his study on Ghanaian labour migrants in Germany, observes that the status paradox is mostly valid for migrants who are neither perceived to be skilled in the country of destination nor unskilled in their home country.
a very low status in the country of destination but at the same time increases his social status at home, connects neatly with Kaufman et al.’s (2004) conceptualisation of mobility in the transnational space as encompassing not only geographical but also social (upward) mobility. In other words, migrants are able to climb the social ladder in their places of origin despite their physical absence. This conceptualisation of human movement allows us to grasp the very complex process of individuals simultaneously moving in spatial and social spaces. It is highly valuable for a better understanding of the situation of transit which, for many individuals, constitutes a period of physical immobility.

Another useful theoretical consideration for the state of transit is Sheller and Urry’s (2006) and Elliott and Urry’s (2010) highlighting of the intrinsic link between mobility and immobility. These authors see the immobile as a part of the infrastructure that enables, facilitates and in fact often encourages the mobility of others. Finally, Ghassan Hage (2005:474) adds yet another dimension. In his beautifully written account of Lebanese emigration, the author introduces “existential mobility”, which he conceptualises as a subjective feeling of ‘going somewhere’ in life, and points to the crucial relationship between existential and physical movement. As Hage (2005:471) elucidates, “it is when people feel that they are existentially ‘going too slowly’ or ‘going nowhere’, (...) that they are somehow ‘stuck’ on the ‘highway of life’, that they begin contemplating the necessity of physically ‘going somewhere’”. According to Hage, physical mobility, i.e. migration, occurs when individuals perceive themselves to be ‘stuck’ or ‘going nowhere’. Every immobile person might thus be conceived as existentially mobile from a subjective point of view. However, my fieldwork material, presented in the following section, will show that this is not the case for all. With reference to Carling’s (2002) work, I would argue that although in some cases the subjective feeling of being existentially stuck leads to physical mobility emigration or onward migration, in other cases this feeling indicates the transition from voluntary to involuntary immobility. However, Hage’s claim reminds us that the subjective feeling of ‘being stuck’ is very much dependent on structural and meso-level conditions, such as labour markets and social networks, but is at the same time highly individual. As Nira Yuval-Davis (2011:4) emphasises, “situated
gaze, situated knowledge and situated imagination construct how we see the world in different ways.” An intersectional perspective thus allows us to see that personal attributes, such as age, gender, nationality, ethnic belonging, race, socio-economic background and immigration status, affect individuals in a very specific social and economic location (Yuval-Davis, 2011) and influence their perception of existential mobility. Many of these elements of intersection will be addressed more thoroughly in the analysis of the empirical material later in this chapter as well as in Chapter 6 and 7.

In conclusion, motivations leading up to migrations are multiple, diverse and highly complex (Bredeloupe, 2010; King, 2002). Given my previously stated recognition of the complexity of migration movements – and in particular those including a location perceived as a transit location – I hold that we should not limit our understanding of migration processes and consequences by sticking to one particular disciplinary perspective (see also Arango, 2004; Sales, 2007; King, 2012). In this section, the standpoint emerged that while irregularity is produced at the macro-level through political decisions on legal provisions, at the micro-level it has all-permeating consequences for individuals’ everyday relations. As I will show in this chapter, transit conditions play out in very similar ways. Furthermore, we have seen that apart from economic deprivation, a lack of opportunities, persecution (which often stem from the same source) and aspirations with distinct implications for women and men from different socio-economic segments of society can account for out-migration. A closer look at the formation and accessibility of social networks seems to be necessary for furthering our understanding of migration trajectories. Importantly, the concept of mobility can entail spatial as well as social or existential mobility in a transnational space, thereby capturing the very complex process of acquiring multiple statuses across borders. Processes of immobility – intrinsically linked to processes of mobility – are closely related to social structures and as such are treated in this study as important aspects of the logistics and conditions of transit.

The next section includes material from my fieldwork and elaborates on how the trajectories of mobility and migration are conditioned in the situation of transit.
Mobility in and from transit

Through an analysis of the fieldwork material, this section aims to pinpoint how transit conditions trajectories of mobility. It opens with a look at migratory movements before arriving in Istanbul and the narrated motivations that led up to it. It continues by examining the Turkish labour market (with a particular focus on Istanbul) and the narrated stories concerned with it. As presented earlier, labour market conditions affect individuals’ trajectories of mobility. A sub-section follows that sheds light on issues of immobility in transit. The concluding section deals with the material that shows how the twist transit adds to the understanding of mobility and points to a master narrative of transit, i.e. what I call the logic of transit. Like the condition of being irregularised, this permeates most aspects of life in transit. As I will elaborate, the term transit does not necessarily imply an actual onward movement per se, but an anticipation of an onward movement within a limited time-frame.

Motivation for out-migration

A couple of overarching motivations for out-migration emerged from my material. While Peter’s primary concern was to maintain and improve the situation of his younger siblings back home, other interviewees had different motives. Victor, for example, elaborated on family backgrounds having shaped his and others individuals’ motivations:

“You don’t need to have the whole world, and that is why I am here, ‘cause my mom is getting old. ‘Please get married,’ that is what she told me, ‘start working, get married, I want to see my grandchildren’ (laughs), that’s the order she gave to me. She did not tell me ‘come to Europe, make big money and come back,’ no! You understand? So what I am trying to say, basically, is that the family you come from also determines the kind of orientation, the kind of lifestyle. Some of us in Istanbul here are seriously under pressure, they get families at home.” – “And what do the families say?” – Look, some of them sold their houses, some of them their cars, you know what I’m saying, or family property to send one person down to Europe, so that they can give back, they put you under pressure, you understand what I’m
saying, so when you're not delivering, you do anything to deliver, like selling drugs, OK, doing the yahoo thing 419,\textsuperscript{70} scam.”

(Victor, 17 March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Thus, while others emigrate to provide for their families back home, Victor’s main incentive was to obtain further education and a European university degree. As such, Victor confirmed what both Adesina (2007) and Khosravi (2010) have pointed out, namely the occurrence of lifestyle migration.

As the literature on migration and gender has indicated, motivations leading up to migration are often gendered (see e.g. Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003; Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram & Sales, 2000; Kofman, 2007; Oishi, 2005; Zambrano & Basante, 2005). Regardless of whether this occurs as a spontaneous, individual movement (albeit often based on a collective decision) or is part of a larger framework of official emigration policies, emigration is based on a “particular set of social norms” that are, among other things, gendered (Oishi, 2005). The motivation for men’s and women’s emigration may thus be very different and partly has to do with the acceptance of the wider local society or kinship network.

On an occasion in spring 2008 I was invited to Peter’s flat. Two newly arrived protégés were sitting on the big mattress on the floor. Both looked very young and could not have been more than twenty. One of them, Kingsley, sought eye contact and we started to chat. The other looked very shy and was quiet. On a few occasions he managed a smile. I asked Kingsley whether he was from Lagos, because I knew that many other Nigerians in Istanbul had either lived in the West African megalopolis for a while or originated from there. “Lagos?” he repeated slowly with a frown. “Ah, Lagos! That’s the place where you catch the plane out.” Peter later told me that both these “younger ones” had their origins in the Igbo-populated part of Nigeria. Kingsley told me that he wanted to go to Spain; he had heard about “that place” from others back home. “It is difficult to be a man,” said Kingsley out of the blue. When I asked why, he explained that: “A man cannot just marry like that. He always has to be able to offer something! A car, a house, a job. He has to have

\textsuperscript{70} The term ‘yahoo 419’ is sometimes also called ‘the Nigerian letter’ or the ‘419 fraud’ and refers to those emails in which the receiver is asked to deposit a larger amount of money with the prospect of gaining an even bigger financial return. The number “419” refers to the article of the Nigerian Criminal Code (part of Chapter 38: “Obtaining Property by false pretenses; Cheating”) dealing with fraud.
respect.” Kingsley wanted to go to Spain because he hoped that he would find a way of fulfilling his mission. As stated in Kingsley’s example, for men wealth and social respect are often a prerequisite of married life. Also, as in Peter’s story, the oldest son (and sometimes also a woman if she was the oldest child) often has a particular responsibility towards his younger siblings and other family members.

While some of the people I encountered in Istanbul left their country in search of employment, others clearly stated that their motivation was driven by the prospect of higher earnings elsewhere. “If you earn 100 dollars and you know that somewhere else you can get 700 dollars for the same work, you do not have a choice anymore, explained Daniel, a Kenyan man in his late twenties. Without doubt, to him the question of forced versus chosen migration was not clear-cut, but rather vague. When I met him for the first time, Istanbul had not fulfilled his dreams of higher earnings. He found it difficult to get a regular job, and the person who had employed him for a couple of weeks refused to pay him. I met Daniel again a few months later. I recognised him when I visited the flat of my Kenyan research participants. “It’s nice that someone cares,” he said, obviously pleased to be remembered. He immediately started to talk about his primary concern: his two children growing up with their grandmother on their small farm in rural Kenya. “The kids must miss you,” I noted. His face darkened. Unable to utter a word, he pressed his hand tightly against his mouth, struggling to suppress his tears. He only nodded. Eventually he uttered hoarsely: “I miss them so much.” He plucked up courage, collected himself and said: “But I do something good for them. I have to. I do what I have to do. They should have a better life” (24 September 2008). His role was very clearly to support his family — an obligation dictated by strong social ties.

These examples show that the reasons for emigration are complex and cannot simply be explained in terms of individual choice, the demands of the labour market or war and persecution. Migrant trajectories are often conditioned by a multitude of factors located at the macro-, meso- and micro levels of analysis. Family background, i.e. the socio-economic position of the family, is pivotal inasmuch as other family members’ behaviour can support and enable lifestyle migration. In other cases, family members can put immense pressure
on an individual, so that migration becomes a matter of existential and social survival, rather than lifestyle. In Chapter 6 I will look at socio-economic status and cultural capital in some detail. In the cases of Victor, Kingsley, Peter and Daniel, global economic conditions, labour market demands, cultural aspirations of ‘going somewhere’, gender and lifecycle all clearly intersect with socio-economic backgrounds.

**Labour market opportunities**

In Turkey, undocumented migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are largely compelled to work in the informal economy, where working conditions are often sub-standard and wages significantly lower than the average. Researchers from the Department of Labour Economics and Industrial Relations at Ankara University state that, in general, “the rate of informal employment is extremely high in Turkey” (Toksöz & Akpınar, 2008:155). Various estimates of the size of the Turkish informal economy exist. Schneider and Sarasan (2007) estimated 31.1 per cent of Gross National Product (GNP) in 1999, and 35.1 per cent in 2005. On average, African men employed in workshops earned around 20 YTL per day in 2007/08. A day’s work can mean anything between 6 to 14 hours of hard work. I often heard people complain about not having any work, not having any pay and being overworked.

In October 2008, in the Kenya house, Sally, Susan and Daniel (all around 30 years of age) talked about the subject openly. “The biggest troubles here are that we blacks either cannot find work or that we don’t get paid for our work,” Sally said. “Or that they overwork us,” added Susan. In June 2008 Susan had left her job in a Turkish household. “I had to work every day from 9 am to 3 am – 18 hours a day! The wife was at home and always found new things for me to do. I did not have a rest, never!” Susan told me that she worked six days a week in the household and was paid 400 YTL a month. Every Sunday she visited the Kenya house to rest, catch up with other Kenyans, prepare her famous *chapati* (Kenyan bread) and listen to stories and updates from back home. After a few months she started to complain about pains in her chest and experienced diffic-

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71 In 2008 the official data stated that from a total workforce of about 21 million, around 45 per cent were informally employed (see Toksöz & Akpınar, 2008:155).

72 The report by the UK Refugee Council (Reynolds & Muggeridge, 2008:65) describes similar amounts of money.
culties in breathing. The others advised her to stop working there. “I was completely overworked, I had to stop,” Susan explained. After two weeks of rest at the Kenya house she felt better. When I met her in October she was still out of work and planned to try her luck in Greece. “Working conditions can only be better there,” the three of them reasoned in unison.

Daniel told me his story:

“In Kenya I had one piece of land. I could have stayed my whole life in Kenya, cultivating the land, barely live from it and then die. But can you call it a life when nothing improves? My two children should have it better. I would like to have a better life! And until we have a better life, I am ready to work as hard as necessary, as hard as possible. I want to work, I am strong! It is very stressful for my brain just to sit at home doing nothing.

I had a job in a cargo office in Şişli, the patron was Iranian, his wife Russian. I worked there for three weeks, but only got paid for two of them. The patron told me: no money, problem! I did not argue, did not insist. I don’t want to disturb him; I am a gentle man. But it is wrong. Imagine, I worked every day from 9 am often to 11 pm, I worked really hard, I was overworked, for nothing! The patron promised 150 dollars a week, and gave me 150 YTL instead. Now I want to go to Greece.”

(Daniel, October 2008)

However, going to Greece required money that he did not have. He says he tried to get the money, but was unsure how to go about it. He added: “Now that I am abroad, people back home think I have money. I have to send it to them. With 50 dollars, my mother and my two children can live for up to one-and-a-half months.” After a while, he added with a weak smile: “But don’t worry, I am fine; I am a man.” Even though Daniel addressed me, the other two women also listened attentively. That was one of the few occasions during my fieldwork where people of the same nationality – and cross-gender – talked about their personal troubles quite frankly and without hesitation.

73 One year later I found out via a telephone conversation with a common acquaintance that Daniel travelled to Greece a few months after our conversation in the Kenya house.
Workshops in Dolapdere. Photos by the author, September 2011
At one point, Sally looked at me hopefully and asked: “Is there anyone here that cares about that people are getting treated so badly? Can we report it somehow to someone here?” – “No,” I said, “not if you don’t have any papers” (residence and work permit). – The gloom disappeared from her face: “Yes, I thought so.” And after a while: “I just don’t understand why they hire blacks when they don’t like us.” – “Because they can exploit us,” Daniel replied wearily. It was the beginning of October and the outside temperature was starting to drop. Winter was approaching. Everyone in the room agreed that the winters were more difficult than the summers. “How can we live here?” asked Susan, more to herself than to me. Both Susan and Daniel were looking for a way to leave Turkey for Greece. For them, there were no doubts that Greece could only be better than Turkey.

Most of the people I talked to told me similar stories. Joseph, for instance, a young Nigerian graduate in sociology, found a job in a small workshop. He was a friendly, almost shy, well-mannered young man and appeared very responsible. He worked 6 days a week between 9 am and 6 pm, without a break, for 100 YTL a week. A Turkish person would have received double that amount, he and others estimated. Joseph indicated that he was from a family with a higher socio-economic status: “If my parents knew what kind of job I do here, they would never allow me. I could never do this kind of job in Nigeria; I would be ashamed of myself. My parents would order me to come home if they knew how I live here.” But despite finding life very difficult in Istanbul, he said: “I cannot go back now; I haven’t accomplished my mission yet.” And his mission, he explained to me, was to get a good job so that he could earn enough money to help his family; even though they were relatively well-off, the family was experiencing some financial difficulties (1 May 2008).

Joseph’s story does not only correspond to Hage’s (2005) observation of the relationship between existential and spatial mobility, but also redirects attention to the previously mentioned observation of the status paradox of migration, whereby immigrants (especially irregularised immigrants) can raise their status back home regardless of the type of work they do in the country of emigration. Interestingly, the application of the theorem varies according...
to the individual’s socio-economic background, as was also pointed out by Nieswand (2011:2ff, 152ff). Joseph’s story and Nieswand’s observations serve as important reminders of the high diversity among migrants in term of their socio-economic (and possibly other) backgrounds.

*The employment market*

Istanbul provides a limited array of jobs for people without the necessary documents (see also İçduygu, 2003; 2006). Many of the undocumented women work in Turkish or expat households, where they clean, take care of the children, or both. The jobs available for male migrants without proper documents are in the construction sector, the manufacturing sector, and sometimes in restaurants. Apart from that, some better educated men and women manage to find work as English teachers, mostly for private students. “The money is good,” said Sarah, a well-educated, soft-spoken Kenyan woman in her thirties, “but it is unreliable, I never know how much I can make a month.”

Apart from playing professional football, teaching English and self-employment, it is very rare for individuals without proper documents in Turkey to find a job for which they are qualified. African graduates in sociology, agricultural engineering or law therefore feel compelled to move to a country where they may have the chance to demonstrate and apply their professional skills.

Another possible source of income is the tourism sector. Many foreigners, including migrants who perceive themselves to be in transit, work in a hotel in tourist resorts. This work often includes cleaning hotel rooms. A few women told me that they were employed as masseurs to hotel guests. But also in this branch, people complain about overwork, little pay and that the promise of a salary in dollars has in practice turned out to be the same amount in YTL – which is considerably lower.75 During the summer of 2008 Ruth cleaned a hotel in a tourist destination. “I was working every day. Every day from 8 a.m. to 1 a.m. And I got paid 600 YTL for that, not even US dollars,” she complained. She said that owner had promised her 1,000 dollars in salary, but only gave her 600 YTL. The rest, she was told, would be covered by tips from the guests that

75 On 31 March 2008 the US dollar had 1.3 times more value than the Turkish lira. This remained relatively stable from autumn 2007 to autumn 2008, when the US dollar increased in value by 1.6 times (Forex, 2009).
would increase her income to 1,000 US dollars a month, “but there was never any tip, not even one kuruş,” Ruth said bitterly.

Men are also able to find jobs in the tourism industry along the Aegean Coast and are often hired as animators, which includes performing dances in daily shows. Victor was one of them. “Brigitte,” he shouted into the phone the first time we talked after he left Istanbul, “they like Africa here! We dance the fire dance, with naked upper body and fire. You know, people want to see the raw Africa,” he adds, thrilled. His other duties included entertaining the guests at night in the disco as well as during the day on the volleyball field and in the pool. “But not everybody can do it,” Victor said, more seriously, and added, “you need the right orientation. People that have never been exposed, they cannot do it. You have to be enlightened!” (March 2008). By being exposed and enlightened, he was referring to dealing with whites, and more specifically, with white tourists. But Victor also complained about his working conditions, the 18-hour shifts, the one day off that he just spent sleeping, and the comparatively little pay he received. In the six months he was there he had to change hotel once because the police detected him during one of their controls. “I am the only black man here, so I am very visible.” This was also why he never left the hotel compound, not even on his day off. Being the only black man in the hotel compound had its advantages and disadvantages: “People like me here, they are curious about me,” he said. At the same time he felt pressured “to do everything twice as well to prove the negative stereotypes wrong.”

Not all the migrants I met were ready to accept the hard work and little pay that tourist resorts offered. Several people told me they had found it too hard and had returned to Istanbul (and often to unemployment). Ann told me such a story. The jovial Kenyan in her late twenties was employed as a masseur in one of the charter hotels on the southern coast. “For every customer I got 2.50 Euro. But it was hard work, ten customers a day! I could not do it!” She broke into hearty laughter: “I am lazy!” When I met her she was working as a sales person in a textile business in Istanbul, where she earned about 400 US dollars a month and expressed her satisfaction with this arrangement. She had found her own way of increasing her revenue. She smiled whimsically: “I tell my customers I am a law student that needs some extra money,” she said, satisfied with herself.
“They think I am smart, they think I am using my brain, and then they buy more. It works!” She shook her head and laughed: “Law! Why did I come up with that of all things?” This anecdote shows very clearly that migrants are aware of the hierarchy of personal attributes at play, i.e. which social categories increase their customers’ confidence in them and the products on sale.

Furthermore, an increasing number of jobs (though still very few) can be found on the ethnic labour market. The term ethnic labour market or ethnic economy designates self-employed migrants and their co-ethnic employees (Light & Gold, 2000:4). I have added the concept of semi-ethnic labour market to designate the jobs and services that are done by co-ethnics at the request of co-ethnic customers, albeit with the owner of the business not belonging to the same group. Before being employed in the textile shop, for example, Mary, a Kenyan woman in her forties, used to guide African buyers around the textile shops. For that she received a small commission fee from every shop owner she guided the customers to, and even more when they bought something. Some people are employed by their co-nationals who manage to open a business in Istanbul. Mike was an accountant for Nicole’s cargo and call shop in Laleli, Geoffrey and Sam worked as waiters in Nigerian restaurants in Tarlabası and Osmanbey and Simon was a DJ in an African club. Other potential places of employment are the various African churches and African-owned cargo offices. Peter, for example, sometimes worked for a Tanzanian-owned cargo company and was paid 40 US dollars per loaded container. After one and a half years in Istanbul he said: “I don’t work for Turkish anymore, you cannot trust them” (March 2009). As will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6, Peter’s acquired migrant capital helped him to recognise (more) trustworthy employment relations, and thus offered a certain protection from exploitation.

Both men and women are employed in the textile business. In Osmanbey, for example, many of the Turkish-, Russian-, and Iranian-owned clothes and textile stores employ African nationals in order to serve their African customers in their own languages. I met Mary the day after she had obtained work in one of these shops. She had been looking for work in the area and visited the shop where

76 This is different from Light and Gold’s (2000:10) understanding of ethnic economy, since they do not regard the ethnicity of the customers as being of interest.
a friend of hers was employed. Kenyan customers entered and the patron asked her to display her sales skills. She started to advise the customers in Swahili. The customers bought goods worth 2,000 US dollars and Mary was hired on the spot. “See, I told you,” Mary said triumphantly, “if God wants and you really want to work, you can make it.” Also Steve, a Kenyan man working in an adjacent shop told me: “I don’t know anything about clothes or textiles, but I speak Swahili and I know the taste of Africans; that is why I was hired” (23 April 2008).

Etienne and Stan, students from the Democratic Republic of Congo, stated that many of their fellow countrymen worked for Congolese business people during their stay in Istanbul. These small jobs included carrying bags, negotiating good deals with a seller and generally acting as intermediaries between buyers and sellers. The estimated weekly wage of 200 to 300 US dollars that could be made within this niche was higher than other comparable jobs open to undocumented African nationals in Istanbul.

Other sources of employment included working as a translator for support organisations or for the UNHCR, which were open to refugees and sometimes also to asylum seekers. Finally, for many African men, and especially those from Nigeria, playing football for a Turkish club was a main goal. I met one such player at Nicole’s office. He told me that he had arrived in Istanbul two years previously and had searched for a club for five months: “But then I played in the Africa Cup in 2006 and got scouted” (14 May 2008). When I met him he was a regular player for a football club in the Black Sea region. Remus, Ruth’s on-and-off boyfriend, hoped for a similar destiny. A graduate in agricultural sciences who was unable to secure a job in his native Nigeria, he often played football with other Nigerians in Istanbul. During a visit to their home he handed me some pictures showing him playing football in the Africa Cup in 2004 in Istanbul. “Here,” he said, “I am looking for a club. Take these pictures to Sweden, maybe you can show them to somebody.” For some of the lucky ones the Africa’s Cup is a stepping stone.

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77 Interestingly, these co-national buyers have a foothold in their country of origin and their European countries of residence.
78 While the UNHCR only accepts refugees as employees, other support organisations also accept asylum seekers (with a valid document).
79 The Africa Cup in Istanbul is an annual football tournament where Africans play in national teams against each other. Many hope to get scouted to a contracted position in a club.
Self-employment is another option. “It is not that difficult,” said Peter, “but you need a start capital, and most importantly, you need people you can trust.” Many of the Africans – not only those employed in the textile and cargo business – also send their trading goods, predominantly clothes and motor spare parts, back home (for more about trade, see Chapters 4 and 7). They sometimes use a cargo service for this, or regular customers. These people then sell the goods in their shops and return the profits via another trader going to Istanbul. Thus, the vast majority of buyers fly in and out of Turkey on a business or tourist visa. To transport the goods back, they either use the cargo services or pack everything into their suitcase, hence the term ‘suitcase traders’. This is a common way of avoiding taxes. In Istanbul, this kind of trading is also performed by other groups, including Uzbek and Russian women (see Keough, 2006; Piart, 2012; Yükseker, 2004). Also Mary, a Kenyan woman whom I often visited at her work place, eventually planned to start her own business. First, she said, she had to build up a regular clientele and gain experience. A regular clientele would not only secure her employment as a sales person in the textile shop, but was also an important precondition for setting up in business. At that moment in time, she said, business was bad in Kenya. Even now the situation is still not back to normal (16 April 2008).

When it comes to education, in general Turkey does not provide any possibility for children and adults without proper documents to enrol on a school or university course.80 Joseph already had a bachelor’s degree in sociology from his home country, but dreamed of further education. He reasoned: “They value foreign certificates in Nigeria: With a foreign degree, they beg you to work for them, they would even call me abroad to beg me home with a foreign degree.” He mentioned that this was how Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, who had studied in the USA, became the Nigerian Minister of Finance.81 Also Victor stated that he had checked all the possibilities of obtaining a study permit for a Turkish university. As he told me in March 2008 in Istanbul, he had found it impossible and decided that he had to leave the country in order to fulfil his dream of enrolling at an institution of higher education.

80 This regulation was changed slightly in 2010.
81 Okonjo-Iweala studied at Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After serving the World Bank for over 21 years, she was appointed Minister of Finance and Economy between 2003 and 2006 (Brookings Institution, 2009).
As this section has shown, gainful economic activities were tremendously important for most of my interlocutors. As a transit location, Istanbul mostly offers employment conditions that correspond to Piore’s (1979) segmented labour market theory, where unstable jobs are often taken by migrants. As such, their highly precarious employment options mean that they fall into the category of the precariat. These inferior conditions have triggered discussions and complaints and in some cases have been a direct reason for onward migration. The section has also highlighted that there some possibilities of having a decent income exist, e.g. by teaching English classes, although this type of activity does not provide labour security. Many Sub-Saharan African women had experience of domestic work in Turkey, which points to the gender typification of tasks on the Turkish labour market. As could be seen in Joseph’s example, not every type of job abroad constitutes status mobility at home. Consisting of individuals from middle or higher socio-economic backgrounds, Adesina’s (2007) suggested category of ‘social satisfaction seekers’, to which Joseph belonged, largely breaks with the long-held notion that only low-skilled individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds are among the irregular migrants seeking a better life abroad. As a result Joseph and Victor found it impossible to access the educational system in Turkey; something that affected their trajectories of mobility. Finally, the section has pointed to possibilities for self-employment and the existence of a small but emerging ethnic and semi-ethnic labour market. As indicated, these economic networks are largely based on trust, and therefore point, again, to the importance of social networks.

Trajectories of immobility in transit: those who stay
The inquisitiveness of migration scholars has hitherto largely been reserved for actual movement in space. In contrast, perspectives of mobility have been better equipped to grasp various kinds of human movements encompassing periods of immobility. I will now attempt to shed light on practices of mobility and immobility from the perspective of transit, and examine how mobility is conditioned in transit.

As the fieldwork has shown, despite the common perception of Istanbul as a place of transit and not a place of settlement for
Sub-Saharan African nationals, a large number of individuals stay in the city for an indefinite period of time. In the words of my interlocutors, on the one hand these are mainly people who have “found something” – referring to the relatively voluntary character of their stay (see J. Carling, 2002) often induced by economic opportunities. Hage (2005) would see them as individuals who perceive themselves as existentially mobile. On the other hand, some people say that they ‘cannot move’, or that they have ‘got stuck’. This situation is less voluntary in nature and indicates obstacles for moving onward that subjectively appear as insurmountable. Most of the migrants in this latter category belong to the small but considerable number of people who have been in Istanbul for over a decade and have not yet obtained the relevant legal documents.

Benjamin, from Sudan, had spent more than 15 years in Istanbul. One afternoon I arrived at the IIMP courtyard after the organisation had already closed its office for the day. There I met a small group of people – Gidey, Michael, Mimi and Benjamin – from the East-African Church, who were about to begin their church service. They were in the middle of an avid discussion, in which Mimi was telling the two men how she had dealt with her boss during her six years as a domestic servant in Beirut. “She would tell me, ‘you have to do this, you have to do that, you have to do it because I am your patron’,” Mimi recalled, and she continued with a fierce face: “You know what I told her? I said: ‘I am here to work, and in order to work I need to rest, and besides that I only obey one patron and he is up there’”, and pointed with her finger towards the sky. – “So you learned the language to be able to defend yourself,” Benjamin noted. – “Yes, I had to,” Mimi replied. On arrival in Turkey, Mimi applied for asylum, and was now waiting to be resettled. This was the first time I had seen Benjamin together with members of the East-African Church. “Yes, you know, they accepted me somehow,” he stated, “Some things I understand, but far from everything because everything is in Amharic, but,” and tapped his heart with his right hand, “in here I understand everything without understanding the words exactly. They call me when they have weddings, when they feast or when they have another religious celebration.” – “So you kind of belong to them now?” I asked. – “I belong to everybody. I have seen so many people coming and leaving, I have seen children
growing up. I have been here for such a long time!” – “Benjamin is patient,” Mimi joked, and everybody laughed, even Benjamin (22 September 2008).

It was unusual to see Benjamin so cheerful. There were times during our conversations when his pain was evident. He frequently mentioned the fact that he had seen many people coming and going. When they came back for a visit with their papers – “because they can then travel” – they were surprised to still see him there. “They look surprised and say: ‘Benjamin, are you still here?’” he laughed quietly, before his face turned serious again: “They have built up a life; they got papers, founded a family, had children. I am still here in the same situation like 15 years ago.” Without a job, without money and with very little hope left. Gidey from Eritrea had also applied for asylum in Turkey. He stated that the application was mostly a result of his lack of money to continue to another country. In our conversation he presented himself as strong-willed and ambitious, strongly believing in success and personal development. “It is not my purpose to be here, my plan is to leave soon,” he stated, and explained: “I believe that I will soon be resettled. I talked to the UNHCR a few weeks ago for the first interview. The interview only lasted for 1½ hours, but I believe I have a strong case. I provided all the necessary documents; that I as a member of the Pentecostal church am religiously persecuted, that I am a writer, that I have published books.” He looked at me, convinced of his statement. As if to guard himself against the insecurity an asylum process implied, he expressed strong personal integrity: “But even if they don’t accept me, I have other plans. I have my own life and my own purpose” (28 September 2008).

Several of my interlocutors had stayed in Lebanon for a number of years before arriving in Turkey. Grace, from Nigeria, was one of them. When I met her she and her family had been in Istanbul for only a couple of months. The thirty-something woman had lived in Lebanon together with her Nigerian husband for nearly six years. She had worked at a hotel, while her husband was employed as a janitor in a school. The unrest in 2006 proved too much and the couple decided to move to a Western Europe country together with their two children, both of whom had been born in Lebanon. The border crossing had been dramatic, however, and Grace could
not hold back her tears when recalling this period in her life. “You know, I never want to do this again,” she said with effort. “We left Lebanon to go to Greece, but I will not cross any border illegally anymore!” She then added, thoughtfully: “The water is too dangerous, it is no option with the children. There is a safe connection by car over the land border, for about 2,500 dollars per adult.” But for 5,000 dollars, she said, she preferred to go back to Nigeria with her family. “I don’t want to be a stranger again in a new country, I don’t want to start a new life all over again,” Grace said, tired and disillusioned (May 2008). Edward, who is familiar with the family’s situation, told me his thoughts about their situation: “They are applying for asylum now, even though now the waiting period for the first interview with UNHCR in Ankara is about one year. But these people, they don’t have any alternative, so they apply for asylum” (September 2008).

Something that Grace mentioned was also shared by several other interlocutors, despite their very different circumstances. Lawrence was as a young Nigerian man in his late twenties, whose wife back home had given birth to a healthy baby boy a few months after his arrival in the city. Convinced that the male role included finding “greener pastures” for his family, the ambitious young man had been very innovative in finding an occupation in Istanbul. When I talk to him in May 2008 he said that: “When I came here my plan was to continue to Greece, but I have found a way to make myself useful here.” He added, “I have adapted to the system here, I know the loopholes and the problems, so now I don’t want to travel anymore. If I went to Switzerland, I would have to learn about the system for another year, I don’t want that, I make use of what I can make here. I use the environment here. Also I am not getting any younger, I don’t want to waste my years adapting to a new system” (14 May 2008). Therefore, just like Grace, Lawrence recognised that hard work and energy were necessary in order to adapt to a new system, a new country and to start all over again, thereby indicating the acquisition of local knowledge.

82 Nevertheless, six months later, Lawrence turned up on my msn-chat, telling me that he was now in Athens. He was unhappy in Istanbul, he explained, as the city offered little opportunity for him to develop, and he had found a safe way of travelling. He found Athens to be much more suitable for him. Two years later, in late 2010, he told me that he was working for a multi-national company based in Athens, and in his spare time was producing Nollywood movies. He even brought Europe to Nollywood and sent me the link to the trailer of his second film on Youtube, (partly) dealing with the lives of Nigerian migrants in Greece. It is dedicated to Nigerians who lost their lives on the way to the Promised Land.
Other conversation partners indicated that they changed their plans because they did not want to risk their own lives. Some of the women with children emphasised that they only stayed because they could not imagine risking their children’s lives. Tina, a Liberian national aged around 30, was one of them. She and her small child had arrived in Istanbul from Lebanon. On arrival in the city, they were put in a connection house in order to organise their onward trip from there. Tina stated very clearly that Turkey had never been a planned long-term destination.

“It is better to pay [for onward travel], and I have the money and I want to go, because I was not planning to stay here, because when you come from Lebanon, the life in Turkey is not good. Even if you find a job, to get a salary is not easy.” – “So people told you those things already in Lebanon?” – “Yes. So we know everything about Turkey. Even with the baby, I would not even get a job. So we knew everything and we were not coming to stay.” (March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Again Tina emphasised the point that, for most Sub-Saharan African migrants, Turkey was not considered a place of residence. In her flat I listened to Tina recall how, with the remaining money, she and her son travelled to Izmir. They stayed in a hotel for about two weeks before hearing that their boat was ready. But things were not as planned, and Tina changed her mind at the last minute. She looked at me and said:

“I went there [to Izmir]. The boat is just like a balloon, a big one, you have to blow. I went there, we were like 25 to get on this balloon, you know, they come at night so you don’t know what they look like. So I enter, and I say: ‘No, I cannot do that with my baby ...’”, she laughs and then is serious again: “I can’t.” – “So you were already on the boat and went out again??” – “I went, yes! But I couldn’t go like this because it is a balloon, they tell you it’s boats, and in the night you have to go out from Izmir, not in the day, because of the police control, ... .” Tina is interrupted by her son who vociferously claims her attention. He wants his mother to put a new CD into the player, and soon starts to sing along with the English children’s songs. Tina turns back to me
and adds: “Yeah, I couldn’t go, I cannot go, I cannot go! I was
scared, but the people that were on the boat they entered Greece”
(4 March 2008, tape-recorded conversation).

Tina panicked when she saw the rubber boat that was supposed to transport her and her son plus about twenty-three other migrants to a Greek island in the dead of night. She assured me several times that she would have got onto the boat without her child. Ultimately, however, she deemed the trip too risky with her daughter. Also Ruth, herself a parent of a small child, hesitated to embark on the dangerous trip across the water. When I talked to her this 35-year-old Kenyan woman had spent about 5 years in Istanbul and given birth to her daughter 18 months ago. During our many conversations between 2007 and today Ruth pondered on her future life. Ruth and her daughter had spent the summer season of 2008 in a tourist destination where Ruth cleaned hotel rooms. At the end of September, I talked to her on the phone. “My work is finished,” she said, “now I will go to Greece. But don’t tell anyone!” I promised. Ruth told me that despite the terrible salary she was able to save up 2,000 YTL. She reasoned: “I have money now, so what should I do in Istanbul? If I stay there, I will just use all the money and eventually I will be in the same situation as before.” She also told me that three Kenyans who used to live in the flat for Kenyans were now on their way to Greece. “Rose and Sarah, they are in Izmir, they are waiting to go. And Stanley is already in Greece, probably in a camp, I don’t know.” Before going to Izmir, however, she wanted to travel to Istanbul to visit two Kenyan women with whom she had shared a flat: “I miss them.” The plan was to pay for her connection and travel down to Izmir to wait for her turn.

When I returned to Istanbul she had changed her plans. Later, during a telephone conversation, Ruth and her daughter were still in Istanbul: “You know, I started to dream about the water. I dreamed that it is night and I’m in the water with my baby. I was afraid, and I decided not to go. It’s too dangerous, I am afraid,” Ruth explained and added: “Also, I have nobody to accommodate me there. I don’t know anyone.” Ruth complained that Tammy, Stanley and Rose and also Susan never called her: “They must be there now, but I don’t know how they are, because they are very quiet” (12 November 2008). Instead, she met her daughter’s father again, “he is a much
better man now,” she explained confidently, invested her earnings in his slowly progressing business and together with him and another Nigerian man had moved into a flat in a neighbourhood some distance from the centre (12 March 2009). “We are living like a small family,” she told me proudly. During that winter and the spring of 2009 she had tried to find a new job in Istanbul, but nothing had materialised. Despite the favourable prospects, the relationship with her boyfriend is again interrupted and in May, Ruth and her daughter return to the tourist town for another season. “I am an idiot, I am such an idiot,” she exclaimed on the phone a few months later.

“People are angry with me because I went back to him, some of them, they don’t call me anymore. Now I am here, it is good. You know, I work soooo hard, and they don’t pay too much, but I have no stress anymore. You should see me, I am soooo thin!! Maybe I will go to Greece, but I don’t know whether it is better there, and me, I am afraid of the water, you know. Maybe I just stay here with my baby. I don’t want to go back to Istanbul, too much stress there, I just want to erase this man from my brain. Every day I pray that he will be erased from my brain. People even called me from Nigeria to say that I should take care, that I should leave this man, that he is bad. God will punish this man! When they pay me here, I’ll buy kontör83 to call Sally, I like her. Maybe through her I can get into contact again with Sarah and Stanley in Greece. Or maybe you can also make some research for me; how is it with a baby there, can I get a job?” (Ruth, June 2009)

Ruth’s initial intention was to make use of her social ties with the other three Kenyans who had travelled to Greece some months before her. With their help, she hoped to be able to start a new and a better life there for her and her daughter. However, contact with these people stopped after they left Turkey, which was something that Ruth felt very negatively about. Thus, despite the four of them having lived together in the same small flat, the Kenya house in Istanbul, the ties between them were not strong enough to bridge the geographical distance and to offer support to Ruth on her planned arrival in Athens. Ruth therefore decided to turn back to her on-and-off boyfriend and to at least get the feeling of ‘going somewhere’ by

83 A pre-paid card for mobile phones.
investing in his business. Even that option did not turn out the way Ruth had hoped. Here we can link to Collyer (2007) and Schapendonk (2011), who pointed to the fragility of social ties developed in transit, and to Carling (2002), who highlighted social network constraints as a reason for involuntary immobility.

Peter had another reason for staying. After two attempts to cross over to Greece, Peter realised that he had to exploit all his options in Istanbul. After managing to save a meagre start capital, Peter too tried his luck in business. Together with one partner in Istanbul and two partners in Nigeria, he buys textile goods in Turkey, sells them in Nigeria and waits for his profits to be sent back. A thorough man, who leaves nothing to chance, he thinks about the weather and what sells on which markets. He told me about his business strategy: “You have to know the markets. In Lagos, for example, you sell mostly hip-hop stuff, while in Abuja they want corporate suits. In Port Harcourt, again, you can sell both.” Autumn had arrived and he had started to think about what to buy and send next. “In December, people are ready to spend more money on nice clothes, because it is the festive season” (19 September 2008). The business worked to some degree and money came in – little by little. The economic crisis of autumn 2008 impacted Peter’s business and in March 2009, he sighed: “Since autumn, the US dollar has increased by 30 per cent against the naira [the Nigerian currency]. Of course, people don’t want to spend three times the money for the same pants they bought half a year ago for a certain price. I still have hopes that the naira will improve, or that people continue buying, but if not, I will have to come up with something else.” Unsure whether he could continue to survive with the gains from his business and possibly expand it, he considered different options; one of which was to move to Greece. “I don’t know yet,” he said, pressing his fingers to his temples, indicating distress, “I am still thinking.” However, before moving he had a few more ideas to try out. For example, he planned to renovate the rather shabby two-room flat he was renting in his name. “I could use it as a hotel for Nigerian customers. During the day I would guide them around, show them the goods they wish for the lowest price possible. Since I am with them, I can get a discount in many places where people know me. In that way, both the shop

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84 A start capital could be as little as 2,000 US dollars. All transactions in the textile business are based and made in US dollars. The Turkish lira is seldom used.
owner and the customers will pay me for that. By renting out my flat to them, I will not only get an additional income, I also prevent others from 'stealing' my customers.” For this reason he still paid a small amount of money for an apartment in Tarabiya, where a number of Nigerians lived, because that was where he would live when he had guests in his flat. Once more, I was impressed with Peter’s thorough and deliberate entrepreneurial skills and told him that. “I am a business man, Brigitte, I have told you!” he replied smiling proudly. Clearly, the Peter I met in September 2008 and then again in March 2009 was permeated by a feeling of ‘going somewhere’. Even though the business proceeded slowly and the economic crisis cast worries over the future, Peter seemed to have accepted the idea of staying in Istanbul. At least for a while. Sharp-minded, he attempted to develop his business despite the very precarious and uncertain circumstances.

To sum up, some of my interlocutors stated that they continued to stay in Istanbul (and in transit) because they wanted to go through the asylum process. Applying for asylum was often perceived to be the last option, when all the other alternatives had evaporated. Often, these people looked upon their stay in Istanbul as “being stuck”, thus indicating the involuntary nature of their stay, their mental fatigue, their lack of money and the unwillingness to risk their or their children’s lives. The asylum process was far from smooth, however. Some individuals had become enmeshed in the structural constraints of an insecure refugee status and an uncertain resettlement process and entangled in the wheels of bureaucracy. Benjamin, for example, struggled for years on an everyday basis with the social and economic consequences of his uncertain status and also psychologically in his struggles against the derogatory value he had been assigned by the powerful, bureaucratic machinery that the asylum process represented. On the other hand, the young Eritrean man, Gidey, expressed faith in the asylum system because he was convinced that he qualified as a refugee under the 1951 Convention. Nevertheless, psychologically unbroken, he maintained his individualistic, self-confident mindset, and with strong integrity trusted in himself to reach his destiny even if the asylum system worked against him. As such, Gidey perceived the asylum system as one way of ‘going
somewhere’. Others stated that they were simply too disillusioned and mentally exhausted to risk the illegal border crossing and to start their lives all over again in a new place. Both Lawrence and Grace mentioned the relative comfort of having acquired new local knowledge and both thematised the huge efforts involved in this achievement.

As we have seen, the decision to stay in Istanbul should not be regarded as a clear-cut result of considerations, but more as a process. Peter, for example, tried to travel to Greece twice, but each time returned to Istanbul without success. By exploiting his options, as he called it, he realised that business was the only way for him to eventually have a relatively stable income. Nevertheless, a start capital as well as a network of people in whom to trust was necessary for that purpose. Also Ruth partly decided to stay in Istanbul (or at least in Turkey) because she lacked social ties in Greece – due to the fragility of the ties she developed in transit. This points to the pivotal role of social networks for trajectories of mobility and immobility; in Peter’s case specifically those that could support his economic endeavours. Chapters 6 and 7 will deal with social networks in more detail.

The logic of transit: anticipation of movement
This sub-section elaborates on the narratives of transit that I captured during the fieldwork.

Many of the interlocutors who had been in Istanbul for some time started to give their transit immobility some thought. “There are some people here that clearly do not know what they are doing,” stated Edward, referring to the many migrants passing through Istanbul before embarking on the dangerous and hazardous trip to Greece. Also Rachel, a long-term resident in Istanbul, and one of the few Nigerian nationals to have obtained Turkish citizenship, had an opinion about the dangerous travels of her co-nationals. Given her conviction that life in a European country was no better than in Istanbul, she called the many Nigerians’ risking their lives when travelling illegally over to Greece “stupid.” “There are many opportunities in Istanbul,” she explained, “you just have to look for them.”

Steve from Kenya had come to similar conclusions. A few weeks previously, on a Sunday afternoon at the Kenyans’ flat, Ruth, Susan and Rose had talked about the difficulties of life in Istanbul. Steve sat on his own skimming a Bible text. He was quiet – until Ruth said
in a loud and frustrated voice: “Well, then I go to Greece, what else can I do?” Steve looked up and said: “You know, there are many people in Greece who are suffering the same as here, and they even want to come back here to Istanbul.” – “Why?” Ruth’s eyes met his in disbelief. – “See,” Steve started to explain, “it is the same: you are here and you want to go back home, but nobody at home would ever understand that.” Ruth nodded. Steve revealed: “It all has to do with the mindset of the people. People chase something, they have the mindset of chasing something, a better life. But – will they recognise the better life when they see it? And you have to ask yourself, what happens to the mindset when they reach the goal, when the goal is gone because it is reached, what is next? People just chase and chase and chase.” Steve pointed out that people only chase material goals, and that they would benefit from looking inside themselves, and through that find God (6 April 2008).

Tina expressed similar statements. In contrast to Edward, Rachel and Steve, Tina’s situation can be described as fully in limbo. The 29-year-old Liberian had arrived in Istanbul from Lebanon and filed an asylum application with UNHCR in Ankara that was rejected 18 months later. She made some money by styling African women’s hair, but otherwise found it difficult to generate an income. During our conversation in March 2008, Tina said that she did not have any concrete plan. She was critical of the option of going to Greece, of continuing to travel.

“If I find a job here to make all the money I don’t need to go to Greece, because Greece is the same.” – “Yes so you can save the trouble of risking the trip.” – “Yes, it is very risky. And you see also, from Lebanon to Turkey from Turkey to Greece, maybe also they say that they have a good job in Italy, ‘why don’t you go there.’ Enough! How long will you be on this journey? You know, you have to sit down, because the time is going and you are getting old, nothing but older and older and older. You have to sit down also. It is not like, now you are going from place to place, your children also have to do the same trip. You have to at least sit down and save, even if it is only 1 dollar you are saving, before he is growing up to be somebody.” – “Because you are not at home here, you are still on the trip.” – “Yes, still on the trip and you don’t know how long you are going to stay, you know.” (Tape-recorded conversation)
Tina talked a lot about the uncertainty of her situation, and the impermanence of her stay in Istanbul. Just like Steve from Kenya and Rachel from Nigeria, she was critical of the restless quest for rewards that might be bigger somewhere else. She reflected on what it meant to be in transit, what it meant to constantly juggle with the different places where life may be even better. Responsibility for a child had already made her revise her plans (see the previous section), and also now in a situation experienced as transit, this responsibility influenced her decision-making. The fact that there was no prospect of schooling in Turkey for her son worried her a lot. This was why she sometimes considered going back to Liberia, even though, she said, she did not know anyone there. There was nothing to go back to; no family, no house, no job, no land, although there would at least be schooling for her son. Her plan had not yet been realised because she needed someone to travel together with the child. She, in turn, would then stay in Turkey or travel to Greece, raise money and send about 200 Euro home every month for schooling and other expenses. “The most important here is that he is not going to school, and I cannot do anything because he is here. He is with me all the time.” – “Yes, I guess now it is OK, because he is very small, but when he is older ...” – “Yes, but time is passing so fast ....” Tina ended our conversation with a deep sigh.

Mary was in a very different situation. This forty-year-old Kenyan told me that she was guided by God to come to Istanbul to study at the bible school at one of the evangelical churches (four hours for five evenings per week for two years). I asked her whether she thought she would ever go to Greece. She answered:

“No. Me, I have an apparition from God; God sent me to bible school. So when I came here [from Syria], I didn’t have any mind of going anywhere else. God spoke to me, but I did not know which country. It took me three weeks to come here and after that God told me I must join bible school.” – “So you were meant to be here.” – “Yeah, maybe when I finish bible school, maybe God will launch me to another country, in Africa, because I go back to Africa.” – “It will be interesting to see where he will lead you.” – “He wants me to go back home, he wants me to go to Asian country, I don’t mind, anywhere God wants me to go. I am walking by his direction.”

(May 2008, tape-recorded conversation)
Since Mary’s arrival in Istanbul she had been very committed to her bible studies. Not everybody understood that, though, and she told me how she was mocked at the Kenya house for giving up her job, for never going to a club, and in general for her strong beliefs. “You know, I have seen many people who travelled to Greece, but I always wanted to stay here because of bible school. Some laughed at me because of that. Some people from the church travelled, and some of them they died.”

As Steve, Rachel, and Tina have already initially touched on, people are supposed to travel further because Istanbul is not understood as a final destination.\textsuperscript{85} Thus, generally, there is a notion of an all-encompassing logic on the anticipation of further movement after a limited period of immobility. This understanding also came across in my countless short conversations with newcomers from various countries, e.g. at the soup kitchen, in Peter’s flat or in the IIMP courtyard, when they told me – some with desperation and some with a reckless look in their eyes – how their only chance ‘to get somewhere’ was to leaving Turkey for Greece. Also Mary’s experience of being laughed at because she decided to stay in Istanbul in order to finish bible school revealed crucial aspects of the logic of transit. The perception of a city that had nothing to offer was a recurring narrative, and it certainly influenced people’s decision-making. This information is vital for a more comprehensive understanding of transit. It seems that aspirations – whether developed in the country of origin, during travel or in the course of the stay in Istanbul – do not only strongly guide people’s actual movements but also shape a mental perception of them. Like irregularity, this logic of transit that I call the anticipation of a limited stay is followed by further physical movement and permeates all aspects of social and economic life.

\textbf{Greece as imagination – Greece as destination}

This sub-section presents the reasoning of several individuals about staying in Istanbul. Often, a stated decision seemed to be accompanied by some kind of ambivalence. Even people who declared that they were staying in Istanbul, every now and then mentioned Greece as a first and vital step towards better living conditions.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{85} Also Schapendonk (2010:131) comments on Istanbul as a ‘place of mobility’.
By October 2008, and after a failed attempt to reach Greece, Tina had decided to stay in Istanbul and eventually return to her country of birth. Sitting on her couch and preparing to plait my hair, Tina offered me a small range of different hair colourings to choose from. She then began the painstaking job of plaiting my hair into hundreds of thin plaits. At one point I asked her whether she was disappointed about not being able to realise her plan to go to Greece. “Yes,” she replied, “a bit. But you know, what would I have done in Greece? It would have been something new all over again, and then again further and further and further and then? Sooner or later I wanna go back to Liberia anyway” (1 October 2008). She had also started to search for information about the living situation in Monrovia. Since leaving the country fifteen years ago as a teenager, she can no longer remember all the city’s districts. She also looked at a couple of flats on the internet, and was surprised that they were so cheap, “25 dollars a month!” she exclaimed. Her new plan was to save a couple of hundred dollars so that she could rent a flat and look for a job without feeling stressed. After countless hours of sitting on her couch, my new look was finally complete. She looked at me, satisfied with her work. Just before I left, she said jokingly: “Now that you look like an African, why don’t you send me your passport from Greece?! Then I put white colour in my face and meet you there!” She burst out laughing, and so did I (2 October 2008). The concept of “Greece” lurks around the corner and never completely goes away – even for people who stated completely different intentions. Greece is a call that changes in intensity but never completely vanishes.

This sudden popping up of the wish to go to Greece occurred several times in my conversations with people who had previously declared that they either wanted to return to their home country or stay in Istanbul. Like Sally from Kenya. All the time I have known her, she has never expressed the desire to travel to Greece. On the contrary, she always stated that she wanted to take her child back home to her sister, and would then return to Turkish tourist resorts to make some money. One day at the Kenya house, she suddenly burst out: “I wanna go to Greece!” – “Why?” I asked, curious to know why her plans had suddenly changed. She replied: “No, I don’t think that I really wanna go. I don’t think that Greece is better, there are already too many people there, and every day more people
are coming. I want to go home!” Then she pointed to Ruth and said: “Ruth, she wants to go!” Ruth nodded, and smiled sheepishly. “If she could,” Sally added (1 May 2008).

These examples suggest that the notion of the logic of transit needs to be extended. Apart from the anticipation of further movement within a limited time-frame, the logic of transit also involves imagination – here of Greece and other European countries as better places. However, as shown above, many individuals who are aware of the domination of this logic actively question it. Despite this, most of them, and above all those with no stable legal status, do not entirely exclude the possibility of travelling further. This became clear in the few possibilities in which travel seemed tangible. In 2008, at the end of May, shortly before I left Istanbul, we sat next to each other at lunch at the Moms and Tots group. Tina burst out: “I want to go to Greece!” Her eyes sparkled with hope and determination. A former class mate that had resettled in Australia had promised to send money, and, at the same time, she had heard of a new connection, one that was supposed to be smooth and safe. One of the few Liberians in Istanbul had travelled that way to Greece and told her about it. “For only 2,000 dollars, in a car all the way to Athens!” She had already invested 20 YTL in a small rucksack for the few things she intended to take with her and proudly showed it to me. She would send the rest by cargo, she thought. In Greece the plan was that her Australian friend would meet her and together they would find a way for her to enter Australia. There she would cook and clean and work hard until she was able to pay her friend back. Tina laughed a lot that morning, and her face shone. I had never seen her looking so energetic and happy.

I ran into Tina again that September, when I returned to Istanbul. She had learned yet another lesson connected to the logic of transit. Everything had seemed to work out at first. Her school friend sent her the money and Tina deposited it with the guarantor. But shortly before she was about to embark on the trip her Liberian friend called her from Athens and told her that she had lied. The connection was not by car all the way to Athens, but would be interrupted by a seven hour hike through the border region. Even her Liberian friend had travelled like that, together with her husband and their
toddler. Her friend told her that the connection man expected them to recruit new clients and to lie to them about the details of the trip. “But I have to tell you, you are my sister,” her friend sobbed into the telephone.

Tina decided to try her luck anyway. But shortly after the group started walking up a mountainous road, people at the front started to shout “police, police”, and everybody ran back to where they came from. Luckily someone helped her with her son. “There was also an Ethiopian woman with a small baby, she used to come to Moms and Tots,” Tina told me. “But she took the boat later to Greece, and she made it. Now she is in Athens, and she has even met my Liberian friend there.” But Tina was scared: “I don’t want to risk my life.” She had also changed; the sparkle in her eyes had disappeared. Pragmatically she explained to me that she would now apply for one of the scholarships that IIMP granted in order to improve her English. And then, in the spring, she planned to travel back to Liberia (22 September 2008). Although I did not meet Tina on my last visit to Istanbul in September 2011, I discovered that both she and her son were still there.

Discussion
This chapter has taken up theoretical perspectives on migration and mobility and briefly presented their different points of departure. The assumption of a linear movement between a country of origin and a country of destination inherent in contemporary migration theories has been highlighted and criticised. Perspectives on mobility were adopted because they open up for the recognition of the inherent complexity of human movement beyond that accounted for by migration theories. As such, they facilitate theoretical considerations of transit and elucidate the symbiotic role that immobility plays in the accounts of mobility. As the theoretical literature review indicated, emigration is not only conditioned by conflicts, economic rationale and people’s socio-economic status, but also by gendered social norms that result in different acceptances of male and female out-migration. However, an analysis of labour markets, individual aspirations or social networks alone can account for the trajectories of mobility and immobility in and from the location of transit.
In transit the original motivation for migration is an integral part of the decision-making process with regard to further mobility. Quite obviously, it matters whether a person flees persecution or pursues educational or job opportunities, whether an individual moves out of poverty to provide for themselves or their dependants, or whether social satisfaction lies at the heart of the migration decision. These things also contribute to patterns of mobility and immobility. In addition, it also matters for the subjective perception of ‘going somewhere’, or alternatively ‘being stuck’. Hage’s (2005) distinction between existential and physical mobility is useful when accounting for various individual trajectories of movement or stasis, and especially when acknowledging the situated gaze inherent in every human being from which reality is perceived and decisions are taken. As we have seen in the examples presented in this chapter, mobility and risk-taking intersect with social categories, such as gender, life cycle (parenting) and social capital (networks).

Different reasons for staying in a transit location have been presented. As pointed out in this chapter, some migrants have carved paths for their social mobility in Istanbul. These will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7. Others have experienced existential mobility, i.e. the feeling that ‘they are going somewhere’, even though social mobility has not yet occurred. Others, in contrast, simply lack the basic possibilities for both social and physical movement and do not perceive their stay in Istanbul to entail existential mobility either. This leads me to state that Hage’s (2005) stipulated observation that the loss of existential mobility leads to physical mobility plays out rather differently when people with an irregular status face travel options that are dangerous and even life-threatening – above all when children are involved. Irregular status should thus be considered as one of the most important intersections impacting on further mobility and immobility from a location of transit. Finally, as explained in this chapter, aspirations guide migratory movements to a large extent. They also develop in the location of transit. For the majority of the Sub-Saharan African migrants I met, Istanbul was not considered as a place in which to stay, which in turn permeated many aspects of their social life. Greece was the place that promised better possibilities for existential mobility and physical mobility. Thus, like irregularity, the logic of transit, i.e. the anticipation of
a limited stay followed by further physical movement, permeated most aspects of the migrants’ social and economic lives.

Furthermore, this chapter has presented critical views of transit movement as expressed by a number of my interlocutors. Despite their criticism and their indications of their stay in Istanbul as voluntary, many of them still wanted to travel, or at least considered travelling further, if a reasonably safe opportunity arose. Such ambivalence can be explained with reference to Eastmond (2007), who points out that refugees (or other individuals in a state of uncertainty, such as migrants in transit) are in the midst of their (mobility) story. Several of the people I met in Istanbul, such as Tina (and Peter at the beginning), made concrete plans to leave the city, e.g. by investing in a new rucksack or paying only half the monthly rent. Considering this, it becomes clear that the decision to leave Istanbul is not a clear-cut event, but rather a process that is highly dependent on external factors, such as the appearance of a new, safe connection, the rekindling of ties with former schoolmates, or the receipt of new and trustworthy information. This finding blurs the line between Carling’s (2002) suggested distinction between voluntary and involuntary immobility – at least from a perspective of transit. My examples suggest that mobility in transit is deeply dependent on social networks. The next chapter will take an in-depth look into how social networks condition transit and vice versa, how transit conditions social networks.
CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL NETWORKS IN TRANSIT

This chapter turns to social networks in transit and explains how the formation, maintenance and function of social networks are conditioned by the fact that these social relations play out in a situation of transit. The chapter is largely divided into two sections: one presenting a review of relevant theoretical literature for the purpose of analysing the material, and the other presenting and analysing the fieldwork material with an explicit focus on social networks and transit with the aid of the conceptual tools derived from the first section. The main findings of this chapter are listed in the summarising and concluding discussion.

The politics of support mobilisation

The concept of politics of support mobilisation, as termed and defined by Ilda Lourenço-Lindell (2002:29), refers to social relationships and the practices and strategies of forging and maintaining them. By doing so, it takes into account the myriad of interests, motivations, tactics and acts of agency that support mobilisation.

“I look upon social fields where both co-operation and struggle take place. They contain internal divisions of rights and duties, imbalances in flows and power, with instances of dependence and marginality. Networks may be held together by rules or sets of informal rights which are enforced, defaulted upon, negotiated and contested. They conflate relationships built for different purposes, recruited in different social settings and underlined by various affiliations and identities.” (Lourenço-Lindell, 2002:28)
This quote defines networking as a dynamic social process in which struggles of power and support, solidarity and exploitation have an equal place. Network analysis basically offers a tool “to map relations of assistance” (Lourenço-Lindell, 2002:28), which fits the purpose of this thesis. The dynamism of social network derives from the character of networks containing both structure and agency. Thus, on the one hand the structure of the network may influence an individual’s actions, or prevent an individual from joining such a network. On the other hand, individuals may seek to change the structure of the network or circumvent network limitations by investing in alternative relationships (Lourenço-Lindell, 2002:29). At the same time, as Cecilia Menjívar (2000:4) points out, “these networks do not exist in a social vacuum.” As such, networks themselves are exposed to and impacted by the structural context of a certain location as well as by the social positions people occupy.

Social networks as loci of assistance
This section draws on theories and previous research on social networks and social capital. J. Clyde Mitchell’s (1969) work on urban areas in the Copperbelt of Africa is often cited as one of the first studies to apply social network analysis. In his work, social networks are defined as a product of a set of norms that are consciously recognised by a group of people (1969:2). Since the publication of Mitchell’s work, many authors have made use of social network analysis in the fields of economics, migration and development.

In most studies of migration, social networks serve as a tool with which to analyse chain migration and integrative support functions (see, e.g., Massey et al., 1998; Morawska, 2009; Tilly, 1990). However, less focus has been paid to structural constraints and internal power relations, thereby obscuring the view of the mechanisms, functions and limitations of a network. As Menjívar (2000:5) points out, “a common background, constant contact, and shared migration experiences do not automatically breed cohesive and supportive networks.” She argues that the structural forces that shape the set of opportunities of migrants impinge on the array of resources they will have access to in order to help themselves and others. This, however, does not imply that migrants are not in a position to act upon individual agency or that all social ties between informal migrants are frail and exploitative in nature. By the same token, little
is known about how new migrants “access, draw upon and maintain social networks” (Ryan, Sales, Tilki, & Siara, 2008). In Thomas Faist’s (1997a) chapter on the “crucial meso-level”, the author points to the need to unpack unequal power relations in relatively closed, small units such as households and kinship formations, and to assess their impact on migration strategies, and specifically on “relative immobility”. By positioning migrant social networks at the meso-level of analysis, as it is done here, it is possible to look into the internal stratification of networks and acknowledge their role as both a facilitator and a hindrance of onward migration in the situation of transit.

A number of highly valuable ethnographic studies address in-depth informal social networks in the context of migration and integration in a new country of residence. For example, Manuel A. Vásquez (2009) has looked into the research-documented perception of the lack of solidarity and community among Brazilians abroad. His study acknowledges the impact of structural constraints on social network formation. The study shows that the lack of a larger population of Brazilians inhabiting urban areas, the lack of economic capital and a busy work schedule all contribute to disrupting Brazilian social networks in the new location. On the other hand, the cohesive function of religion is observed – with the condition that church programmes churches emphasise outreach rather than personal matters.

Furthermore, a number of scholars include the mechanisms of intra-group stratification in their analyses – an issue that emerges in my material as very important. In her study on informal networks of documented and undocumented Salvadorian immigrants in the United States, Sarah J. Mahler (1995) points out how the newcomers – expected to be exploited by Americans – are taken advantage of by their co-nationals. The same patterns of exploitation and instability in informal Salvadorian social networks in the United States have also been observed by Cecilia Menjívar (2000). She describes how individuals have been unable to gain the support of their family members, and highlights the often under-researched fact that social networks – particularly those are based on strong ties – are not made of steel and may bend under extreme conditions of structural disadvantage, such as poverty.
Vilna Francine Bashi’s (2007) main criticism is that immigrant networks have largely remained a black box in migration research. By looking into stratifications of control and power in West Indian transnational social networks, she has been able to develop a network formation consisting of what she calls ‘hubs and spokes’ and analyse the roles that these play. In a hub-and-spoke network, hubs are the seasoned co-ethnics who organise the migration and integration of newcomers into the United States. Hubs are generally driven by the wish to enhance their reputation and thus their social capital, and consequently tend to select those migrants who promise the success of local integration. These newcomers often find themselves in a long-term relationship of dependency with the hubs. In addition to their knowledge of the local circumstances, the amount and quality of the hubs’ social ties to gatekeepers of integration (e.g. employers, landlords etc.) serve as factors of stratification within the group. In some of the studies, the internal power stratifications of networks are explained with reference to patriarchal structures (Faist, 1997a; Faist & Özveren, 2004).

In the above literature, gender relations, social capital and cultural capital have all been identified as stratifying assets in intersection with ethnicity.

Social network versus community

Before continuing the literature review on social networks, it is necessary to clarify the use of the term social network and the avoidance of the term community in the next section. I chose ‘social network’ as an object of analysis and not ‘community’ – despite the fact that the latter is an emic term and widely used by my interlocutors. As stated initially, most of them arrived in Istanbul without having any contacts in place. However as will be discussed more extensively below, they readily used the notion of “one's own community”, thus implying the possibility of support, solidarity and a feeling of responsibility towards the newcomers.

The use of the concept ‘community’ has been contested in recent anthropological studies (for a thorough account see Amit & Rapport, 2002). The concept has (too) often been used as a locus of research, with a neglect of its internal structures, functions and struggles (Amit & Rapport, 2002:42). This has led to the suggestion
that community represents a social unit that is free from friction and a space in which members can harmoniously extend claims of assistance towards their ever responsive co-members. Also, ‘community’ has often implied a sharp boundary both at the meso-level between different communities and at the individual level between members and non-members of a community (Amit & Rapport, 2002:45). The term tends to evoke the impression of an a priori existence of a bounded unit, and paints the picture of an essentialised membership. The notion of network, on the other hand, can indicate a relationship between two or more people or a whole myriad of interpersonal connections. What sets these notions apart from one another is that ‘social network’ carries an acknowledgement of “efforts, experiences and history” employed to connect people with each other (Amit & Rapport, 2002:22). Furthermore, while not foreclosing the ‘ethnic’ from playing the central role, ethnicity is not automatically assumed to offer the glue of sociality. Rather, as Vered Amit and Nigel Rapport (2002:22) state, networks “(...) are likely to extend across many different categories and situations.”

As will be shown in this chapter, the fact that on many occasions my interlocutors talked about distrust among their compatriots, and openly expressed their suspicions against some of their co-nationals, highlights a micro-cosmos of individual interests and boundary-makings within a group perceived as ‘community’. In the context of my field research in Istanbul, ethnicity (or nationality) – instrumentalised as well as pragmatically approached by many – appeared to constitute the reliable lines of boundary-making and network formation, at least in the initial stages. This presumed ethnic or national social unit is what many people referred to as ‘community’, or sometimes ‘her/his own people’. Nevertheless, within this presumed sociality, many sub-groupings are formed around intersections of social categories. Regarding the local dynamics of social amalgamations as networks rather than community has the advantage of not seeing boundaries as well-defined as the term ‘community’ suggests. Also, it allows us to observe that some networks are strong and stable, whereas others are fragile and sometimes purely utilitarian.

During the fieldwork this became very clear in my conversations with students from African countries. Matthew, for example, was enrolled on a master’s course at one of Istanbul’s universities. Liv-
ing on the university campus, this Kenyan did not come into contact with other Kenyans or other Africans. During a visit to the city centre he heard about the monthly African Mass in the centrally located Catholic church, which he decided to attend. There he met people from a variety of African countries and was invited by some Kenyans to visit the flat where Kenyans gathered in Tarlabası. But he also forged friendly ties with people of other nationalities, such as Peter from Nigeria. A couple of weeks later he recounted his visit to the flat to Peter and to me over a cup of tea. Making clear that he privileged his student identity, he framed his visit to the Kenya house as ‘nice’ but did not indicate any shared collective identity. It was obvious that Matthew had no prior knowledge about the migration of his compatriots to Turkey and the conditions of their stay.

The other example on which I would like to draw is Edward’s account of the ‘African community’ in Istanbul, already mentioned in Chapter 4. One of the reasons why the attempts to form an organisation to “unite Africa” failed miserably was a power struggle between nationalities and between legal statuses. The suggestion of a student heading the organisation was clearly opposed (a longer discussion about this appears later in the chapter). This suggests that social networks among Sub-Saharan African migrants are located at the intersection of ethnicity and immigration status as well as – in some cases – socio-economic background. However, the fact that Matthew did not have any contact with Kenyans or that it was felt improper for a ‘community’ to be represented by a student, does not imply that students are generally excluded from the networks. It adds up to the realisation that shared ethnicity alone does not create a community. Yet, ethnicity does play a relevant role in the formation of social networks among Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul. In fact, my fieldwork shows that ethnicity accounts for an important part of social network formation, where claims for and an extension of support play a central role. The advantage of applying the term ‘network’ rather than ‘community’ is that it offers a broader view of interpersonal relationships and opens up for the recognition of a social linkage other than ethnicity.
Social and symbolic ties

Social networks are formed by the social ties that people share with each other, i.e. relations between individuals whose interpersonal transactions are guided by expectations, obligations, norms or shared interests.

The strength of social ties can vary enormously. Mark Granovetter (1973) distinguished between two sets of personal ties and called them strong and weak ties. Strong ties are defined by emotions, intensive transactions and endurance, and are often found in small, bonded groups such as families, kinships, communal organisations or other groups of individuals perceived to be sociologically alike (Faist, 2000:201; Granovetter, 1973:1361-2). Strong ties have a cohesive function but can, as Granovetter (1973:1378) critically notes, lead to the fragmentation of social relations between societal groups. Weak social ties, on the other hand, are characteristic of indirect and superficial relations, such as the relation to a friend of a friend, or to a new acquaintance, i.e. to people outside the immediate sphere of kinship or social similarity. Importantly, weak ties are not necessarily inferior to strong ones or of less value to individuals (Faist, 2000:101; Granovetter, 1973:1366). The positive aspect of weak ties lies in their possibilities for diffusion (Granovetter, 1973:1378), which implies gaining access to more diversified resources outside the immediate sphere of intimate relations. Regardless of some of the more critical perspectives (see Koniordos, 2005b; Morlicchio, 2005), weak ties are generally seen as the most useful when it comes to spreading and obtaining information – especially if they create links between different networks (Faist, 2000:101).

From a micro-level perspective, and on an everyday-basis, social networks are kept together by three different mechanisms that function like a glue between individuals: norms, reciprocity and solidarity (Faist, 2000:104ff). While relationships based on strong ties are more often constituted by norms, i.e. a set of culturally coded responsibilities and rights (Faist, 2000; Lourenço-Lindell, 2002), in reciprocal relationships with weak ties the transactions can vary according to the time that has elapsed between a favour done and a favour returned and depending on the service that is exchanged (for example a service can be paid back in kind or in money). Reciprocal transactions are understood as actions that require a reaction of
approximately the same value in return. If the reaction does not come about, the principle of reciprocity ceases. Depending on the degree of trust involved, the reaction is expected to evolve after a shorter or longer period of time; from immediately to several months (Faist, 2000:105). A balancing account between two (or more) particular actors can be termed as ‘specific reciprocity’, while transaction between different members of a group can be termed ‘general reciprocity’ (Faist, 2000:106-7).

Along similar lines, Robert Putnam (2000) developed a different terminology departing from the distinction between the results of social capital in integration and linkage (see Woolcock, 1998). For Putnam, bonding ties bind sociologically similar individuals to each other, while bridging ties enable individuals to connect to individuals outside their immediate social sphere. Michael Woolcock (2001) added a third kind of tie – linking ties – to this categorisation, which enables individuals to connect along a vertical scale of social and economic positions in society. Both Putnam and Woolcock regard bonding ties as crucial for “getting by”, while they ascribe bridging ties the beneficial effect of “getting ahead” (Field, 2003:65). In migration studies, contacts with the majority society are usually considered as linking ties (Ryan et al., 2008:676). Although this different categorisation of social ties has many similarities with those presented above, the difference is that the strong/weak-categorisation reveals more about the mechanisms that connect individuals, while the bonding/bridging/linking-categorisation discloses the diversity in terms of the social categories comprised.

In their interview study on Polish migrants in London, Ryan et al. (2008) found that cultural capital (including qualifications and linguistic skills), immigration status and the attitudes of the receiving society had a significant impact on the creation of contacts with other migrants and with the receiving society (Ryan et al., 2008:677). Even though weak social ties are seen as important for alleviating social living conditions, the question as to why some migrants are able to forge helpful weak ties and others are not is largely under-researched (Ryan et al., 2008:676). This observation is shared by Lourenço-Lindell (2002:238), who has observed that some individuals in her study were able to connect to a variety of social networks, while others found it difficult to select a network
of their liking or to disconnect from those who took advantage of them. Thus, it appears that scholars of social networks and social capital have hitherto not shed enough light on the internal processes of stratification in social networks. As a result of this, there is a lack of knowledge as to how resources and information are transferred between individuals in a social network – an issue that highlights the internal stratifications of power. Schapendonk (2011:137ff) argues for “the strength of new encounters”, by which he means the connections – loose or strengthened over time – that are established (and sometimes also lost) while travelling, i.e. during the period of instability that an irregular journey entails. This observation certainly corresponds with the many observations I made in the course of my fieldwork. However, I go one step further in that I analyse the basis on which these new encounters have been forged. Adapted to a situation of transit in Istanbul, the ability to establish new social ties and thereby acquire social capital is of pivotal importance. Istanbul’s prominent ethnic, social and economic diversity provides an optimal platform for establishing bridging ties and allowing them to grow – over time – into strong ties.

Importantly, symbolic ties differ in several ways from other social ties. As mentioned above, they do not have to be of an enduring nature but can be sustained without direct contact with other people. In other words, it is not the continuous relationship that is the most important, but rather the common meaning-making and shared future expectations and religious, ideological, ethnic or national representations (Faist, 2000:102). Symbolic ties are also important because they go beyond the limited reach of strong ties and weak ties. Symbolic ties between individuals can emerge without prior personal contact. They thus correspond to Benedict Anderson’s (2006) concept of “imagined communities”, where people perceive themselves to have a clear understanding of and a sense of belonging to those in the same ‘community’. A nation is often imagined as a community, with ‘culture’ as the unifying glue that holds the ‘community’ together. As Anderson (2006:7) points out, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”
Religion, racial features, (political) ideologies and any other kind of similarity can form the basis for symbolic ties. This concept suggests that ties do not develop in an empty space, but that ‘something bigger’ governs their formation which is detached from both the individuals in question and from an immediate place and moment in time (Faist, 2000:15ff). ‘Something bigger’ thus refers to a kind of “imagined community”, or symbolic kinship, that can be acted upon even without prior personal relationships. This can be based on a common nationality, ideology, religion or ethnicity. Thus, an important feature of symbolic ties is that they allow individuals to have social relations with “an otherwise anonymous crowd of strangers” (Faist, 2000:101).

As can be seen from Peter’s story in Chapter 2, in the conditions of transit in Istanbul, most of the contacts between Sub-Saharan African migrants begin as symbolic ties, because in the initial stages – according to the explanations provided by the interlocutors – any person with black skin is perceived to be a member of a symbolic social network of “blacks”.

Social capital as a social stratifier
The central thesis of social capital theory is that “relationships matter” (Field, 2003:1). Social capital is a product of social ties, although not all social ties necessarily produce social capital. Social capital stems from those ties that are mobilisable for a certain goal, and are generally concerned with pursuing social advantage (Anthias, 2007:1). The application of the concept of (social) capital has the advantage of highlighting history – in that it implies accumulation – and thus goes beyond a momentary snapshot of action (Bourdieu, 1983:183). Much has been written about social capital in the academic literature since the publication of Pierre Bourdieu’s work in the early 1980s, most prominently by James S. Coleman and Robert Putnam in the 1990s, who put the concept in the forefront of American sociology and economics. Social capital has been used in many guises – from metaphor to starting premise to theoretical framework – and can be regarded as a truly interdisciplinary concept (Koniordos, 2005a:4).

The works of Bourdieu (1983; 1986), Coleman (1990) and Putnam (1993) are predominantly cited in studies on social capital,
and inasmuch as they depart from rather different world-views and purposes, offer relevant positions of departure. For the purpose of investigating how social capital stratifies social relations, Bourdieu’s work seems the obvious point of departure, inasmuch as he accounts for how a different access to resources shapes and reinforces social inequality and hierarchy. For Bourdieu (1983; 1986), money and property alone do not explain social stratification in society; in his account social and cultural capital are of equal importance, because they can be converted into economic capital. Coleman (1990) and Putnam (1993), on the other hand, are more concerned with the benefits of social capital for family and community by the translation to and alleviation of human capital for the next generation (see Behtoui, 2006:21; Haug, 1997:2). Their work is therefore less relevant in the process of making sense of the ethnographic material presented in this thesis. Furthermore, this tradition of research has generally tended to view social capital as (solely) positive, and has been criticised for considering social capital as independent from structural constraints (see also Arneil, 2006:16).

In this thesis I therefore use Bourdieu’s definition of social capital. Given the topic of the thesis, Bourdieu’s view of social capitalism as an “ideology of inclusion and exclusion” (Arneil, 2006:17) seems very suitable. Bourdieu (1983:187) claims that “the size of each individual’s social capital depends on the range of diffusion of mobilisable networks of relationships and on the size of the (economic, cultural or symbolic) capital of those in relationship with the individual.”86 He thereby stresses the relational character of social capital, where other actors’ capital is crucial for the individual’s social capital. Woolcock (2001:8) shares this point by defining social capital as a ‘relational variable’; thereby implying a certain social and economic embeddedness of the social actors (Woolcock, 1998:163). Furthermore, I find Nan Lin’s (2001) work useful when accounting for the social inequality among groups and within groups (intra-group stratification). By paying attention to both the opportunity structures and the choice at the structural level, as well as purposive actions (or agency) at the individual level, Lin presents a model in which the relational sphere between micro- and macro levels is taken into consideration. By paying attention to the composition of

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86 Translation from German by the author.
individual networks, Lin (2001:39) finds that they are shaped by the homophily principle, which means that interactions usually occur among actors with similar socio-economic resources and lifestyles, or with similar ethnicities. This raises questions regarding the recognition of similarity, which will be dealt with in the next section. Due to the dominance of homophily in network formations, individuals – especially those with fewer resources at the lower end of the social stratification – need weak ties in order to increase their social capital by diversifying their network. Nevertheless, Lin (2001:73) recognises the constraints that structures place on opportunity and choice, as indicated by Granovetter’s (1973) strength-of-the weak ties proposition. He argues that social inequality is a result of groups’ different access to social capital, which in turn is a result of a process shaped by different opportunity structures for different societal groups. Social capital is thus both a product of groups and of individuals (Faist, 2000). Inasmuch as an individual’s social capital is connected to the resources of other members of the network, the position of the network in society has an impact on further social capital development. For Lin (2001:73), the structure largely determines the agency of individuals in their efforts to form and maintain social ties. That is why external and structural factors that either enable or constrain a group’s or an individual’s ability to access resources need to be taken into consideration (Danış, 2010:145).

**Social capital and trust**

Social networks enforce norms, reciprocity or solidarity between members and in that way that increase trust. Indeed, norms, reciprocity and solidarity are necessary for the creation of trust on which to base a social relation, and the relationships in turn increase and reproduce mutual norms, reciprocal actions and trust between the group members (Haug, 1997:16). The most important factor in trust-building is the trustworthiness of the other person (Haug, 1997:17). Especially in relationships in which transactions are more time consuming, i.e. where reciprocity is not immediate, trust is of considerable importance. This probability of trustworthiness is usually greater in small, closed circles of people, such as family and kinship relations. Nevertheless, trust also appears in weak ties relations (Haug, 1997:17).
According to Piotr Sztompka (1999), trust can be defined as the anticipation of someone else’s future actions. Or, as Partha Dasgupta (1988:55-6) puts it: “You do not trust a person to do something merely because he says he will do it. You trust him because, knowing what you know of his disposition, his information, his ability, his available options and their consequences, you expect he will *choose* to do it.” In relation to my material, this rather functional and instrumental understanding of trust is more applicable in weak social ties, and less so in strong familial ties. According to Coleman (1990:307), “individuals in social structures with high levels of obligations outstanding at any time, (...) have greater social capital on which they can draw.” Trust and social capital thus work together: a service is extended to a certain person if the lender can extend trust to this person for repayment in any kind of currency (money, contacts, other resources) at a later stage. Although social network theorists do not always agree about trust being a requirement for or a consequence of social network formations (Field, 2003:64), the findings from my fieldwork suggest – as we see later in the chapter – that it is both. On the one hand, (in line with Woolcock, 2001:13), trust develops as a product of social capital over time (weak ties grow strong). On the other hand, trust, produced in different ways, can be seen as a source of social capital (for the latter see the discussion on immobility as a trust-inducing state in Chapter 7).

**Cultural capital as a social stratifier**

Bourdieu (1983; 1986) suggested that all forms of capital accumulation should be understood in terms of power relations between different groups of people (see Arneil, 2006). Cultural capital after Bourdieu (1986) often refers to language, certain skills and educational qualifications, and is often expressed in behavioural codes derived from socio-economic background and education. The concept has been used by Bourdieu to explain the social reproduction of class structure and the related human behaviour (Lin, 2001:18). Thus, Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of cultural capital includes formal educational credentials, even though he regards these credentials as cultured means working towards the reproduction of domination in society rather than given. The other part of cultural capital includes informal education, i.e. the skills, knowledge, social codes
and social frames of reference that cut through affinity to social class and are usually not formally measured and credited.

Also Ryan et al. (2008:677), in their study on Polish migrants’ social networks and social capital in London, realised the crucial role that cultural capital played in the formation of (migrant) social networks. While reception structures and public sentiments towards immigrants are regarded as crucial for migrants to mobilise their social ties in a beneficial way (see also Dans̄, 2010:145), cultural capital has been found to be equally important, especially when it comes to establishing bridging ties.

Migrant capital
The process of migrating, and the time in the transit space in particular, involves constant learning, similar to what I have elsewhere called an apprenticeship (Suter, forthcoming). Here I introduce the notion of migrant capital to capture this process, which I see as a specific, locally embedded type of cultural capital. At the bottom of the conceptualisation of the term lies Mahler’s (1995) term ‘immigrant capital’ which she applies to the newly arrived migrants’ realisations that their fellow nationals’ informal local knowledge provides them with relative power. It thus refers to the migrants’ levels of knowledge of the structural and relational system in Istanbul that helps them to avoid exploitative situations. This includes Turkish language skills, the knowledge of how to get along with co-migrants, whom to trust, how and where to access the necessary resources, as well as how to handle the Turkish police, employers, estate agents and neighbours, and how to negotiate relative security and obtain relative economic stability from a marginalised (and often illegalised) status. As stated elsewhere, this thesis illuminates Sub-Saharan migrants, with intimate knowledge and understanding of their situation and of Istanbul, rather than Turkish people or any other actors relevant for these migrants’ situation in Istanbul.

Here I find it useful to conceptualise local knowledge as capital (rather than just a component of cultural capital), because it fits very well with Bourdieu’s (1983; 1986) understanding of the function of capital, which is to produce by and reproduce social hierarchies and inequalities in a social context. Moreover, the acquisition of migrant capital excels itself through a learning process of the specific quasi-institutionalised rules and regulations in the
primary social network, thus implying a certain historical development. Obtaining legal status reduces the risk of being exploited, and raises the person’s social status and her/his social capital within a network based on ethnic ties. By the same token, my material suggests that the possession of papers already implies a relatively high migrant capital.

In sum, this section has highlighted social networks as loci of assistance and support. Nevertheless, Mahler (1995) and Menjívar (2000) also highlight the darker sides of networks by speaking about practices of exploitation and deception among (irregular) migrants. The following section describes that newcomers to a social network often have difficulties in recognising trustable ties and how this is improved over time with the accumulation of migrant capital. Constituted by local knowledge – specific both to the location and to the individual’s experience of migration – migrant capital is seen here as a form of cultural capital and as an asset that stratifies social relations among individuals. Social capital, the other major stratifier of social relations, is seen to derive from trust, with the effect that individuals who are perceived as trustworthy can accumulate more social capital. Trust is also at work in reciprocal exchanges, which, depending on the trust between the exchanging individuals, allows for longer or shorter periods to pass between the exchanges.

Social relations in transit
This section combines the theoretical approaches with the fieldwork material in order to increase our understanding of how transit conditions the forging of social networks, their maintenance and their functions. It begins with a brief overview of the literature concerned with social networks in transit or other precarious situations and then examines network formations and the issue of trust in transit. Practices of solidarity and exploitation are also discussed. Finally, the chapter turns towards the establishment of alternative relationships, i.e. relationships developed through bridging ties, and ends with a general discussion.

In general, the literature on transit and transit migration does not tend to describe relations among co-ethnics in any great detail.
(Collyer, 2007; Danış, 2010; Schapendonk, 2011; Streiff-Fénart & Poutignat, 2006; 2008), and negative aspects are often excluded (see, e.g., Alioua, 2003; 2004; 2008). However, some studies on social relations among co-ethnics or co-migrants in irregular but not necessarily transit situations do witness to their less beneficial sides (see, e.g., Mahler, 1995; Menjívar, 2000; for gender aspects see Stock, 2011). Previous research on transit situations has witnessed the lack of strong (emotional) ties (Collyer, 2007; Papadopoulou, 2004; Schapendonk, 2011). As Papadopoulou (2004) points out, strong ties are often maintained on a transnational basis – both with the country of origin and with friends and family in various other countries – and especially so at the beginning of a transit period. Recent publications about undocumented Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco mention and thematise the presence of core families and single women with children (Kastner, 2010; Stock, 2011). These studies also highlight family migration and family formation in transit, and thus pay attention to the strong social ties that exist in the transit location. The literature that is concerned with migrants in transit often describes social ties with co-migrants and co-nationals as rather utilitarian; they are purposeful and intense for as long as they are necessary (Collyer, 2007; Schapendonk, 2011). Thus, the constant in and outflow that is typical of a transit location and that I observed in Istanbul (but see also Papadopoulou (2004), who writes about Athens), contributes to network formations that are subject to constant change (see also Schapendonk, 2011). A few studies have focused on the formation or existence of social networks and social capital in transit. Papadopoulou (2004:179), for example, highlights the maintenance of ethnic and political divisions among the Kurdish population of Athens, resulting in divisions between Kurds from different countries affiliated to different political parties and between politicised and non-politicised individuals. These ethnic/subdivided ties mainly provided psychological and material support. Didem Danış (Danış et al., 2006; Danış, 2006), in her study on Christian Iraqis in Istanbul, observed how the ethnic, political and religious affiliations of individuals (prior to their migration) influenced their access to existing social networks in Istanbul, and how individuals derived different social capital from them.
Many of the points made by the above-mentioned authors have also emerged from my own material, and new ones have been added. However, the richness of description and depth of analysis differs from the other studies, and sheds additional light on processes of social network formation in transit.

**Social networks around ethnicity/nationality**

Recalling Peter’s story, as told in Chapter 2, I note that in the initial stages of transit networks based on race and different layers of ethnicity are of tremendous importance. Thus, when a migrant arrives in a new place without any previously established local contacts, ethnicity plays a crucial role because it steers migrants towards informal social networks. Indeed, during my fieldwork, ethnic ties based on ethnicity/nationality were observed as a usual way into a social network and were thus an asset in the process of accumulating social capital (see also Suter, 2012a). These ethnic ties can be regarded as symbolic ties, because they can be instrumentalised and made use of, even without prior contact. They are not based on close contact or shared interests, but on a shared understanding of an “imagined community” or a feeling of belonging (see Faist, 2000:102). Even migrants with no previous contacts in a new location are seldom ‘blank sheets’, but can often tap social capital from an ethnic group whose extent and scope is coupled to the position the respective ethnic or national group has in the new social context.

Like Peter, many of the interviewees stated that they asked a taxi driver or a hotel receptionist where they were most likely to find another black person, and then walked around until they found someone. A black person is thus perceived to know other black people who can be of help. In that sense, it is the social capital of the other black person that is accessed through the symbolic capital of race. Usually the first black person would either connect the newcomer to another black person of the same nationality, or – if this could not be done immediately – would host the newcomer until contact with her/his fellow nationals could be made. Thus, through ethnic ties, the resources inherent in the social capital of the fellow national would be tapped with regard to accommodation, food and information relating to onward travel and/or money-generating activities.
A location’s characteristics, in terms of formal and informal reception, play a crucial role in how initial support ties work and what they can provide (see also Danış, 2010; Ryan et al., 2008; Stepick, Rey & Mahler, 2009). While formal reception involves Turkish immigration and asylum regulations, the informal receptive framework consists of the everyday treatment of migrants by the police and the wider Turkish society as well as the ties of assistance in the various informal social networks accessed by migrants. Thus, a location in which one’s national or ethnic group has already formed an (economically) integrated social network has a different impact on a migrant’s mobility trajectories than a transit space where there is no organised form of social network, and in which the members of one’s potential network are in the same precarious situation as the newcomer him/herself. Drawing from her extensive fieldwork experience with Kurdish migrants in Greece, Papadopoulou-Kourkoula (2008a; 2008b) emphasises the pivotal role of local and transnational social networks for the way in which migrants adapt to the structures and conditions they encounter in the new country. Thus, notwithstanding the strong influence of the length of residency on social networks (Vásquez, 2009), the degree of establishment of an ethnic or national group in economic, legal and social terms has important consequences for their access to social capital and how newcomers are incorporated.

"Birds of a feather flock together"
Nigerians account for a large number of African migrants in Istanbul and therefore feature prominently in my study. The following section is based on the material collected through contacts with interlocutors from Nigeria, ‘Africa’s giant’.

Usually, migrants from Nigeria stressed that ethnic group affiliation did not matter in Istanbul, but that nationality was the important unifying attribute. Despite that, most interlocutors expressed a rather clear-cut (and essentialist) view of Nigeria’s three main ethnic groups: the Haussa, Yoruba and Igbo. An informative elaboration of the relationship between the three major ethnic groups and Nigerian ethnicity from the perspective of a Nigerian interlocutor is presented here:
“When we are talking about Africans, Africans that move, high movers, we talk about Nigerians. We move a lot, OK. Why? One, I would say we are not contented people, we are not satisfied, we want to want more, we want more things, good things. And apart from things, we like to explore.

We are coming to Turkey now, especially when talking about Nigerians talk about the Igboooooos, I am Igbo. When you come to Nigeria, there are three main [groups]. You have the Haussa, which are the majority; you have the Yorubas; and you have the Igbos. In the history of Nigeria, the Ibos were the first people who wanted to split Nigeria, the Biafra stuff, OK, ‘cause we are very intelligent people, we are very independent people, OK. In the beginning, in the old days, the Haussa, they have their chiefs, emnya, the Yorubas, they have their obas, that’s the chief also, but the Igbos never had one, (...), we have always been like one crowd, we have no head (... ).” – “But was there a lot of solidarity between the Ibos then?” – “Yes, there is a lot more solidarity among us, because we are more conscious, and we are more enterprising. The Yorubas are more contented, as in ... OK, let me give you an example: A Yoruba man would just have a car, a 1979 Cadillac, OK, very old car, and he is contented with it. But an Igbo man, no! He wants a Mercedes, wants to ride a Hummer state of the art, your house, everything, we like good things, basically, you know. And the Haussa are more religious.” – “They are Muslims” – “Yes, they are more inclined to the Islamic world, and they are the majority. When you talk about the Ibos, we are richer, when you talk about rich Nigerians, we are the ones; we come to Turkey and we buy everything, we buy clothes and we sell, we go to America, we go to everywhere. The Yorubas are more concentrated in London, so when you come to London the Nigerians are basically the Yorubas. Why, because it is a conservative community, and an Igboman cannot fit in there, because it’s gonna take you like ten years to get what you should get in one year, so that is why we choose to come to other European countries like Germany. We are the ones who came to Germany, we spluttered Germany, Mercedes cars, 1979, 78 model, umm ... (...), we pick them, send them to Africa and sell them there, because they are not so common in Africa. Those are ex-
pensive cars, we take them down and sell them there, then we bridge the gap. Without the Igbo man, in Nigeria, in Africa, Africa would still be ... behind! We get a lot of things from Europe, and we bring them back home! At least in measure of the gap, because the gap is wide! Very, very wide. You guys are very far away from us. Even with the money we have and everything, you are still far, developmentally, infrastructurally, everything, you are just there and we are here. So, we are the bridging [link], and that is why we travel the most. You get me?” – “Yes, I get you.” – “So, that is why you find an Igbonman everywhere. In Istanbul here, most of the guys are Igbonos, hardly any Yorubaman, and the Haussa, they don’t leave home at all. The Haossas run our government, and make money through it. And they are dumb, they don’t go to school, they are not intellectuals, so they run down the economy, they run down everything! You see them, so rich, in government. The Igbonos basically are not in government, we are independent people, I told you at the beginning, we make our own money, fuck the government, and the government can’t control us. OK, I wouldn’t say we are outlaws, but probably that is what the country has turned us into. We don’t believe in the Nigerian Government anymore, so that is, even when we go to school and come out, we have to get a job! It is all about ... connections, you understand, so ... that is it. Because we even go to other African countries and open their eyes. Recently Angola, for enterprise, they have oil, but they are very timid. So we go down there, push things down for them, bring generators, and make money. We are waiting for Sudan or Somali, that’s another critical place in Africa, they have oil! So you can say that the Nigerians are the Chinese of Africa.” (Victor, 17 March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

This extract from of a longer conversation suggests the multi-layeredness of ethnicity and the fact that the different layers shift between ethnic group (Igbo) and nationality (Nigerian), depending on the situation. Importantly, these do not necessarily have to be ‘real’, but can be imagined in a simple conversation, such as the one we had on that day. Thus, although in some contexts (real, imagined, narrated) Victor gives weight to his Igbo identification by stressing the individually and culturally perceived boundaries of the two oth-
er major ethnic groups in Nigeria (the Haussa and the Yoruba), in other contexts he emphasises his nationality as a boundary for other nationalities on the African continent.

In my fieldwork contacts with people, nationality was commonly portrayed as the dominant creator of identification. As Victor indicated above, the majority of the Nigerians in Istanbul were from Igboland, which probably contributed to the perception of a ‘Nigerian national unity’ and the alleged insignificance of different ethnic groups within Nigeria. While this may be the case in many everyday life situations, power struggles over influence may bring ethnic group lines (and other markers of difference) to the forefront. For example, two former members stated that the Nigerian Association did not survive – or actually never came fully into being – due to an internal power struggle along ethnic group lines. This supports the understanding of race, ethnicity and other social markers of identification as fluid and shifting in importance depending on the context (see Chapter 4).

In his personal system of gratitude, Peter (see Chapters 2 and 6) preferred to extend his support to the men originating from the same village or the nearby surroundings and, notably, called them “relatives”: “Here, the Igbos are my brothers, but the ones that also speak my dialect are closer to me. I call them ‘relatives’.” Most of the people he called were newcomers whom he had introduced to Istanbul. Peter defended the dominant paradigm among Nigerians of the insignificance of ethnic group belonging, but nevertheless pointed out: “I am open to anyone – but the closer the better.” As the closeness of ethnic affiliation, geographical origin and dialect facilitates trust, investments in these relationships (as well as the rewards from them) can be considerable. Peter summarised this with an explanatory idiom: “Birds of a feather flock together” (10 June 2009).

Quasi-formal migrant organisations
One morning, at a centrally located çayhane (tea room), I asked Edward about African associations, or any kind of (formally or informally) organised setting in which African nationals were involved. He abnegated, but told me that some nationalities had made attempts to organise themselves, and listed the Nigerians, Congolese, Gambians, Eritreans and Ethiopians. In many cases the organisa-
tions were not officially recognised, simply because nobody in the organisation had any legal papers. Some of these organisations still exist, but are limited in their work, and mostly promote cultural aspects and internal solidarity. However, negotiations with Turkish officials, e.g. regarding their status or on behalf of their fellow nationals in prison or police custody, are not possible.

“When you see Nigerian people, most of them here are economic migrants, they used to have a kind of organisation. But now the organisation is going back, we don’t know why, there are many tensions in the community because of the tribes, Haussa, Ibo. So, we have a kind of Congolese organisation, which is more or less constant, which is more or less well organised, but then not all the Congolese people belong to the organisation. So to be a member you have to be registered with them, they ask you for 5 YTL every month, that was before, maybe they have increased it now, I don’t know. So, if somebody gets sick and doesn’t have the money for medicine, then the community leader has some resources to help. So, Gambian people used to be organised, but now, they don’t have any meetings anymore.” – “What happened?” – “I don’t know exactly, but the person who organised it before, the leader, he went back to Gambia, and took all the money with him. And then so many people did not want to be in the organisation any more. Since that time they cannot really organise any more. Sudanese people they don’t have any organisation, Somali people, no organisation, but, like Sudanese people, Somali people, they live normally in Kumkapı, they are not organised but they all know each other because they all live in the same place. Ethiopians and Eritreans they don’t have an organisation, only, they have a church, which Pastor Michael is the leader of, so only they use that organisation to be united. The Congolese they also have a church, the Nigerians they have church, but, in terms of an organisation that could help them to solve some internal problems between themselves, they don’t have one.”

(Edward, April 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

As Edward spelled out, many nationalities have tried to organise themselves and to unite, in order to enhance solidarity through a principle of re-distribution, but for most groups this has been a frag-
ile process with a large number of obstacles. Edward continued to talk about an attempt to organise an “All African organisation”:

“Before we tried to make even some kind of African organisation, to which all the communities could belong, we had two, three meetings in 2001, 2002 or 2003 maybe. We tried to come together to see if we could get a strong African organisation, which could later meet with the Turkish authorities to see whether the Turkish authorities could give jobs to people with various kinds of working skills, in terms of working underground or whatever. We talked about that for two meetings, and then we wanted to meet with a guy from the Şişli authorities and the guy came and asked how many people among us had legal papers. Nobody had legal papers.” Edward laughs wholeheartedly. “And then the man said, ‘I am not allowed to cooperate with people without papers.’” – “So who was present at this meeting?” – “So many Africans. We wanted of course to have some kind of chairman, but then the Nigerians were fighting to get the post for them, so we postponed and then we said, next time we choose the big man. But the Nigerians at that time they were many, so they wanted to get the post. But many people opposed, they wanted to find somebody that is neutral, and then … the organisation finished before we even got started.” – “Which nationalities did you gather?” – “All the people: we had so many Nigerians, we even invited Ethiopians, Somalians, we tried to reach all the community. We also invited students, African students, and in that way we could have settled the organisation because these people have papers. So the idea was to make a list of complaints and then direct somebody that knows the language and that has papers to go and talk for us, to the mayors, to the authorities, somebody that is not afraid. But then the Nigerians again opposed this idea: ‘why should we have students, he is a student, he has papers, he doesn’t know the problems here, why should we make him chairman?’ I mean, the organisation was going to be ‘Africans united’ here, and those people, the students are Africans, and also they encounter so many problems here, so why should we exclude them from the organisation? So we thought, I thought, it could be good to make a student the chairman, and after two years maybe we could choose another person from the asylum seekers
or migrant community, but, at the beginning I found it better to choose somebody that had good papers, but anyway we didn’t do anything.” – “And now?” – “You know, African people are kind of egoist. If you talk about those issues, maybe somebody that has good interest doesn’t want to belong to the organisation, some they don’t want to lose time, even those people, we now have some African people who have legal papers, because they married into a Turkish family, and then they have a kind of temporary resident permit, and if you call these people they are not ready to cooperate with you because already they have the chance, and they feel that if they cooperate with us that don’t have papers, maybe it is a danger for them, so they prefer to stay away.”

(Edward, 19 April 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

This excerpt once again illustrates the variety of personal interests and power struggles among people who are not only often referred to as a community, but who also talk about a community themselves. Power struggles include the various social categories and identifications, such as nationality and legal status in Turkey, religion, ethnicity and and class, and (most likely) boil down to very individual, personal interests. Edward concluded our conversation by talking about a general lack of solidarity: “not even African solidarity, but migrant or refugee solidarity”. Interestingly, he located the problem of cooperation and solidarity in a lack of engagement stemming from people’s expectations that Istanbul was just a short stop on their path to something else, somewhere else, and concluded with the words: “the transit matter inhibits solidarity.” This is crucial for a better understanding of social relations in transit.

The Kenyan organisation

The next sub-section deals with the Kenyan organisation that existed some years ago. Despite the obvious constraints of establishing a migrant organisation, people affiliated to some nationalities erected certain formal organisational structures.87 The Kenyans were one such nationality, and today (2011)88 their organisation no longer exists. Even during my fieldwork (2007-2009), the organisation was perceived as defunct.

87  All of which were informal in a Turkish legal context.
88  In 2010 I heard that the Kenya house no longer existed (because the organisation around the payment of it dissolved).
Kenya house, a two-roomed flat located at ground-floor level in a multi-storey building in Tarlabası, was the first point of entry for Kenyan nationals arriving in Istanbul. The (former) head of the Kenyan organisation, Steve, told me:

“The Kenya house spontaneously developed into a meeting place. We were all busy during the week, but every Sunday we would flock there. The small flat was sometimes completely overcrowded. So we used to hang out there on Sundays. One day we thought we should have a chairman, right. The Kenya house is a place to sleep, a place to be welcomed, a place to start life in Istanbul or plan the continuation of travels, and one can stay as long as one likes. Everybody that lives there shares rent and food. If the people there cannot pay, we try to share the rent among all the members of the organisation. That was the idea behind it, because we wanted to keep the house in case a brother came and needed help.” (9 December 2007)

As Steve’s wife Sarah filled in, tribe did not matter, what was important was the Kenyan nationality. Indeed, the people I met at the Kenya house belonged to different ethnic groups, mostly Kikuyu and Luo. Steve continued:

“So we had this organisation for maybe one year. We would usually gather every Sunday after church and talk about issues of concern, such as who was new, who had travelled, who had found a job, who needed a job, who could contribute, how to help each other etc. It was basically about getting an update on the community. We would also raise money every month, something small that everybody could afford, like 5 YTL. We would then save that money to pay hospital bills when necessary, rent, food or other things that someone needed. Giving birth in this country costs about 1,000 YTL, so we needed to collect that money. Any member could put any idea on the table, and if there two people needed money, the association decided together which case was more urgent.”

However, at the time of my fieldwork, very few Kenyans remained. As the former chairman stated, many had either returned home or continued to Europe. The chairman himself found a way of legally
travelling back and forth between Kenya and Istanbul, and was not around all the time. When I met him in December 2007, this was seen as one of the main reasons as to why the organisation no longer functioned anymore. Steve was convinced that he had been given the leading position in the organisation because people could trust him. “The way you live your life is decisive, as well as your character,” he explained. From what I could gather, both Steve and his wife enjoyed the affection of their compatriots. Ruth often called him a “good boy”, and praised both him and his wife for their piety and humbleness. On some occasions she also added that even though she had had enough of black men, she wished for a man just like Steve. Clearly, Steve was a man whose personality and deeds enabled his compatriots to place trust in him.

The Kenyan organisation was short-lived. It attempted to employ a collective solidarity by providing accommodation and some of the basic necessities for (health care bills, food etc.) those Kenyans in need. The fact that the organisation did not dissolve due to a power struggle (like the Nigerian organisation), but because of the fluctuation of people present in Istanbul, reveals interesting differences between the migration trajectories of Kenyan and Nigerian individuals. Whereas a few Nigerians had resident papers and even Turkish citizenship, among the Kenyans only a couple of individuals possessed a temporary resident permit. The legal status of the members of a social network and the history of their presence in a location thus impacts (among other issues) the formation and maintenance of formally established organisations.

Trust in transit
As touched on in the above section, my Sub-Saharan African interlocutors in Istanbul perceived mutual trust among migrants to be very weak. Many had experienced situations in which their trust had been abused – resulting in harsh consequences for them. Consider, for example, Tina’s disquisition on the lack of trust between people.

“You don’t know who to trust, you don’t even know who to talk to, you know, because sometimes you have a problem in your heart and you want to talk! Because if you bring it out you feel more relaxed, you know! But then you don’t know who to talk to because (...)” – “So what do you do then?” – “I don’t
know, we just keep it. Like sometimes when I don’t feel good, I just go and cry cry and I feel good again. Because there is no-one to talk to. So you just have to keep it by yourself.” – “But you have some friends here?” – “Yes, I have friends! But you don’t tell your friends your problems, everybody is pretending to be always well.” – “Aha, OK.” – “You know… everybody pretends, all us here,… so you pretend too.” – “Yes” – “Because everybody doesn’t feel good, you don’t have nothing, you pretend, so you too, you pretend. Because nobody wants to see people that don’t have, they don’t have nothing, they are suffering….”– “So you think that if you told someone that you are not good, that you are suffering, that people would leave you alone …?” – “No, if you go and tell people, they will change the story and tell everybody, like Africans, you know. Like if I would go now and say, ‘I don’t have money, my friend left and I have to pay the whole rent and I don’t know how’, she will go and tell people and will make up stories that are not true, you know. Maybe you even look ugly in the eyes of people, you know. Like this clothes [points at the clothes she is wearing from the clothing cupboard at IIMP], no-one knows where we are getting the clothes, and nobody is asking, you know!” – “So you do not tell anybody where you get them from?” – “No, only the people that go there know where I am getting them from, but not the other ones. Because some people are working, they are getting money so they find themselves very big; so if you, you don’t have, you know, they are more important than you.” – “So they do not ask you where you get the clothes from?”– “They don’t ask (…). Everybody is pretending they are always well, but they are not happy. You know, you cannot explain it to anybody. Because everybody wants to show that they are big, so you have to do the same.” – “You learn.” – “Yes, you have to learn!”

(Tina, March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

The learning process that Tina talks about can be regarded as part of the migrant capital that is acquired in a transit situation. It is directly coupled with other research participants’ earlier statements that people are not rewarded for openly showing their misery.

Tina talked a lot about trust; an issue that had been particularly important to her since her arrival in Istanbul. Coming from Lebanon
in 2006 with her small son, several thousand dollars in her pocket and the strong intention to continue to Greece, Tina quickly became familiar with the new realities of Istanbul as a transit location and of her own role as a newcomer in it. She met a woman from another African country who told her about a safe connection.

“We came, everybody is lying because we just come, we don’t know, we don’t know who you should talk to. Someone would come and say that he has a connection to go to Greece so we have to pay. I came with 3,500 dollars and I paid 400 dollars for the transport to Istanbul. So one from here from Guinea, or Ghana, she is very … bright, you know, she talk very good. She told me that there is a connection man here, ‘if you pay him 2,000 dollars and he has a car, he will take you to Greece.’ (…) So I asked her if she trusts him because I trusted her, she said: ‘the man is good, you don’t need to take risk to go over the sea, it is very cheap, but very dangerous.’ I was like this: ‘good idea!’ So I gave her 2,000 dollars, and she said ‘tomorrow morning the man will come.’ Until today I did not see the man or her again.”

– “Oh no!” – “Yes, this is how it is. If you just come, everybody is lying! Because even they are trying to survive here, they want to use you to survive.” – “So it is really difficult to know whom you can trust?! ” – “You cannot even trust anybody, because how can you, you don’t even know who to trust, you know.”

(Tina, March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

As Tina states, the uncertainty about whom to trust was great for people who had just arrived in Istanbul and had no previous contacts there. Thus, apart from the overall lack of trust, newcomers found it difficult to recognise trustworthy relationships, mostly due to the unequal distribution of migrant capital (local knowledge, skills and resources). Given the prevalence of mostly weak tie formations, coupled with the absence of cultural norms, obligations and social control, it is mainly a rather functional version of trust (see Dasgupta, 1988; Sztompka, 1999) that emerges. This leads to a situation where trust is more easily extended to ‘outsiders’ than ‘insiders’ – something that counters the common sociological understanding of similarity between people as a facilitator of trust (see Sztompka, 1999:80). There are two aspects to an explanation: a) extending trust towards ‘outsiders’ should be seen first and fore-
most as a tactic of avoiding relationships of high distrust among
the ‘insiders’ (people within the same social boundaries), and b) in
many cases it is recognised that ‘outsiders’ cannot inflict harm, or at
least do not have an interest in harming, due to their very different
socio-economic and legal situation.

This is corroborated by the fact that some of the research partic-
ipants turned to me to verify a claim (NSK passports, for example,
or life in Europe and asylum systems) or to report on the condi-
tions in Athens following my visit there, because my judgement was
deemed to be more reliable than that of their compatriots. Some
also revealed that they asked resident foreigners to perform services
for them. Victor, for example, asked an Albanian call shop owner
to keep some dollar bills for him (around 200 dollars) because he
did not want to carry them around in case he was robbed by the
police, a local gang or fellow migrants. He extended sympathies to-
wards the Albanian shop owner whose telephone he used to call
his family. As he found himself unable to trust his compatriots, the
trust towards the Albanian shopkeeper arose from a situation in
which Victor managed to reduce the asymmetry of dependency and
power. If the Albanian shopkeeper did not return his money, Victor
explained to me, he would spend his telephone money elsewhere and
encourage other Nigerians to do the same.

Faith played an important part in the lives of many of the inter-
locutors. This thesis will take a closer look at the role of churches in
Chapter 6. However, at this point, I would like to share the obser-
vation that most of my interlocutors often uttered expressions such
as “If God wants something will come up”, “I trust in God – what
else can I do?” or the like. Sztompka (1999:115ff) interprets this
submissiveness to fate as a “functional substitute of trust”.

The physical absence of strong ties and the fragility of weak ties
Most migrants in conditions of transit have strong ties to people
who are not with them; ties which they maintain transnationally
and – if possible – access for financial or emotional support (see
also Collyer, 2007). Instead, as pointed out in the above sub-
section, weak, fragile and utility-based ties prevail in the circumstances
of transit, e.g. where most of the network’s members neither have
a legal residence permit nor stay in one place for a long time, and
where many of its members struggle to make ends meet. As can
be seen from the material presented above, the transit situation has been identified as a factor that hampers people’s engagement in the formation and maintenance of organised collectives due to an anticipation of temporariness. This same anticipation has to some extent shown interesting parallels with the emotional investment in social ties that are otherwise potentially strong.

The fragility of ties and the absence of strong ties were illustrated by Victor, four months after his arrival in Istanbul:

“I wouldn’t call them my friends, my mates [co-nationals] here in Istanbul, my friends are not here. My major friend is in Scotland, I have one in Holland, but I don’t have any in Turkey, OK, and I am trying not to have, because this kind of people here in Turkey, I don’t like the way they behave, I don’t like.” – “In general?” – “Yes, in general, I am not saying I am righteous or anything … the orientation we have is different from … my kind of orientation.” – “Is this because you are … very well educated?” – “Maybe, maybe” – (Victor, April 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

The majority of my interlocutors expressed similar sentiments. Gloria was one of them. This forty-something business woman and the mother of a teenage boy said that “people don’t keep friends here. I have many friends, but I don’t have any friends.” She found that close, trusting contacts with other people were impossible. She identified the spirit of the place as one source of the problem. “The police are aggressive towards us, and everybody wants quick money,” she clarified, “there is no solidarity, only distrust and jealousy. But it is this climate that makes people this way,” she concluded, attempting to explain the behaviour of her fellow nationals in the structural framework in which their reality plays out. Tina had reached a similar conclusion. The uncertainty of her stay in Istanbul was tangible. When she felt low and hopeless her aunt, who had been resettled in the USA, was the only person with whom she could share her feelings and her concerns: “I tell her everything, everything. She knows that I am not a lazy person, that I like to work, but she knows everything. With Dany [son] it is not easy and like that. Because she knows that I can be hard working.” Just like the others, Tina was in a situation where emotional support through
strong ties could only be maintained and enjoyed transnationally – in her case over the telephone. Despite the fact that she called some of the people in Istanbul ‘friends’, locally she did not have anyone she could trust or ask for emotional support. She told me how she managed difficult situations:

“What bothers me most here is people who keep complaining. The ones that already look bad. They just remind you of your own situation, and what is that good for? How does it help my situation if I am crying all the time? If God wants to solve it for me, he’ll solve it whether I cry or not. I always go out, I never complain about the money. Sometimes I don’t have any lira in my pocket, then Dany and I go for a walk, we go to the big shopping mall and back. Slowly, slowly, just the two of us. But I never tell anyone how I really am, only I know that.”

(Tina, 2 October 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Tina and her 4-year-old son spent the cold winter of 2007/08 alone in a three-room flat; alone because their roommate had gone to Greece and they were unable to find anyone else. All the money that Tina had was spent on the rent and food. In order to reduce the costs, Tina only used the electric heater in their bedroom, due to the high price of electricity. For several months they lived in this one room; they slept there, ate there and played there, and only left it to go to the toilet and to cook. Obviously, Tina found not being able to work and having so much time to herself difficult. During our conversation I asked her why she did not try to teach English – like one of her (Afro-)American friends. But Tina only laughed: “You know, sitting at home, doing nothing, the brain does not work. It makes your brain very dull. People just sit around and think too much. Even at school [Moms and Tots] everybody is like that” (4 March 2008). Tina indicated that the uncertainty of her situation prevented her from looking for a ‘real’ job. She felt that she had lost the struggle of ceaselessly thinking about her situation; a condition that made her uneasy and paralysed.

Ruth would probably have shared Tina’s observation that “nobody wants to see people that don’t have.” Once, late at night, my telephone rang. Ruth flashed me and I called her back straight away. I heard sobbing at the other end of the line. For a few long minutes
Ruth struggled to tell me something, but all she could do was sob. Finally she managed to sniffle: “When you are in this condition, people move away from you.” We met a few days later and she – much more stable but still very low – told me that all her cohabitants from the Kenya house would soon be leaving for a tourist resort in the south of the country, leaving her and her child alone in the house. Ruth’s biggest concern was how she was going to pay the rent on her own. But what hurt the most was that the others did not tell her about their decision. Instead, she found out about their plans by chance (March 2008).

Peter expressed similar views. After almost one year in Istanbul, he still did not have any friends there: “At least not in the sense of sharing feelings, or to really open up,” he clarified. “It is not possible here. Because there is always the danger that what you tell someone today could be used against you at a later stage.” Thus he expressed the same kind of suspicion and distrust as Tina. Also, just as in Tina’s case, Peter’s strong ties were maintained transnationally with his younger siblings and his mother back home. Although he phoned his younger siblings regularly, he did not dare to do the same with his mother – and despite missing her bitterly, he only called her sporadically: “Because when I hear her voice my situation appears unbearable. Then I just want to give everything up and go home,” he explained with a sigh. He told me that he had last called her five months ago, on the 1st January, to wish her a Happy New Year.

As these anecdotes have shown, both the fragility and the utility of social ties in the situation of transit is related to the level of distrust prevailing in Istanbul as well and to the overall precariousness experienced by most of the migrants I met.

**Trust-inducing mechanisms in transit**
Recalling the theoretical perspectives presented earlier, norms, reciprocity and solidarity are commonly pointed out as mechanisms that forge trust between two or more social actors. This sub-section will deal with the creation of trust in a transit situation. As the material has shown, trust-inducing mechanisms have a specific twist in a location of transit. I will first present trust-inducing mechanisms as they have emerged from my material, and then analyse the transit twist of these mechanisms.
Especially when organising their onward travel to Greece, my interlocutors usually talked about the good reputation of both the connection man and the guarantor as the decisive factor of choice and, to the degree possible, trusted this reputation. This fits well with Ilse van Liempt’s (2007:46) findings on the importance of the ‘good reputation’ of a smuggler (i.e. connection man) for their business. In the course of my fieldwork, it became clear that there was another trust-inducing mechanism, one that is perhaps typical for a location in which people are prominently by themselves and that is understood by the wider society as a temporary stopping place. In the following conversational snapshot, Tina from Liberia hints at that mechanism:

“It is very difficult because you don’t know who is speaking the truth and who is lying. Like in the connection house\(^89\) some people don’t keep their money under the bed there, because there are a lot of people there, you don’t have to keep the money in the house, maybe you come back and someone has taken your money. Everybody has the money in their pockets (laughs). But if you have it in your pockets then sometimes the police take it. So yeah, you know it is very difficult, you don’t know who to trust.

Like one boy in Tarlasbaşı, he has money; he brings the money to me to keep. And I keep his money and he calls me every second, every minute! ‘How are you, are you fine?’ (Laughs.) I know why he is calling, and he is: ‘Hello sister, how are you, how is the baby?’ He just wants to hear my voice and to know that I am still here. So the guy left for Greece now, but when he was here all the time his money was here with me, like 1000 dollars.”

– “So how come he knows he can trust you?” – “I don’t know, he just saw me in the church, and he is also from Guinea. I don’t know him like that, maybe … he came to me: ‘Sister I have a problem,’ and I don’t know him, maybe I just see him a couple of times, and I say: ‘OK, if you trust me you can give it to me.'”

(Tina, 4 March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

As Tina points out in the quote above, for other migrants to trust her, it is important to hear that she is “still here”, thus hinting that her immobile status increases her trustworthiness and serves as a

\(^{89}\) A connection house (sometimes also called “safe house”) is a house or a room where persons can find shelter for the limited amount until they find a connection to travel the next leg of the journey to Greece.
trust-inducing mechanism. Gloria is another woman who has been entrusted with keeping money for her compatriots, both as a private person and as a guarantor. In both cases she stored large sums of money in her house. While Gloria did not want to elaborate on her trust-inducing qualities, the presence of her child, her relatively wealthy position and her temporary legal status could explain why others had confidence in her. Other people acting as guarantors for the trip between Turkey and Greece were those with Turkish citizenship, with a well-functioning business, or, like Tina, with children. Dawit, for example, acted as a guarantor for his Sudanese fellow countrymen and often stored large sums of money for people crossing over to Greece. On the migrants’ successful arrival in Greece, Dawit would then transfer the money to the connection man, who would in turn reward Dawit with a percentage of the total sum. In that sense, (one of) Dawit’s interests in maintaining the trust he was afforded lay in the long-term view of a relatively stable income derived from his involvement in other people’s travels. Thus, in the context of a location that represented transit for many (Sub-Saharan African) migrants, the immobility of a person increased their trustworthiness. As outlined above, reciprocal transactions were expected to evolve after a certain period of time, depending on the degree of trust involved (Faist, 2000:105). A person’s immobility increased this time-slot and resulted in greater trust, and, most likely, the accumulation of social capital.

Uncertainty and fear lead to distrust, defined as negative expectations with regard to the behaviour of other people towards oneself (Sztompka, 1999:26). This can easily be applied to the situation of undocumented Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul, for whom the risks are high in terms of survival, well-being and onward travel. When interlocutors lament the high level of distrust between themselves and identify that “the climate in Istanbul makes people that way” (Gloria, 14 April 2008), Sztompka’s theoretical statement is well represented. As we can see from Gloria’s exclamation, there is a clear awareness of the wider structural framework that is identified as impacting people’s behaviour and actions, and ultimately the effect and outreach of social networks.
Solidarity and exploitation
Some of the quotes in the previous sections have already touched on aspects of solidarity or lamented the lack thereof. By way of continuation, the following few pages will examine the practices of solidarity and exploitation in more depth. Both the negative and positive aspects of social network formation will be discussed with the aid of the empirical material and theory. According to Faist (2000:108), solidarity is a phenomenon that emerges among people who share (weak) social and symbolic ties which in turn (as shown in previous sections) are subjected to the situational priorities of social identification.

As could be seen in Peter’s story, many Nigerians in Istanbul try to take advantage of their fellow nationals. They are not the only ones to do this, however. As noted by Menjívar (2000) and Mahler (1995), charging for services and information that under different circumstances would constitute reciprocal exchanges between network members is common among migrants living in precarious conditions. It is important to state that this finding has to be contextualised in the larger macro-structural conditions in which these migrant networks develop and exist.

Distrust and jealousy
Given the migrants’ stories about the exploitative behaviour of “their own people”, it is hardly surprising that anecdotes of broken promises and trust are common. When asked how Istanbul presented itself to African migrants, Peter answered that “it all depends on the orientation you get from your brothers” (March 2009). In several conversations he elaborated that in most cases newcomers are not introduced to the possibilities for gainful economic activities that Istanbul has to offer. Instead, they are met with all kinds of testimonies as to why Istanbul should be left behind as quickly as possible. As Peter explained, “competition is hard in the field of legal economic gains and people do everything to guard their few sources of income.” It can thus be deduced that people with restricted and homogeneous sources of information – which is often the case on arrival – often think that Istanbul has nothing to offer. Other researchers have reported similar conclusions. For example, Ryan et

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90 Precariousness in this case does not only refer to irregular residence status and the frequent conditions of poverty, but also, and importantly, to the lack of knowledge about the new location and the absence of protecting social ties.
al. (2008:685) found that in London “there were high levels of distrust, rivalry and competition for scarce resources among groups of Poles. In fact, it would appear that the greatest level of distrust was among those migrants most reliant upon ethnic-specific networks.” It can thus be assumed that in these cases, the ethnic-specific networks were rather homogeneous, also concerning socio-economic position and bridging ties with other migrant networks and the receiving society.

The high level of distrust between migrants was evident on many occasions. On one occasion I asked Peter to write down some Igbo names for me so that I could use them to change the names of the interlocutors in my dissertation for reasons of confidentiality. He chewed my pen, obviously concentrating on the task I had set. He finally handed me a list of about fifteen names from different areas in Igoland. The process took much longer than I expected and I reacted to that. He explained that he did not just want to list the names that were common in his area of origin. “Your book will be read by Nigerians all over the world. I don’t want them to identify the region that I come from, because that might exclude people from my clan from important information,” Peter’s statement again clearly indicated that networks based on nationality were not a single unifying and frictionless unit.

Although all the interlocutors mentioned some kind of distrust of their co-nationals, Peter was the one who expressed it most prominently and at almost all our meetings. Due to a long absence from Nigeria when he was in his twenties, when he tried his luck as a petty trader in neighbouring countries, he felt somewhat alienated from his fellow countrymen. Despite that, he found that he had to rely on his co-nationals for information and services. Time and time again, for example, he expressed his hatred of “the Nigerian system” that he on many occasions criticised for its lack of solidarity.

The distrust between members of Sub-Saharan ethnic social networks was also a topic of conversation in my first discussion with Gloria. Together with her son, Gloria had been living in Istanbul for almost a decade, and was well known in her social networks. She agreed to help me with my project because she could relate to my academic background through her own past university studies. We met
at Burger King near Taksim Square, and while Gloria and I talked her son enjoyed an ice cream. Gloria gave me general insights into the situation of Africans in Istanbul, and illustrated them with fragmental stories of her own life. She refused to be recorded and did not want to me to take notes either. Instead we agreed that I would write down as much as I could remember after our conversation and that she would read the text in a week’s time to check whether I had understood her statements correctly. The next time we met I gave her three A4 pages to read. After reading the text, Gloria picked up her pen and erased all the personal information. She partly replaced it with “some people”, “some Africans” and other generalising terms. Her country of origin was also changed to “some African countries” or “Africa”. When she had finished, my document consisted of very general sentences, such as “In some African countries, a university graduate does not earn more than 50 dollars” or “Life is rubbish in most African countries.” As she elaborated afterwards, not only did she intend to improve my language, she also wanted to make sure that nobody would be able to trace the information back to her. In short, she explained that her position as a relatively wealthy and therefore highly respected member of a social network in Istanbul made her very cautious about everything she did.

*The thin line between support and exploitation*

It is interesting to note that the line between solidarity on the one hand and exploitation on the other can be rather fine. Co-national social networks usually provide newcomers with basic needs like accommodation, food, information about the city and possibilities for travelling further. Yet is also here, in these initial nationality-based support networks, that the exploitation of newcomers takes place in a seemingly institutionalised manner. It is against this background that Lawrence’s contradictory statement has to be understood: “Here in Turkey, any African is my brother and my sister.” Half an hour later, this Nigerian man in his late twenties concluded our conversation with the following words: “In Turkey, a brother betrays his brother and a sister betrays her sister, there is no trust, there is just betrayal” (15 May 2008).

A look at the literature confirms that this development of exploitation and profit-making at the hand of co-nationals is far from unique among Nigerians and other Africans in Istanbul, but
is common among migrants competing for scarce resources such as employment, and especially those who are vulnerable due to their irregular status. As Mahler (1995:29) points out: “Where the greater society fails to meet the needs of immigrants at affordable prices and with a modicum of convenience, immigrants step in to meet their own needs.” In her research into informal social support networks among documented and undocumented Salvadorean in the United States, Mahler (1995:29) calls these ways of profit-making “imaginative strategies for achieving goals immigrants find difficult to meet, given the limited opportunities available to them.” Mahler’s research participants left their home country with the anticipation of exploitation at the hands of Americans, only to find themselves taken advantage of by their own co-nationals. This unexpected and harsh social reality prompted them to portray their compatriots in very negative terms. Instead of the “old community solidarity” they anticipated, they faced “a competitive, aggressive subculture” (Mahler, 1995:30).

The Nigerians that I met often talked about their co-ethnics in very negative terms. Indeed, it was mostly from Nigerians that I learned about exploitative and profit-making practices. Several almost institutionalised practices specifically target newcomers; one of which is access to accommodation. Accommodation was usually arranged within national groups and access to it was regulated in several ways. Nigerian newcomers were directed to accommodation that often consisted of a damp and shabby room in a central neighbourhood of Tarlabası or Aksaray, with up to ten inhabitants at a time, tellingly called a ‘ghetto’. In most of the cases the newcomer was obliged to pay a fixed entrance fee (between fifty and several hundred dollars) in addition to a monthly rent that was also fixed, irrespective of the number of inhabitants occupying the room at the time. The person in whose name the place was rented – referred to as the ‘owner’ of the accommodation – was usually a co-national who had been living in Istanbul for a while. It was usually here that the most common forms of exploitation took place, for example charging money for services that under different circumstances would not be charged for.

Victor, for example, paid an entrance fee to his ‘ghetto’ on arrival in December 2007. After a failed attempt to cross the border two
weeks later, he was obliged to pay a new entrance fee in order to gain access to a new ‘ghetto.’ He explained the system to me:

“If [the situation was different, a couple of us could rent a place and] even pay the house rent together, you know, but people don’t do that in Turkey. Here you come in and you pay 100 dollars. You don’t share the house rent but you pay a fix amount, you see, and that is where the problem comes from. It depends on the kind of person. If you are a good person, you say ‘OK, come in, you can stay.’ But nobody can, everybody only has petty jobs, no matter how steady the job is, you simply can’t!” (Victor, March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Peter, too, talked about newcomers being intimidated: “They put you in a house, put fear in you by telling you terrible stories about the Turkish police, so that you don’t dare to leave the house. They do that only when you have money.” And, typically for him, he concluded his analysis with the idiomatic saying: “It is better to serve in heaven than to rule in hell,” thereby stating his conviction of the importance of acting in a morally correct way, even if this did not lead to a quick advancement up the socio-economic ladder.

Among the cases of obvious exploitation, it was not only the newcomers but also the co-nationals aspiring to travel to a European country by irregular means who presented an ideal market for all kinds of products related to their needs. For example, migrants without a passport need the services of a co-migrant (or any other person) with a passport in order to receive money through international money transfer. Similarly, migrants in need of information about connections need the services of someone with that kind of information. Often, these services come at a cost. In some cases, direct cunning is involved, as was the case with Peter and the NSK passport. Peter was not the only one with extended hope about this passport: about a quarter of all NSK passport holders are Nigerian nationals (Arns, 2011:2).

Another exploitative practice is that the identity cards (kimlik in Turkish) that many Nigerians carry with them are often copied and new names inserted. Victor explained this practice but stated that there were limits to this exploitation – pertaining to the acquisition of local knowledge:
“When you got this kimlik from [a brother], did you have to pay money for this?” – “Yes, that is what I was telling you before, we exploit ourselves! OK, but if you’re familiar with the system, like I am now, like after 1 month, you know all the tricks, so when you are old enough to know the tricks, you don’t get exploited! And if you are a good person you don’t allow people to be exploited.” (Victor, March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Power asymmetries can substantially impact the reciprocity that can be counted on and can lead to a unilaterally defined balance of accounts (Faist, 2000:107). Power relations are richly exemplified in my material: it is usually in unequal power relations that exchange can take the shape of exploitation. Importantly, power can manifest itself in different ways. In contact with a newcomer in Istanbul, power is established through knowledge of the local circumstances, practices and codes, i.e. the migrant capital. Thus, the system of exploitation reaches its limits as soon as a person has been in the city long enough to have become familiar with the local informal rules and practices. In other words: the higher the migrant capital, the less the risk of being tricked or taken advantage of. Time is thus a crucial element in the transit space, and in the path towards (semi-) establishment (for more on establishment see Chapter 7). As pointed out in this sub-section, the line between exploitation and support can be rather fine at times. The fact that the owner of Peter’s first flat bought groceries for him (Peter paid) can be defined as an act of reciprocity. On the other hand, the fact that Peter was overcharged is a clear example of a unilaterally defined transaction amounting to exploitation.

Nigerians in Istanbul is not the only migrant group to take advantage of their co-nationals. Charging for services and information that would normally have constituted reciprocal exchanges between network members is common among migrants living in precarious conditions. This is something that both Menjívar (2000) and Mahler (1995) noted and has also been reflected on in this thesis.

Alternative strategies
I noticed other examples of social support relations in which aspects of exploitation and solidarity appeared to be more fine-tuned. For example, when Peter, a fierce opponent of what he termed “the Ni-
gerian system”, found himself in a position to do so he deployed a
different strategy of gaining benefits by supporting others. After a
few months of doing petty jobs, he was able to rent a small place
in Tarlabası. On almost every occasion we met he told me that he
offered shelter to ‘younger ones’ and avoided my question about
whether and how much he charged them. “If they can they will give
something,” he would usually reply. Even a few months later, in
times of great financial stress, he did not ask his ‘younger one’ for
any financial contribution. Instead he said stoically: “If he is good he
will offer to pay half.” In May 2008, over cups of tea in a tea room
on the shores of the Bosporus, he told me about his support sys-
tem and his reasoning of it. Peter usually helped newcomers with all
kinds of necessities – ranging from shelter and food to information
and contacts. In other words, Peter helped them to develop their mi-
grant capital, something that he himself had to acquire the hard and
lengthy way. Importantly, these “younger ones” originated from the
same village or a village close to Peter’s and contacted him on arrival
in Istanbul.

However, a closer look at Peter’s support system makes it less
altruistic than it initially appears. Peter is well aware of the fact that
his generous support will affect his young protégés. His words “I
will always be their master, because wherever they go, without me
they would not be where they are”, reflect the fact that this status
position is intended and beyond his influence. Indeed, when first
encountering one of Peter’s “younger ones” at his place, I asked the
young man what he was called. I observed how he first tried to catch
Peter’s eye and only with Peter’s approval told me his name.

But there is more to social capital derived from migrant capital
than just an elevated social position for Peter. Most of the people
who benefited from Peter’s system were younger men from the same
village or region, who would, as explained in Chapter 2, spread his
good reputation at home and benefit Peter’s family. Peter hoped for
a generalised reciprocity that “emphasizes an overall balance within
a group” (Faist, 2000:107). Thus, the establishment of a transna-
tional social field between Peter (in Istanbul), his “younger ones”
in Istanbul and later possibly in European countries, and their fam-
ilies in the same village or region in Nigeria, could be understood in
terms of a regulation of social behaviour. This regulation – which
can easily amount to control – serves as a facilitator of trust. Social control can in fact be seen as an accompaniment of social capital (Faist, 2000:15) in a social field enabled by both strong (between the family members) and weak (between Peter and his protégés) social ties. Analytically, it is the advantage of a transnational perspective that brings forth mechanisms of general reciprocity across borders.

Furthermore – and of special interest for understanding transit – Peter understands others’ gratitude as a way of facilitating his onward travels to European countries at a later stage; “I have paved my way,” he would often say when prospecting his onward travel to Greece and other European Union countries. This statement reveals that reciprocity is expected, albeit not immediately and not necessarily in the same form.

However, Peter’s strategy also points to something else. Clearly, the harsh structural conditions marked by scarce resources and limited rights are way beyond the undocumented Sub-Saharan African migrants’ scope of influence. This facilitates a situation in which members of a social network capitalise on the needs of their compatriots. Nevertheless, Peter’s example shows that capitalising on compatriots’ needs does not necessarily amount to exploitation or a zero-sum result. Migrants do make choices, even under the harshest conditions. In this sense they act, and do not just react.

Sztompka (1999:80) has observed that closeness facilitates trust. The explanation that “we are merely better at predicting the behaviour of those most like ourselves” (Sztompka, 1999:80) fits his definition of trust as enabled by the anticipation of the trustee’s actions. Nevertheless, there might be an additional factor as to why similarity – which in Peter’s case is constituted through ethnic and geographic proximity – induces trust, and that is the aspect of social control. Trust is not only extended from Peter to a “relative”, but also to their common surroundings, indicating that a potential breach of trust would have social costs in the home context.

Establishing bridging ties: the time aspect of network formation
The characteristics of migrant networks allow for contradictions and expressions of discontent among some of their members. Internal power structures may on the one hand exclude some people from becoming members, while some individuals with membership
status may feel that their room for manoeuvre is limited. On the other hand, individuals may grasp other options outside their immediate social network and invest in alternative relationships in order to increase their leverage (Lourenço-Lindell, 2002:29). This implies a steady interplay between structure and agency, since the building of alternative relationships might change the structure of the social network that initially forced the individual to search for alternative social ties. This section looks at the establishment of bridging ties and highlights some of the means and venues for forging those ties. A particular focus is directed towards churches.

Bridging boundaries
The search for alternative relationships, or building alternative social ties, is part of what Lourenço-Lindell (2002) terms ‘the politics of support mobilisation.’ Social networks are “constructed and reconstructed through the actions of participants who may have opposing interests” (Lourenço-Lindell, 2002:29). ‘Building alternative relationships’ is here seen as another expression for bridging or linking social ties. To recall earlier discussions, bridging ties are ties between individuals who are perceived to be socially different. In the migratory context, this might be people from the host society or migrants from third countries. “The structure of an immigrant network affects its function” (Bashi, 2007:264). Therefore, an analysis of social networks requires attention to the quality (in terms of social capital) and width of social networks (the diversity, in terms of bridging or bonding ties) as well as the individual’s position in the network. Individuals usually have different social positions in local social networks that directly correspond to what they can expect from these networks; i.e. which resources they can access (Menjívar, 2000:36). These social positions are dependent on the social valuation that people receive within the networks (Anthias, 2007:792). In my conversations with Sub-Saharan migrants in Istanbul, it became clear that not everybody had access to these particular networks, and that the same resources within these same networks were not randomly available to all members. Rather, it was obvious that individual attributes, such as gender, age, nationality and transnational connections, as well as individual capital such as financial, human or social capital, played a crucial role by regulating both the re-
sources and access to them. Legal status also contributed to shaping the multiple intersected positions of power within a network (see Morris, 2003).

As pointed out by several of the interlocutors, one major difference to life before migration was the mélange of people from all kinds of socio-economic backgrounds in Istanbul. The fact that people were “mixed” in Istanbul was something that Gloria had very strong feelings about. Coming from an economically well-off family and having enjoyed a high level of education, she had been in Istanbul for the past ten years and had established a successful trading business in motor spare parts, textiles and other items. She expressed discontent with the “mix of people here in Istanbul, as in Nigeria upper class people only speak to upper class or sometimes the second class [middle class].” She was especially annoyed about people who got rich quick and showed off with an expensive new car or gold rings. “Some of them they don’t have a house here, they don’t have anything here, but as soon as they make money, they buy a car or rings and feel powerful.” At the same time, she also observed that people paid her a lot of respect because she had money. “But I do my best not to show it, and you will only see me in nice clothes when I go to church and festivities.” But the blessing of being well off also had its disadvantages. “People come all the time and ask for money for food, for rent and for travelling. Most of the time I give something. They are grateful, but it is only momentarily. Some travel to Greece without even saying goodbye. Some just take the money and then come back and ask for more. I cannot distance myself from them, so I usually give something. But, as I told you, in general, I prefer to be on my own.”

Her younger compatriot, Joseph, aged 25, a graduate in sociology, came from a similar well-off socio-economic background. He told me about the difficulties he experienced with many of the other Nigerians in Istanbul, which he explained stemmed from differences in education. “Here there are too many uncultured people. They behave aggressively, the mentality is just not the same, and it is not possible to reason with such a person,” he lamented and indicated that he kept himself to himself in the flat he shared with seven other young Nigerians (1 May 2008). He tried to establish ties with other
Nigerians and with foreigners of similar educational and socio-economic background, as well as with Turkish employers.

Victor, also with a middle-class background and university education, often referred to himself as “enlightened”, due to his high level of education and exposure (to white culture) at a Anglo-Saxon Catholic school. It was for this reason that he explained his creation and maintenance of relatively stable contacts with European tourists, Turkish employers in the tourist industry and researchers and journalists. In his own words:

“OK, I am not saying I am better than the others, but it makes me completely ... uhm ... uncomfortable with the others. OK, staying with the others, it makes me more like the odd man out, ‘cause whenever I am with them, I normally keep quiet, I don’t talk much and I don’t ask questions and I am just nonchalant about whatever is going on.” – “So what makes you different?” – “First, my orientation back home, my background, my family.” – “You mean your education?” – “No, not just education, the orientation back home. OK, let me tell you my educational background first because I think that’s the major aspect: I went to a Catholic school, from kindergarten, primary, secondary, I was tutored by white sisters from the Catholic church. My headmistress was from Ireland, then my handwriting teacher was Sister Claire, she was also white. So I would say, basically, I was opportune, basically the background back home where I come from is different.” – “Which means that you are more used to whites?” – “Yes, I am used to whites, I have been exposed. Even back home in Lagos where I grew up, that differs from most guys here, they come from very rough environments (...). Many areas in Lagos are like ghettos. (...) So I was used to a lot of good things. I’m not saying I am the only guy from that area here, OK, but what I am trying to say, apart from that I went to school, OK, most of them did not go to school. So definitively the orientation is different, the thinking is different. (...)

Most of them are business men, back home in Nigeria. They just woke up one day and came to Europe. So their line of thinking or their reasoning is definitively different from mine. OK, I am more exposed than most of them, some of them have not been to school for one day, OK, and there is something about
people that don’t go to school: They think they know everything, when they don’t know anything, and you’re bound to clash with them. OK, fine, maybe we are having an argument, that’s why I am trying as much as possible to avoid arguments. I keep quiet most of the time, because somebody is arguing, and there is no base for the argument, he is just arguing on what he does not know about, you have to argue when you have facts! So basically that’s the problem I’m always having with most of them.”

(Victor, April 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

In all three cases – Gloria, Joseph and Victor – it is clear that their social identification goes beyond the aspects of nationality. It is important to note that they accept social ties based on ethnicity, in that they recognise the claims for solidarity and reciprocity. This supports Lange and Westin’s (1985) claim that ethnicity is not instrumentalised out of nothing. However, for all three, other aspects of their social identifications are more – or at least equally – important. So, inasmuch as they acknowledge the ‘we’ of common nationality, their overall identification goes beyond this. Instead, they look for other individuals with a similar socio-economic background and with a similar education and lifestyle orientation, irrespective of their nationality. This is in line with Ryan et al.’s (2008:675) emphasis on the differentiation of networks over time. These ‘new’ social ties are extended towards other African nationals, towards people from different countries attending the same church, towards nationals from Western countries and so on, and are based on a linguistic commonality, religious affiliation, the level of education or the ‘orientation’ (lifestyle) of the family back home.

Means and venues for establishing alternative relationships
The term ‘alternative relationship’ refers to the formation and maintenance of social ties with individuals who are perceived to be socially different. In this study – driven by my material – alternative relationship means a relationship that is based on commonalities beyond ethnicity. This section presents some of the important means and venues for the formation of alternative relationships.

Bridging means language and skills
Language skills clearly serve as a tool for bridging boundaries. Peter, for example, was able to bridge some boundaries with his skills in
French and knowledge of Cameroon. On a number of occasions, especially at the beginning, he stated that as he had not been to Nigeria for the past fifteen years, and did not appreciate the ‘Nigerian system’ of exploitation in Istanbul, he was keen to establish more lasting contacts with Cameroonian or other French speaking African nationals. Tina from Liberia learned French in a refugee camp in a neighbouring West African country and acquired knowledge of French cuisine in her previous country of residence. Through the French Embassy she is potentially able to activate her cultural capital and convert it into a job (financial and possibly social capital) (see also Chapter 4). Both Peter’s and Tina’s stories reveal their migration history, because in both cases their language skills were acquired after they had left their country of origin.

Tina, like Edward from Burundi, was one of the few individuals among my interlocutors whose nationality was not represented in large numbers. Both she and Edward distinguished themselves from the others by their rather long list of languages spoken in addition to their mother tongues, through which they were able to access various social networks. Apart from learning French in a refugee camp, Tina also learned Arabic during her time as an employee in Lebanon, and often conversed in French with French-speaking Africans and Arabic with Arabic-speaking nationals and other migrants (from other African and from Asian countries). She was loosely connected with a variety of networks: she frequented a Nigerian church, was regularly seen in the IIMP courtyard, and participated in the activities of the Moms and Tots group. On one occasion she laughingly told me that she had even started to speak like a Nigerian now (5 May 2008). Furthermore, as stated above, through the French cultural institute she looked for work in the households of French speaking expats. As she was able to generate some income through her African hair-dressing skills, she also maintained good contact with a couple of (Afro-) American women residing in Istanbul. It is clear that through her language skills Tina was able to bridge boundaries, something that she – due to the absence of any substantial number of Liberians in the city – was dependent on.

**Venues: support organisations, tourist resorts and churches**

In a city in which the resources that migrants are able to access are limited, official and semi-official institutions that support asy-
lum-seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants are very important. Most of these organisations are church-based and internationally funded. Many migrants are obviously in dire need of the material donations offered, while others state that they only frequent these places to socialise and to get an update on issues of interest, such as who has arrived, who has left, new connections, variations in prices and so on. One characteristic feature of being an illegal migrant is that it is difficult to ‘hang out’ with each other in public spaces. These organisations’ premises are therefore a welcome platform for socialising and establishing contacts. Some people – asylum seekers or refugees – also find limited employment with these organisations, mostly as translators or nurses.

Even though the IIMP courtyard was usually characterised by clusters of people of the same nationality, people were able to form alternative relationships beyond nationality there. People would congregate in small nationality groups – of Nigerians, Congolese, Filipinos, Iranians, Eritreans, Ethiopians or Sri Lankans. As stated by almost all my interlocutors, the national groups (i.e. members of nationally-based networks in transit) do not normally interact with each other, but individuals do. In fact, it was quite common to see mixed couples and their off-spring. Many of them were Kenyan, Ethiopian and Filipino women who had intimate relationships with Nigerian men, while others were Sri Lankan or Ethiopian women involved with Sudanese men. Although some had developed relationships in Istanbul, others had got together in a previous country of residence. Also, as mentioned in Chapter 3, I received a marriage proposal from almost every male interlocutor I engaged in conversation with, and was sometimes asked to act as a potential matchmaker between my white female or male friends and my black interlocutors or their black acquaintances. Investing in a relationship with me (or with other researcher, journalist or tourist from the European Union) was certainly a conscious decision with a view to obtaining some kind of support, whether in terms of direct or indirect information, money or contacts (see also Schapendonk, 2011). Therefore, the premises of the support organisations can also be seen as venues that enable a person to create bridging ties in the form of relations with researchers, journalists, missionaries and so on.

Tourist destinations along the Turkish coast of the Mediterranean Sea were also a potential venue for establishing bridging ties. Four
months after his arrival in Istanbul, Victor left for a hotel in a tourist destination along the Aegean Sea, where he found work as an animator. As he stated a couple of weeks later over the phone, he liked the contact with tourists, and had a good relationship with his boss and with his co-workers. Victor regarded the time spent among European tourists in a Turkish coastal town as a ‘learning phase’ or a ‘learning opportunity’ for a future life in a European country. Stan, a Congolese, got to know his future wife – the citizen of a EU country – while working in a tourist resort. According to Victor’s account, the tourist spots along the Aegean Sea also feature as a venue for establishing bridging ties. What clearly helped these two men to establish their relationships was their ‘orientation from back home’, as Victor used to call it, namely a middle-class background and a high level of education. Moreover, as Victor analysed, the job could only be done by people who had been – in his words - ‘exposed’, meaning that an informal knowledge of ‘white or European culture’ facilitated the formation of social ties with European (and Turkish) tourists. This, generally speaking, an individual’s cultural capital, including their formal educational credentials and informally acquired knowledge of languages and cultures, is a main facilitator of social ties outside the immediate scope of ethnicity.

Finally, churches provide one of the most prominent venues for establishing bridging ties. As the following sub-section will show, churches fill an important role in strengthening migrants’ self-esteem etc. At the same time, the material presented here shows that many of my interlocutors were clearly aware of the potential contacts they could or could not make in the churches in Istanbul.

Social networks around churches
Istanbul is a city with a high degree of religious pluralism. A large number of Christian churches offer sermons in various languages. Apart from the officially registered churches, many unregistered but tolerated Pentecostal/evangelist churches are also emerging (with a longer or shorter life span) and contribute to a diverse religious landscape. Many important social networks revolve around those congregations. Their social capital varies tremendously, depending on the ethnic composition of their members and their financial, social and cultural capital as well as their migrant capital. Importantly,
those locations of worship are also places for encounters, meetings and gatherings.

Apart from their flats and occasional places of work, a few African restaurants and the venues of the support organisations, for African nationals in Istanbul churches are vital places for social encounters. These churches contribute to the formation of social contacts between Africans nationals and the wider society (including other non-Turkish nationalities), and thereby to social capital. This is how Victor understood the function of African churches in Istanbul:

“There is a lot of charity work, for example they make visits in yabancı and basically fill us with the feeling that we want to feel, back home, the songs at the Nigerian church are mostly local dialect hymns. Like now we are pushing Easter, and Nigerian churches are already saying, ‘OK, free food on that day.’ Something happens at Christmas and New Year here, you have to celebrate with the people who know how it should be celebrated.

I am Catholic, so I go to the 10 o’clock mass first, and then if I have an invitation I go to the Blessing and Prosperity Church or any other church. But in fact, me personally, I think most of the churches don’t even make money, because people don’t work here, because the ones that work and the ones that are well off, they don’t stay around here and basically they don’t go to church! So I don’t know, but I know that there is a lot of concern, even when they cannot help you, they pray for you, assure you, and give you hope! And some churches, they give you food, and sometimes some of these churches go to visit people in prison, and when you are sick, they come and visit you in the house and you have to know one thing: most of these churches are not registered churches. So they cannot spread their net out so well, so in that sense they are illegal, but there is religious tolerance in Turkey, in Istanbul.”

(Victor, March 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Religion – and more specifically churches – often has an important position in immigrants’ lives in the new location. As formulated in

91 This colloquial term literally translates into “foreigner” and is derived from the Turkish term yabancı şubesi or Yabancılar Şube Müdürlüğü, which formally translates as the “Foreigners Department of the Istanbul Security Administration”. However, yabancı was colloquially used to designate “detention”.

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the introductory chapter of a collection of ethnographies on immigrant congregations in Miami (Stepick et al., 2009:6), “[m]ost studies of immigrant faith practices and religion demonstrate its role in reinforcing and perpetuating ties to the homeland culture as a mechanism for both easing the psychological distress occasioned by immigration and providing a community of co-ethnics who can assist each other in adjusting to life in the United States while retaining ties to those they left behind.” Thus, as Victor identified above, the churches bring together people with the same tradition of practising religion and by that enable a sense of ‘feeling of home.’ Religion ties people together socially in their new location, and connects them symbolically with their homeland (Stepick et al., 2009:6).

However, my material also suggests that the social spaces that church congregations offer constitute a site for the formation of social ties and, thus, the potential creation of social capital beyond ethnicity (see also Stepick et al., 2009). Churches – or religious institutions in a broader sense – usually welcome people regardless of their nationality, and seldom discourage a person from attending Mass. This openness has the advantage of enabling the creation of social ties beyond race, ethnicity, gender, age or social status (class). In comparison with social networks based on ethnicity/nationality, churches provide a platform for the building of social networks with wider-reaching bridging aspects.

In the course of my fieldwork I visited several churches that attracted many African nationals. Beyond their primary function as a place of religious practice, they all constituted a platform of encounters from which to build social ties. This commonality notwithstanding, the churches attracted rather different groups of people in terms of ethnicity, financial resources and cultural capital (including immigration status). Given the composition of the members of a social network built around a church, the churches seem to offer their members significantly higher chances of finding employment or a Turkish or other marriage partner – factors that in turn have a clear impact on mobility and immobility respectively. Four of these churches are described in the following sub-sections.
The Blessing and Prosperity Church

The Blessing and Prosperity Church\textsuperscript{92} is located close to Taksim Square, in the neighbourhood of Tarlabasçi and attracts a rather particular group of believers. It was founded by a Nigerian – seasoned in terms of length of stay – and is mostly frequented by young Nigerian and Ghanaian males whose stay in Istanbul is short-term and whose lodging is concentrated to the neighbourhood. Peter, who on many occasions expressed a strong belief in God and for whom religious practices were part of everyday life, chose this church because it suited his religious beliefs and matched his religious traditions. Furthermore, as already noted, the founder – or “owner” – of this church was also the owner of Peter’s accommodation.

Pastor Shoan talked about the situation of believers in Istanbul in a very direct way. “You feel like your life is shit and the only thing you want to do is go back to Nigeria and kill the agent that brought you here...,” he said at one point during Sunday Mass in December 2007, and encouraged the people listening to him to embrace God, because “everything will be better, but it will only be better when you get close to God.” He reminded them in a loud and sharp voice that “you cannot do anything on your own!” and repeated “you cannot do anything on your own!” and that “Your life is not your responsibility, it is God’s will, so you cannot do anything, but embrace God!” The religious sermon took place in a room of approximately 50 square metres and lasted for four hours. The room was simply decorated, and cost the “owners” 1,500 YTL per month in rent. The church was founded in summer 2007 and the owner had ambitious plans, which included finding a sponsor in order to spread the word of this particular branch of Pentecostalism throughout the world.

As part of its charity programme, the congregation collects food, clothes and money for African nationals imprisoned in Istanbul. The only member of the church with legal residence status frequently visited Istanbul’s prisons in order to allow for an exchange of letters between the African (often Nigerian) inmates and their families and to support the inmates with small everyday items, such as soap or blankets.\textsuperscript{93} However, the church dissolved after about a year, when the founder was alleged to have financed his trip to Greece with the money donated by the members for charitable purposes.

\textsuperscript{92} The name of the church is feigned by the author.

\textsuperscript{93} In 2011 about 400 Nigerians were reported to be inmates of Turkish prisons (Okojie, 2011).
Clearly, the Blessing and Prosperity Church offered a platform for social encounters, which fulfilled an important socialising function for undocumented Sub-Saharan Africans in Istanbul. The number of people with residence permits or even citizenship was very low, and in fact, most of its members, including the pastor himself, either left or planned to leave Istanbul for Greece and other European countries. As a result, less social capital was available for members to tap in order to secure economic stability. On the other hand, the church attracted a crowd that was very similar in ethnic origin and shared substantial religious traditions. It might therefore have provided emotional and mental comfort after all.

The Holy Triumphant International Church
My visits to this church took place during the winter and early spring of 2008, when the air was cool and moist. The concrete walls were decorated with golden, violet and purple drapes and the floor covered with a red fitted carpet. A rather modern and slightly kitschy image of Jesus was placed at the front, next to a synthesiser, a drum set and the pastor’s pulpit. The attendant crowd sat on white plastic chairs (22 November 2007). Pastor Aiseosa holds Mass three times a week in the Holy Triumphant International Church,94 located in the basement of a multi-story building in Kurtuluş. The pastor is eloquent and charismatic and shows great concern for the material and spiritual well-being of his congregation. When I met him, the thirty-eight year old Yoruban man, married to a Nigerian national, had been living in Istanbul for four years. He was commissioned to serve as a pastor in Istanbul, thus indicating transnational ties with his native Nigeria. As he stated, the church had several different functions and roles to play. “Of course, the main function of the church is to spread the word of God, to teach the real word. My work enables the people to trust in God and to accept his directions on how to live a good life. This includes living an honest life free of criminality, and I tell them that ‘you can only stand in front of God if you live according to his will.’ But the presence of a church means much more than that, OK? It also means for example that people can live a responsible life through the church; they can marry and have children now. They could not do that before I came here.” Pastor Aiseosa’s church gathers believers from various West African

94 The name of the church is fictitious.
nationalities, even though the majority originate from Nigeria. The Nigerians gathering there are from different ethnic groups (not only Igbo) and live in different parts of Istanbul (not only Tarlabası). By offering services such as marriage or baptism in a traditional way, the church not only facilitates a ‘traditional’ social order in accordance with the tradition of origin, but also connects its members. The latter in turn is essential for trust building, a strong social capital and the general well-being of the people considered. Yet another function of the church is to “re-shape the people’s vision of their life” which basically means, as the pastor explained, to make newcomers familiar with the possibilities of establishing themselves in Istanbul. “You know,” the pastor told me after one of the masses I attended at his church, “the only way you can make it here is with business. So we tell them where to go for contacts, and how the business works: we tell them what to buy, how to send it and where to send it. By that they can make some money and send it to their families who depend on that.”

Apart from the spiritual function and the educational function, the church also acts as a welfare provider. As the pastor elaborated: “In general, blacks do not help each other here, they only do this through the connection of the church.” The church thus provides a space in which individuals can bond through common activities both during and after the sermons. As such, then, these places enable the creation of trust to each other which potentially results in social capital. Social capital then enhances cooperation between people in their daily lives, and by that, increases well-being to some extent. The church also sometimes collects money for a specific cause, such as for health care or funeral expenses.

“In general,” the pastor concluded, “in the church, I try to make them see the fact that they can make it! Despite the way Turkey treats them. The church is here to revive people, to make them focus and to make them forget about all the difficulties,” he clarified, and continued to talk about the abusive behaviour of the Turkish police. Indeed, some of his sermons deal with the harsh reality in the new location. During Mass in early spring of 2008 he bolstered the religious followers and with a loud and insistent voice proclaimed: “The future will be good! From now on until the end of this year, everything will be better; for you! For your business! And for your families! Everything will be great!” He repeated it again, his voice
gaining in strength. After the third time people started to adopt the pastor’s mantra and screamed: “It will be great, everything will be better!” They laughed, high-fived each other and congratulated each other on the good fortune that awaited them, “God is with us!” The crowd that left the church that day was in high-spirits. For Pastor Aiseosa, the church has also had the role of providing psychological support to those people attending his services. But apart from his commitment in the church, the pastor ran an export business on the side. As I later heard from others, he also offered services to newcomers, such as making his Turkish bank account available for money transfers to Istanbul, advising on accommodation, jobs and travel to Greece. In order to improve his monthly income he also taught English at a private school in Istanbul.

The Floating Chapel Church
Located in the vicinity of Taksim Square, the Floating Chapel Church,95 established by a Christian Turkish family, attracts a rather diverse crowd, mainly composed of Africans nationals of both genders and different nationalities. Of the some fifty people who usually attend Mass, some are traders, some are business owners, some are asylum seekers and some are students. Many of them are employed on the ethnic, semi-ethnic or Turkish labour market, and have spent a couple of years in Istanbul. When I was there, there were only a few newcomers among them – a small and quickly changing group. In addition, a substantial number from Turkey attend, as well as people from Asian and also European countries. The church also offers a two-year intensive bible study course, after which the candidates also are eligible to act as pastors.

Given the composition of the members of the social network built around this church, the interlocutors who frequented it had observably higher chances of finding employment or a Turkish or other marriage partner. Victor had also heard about this church, and shared his thoughts with me.

“There is this new church [the Floating Chapel Church], it is owned by a Turkish man. We feel more protected in this church. Because it is registered, it is an open church, people know about it, and we feel that we are not being assaulted or anything.

95 The name of the church is fictitious.
Because there are white people, and that is why most Nigerians go to that church: they want contact, maybe you can get a white girl there, or you could get jobs” – “And white means only Turkish, or white means white?” – “White means white, but basically Turkish. And there, the tendency is that the Turkish, like the one that owns the place, speak English. I have never been to the church but I heard about it. Everything is conditional here, it depends on what you want to do! You can go tomorrow to a black church where you don’t get contact, where you don’t get whatever – if this is what you are looking for, you look for the churches where you get your contacts.”

(Victor, April 2008, tape-recorded conversation)

Here Victor suggests that Nigerian/African migrants know where social ties can be made, and which resources are likely to result from them. Victor, who repeatedly stated that marrying a white woman to acquire legal papers was not a tactic that he planned to apply (“I have my standards!”), had never attended the Floating Chapel Church. Instead, he sometimes visited the Catholic church in Beyoğlu’s central area or practised his religion in private.

A visit to Mary in the textile shop in Osmanbey a few days after she invited me to attend Sunday Mass at the Floating Chapel Church was very illuminating in terms of the social capital of this religious congregation. After the customers had left Mary from Kenya and Paul from Nigeria – both of whom were faithful members of the Floating Chapel Church – began to talk about the church. After praising the pastor and his family, and explaining their religious practices to me great detail, Mary turned to me and said: “You know, so many members of our church are working close by.” Indeed, some of the church’s members – of Kenyan, Nigerian and other nationalities – are employed in the neighbouring textile shops. Mary nodded her head to confirm what she just told me and said: “You see, we people from the church are blessed with jobs!” (16 April 2008). Over the next seven months I visited Mary and Paul a few times in their shop. On one occasion, in September 2008, Mary started a long monologue about her religious convictions. We were interrupted by Paul who entered the shop carrying a small piece of paper with a telephone number on it. The number, Paul said, belonged to a Tanzanian man, a new member of their church,
who was in need of a job. “He speaks Swahili, Turkish, English and French even,” said Paul and double checked with Mary: “Wasn’t there a shop owner here recently looking for staff?” Mary nodded and encouraged Paul to talk to the shop owner on the Tanzanian’s behalf. Agitated by her attempts to convert me to her branch of Christianity, I innocently asked her whether she had met Daniel, the Kenyan man, a newcomer, who was looking for a job. Mary confirmed that she knew him. Silence reigns between us. She then added defensively: “Yes, but this man [Daniel] doesn’t speak Turkish!” (25 September 2008).

We can thus deduce from Mary’s statement that the division between bridging ties and bonding ties – between the perception of each other’s similarity or difference – cannot always be established in a clear-cut way. Social identification is simultaneously established from a multitude of attributes, and is viewed as fluid depending on the situation. For Mary, who found salvation in the Pentecostal branch of Christianity and was a student of the church’s intensive bible study class, her religious identity was in many situations very thick and held a master position. Despite her being a regular visitor to the Kenya house, she often stressed her religious belonging over her social, ethnic ties. In fact, especially during the later stages of my research, her preaching of her religious beliefs increased at the same time as she accused many of her fellow nationals as being possessed by the Devil.

As the church was open to everybody who felt connected to it or were curious about the Pentecostal branch of Christianity, the Floating Chapel Church managed to attract a large variety of people in terms of ethnicity. Although judging the socio-economic position of an individual by appearance can sometimes be misleading (as we have seen in the section on negotiations of safety), the dominance of fine clothes, shiny leather shoes, elaborate gowns and other fashionable clothes seemed to represent the elevated social, cultural and economic capital of its members. As I observed in and outside the premises of this church, many of its members were (informally) employed or had their own business, which in turn facilitated jobs for newcomers.
The East-African Church

The East-African Church was founded by an Eritrean pastor who arrived in Istanbul a few years ago and applied for asylum. Before he could start (or “open” as the interlocutors called it) the church, the pastor spoke to some support organisations about his plans of establishing a church. A staff member of one organisation helped him to contact the pastor of an international church, and after that the East-African Church started using the premises of that church twice a week. The sermons are held in Amharic and serve Protestant Eritreans and Ethiopians. Catholics sometimes join them. The pastor is careful to point out that the people who attend the church amount to only a fraction of the Eritreans and Ethiopians in Istanbul. In that sense, the network that stems from the East-African Church in Istanbul is formed at the intersection of ethnicity and religion. The pastor assured me several times that the Eritreans and the Ethiopians in the church had a good relationship with each other:

“They have no problems the people, only the two governments have problems. The people have had good relation for a long time. For example in my church, sometimes we don’t know who is Eritrean or who is Ethiopian, we don’t ask. Mostly they are spiritual people, they don’t care. Maybe apart from the church, they can ask each other where they are coming from, but in the church, you cannot see that”

(Michael, November 2007).

With the exception of this church, no other formal or informal organisation gathers Eritreans and/or Ethiopians in Istanbul. Apart from church services, such as sermons, baptisms and weddings, the church also attempts to support its members as much as possible. The pastor explained:

“So I started to organise the community, when they have problems they come to the church, we refer them to IIMP sometimes, and if they want to apply to UNHCR we bring them to RLAP96, that’s what we are doing if they have some problem. Also, if there is an accident or if they die, we collect money if their family cannot pay.” But the pastor denied that people would only come to church if they needed something. Because “even the church, we don’t have money. Because all the people attending

96 The former name of RASP.
the church, men and women, they are not working. (...) There are some that are living in Turkey, but most of them are people who intend to travel to Greece and Europe. So they cannot work and they cannot give money to the church to support others. Most are migrants and refugees, they cannot help. Money to support others, yes, that's the problem.”

(Michael, November 2007, tape-recorded conversation)

The pastor himself was often hired by support organisations for translation work but said that: “I cannot work the whole week with translations, and if I get even another job in another place, I cannot work, because the church needs some people, someone to organise. It is not fair to say ‘oh, now I go and work’, or ‘I don’t want to be a full-time pastor in the church’”, he laughed, “I cannot say that, I have to be responsible.”

I met Michael, the pastor, at a bible study session. At the dinner preceding the bible study we sat at the same table. Michael looked visibly low and burdened. He handed me some papers documenting the persecution of believers of Christianity in Eritrea and told me to read them. Turning towards Pastor Shawn (the pastor who ran the bible study group) who was sitting at the same table, Michael told him about the many Eritreans who were about to arrive, many of whom he knew personally because they were all members of the same church. He said that they had called him from Ethiopia and Sudan asking him for help when they arrived in Istanbul. “Of course I have to help, since I know them personally, what else can I say to them on the telephone?” he asked us rhetorically. What worried him was – especially as the temperature had fallen to zero degrees Celsius – that the regular flats for Ethiopians and Eritreans were already crowded. He had tried to find flats in centrally located areas but the cheapest rent was beyond what he or the church could afford. “The church tries to help,” he explained, but as most of the church members were refugees themselves, this help was severely limited. “They want to travel to Europe, because most of them have asylum cases, but they need to arrange their trip to Greece and for that time they need a place.” This was usually a problem for the church, but because he knew some of the people concerned it had become a personal problem, he said with a frown (14 December 2007).
I met up with him again about a week later in order to return the information sheets on Eritrea he had given me to read. We sat down together, and I inquired about his search for support for the group. He again stated that the rents were too high in Istanbul and that the community in Istanbul was unable to help financially. Therefore, he stated, he had decided to contact the Eritrean diaspora abroad, in the hope that they could send money to help their compatriots in Istanbul. “There is a well-known Eritrean singer in the US who also has his own ministry. I know that they send money to Christian Eritreans in Sudan and Egypt, so I want to ask them to also extend their help to Istanbul.” These diaspora churches, he clarified, would not just help any Eritrean. “It is not even enough to have the same faith,” he said, “we also need to have the same doctrine. So you can expect questions for example about baptism. That’s why we need to work on our doctrine, we have to write one, and we have to write about the structure of our church, how many members we have and so on. But I am working on this, I will finish it soon.” His plan was to send it to a church that he thought might be willing or able to help, but not to all the churches (20 December 2007). Thus, apart from his personal transnational networks, through which he learned about the imminent arrival of a number of Eritreans, his intention was to plug his church into a transnational source of solidarity of Eritrean evangelical congregations.

Two months later, in February 2008, Michael summarised the previous weeks for me. Many had come, he stated, but most of them had continued to Greece directly. Unfortunately, he had been unable to reach the Eritrean pastor and singer in the US because the contact details on the website of the church proved to be incorrect. We again talked about diasporic relationships (transnational) and he said that due to his involvement in many churches in Middle Eastern countries, he had many contacts there, but none in Europe or America. “It takes time to establish contacts, you know, because the church here is new.”

All the members of the church did not share the pastor’s view about relations between Eritreans and Ethiopians in the church being harmonious. Gidey, for example, made a clear distinction between the two nationalities: “We Eritrean people, we help each other, it is in our culture. If you have a friend you help them, right,
so we help each other. Some Eritreans come with money and it happens that they pay the trip for themselves and two others, for free, you know!” What Gidey is referring to here is trust as a normative obligation inscribed into a cultural rule (Sztompka, 1999:66). As Sztompka clarifies, these normative obligations are often role-specific. In the context of Istanbul as a transit space, where most Eritreans live in very poor conditions, are often undocumented and compete for scarce resources (jobs, housing, contacts) with other nationalities in the same marginalised situation, this role can be constituted by having a certain nationality (and furthermore originating from a certain area in the country or having a certain socio-economic profile).

Two months earlier, in summer 2008, Gidey estimated that there were about 250 Eritreans in Istanbul, with around thirty people arriving every month through Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan or Syria. At that present moment, however, the number of Eritreans was only eleven. “Eritreans are fewer in number,” he explained, “we are 4 million people against 82 million people, and there are still conflicts. Also between the people, not only between the governments. People know about this war, every Eritrean knows, but people in Ethiopia they don’t all know about this.” He vehemently explained that people did differentiate between Eritreans and Ethiopians, and that the help that Eritreans were portrayed as being so famous for only went to other Eritreans, and was not extended to Ethiopians.

“Eritreans speak Tigrinya,97 but they say, ‘I am not Tigray, I am Eritrean Tigray!’ We Eritreans we like to keep to ourselves: here in Turkey, we are neither beggars nor cheaters, there is no bad stereotypes about us. We just keep to ourselves and don’t get married to other citizens. We don’t even go to IIMP, we just talk to each other and try to solve our problems by ourselves. We don’t believe in others! Eritreans help each other, this is why in a new country we have to find other Eritrean citizens. It is only here in Turkey that we meet in church with Ethiopians, in Greece and in all other countries there are Ethiopian and Eritrean churches, Tigrinya and Amharic churches. Some people ask me: ‘Why is this church in Amharic?’ The answer is that I don’t have any nationality, I am not interested in citizenship, I also work with different nationalities, Sudanese and Nigerians.

97 The Tigray live in both central Eritrea and in the Tigray region of Northern Ethiopia. Their language is Tigrinya (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online 2012).
It is to my advantage that I speak Tigrinya perfectly, even better than regular Tigrays, because I studied books. This gives me the freedom of mingling and being in contact with others. I am free of accusations that I might not be a good Eritrean, might not care about my people, my country, and that I might not be not one of them. At the moment we are maybe five Eritreans in church and about thirty Ethiopians. We are fewer in number.”  
(Gidey, 28 September 2008)

Interestingly, in the above quote Gidey differentiates the picture of unconditional sister- and brotherhood among Eritreans that he painted over large parts of our conversations and, in the last few lines, reveals issues of conflicts. There seems to be a very clear image of what a ‘real’ Eritrean ought to be like. Gidey regarded his superior language skills as his ‘free card’ to making contact with other nationalities without being accused of not being one of them. Another issue that a war-torn and conflict-riddled people carry with them was that: “You know, not all Eritreans are persecuted. Some were spies that called to police to report on us; some of them are here, they apply for asylum, and they pretend to have changed their thoughts: they say ‘sorry’ and all that. Me personally, I don’t want to hate them, because I am a Christian. But other people are angry with them,” Gidey revealed. This again was another aspect of social division among a group of co-ethnics, and one that at least in their country of origin severely impacted their daily lives.

Like the other African churches mentioned above, the East African Church tried to unite people and, in this particular case, to bring people together who had a history of occupation and war. Using Pastor Michael’s words, the church managed to practice religion without tensions between the two nationalities, and thus contributed to establishing better relations between them. Nevertheless, as Gidey stated, those tensions were not completely forgotten, and were still present beyond the realms of the church and church activities. However, as he also pointed out, tensions did not only exist between the two nationalities, but also among the Eritreans themselves. Furthermore, comparable to other African nationalities, many of the Eritreans and Ethiopians passed through Istanbul on their way to Western Europe, which had several repercussions for the church-
based network. Apart from the scarcity of financial resources and accommodation to support their members in need, the lack of documents infringed on the churches’ ability to engage with the Turkish society. Pastor Michael thus attempted to establish transnational relations, which at least at the time of my fieldwork remained futile (partly as a result of the relatively short existence of the church). Nevertheless, the initial support from another international church registered in Istanbul was seen as pivotal to the existence and the continuity of the church. Members of that international church were often invited to celebrations. Apart from that, celebrations were also organised together with other (African) churches. These activities largely contributed to a wider network, and to opening up the ethnic networks under the common denominator of religion.

In sum, the above-mentioned churches fulfilled several very important roles. Firstly, they not only provided spiritual and other religious services (such as weddings, baptisms etc.), but also connected people, both to each other and to the homeland. Importantly, these connections between people also helped to create trust between them – something that, as already indicated, was rare among Sub-Saharan African migrants in transit in Istanbul. Secondly, they provided a platform for social encounters. In fact, the sociological profile of the churches’ members intersected – depending on which church one attended – various social categories; most prominently ethnicity, socio-economic position and legal status. Although the Blessing and Prosperity Church offered a rather narrow and homogeneous social network, individuals attending the Floating Chapel Church and the East-African Church were able to form a wider array of social ties.

**Discussion**

In this chapter, my ethnographic material and the theory on social networks have been interwoven in the analysis. Different struggles and interests within social networks have been highlighted in order to avoid the shortcomings of social science that portrays social networks as exclusively beneficial for its members. Instead, social networks are treated here as fields with different social positions stemming from an internal stratification of power. This stratification, as we have seen, is largely produced and reproduced by social and cultural capital. The chapter has also introduced the concept of
migrant capital, which is a specific locally embedded form of cultural capital that often results in the stratification of migrants in a transit location.

Migrant capital explicitly refers to migrants’ experiences in a new location and acknowledges the beneficial impact of acquired local knowledge. To recall, Bourdieu’s (1983) definition, social capital does not only depend on the range of diffusion of mobilisable ties, but also on the volume of the social, economic and cultural capital possessed by other members of the network. In other words, the composition of a social network matters and largely determines the social capital an individual member has access to. However, such an analysis would be incomplete without considering the history of the presence of a group of migrants of a certain nationality as well as the legal status of the members of a social network. This was exemplified by the four churches described in this chapter: churches are a focal point for the creation of social ties, because they (or most of them) guarantee access to individuals regardless of nationality, gender, age or socio-economic status. One of the churches described above obviously had a higher proportion of its members in (informal) employment, while the membership of the other churches changed more frequently, which meant that the network was more exposed to transit movement. Turning the argument around, it can also be argued that the composition of the latter churches directly or at least indirectly motivated their members to move on, because the network around the church had little potential to help to establish relative economic stability in Istanbul. These aspects of mobility and immobility will be dealt with in more depth in Chapter 7.

Furthermore, although in its initial stages social network formation in transit in Istanbul primarily evolves along ethnic lines, in a second step, individuals start to form more diversified social ties to individuals outside the immediate scope of ethnicity. This is of crucial importance, especially for those individuals who belong to a minority nationality in Istanbul. Different skills, such as manual capabilities or knowledge of languages and other cultures, are essential for establishing bridging and linking ties. It was also pointed out that cultural capital, which stands behind these skills, is best used in places like the premises of support organisations in Istanbul, in tourist destinations along the Aegean coast or in the various African and
international churches of Istanbul. As has been shown in this chapter, cultural capital may serve to connect an individual to the wider society and to their immediate ethnic group. The value of the capital is dependent on the context and the goal intended. Thus, while Peter’s support to his “younger ones” was useful to their transit endeavour, Peter was unable to connect them to the wider Turkish society (apart from employers). For a person intending to proceed to Greece, this service might prove to be perfect, whereas connections with the wider Turkish society might not be useful at all.

Most of the Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul travel alone. Their strong ties to family and kin are maintained and cultivated transnationally, connecting individuals in various African, European and other countries. These ties transmit emotional support and sometimes money, but are also often reminders of the individual’s obligations towards the wider family. The majority of the individuals with strong ties with other individuals in Istanbul were mothers with children, together with a few established families.

The aspect of time appears to be central for establishing, maintaining and diversifying social connections. It is also crucial in terms of acquiring migrant capital, which is conceptualised as deriving from local knowledge. After a while, this learning process prevents its holders from being exploited, both by employers of various nationalities and their co-nationals. The exploitation of newcomers by their co-nationals is, as this chapter has indicated, rather institutionalised, especially among Nigerians. There is often a fine line between support and exploitation. Peter’s own system of gratitude serves as an excellent reminder that migrants do have a certain room for manoeuvre and that choices can be made. The time aspect, coupled to the principle of reciprocity, also seems to lay behind the difficulty to forge strong ties, both individually and in the frame of formal organisations. “Transit inhibits solidarity”: thus, the anticipated temporality of a stay in Istanbul and the intent to leave the city proves difficult in terms of investing in emotions or energy; both for establishing strong ties of friendship and of formal organisational structures. The anticipation of someone’s leaving squeezes the principle of reciprocity into very small time slots that require immediate exchange.
As we have seen in this chapter, trust between Sub-Saharan African migrants in transit in Istanbul is generally rather weak. As pointed out, especially for newcomers who lack the locally embedded migrant capital, recognising trustworthy relationships is difficult. However, notwithstanding the general high level of distrust, there are many acts of support, in form of services or gifts. This chapter has pointed to a few of the factors that increase trust in transit: apart from a good reputation, the relative immobility of a person may also make them appear trustworthy. This immobility can be seen as chosen or imposed due to the presence of children whose life one does not want to endanger by crossing the border illegally, due to a well-working business that guarantees a relative stable income, or due to a legal status that opens up for business possibilities in Turkey. These grounds for trustworthiness seem to be specific to the situation of transit, in which many social transactions and relations are permeated by the anticipation of temporality.

This chapter has shown that the analysis of social networks in transit is deeply connected to issues of mobility and immobility. In the next chapter, theoretical perspectives on social networks and mobility – hitherto held apart in the analysis – are combined. This will allow us to see how transit conditions certain aspects of mobility and affects the formation, maintenance and function of social networks.
In this chapter, I will pick up the threads from the previous chapters and look at the complex picture of transit that emerges when theoretical perspectives on migration and mobility and social networks are combined from an interdisciplinary perspective. For the purpose of analysis, the issues of mobility and social networks have been dealt with separately in Chapters 5 and 6. In the realities of my field they were certainly intrinsically linked. This chapter combines the two analytical efforts, thereby serving as the focal point of the thesis. Both the fieldwork material and the theoretical standpoints are presented, followed by brief analyses after each section and a longer re-capitulatory discussion at the end. Three aspects have crystallised from the material. The first is the social stratification among Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul, which I understand as being specifically twisted by the logic of transit and its impact on social networks and mobility. The second, and very much connected to this intra-group stratification, is immobility in transit. Unlike in Chapter 5, here immobility is connected to social networks and again to the logic of transit. Finally, this chapter also directs attention to the existential, social and circular spatial aspects of mobility, and points to trade relations between Sub-Saharan Africa and Istanbul and their pivotal role for migrants’ pathways towards social and economic stability in transit.

Transit conditions
So far I have talked about the transit narrative, or what I have come to term ‘the logic of transit’. As already indicated, this refers to the
common anticipation of further movement after a limited period in Istanbul. This section shows how this logic of transit forms and informs transit conditions, which in turn contribute to the reproduction of transit movements through Istanbul.

My fieldwork shows that the period in transit is conditioned in a way that encourages onward movement. These conditions refer to all levels of analysis, from legislative framework, to police behaviour (as presented in Chapter 4), network formations and individual aspirations. This section will clarify and discuss these conditions.

Eddy, a deeply religious and highly educated Eritrean arrived in Istanbul two months before I met him in spring 2008. With a nursing degree and work experience from Asmara he soon found employment with one of the support organisations where he could make use of his qualifications. He declared himself ready to help me with my project, and a little later we sat opposite each other at simit sarayı and sipped tea. Eddy told me that he had applied for asylum with the UNHCR in Ankara. In reply to my question about why he had chosen to apply for asylum in Turkey, and not in Greece or any other European country, he stated: “I don’t have money, it is difficult to go and it is illegal. Legally, I don’t know how I can go to Greece, and for the illegal way you need to pay much more money. Some guys told me up to 3,000 Euro. The work with the organisation gives only little money, but it is really good for me.” Eddy had become an active member of the East-African Church in Istanbul, and spent his free time in the church library studying the bible. He planned to continue to work in Istanbul and study the bible until he received refugee status and was resettled. Two months later, in May 2008, he was assigned to relocate to Izmir as his satellite city and to await UNHCR’s decision there. He left Istanbul with reluctance.

I met him in October of the same year in Athens, and over a sandwich in a snack bar in Omonia Square he recalled his time in the Turkish coastal town: “I was in Izmir for four weeks. I had to pay everything myself. I lived in a hotel which cost me about 6 YTL each night, and then I also had to buy food. Every week I had to go to yabancı şubesı, the police, for registration. When I came the third time, a policeman asked me: ‘What? You are still here?’ Don’t you wanna go to Yunanistan (Greece)?’ ‘No,’ I replied and told him that
I had applied for asylum in Turkey, whereupon the police officer told me to forget about the UN in this country, it will not work anyway.” Back at the hotel, Eddy met another Eritrean man, “one that organises connections, you know,” Eddy explained, “and this man asked me the same thing: ‘What are still doing here? Don’t you wanna go to Greece?” Eddy explained that he did not have any money. “Three days later, the man came to my hotel. He told me he would do me a favour and let me travel for free. I could hardly believe it. The same evening I went and everything went perfectly. I went for free and I made it the first time, I am so lucky!!” Eddy looked at me triumphantly. “You know, some people pay and they try and try and try and only after ten times they manage, but me, I am lucky! It took us only one and a half hours to reach the island. We were brought into the camp and received some food. You know, the camp was in a very bad condition, but I didn’t care, I was just so happy that I made it. After four days they transported us to Athens. The boat that went one night later had problems with strong sideways currents. They were on the water for eight hours and then they had to return. But as you know the ones who pay they don’t lose their money when they have to return, but me, I had only one chance, and everything went well,” Eddy recalled, with satisfaction.98

Some scholars (for example Schapendonk, 2010) would rightly identify Eddy’s trip as an ‘opportunity’ that as such should not be neglected in the analysis of migratory trajectories. Although I largely agree with this, I would still like to emphasise that opportunities are not just simple coincidences. Apart from weather conditions and, to some extent, the seaworthiness of a rubber boat, opportunities do not ‘just happen’ but are rather patterned and conditioned evidences of the existence of a transit logic. Eddy’s story thus reveals much more than the contesting and alteration of initial plans. For example, it points to conditions that enable onward travel (which therefore post-hocely render Eddy’s stay in Turkey as ‘transit’). These conditions can be said to be at the operative level (police)99 and the meso-level (Eritrean connection person) and include social processes (ethnic solidarity) that can collectively be called ‘opportunities’ that enable Eddy to proceed to Greece. As stated elsewhere (Sut-

98 One year after our meeting in Athens, Eddy received refugee status in another EU country and was about to start a university programme.
99 Information about the production and reproduction of the transit logic among Turkish officials has also been gathered by Danış (2010:216).
er, forthcoming), I conceptualise the myriad of conditions working towards transit movements as ‘transit space’ in analogy to Faist’s (1997b:252) migratory space. This space goes beyond the geographical location and includes “larger opportunity structures, the social life and the subjective images, values and meanings that the specific and limited place represents” (Faist, 1997b:252). As can be seen above, this space is not just constituted by migrants who anticipate their stay in the city to be of a temporary nature, but also by individuals of the receiving society who, in their roles as policemen or (as we will see later) employers, have become part of it. Eddy then becomes an individual in a transit space in which funnelling people is inherent to its logic.

Practices, occupations and infrastructure
The conditions of transit lead to different roles, practices and infrastructure – all of which will be addressed in this sub-section.

Rachel did not think very highly of her compatriots’ risky undertakings. “It is crazy,” the sturdy woman raised her voice, “some people come here with 3-5,000 dollars in their pocket, and all they want to do is go to Greece. With that money, they could start a small business here in Istanbul.” To illustrate her point, she gave me examples of Nigerians who owned middle-sized, income-generating companies in Nigeria thanks to the small scale businesses they had started in Turkey. She thought that one explanation for the occurrence of a transit movement was the fact that people generally did not have any information about Turkey. “They don’t make any inquiries before coming here; they just let themselves be blinded by the prospect of the money they are going to make. And once they are here, and find out that they have been deceived by their agents back home, most of the people believe what they hear from their fellow nationals. They don’t gather information about the possibilities in Istanbul, and if they do, usually the ‘old ones’ tell them there is nothing here,” Rachel pointed out (15 May 2008).

This (semi-) institutionalisation of anticipated impermanence brings about several quasi-formal transit occupations in a location of transit. When it comes to onward travel, the people organising connections to the Promised Land are vital. Mostly, migrants in Istanbul call these people “connection men”, or simply talk about “a
connection” and the person facilitating it, while the vast majority of the international literature refers to “human smugglers”. Also, the guarantors occupy a central position, inasmuch as they have a crucial link to the connection man and the traveller (see also Chapter 6). In the case of Sub-Saharan Africans in Istanbul, the guarantor is often a person of the same nationality – or at least from the same African region as the traveller – and is responsible for storing the traveller’s money until the person calls from Greece to report on the success of the connection. If the trip has been successful, the guarantor transfers the money to the connection people (and often earns a percentage of the sum paid), but if the connection fails, the guarantor hands the money back to the migrant. The role of guarantor is typical for a transit location, and can thus be looked upon as a transit occupation, institutionalised in a place that has succumbed to the logic of transit.100 What makes the character of the guarantor interesting for the purpose of this thesis is that the position is usually filled by someone who is widely and highly trusted. For (informal) business transactions, the service provider’s good reputation is often the main prerequisite (see also Liempt, 2007). However, in the transit location, a good reputation alone is not sufficient. The mobility and immobility potential of the service provider acts as a trust-inducing complement and is an important component.

In Istanbul other facilities, or immobile infrastructures as Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006) would call them, also facilitate transit movement. Public and private facilities to transfer money are an important example. As we have seen previously, among Nigerians and some other nationalities, accommodation for the initial stay is (most often) available. However, these facilities do not just exist as a matter of solidarity, but are often very much seen as an opportunity to do business and as a source of improving one’s social position in a network by exercising influence over the newcomers. As influence stems from the provision of a service, the person acting as a linking or bridging social tie has to have access to these prerequisites. For example, Peter’s position as “chairman” with regard to his “younger ones” does not only indicate a common ethnicity, but also that Peter is able to provide them with accommodation, jobs, contacts, information and other services.

100 Knowledge about similar roles has been empirically grounded by Alioua (2003) and Streiff-Fénart and Pourignat (2008).
Transit movement is also linked to the Istanbul labour market to which African migrants have access. In general, the jobs that are available to them are petty jobs that generate little money – if any at all. As skills other than hard work and physical strength are not required, the workers are replaceable. The fact that African workers are occasionally paid less than agreed or not at all implies that worker replaceability is a component of this employment segment. Even the few jobs that generate higher income (such as being a private English teacher or an employee in a textile shop) offer little to no safety at all, thereby consigning this labour force to the precariat (Standing, 2011). But there are more direct hints at the institutionalisation of these conditions. At the end of August 2008, Victor had finally made up his mind. Although still working at the hotel in the tourist resort, he waited for his next salary and then left for Greece. Talking to me on the phone, he expressed his agitation that his salary would not be paid until the middle of September – which meant that he would work two weeks for nothing. “I told my boss that I would like to travel to Istanbul for some days, but he just said that the money will come on the 15th.” Victor sighed and added: “He knows the business, that’s why he is doing it” (13 September 2008). If Victor’s analysis was correct, this constitutes a practice in a segment of the Turkish labour market that has adapted to the circumstances of transit.

As can be seen in Eddy’s example above, the conditions that form and reproduce transit are not only limited to social networks of co-nationals or other migrant nationalities. An examination of the labour market practices in Turkey strongly suggests that despite the Turkish public’s relative unawareness of the presence of migrants in general, employers and the police are not only aware of their existence on Turkish soil but, at least in the case of Sub-Saharan African nationals, also of the significance of Istanbul and other parts of the country as a transit location, thereby contributing to the formation and maintenance of a transit space.

Intra-ethnic stratification

Despite the existence of ethnic social networks that help and support their members (although often to a limited extent), this study has identified a rather clear social stratification within these boundaries of ethnicity. In this section, attention is paid to the way in which
transit conditions form this social stratification and which positions a network member in a migrant social network in Istanbul can be assigned to. As shown in Peter’s story in Chapter 2 and many other snapshots throughout the thesis, a power spectrum exists in which the time spent in the locality and legal status play a major role. As shown as shown in the graph below, I identified a pattern of social stratification in Istanbul as a transit location that is based on immobility intersected with legal status and migrant capital. Importantly, time is inherent in all the factors related to the formation of social capital. This social stratification is largely seen as produced by transit movements and, in turn, reproducing transit movements.

The components that forge social capital in transit

*The established*
In Istanbul, there are a small number of African migrants whom I term ‘the established’, i.e. people who came to Istanbul with various plans and intentions and found a way to earn a living and, most importantly, to obtain legal residence and working papers. This often happened through a love marriage or a contract marriage which eventually led to Turkish citizenship. Up to 2003, the Turkish Citizenship law granted citizenship to every foreigner who married a Turkish national. Now, citizenship is only granted after three years of marriage to a Turkish national (Kirișçi, 2008:8).
Nicole was one of the established African migrants in Istanbul. I first met her at a bus stop in Kurtuluş, where we were both waiting for a bus to Taksim Square. We had both just attended a church service at a Nigerian church located in the basement of a block of flats, and started chatting about the service, the charismatic pastor and eventually about her life in Istanbul. Nicole had been in Istanbul since 1996, and gained citizenship three years later through marriage. She first lived in a flat together with other women from African countries. They were now all in Europe, but Nicole, who was 29 years old at the time, decided to stay in Istanbul and try her luck there. A couple of years previously she had started her own company exporting textiles and other items to various African countries, including her native Nigeria. When we met she was considering exporting soap to Zimbabwe. She also had thoughts about importing traditional African handicrafts, and had concrete plans to travel to Kenya to buy masks and textiles that she planned to sell in a new shop she was about to open. A few months previously she had made her husband (also Nigerian) a partner in her company.

I visited her a few weeks later (in December 2007) in her newly-opened shop in a multi-storey business passage in Laleli. There were no logos on the windows and Nicole and her newly hired accountant Lawrence were about to finalise the installation of three telephone lines for the call shop. The sale of African handicrafts and the provision of Internet booths and cargo offers for the export business were also in the pipeline, Nicole explained. Nicole had recently made the acquaintance of Chris at the church. His previous work experience as an accountant in Lagos as well as his computer skills had been good reason to employ this young and energetic man. Lawrence and another Nigerian man who was in the office when I visited had arrived in Istanbul a couple of months previously.

While setting up the computers, the three of them vividly discussed business opportunities and general development in Lagos. At one point, when the discussion turned to property prices, the three began to argue. Nicole clearly had a different impression of the situation than her two compatriots. “Do you think I am the fool?” Nicole shouted rhetorically, and provocatively asked the two men: “Tell me, how much did you pay to your agent?” Everybody laughed heartily, thus reaffirming Nicole’s wit and doggedness. It is
widely known that the so-called “agents” in Nigeria who organise all the technicalities (visa and flight ticket) for the travel to Turkey, Syria or Lebanon usually deceive their clients by promising direct and easy access to Greece from Istanbul. Often the travellers spend up to 10,000 US dollars only to see their seemingly smooth plans shattered on arrival in Istanbul. After a while the discussion shifted to Nicole’s two children, whom she had just removed from the kindergarten. “They started to speak Turkish, and there is no use for this language for them,” she explained. Apart from the language issue, Nicole did not have any confidence in Turkish public schools. “I want my children to think independently,” she explained, implying it to be something that public schools in Turkey do not encourage. International schools in Turkey were beyond her budget, which was why she was looking into the possibility of sending her children to a European country where the schooling was free and of good quality. She was therefore considering sending her niece from Nigeria to an English-speaking country together with the children. “But it is complicated,” she sighed. Lawrence followed our discussion from his position behind the computer. In an attempt to contribute to Nicole’s anti-Turkish education statement, he started to denigrate Turkish universities and attacked their academic qualities. This made Nicole furious, and she vehemently started to defend Turkey: “I love Turkey and I like the people, and the education is very good here, so don’t speak about things you don’t know anything about. I am proud to be Turkish!” (22 November 2007, 14 December 2007, 15 May 2008).

Clearly, through her Turkish citizenship, Nicole had substantially increased her social capital within her immediate social network based on ethnic ties. By registering her own company she was not only able to make her husband a partner, but also to create employment (within the ethnic labour market) for her co-ethnics (or co-believers from the church). Moreover, by remarrying a man from West Africa, she was able to secure his legal status in the country too. Nicole, thus, had a high migrant capital which translated into a high social capital within her social network. The fact that she was in possession of Turkish citizenship also gave her potential bridging capital to the wider Turkish society, which could also result in linking social capital to individuals with power in the Turkish society.
Another established migrant was Rachel, a Nigerian woman who came to Istanbul 15 years before I met her. Initially her plan was to go to Europe, but faced with the risks involved in crossing the water, she decided to stay in Istanbul: “I have only one life, you know,” she explained. During the initial years she eked out a living as a domestic worker in a household, where her duties mostly included babysitting and cleaning. “I had to go through a lot of hardship,” she said, and proudly added: “I had nothing in the beginning, but I have always worked.” In the meanwhile she had obtained Turkish citizenship through marriage, and then re-married another man from an African country. She was highly critical of most of her co-nationals’ quest for quick money. “It is better to have 1 YTL in peace, than 1,000 YTL through troubles. If you are looking for troubles, you will also get them,” she reasoned. A couple of years previously she had opened a small restaurant serving Nigerian food. Now her restaurant seats ten people and delivers an additional 30 plates of rice and spicy chicken to customers and employees of the neighbouring textile shops. Her customers were Africans of different nationalities (Kenyans, Nigerians, Ghanaians and Tanzanians, to name but a few) who were in the neighbourhood for a short time to purchase textiles, or resident African nationals employed in the textile shops.

One day in April 2008 I visited her at the restaurant. While I sat at the kitchen table enjoying the portion of rice and marinated chicken I was offered, Rachel was busy washing up, answering the telephone, writing a shopping list and preparing for the next day. Although she had a lot to do she made time to talk to me. She told me that she liked Turkey. She was aware of the fact that most of her compatriots had different opinions about that, but said: “I don’t let myself think about the negatives, you know. Because they are there, there are a lot of negatives, but if I would give space for them, I could not do it here. I have suffered a lot here, but I know the system here.” She paused for a second, and then gave me a gloomy smile: “You know, I know how to be angry at them, in an efficient way. That helps a lot. I don’t wanna go somewhere else. Maybe it is better there, but I know the system here.” She paused again. “Also, Europe, they have their own problems.” Just recently she visited the UK for a week, and saw how “the people [Nigerians]” are living there. Some of them were just plain lazy, she snorted, and relied
on social security money, while others toiled the whole day long. “That’s no life there either!” she proclaimed momentarily disgrun-
tled, and affirmed, “No, I like Turkey. I am Turkish and I feel like a Turk, and I speak the language fluently.” There was the sound of steps on the stairs and her husband entered the room. He greeted me and sat down on the kitchen bench. Rachel served him a meal that he started to eat slowly and quietly. Her thoughts returned to her present situation. “You know, I am looking for a new room. I would like to expand my restaurant and offer hairdressing services. But it is difficult because the rents are so high. I am such a fool that I didn’t buy ten years ago. Because back then the rents were still affordable, and also I still had some money. But people, my friends, discouraged me. They say ‘What do you want with a house here? It is better to in-
vest in Africa, there is nothing in Turkey!’ So I listened to them and didn’t buy anything. But it is not true, there is a lot in Turkey, and if I had had a different mindset and my friends hadn’t discouraged me, I would be better off now.” Rachel looked tired. “That’s the thing with the Africans; here, nobody wants the other one to be better off than themselves. We are all in one pot, on top of each other, using each other to climb higher and higher, pressing one another down.”

Like Nicole, having obtained Turkish citizenship, Rachel was able to offer employment (in the ethnic labour market). Due to her flu-
ent Turkish and (just as importantly) her knowledge about “how to argue with the Turks”, i.e. of the social codes, she was able to help members of her social networks in their struggles in Istanbul. For that she was highly estimated.

Another Nigerian restaurant, owned by Vivienne, was located in the vicinity of Taksim Square. This Nigerian woman in her 40s sat down to talk to me and asked me to do the same thing. She sipped a beer and worked her gums with a tooth pick. It was early afternoon and the remaining lunch guests had just left. Vivienne, who arrived in Turkey in the year 2000, had an air of authority about her. She seemed to be on the lookout, and certainly gave the impression that she did not stand any nonsense. At the beginning, she said, she did a lot of investigation: “During the first weeks in Istanbul, I was con-
stantly walking. I walked around everywhere because I wanted to see how money could be made in this place. That is where I decided
that I needed papers.” Two years later she obtained Turkish citizenship through marriage – along with a Turkish first name: Zeynep. She chose it from a list of names when she was naturalized: “I liked it the most.” She opened her restaurant four years ago, and every day serves 20 to 25 portions for 8 YTL per plate. “If somebody only has 5 YTL I give it for 5. Sometimes I even give it for free. They never ask for it, you know, they just sit there and keep quiet. Then I ask ‘Have you eaten today already?’; so when they say ‘no’, I usually give them for free. But it is difficult. When should I stop and how often can I do this? It is not easy, you know. I cannot survive with the restaurant alone.” Vivienne also had other sources of income because she had registered a textile export/import company in her name – something that her Turkish citizenship entitled her to. “That allows me to write letters of invitation to Nigerian traders, who then do business in my company’s name. At the end, I get 18 per cent of their spending.” Furthermore, she was able to offer several services to fellow Nigerians (and others) either residing in Turkey or abroad who were interested in engaging in trade between Turkey and Nigeria (and other countries) or were keen on visiting Istanbul. Vivienne spat out bits of her toothpick and talked incessantly. There were a lot of problems for Africans in Turkey, she pointed out, a lot of problems with the police, and, what enraged her most, the Nigerian Embassy in Ankara did not care about that. That was why she was part of a small group of Nigerians who were involved with starting a Nigerian Association. Since Turkish law proscribed that the founders of an officially registered organisation had to be legal residents, she was once more in a rather beneficial situation, given the scarcity of Nigerian nationals with legal resident papers in Istanbul. Thus, by obtaining Turkish citizenship, Vivienne – Zeynep – had become a person which whom others had a genuine interest to be on good terms with. Zeynep’s next plans were to open an import/export shop in Osmanbey. People would still be welcome to visit at her future shop, but she would no longer serve beer or food. When hearing about my country of residence (Sweden), she immediately made the connection with Norwegian stockfish and started to wonder how her plans for a prospective import/export business relation might materialise.

101 This refers to the 18 percent VAT rate for consumption.
The semi-established
The category of semi-established also emerged from my material. Just like the established, they too arrived in Istanbul for a variety of motives and circumstances and stayed on for various reasons. What differentiates the semi-established migrants from the established is above all their immigration status in Turkey: most of them do not possess any legal papers, and are thus much more exposed to the arbitrariness of irregularity and the existential conditions of impermanence related to it. Although many of them manage to make some kind of living, many of the important decisions are not theirs to make and the basis of their economic gains remains rather unstable.

Like Peter, semi-established migrants have been in the transit location for a while, a few years even. They do not have any immediate plans or see any possibility of leaving the city (or the country), which does not necessarily mean that the aspiration to move on has vanished completely. They know their way around the city, know where to look for work, have an established social network (although the intensity of that can change), know where they can get what, know who to ask for what, know which employer to avoid and which to choose and know how to survive. In other words, they have established routines – of dealing with the police, of dealing with Turkish people on the street, of dealing with things that constitute a fear factor and hardship for newcomers. However, what they lack is papers. Either unable or unwilling to travel further, they try to – as Peter said – “exploit their options” in transit. If they have not managed to secure a (more or less) stable job, they often strive to open a small business (self-employment usually involves small scale trade between Turkey and their country of origin) or exploit newcomers. Once they have managed to save a certain amount of money they either expand their businesses and stay, or leave for Greece. Sometimes they are satisfied and return to their countries of origin, or find a way to engage in legal circular migration and experience upward mobility. However, some of them find that all their efforts come to nothing and, discouraged by that, take the first opportunity to leave for Greece.

Ruth can be categorised as semi-established in Istanbul. This 34-year-old Kenyan came to Istanbul in 2004. At first Ruth worked in Turkish households, but after the birth of her daughter two
years later, found it difficult to find work. Her relationship with her daughter’s father, a Nigerian who was trying to build up his own export business but without much success, was characterised by quarrels, and occasional violence from his side, although at best there was a deep commitment to a loving and mutually respectful relationship characterised by joint prayers and a lifestyle guided by the Christian principles. Ruth and her daughter lived for the most part in the Kenya house.

When I visited Ruth for the first time she lived there with her daughter and three other women. The constellation of roommates was in constant change. I also met Ruth at the Internet cafe where she worked as a waitress. Even though Ruth liked the owner, she was upset about the long working hours – six days a week from 10 am to 7 pm – and the meagre salary of 10 YTL a day. It was hardly enough to survive. A few weeks later, Ruth needed to see a doctor with her child and arrived at work thirty minutes late. Her boss promptly fired her. As much as Ruth needed that job/income, her dismissal came at a time when she had anyway considered not working, because the Kenyan woman who took care of her daughter had started to demand money for her babysitting services. Alternatively, if she looked for a job she would not have time to take care of the child once. For the following six months Ruth did not have an income. She lived at the Kenya house, ate the food that others bought, and tried desperately to find some source of income. When she asked the father of her child for financial support, he told her to “go and talk to your own people.” Even though the other Kenyans chipped in money for the rent and food (not only for Ruth), there was a lot of tension between them. On several occasions Ruth burst into tears when telling me how others treated her. Other Kenyans told me the gossip connected with Ruth’s situation.

In May 2008, Ruth obtained work as a cleaner in one of the tourist hotels on the Southern Mediterranean coast. She could take her child with her and happily met the new challenge. The work was very hard, and paid less than promised, she told me over the phone. Nevertheless, she had managed to scrape a decent sum together by the end of the season. “I will go to Greece,” she told me excitedly in September, “I will find a good job there and everything will be better.” But, my return to Istanbul, she changed her plans, and dur-
ing the winter months she tried to find a job in Istanbul, but with no success. In the coming summer season she again had to cleaning hotel rooms in a tourist resort.

*The newcomers*

All people I met in the course of my fieldwork in Istanbul were newcomers at one point. Newcomers constantly streamed into the transit space. They came, some stayed and gained experience – and thereby accumulated migrant capital – while others disappeared before they could develop routines, internalise the rules of transit, or became a regular part of a social network in Istanbul. Their scared faces exposed them as inexperienced newcomers to the transit situation and unaware of the rules of the game of this particular location. On a few occasions, when accompanying Peter on his errands, he pointed some newcomers out to me: “See the ones over there, they just arrived. You can see it in their tired bodies and dirty clothes.” And another time: “They were newcomers, didn’t you see the fear in their eyes?” (November 2007).

A newcomer’s appearance often promised an income for those (often co-migrants) ‘specialising’ in making money from newcomers by providing (un)necessary services often over the odds or by – deliberately or not – providing incorrect, misleading or incomplete information. According to Rachel, “they just sit around in their ‘ghettos’ the whole day doing nothing but complaining and contaminate the newcomers with their negative attitude.” But some interlocutors reveal that there were also other ways of influencing the newcomers. As one interlocutor stated, some of the “old ones” regularly go to the airport to await newcomers, approach them with the promise to taking them to Greece. They then let them stay in their houses, and once their money is finished force them to work in drug-related activities. Other ‘old ones’ made them work in the drug-related business in exchange for accommodation, while others again fooled them by saying that the only way to make money in the city was in drugs (8 April 2008).

As shown in Peter’s story in Chapter 2, the inferior position of newcomers is also instrumentalised by those who derive other less-exploitative advantages from them, e.g. by helping, providing shelter and connections, giving information or material assets in the

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102 According to my categorisation, the “old ones” can both be established and semi-established migrants.
transit space at a low cost or for free, the recipients’ gratefulness is secured for a later stage on their journey, based on the principle of reciprocity. At the transnational level, stories of good deeds from the transit space may also be beneficial for the immediate family back home. Thus, newcomers have a special social position in a transit space. It is their constant inflow that keeps the system running.

Discussion

The established migrants presented above are three Nigerian women who became naturalised Turkish citizens and grasped the opportunity to start businesses. I have been told there are only a handful of naturalised migrants from Sub-Saharan African countries; most of whom own call shops, import/export companies or African restaurants. The vast majority of them are women. As could be seen in Chapter 4, some of my male interlocutors are of the opinion that it is easier for (African) women to marry Turkish men than for their male counterparts to marry Turkish women. This certainly has a lot to do with gender roles and the acceptance of interracial marriage for women in the Turkish society. Some of these women (such as Nicole and Rachel) have, after divorcing, re-married African nationals, and thus, in turn, secured these men’s legal stay in Turkey. Securing citizenship in a context like Istanbul – where the majority of one’s wider ethnic social network neither possesses Turkish citizenship nor legal papers – constitutes a tremendous increase in status within their respective ethnic networks. Within their wider social network they become attractive potential marriage partners – suddenly even more attractive than “white women”. They become employers, negotiators and representatives. They open restaurants, and thereby create meeting places where people eat “like at home” and establish contacts.

Many of these women and men have started ‘ethnic businesses’. The term is used here to denote that on the one hand these businesses satisfy an ‘ethnic demand’ (e.g. specific hair-styles or food), while on the other hand they provide jobs for their compatriots or other co-African nationals who do not have papers. Furthermore, they might help a semi-established to start up in business by using their name. The deal often involves a certain profit percentage for them. Many of these people complain about the hardships of life in Tur-
key, but at the same time defend their new home country to the hilt if a newcomer or a semi-established migrant complains about it. In short: their legal possibilities and economic activities enable ‘the established’ to offer services and jobs to others in their social networks, which substantially increases their social capital. Furthermore, their legal status and their economic investments in Istanbul render them relatively immobile, which in turn increase their trustworthiness and thereby also their social capital. The particular social stratification in this transit location is thus largely conditioned by immobility and its intersection with migrant capital and immigration status.

The semi-established category is rather different. As has been pointed out by Sigona (2012) and Sager (2011), irregularity permeates all aspects of a person’s social, economic and political life. Therefore, despite their relative immobility and their at times remarkable social capital, their irregular immigration status hinders the semi-established from reaching a relative economic and social stability. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the support and exploitation of newcomers is one of the most stable sources of income for the semi-established to engage in. Another economic activity is centred around the presence of African traders in Istanbul, something that will be elaborated on later in this chapter.

Immobility is a very central aspect of the categories of the established and the semi-established. The established and to some extent the semi-established are those who are most likely to fill the quasi-formal occupations occurring from the logic of transit in such a location. The guarantors that I have met (or at least those I know of) have thus either been people from the established segment, i.e. co-nationals with Turkish citizenship and a steady job, or the semi-established, with immobility-inducing characteristics, such as a well-running business, small children or both. As explained in Chapter 5, recent scholarly publications on mobility have the advantage of not only directing the attention to the people who are actually moving, but also to take into consideration the immobile infrastructure that enables movement (Sheller & Urry, 2006:212). This is central to my argument, as the occupations of connection man and guarantor can be disposed as an immobile infrastructure of mobility. Also, the many services of the semi-established (and perhaps also some of the established), such as providing accommodation, information
and contacts – irrespective of how exploitative these practices might be – ultimately constitute elements of an infrastructure that facilitates transit. Further, by hiring co-nationals or other individuals of Sub-Saharan African nationality to work in their restaurants, shops and hair salons, the established grease the transit motor by enabling newcomers to earn some money with which to pay their onward journey to a European country. As such, the established can be seen to have an informal role in the transit space by helping needy newcomers to engage in the services of those with formal occupations, namely guarantors and connection people. However, it should also be pointed out that this informal role may – in interaction with the legislative framework – potentially slow down the transit movement by offering possibilities for relative economic stability and more concrete hopes for eventual establishment. As much as the constant influx of newcomers is crucial for the functioning system of transit, the voluntary immobility of the established migrants and the (not necessarily voluntary) immobility of the semi-established are equally crucial.

Migrant capital as a decelerator of physical movement
As we have seen in the above section, immobility coupled with legal status and enhanced social capital sharply influences the social position within a network that individuals can reach. But also individuals without Turkish citizenship or legal status experience how immobility can provide them with social capital on the one hand, and with relative existential comfort on the other.

Etienne and Stan, the two Congolese students, share an interesting analysis of hierarchy among the social network of their compatriots. They point out that the person in the network who has been in Istanbul the longest, and enjoys a higher status for their migrant capital, has substantial opportunity costs to consider when considering moving on to another country.

“The first man has the honour. If they move, they lose all the respect they have here. They are an icon of knowledge here in Istanbul; people trust them.”

(19 November 2007, tape-recorded conversation)
While his original intention was to enter Greece as quickly as possible, Victor found that he quite enjoyed his work as an animator in a tourist resort, and during a telephone conversation expressed hesitation when faced with his prospects of future mobility. He liked the contact with tourists, he said, and had a good relationship with his boss and co-workers. One month before he finally made his initial plan a reality and boarded a rubber boat in the middle of the night for a nearby Greek island, he was indecisive. In light of the distressing uncertainty that Greece and the EU yield, he had come to value the familiar – and therefore soothing – routines of his working life in the Turkish tourist resort. As he told me on the phone: “My boss made me the offer to work for him during the winter. This work is crazy, but I got used to it, I cannot stop. Of course, the European Union is the final stop, but there I have to start all over again. Many guys are now in Greece, some of them continue to travel, and others are stuck. Greece is the same as Turkey. Also, everybody is going to Greece. But,” Victor stressed, “I have built up something here in [name of the place], and I know what it took me to be where I am today!” His referral to the time spent in Istanbul was to the time without money in his pocket and the disgrace of asking his family back home for financial support. His boss even offered to find him a woman to marry for papers, the deal being that Victor would be granted legal residence and while working for the boss pay the woman part of his meagre monthly salary. “It’s slavery,” Victor said, obviously annoyed, “that’s what it is.” Suddenly he sounded low-spirited: “You know, today is my day off, but I will just sleep the whole day and then go to the disco in the evening and dance attractively. One day, I will laugh about all of this, but now I can’t. I learned one thing: Being illegal is bad, it is highly dehumanising!” (6 August 2008).

These are two snapshots of migrants refusing or at least hesitating to proceed to Greece in order to pursue their initial plan. The students Stan and Etienne argued that their seasoned co-ethnics would lose all the respect they had built up in Istanbul if they moved to a European country, and thus depart from an understanding of social capital as clearly location-specific. Victor was in a similar situation, the only difference being that he had not built up a position among his co-ethnics, but in relation to an employer. However dehumanis-
ing this position was, he could not ignore the relative stability and safety it granted. Thus, as argued above, social capital derives from participation in social networks and depends on the quality and the width of these networks. Social capital might appear to be location-specific. Without knowing more about the informal heads (the “first men”) of the Congolese social network and how it was dispersed locally and transnationally, further analysis is impossible. As argued earlier, for a thorough analysis to be carried out the nature and functions of a social network have to be highlighted in order to arrive at the actual constitution of social capital for an individual within a certain social network in a certain location. Thus, depending on the source of social capital, the respect and influence and the relative stability and safety that people experience in a particular place can constitute an obstacle for further movement.

As indicated in Chapter 6, in the section on social networks, migrant capital defined as a specific type of cultural capital designates informal local knowledge in general and the migrant experience in particular. Knowledge about how to get along with co-migrants, whom to trust, how and where to access the necessary resources, how to handle the Turkish police and employers and how to negotiate relative security and establishment (i.e. economic stability) from a marginalised (and often illegalised) status is part of that. As can be seen in the two illustrations above, as well as in many other places throughout the thesis, migrant capital is often implicitly named as a hindrance for further mobility. The soothing comfort of knowing the system, knowing “how to argue with them”, and the hesitancy to start one’s life again from scratch in a new place all bear witness to migrant capital as a potential rupture of the transit movement. This can be related to what Faist (1997b) identifies as “local assets” that are a potential factor of immobility.

The established exposed to transit

The logic that conditions transit does not only permeate the daily existence of the semi-established and the newcomers but also that of the established. As we have already seen, the established form part of an infrastructure by providing people in their network with information, contacts and sometimes the possibility of earning a salary (and of staying). However, as the material highlights, even their
everyday life is impacted by the movements of the members of their social networks. Thus, the realities of a transit location – of people arriving and disappearing – is also felt by the people who do not intend to travel further, namely the people who have established themselves in Istanbul. Rachel, the women running her own restaurant, told me that she was often approached by newcomers to find them a job. She snorted: “I do that sometimes, you know. But some people are just unreliable. They beg me to organise a job for them. I make inquiries within my network and finally find something for them, and then they tell me that they are going to travel to Izmir the same evening. You know how that makes me look in front of the others?!” (April 2008). Rachel was visibly enraged when she talked about those incidents. As a naturalised citizen in Turkey, striving for financial and social stability, she admitted that she had to work very hard in order to be able to take care of her family. She thought that the fact that Istanbul meant hard work was another reason why people wanted to leave for Greece. “They are not prepared for that, they come with the mindset that Europe promises a lot of money in a short time. They are not ready to settle with the conditions here.”

When I met Rachel some weeks later in a textile shop in Osmanbey, she sat on the sofa with a Fanta in her hand and chatted. She told her audience (me, Mary and Paul) that she was looking for someone to help in the kitchen, but lamented that it was very difficult to find someone who was reliable. “Everybody is looking for work!” I stated quite puzzled, recalling the uncountable conversations with interlocutors and other Sub-Saharan African migrants, and asked: “Why is it so difficult?” – “No,” she replied in a high pitched and frenzied voice, “they are all lazy! They work two days, and then they stop because they are too lazy!” She later moderated her judgment. “People expect a high salary, but that is impossible for me. Also, sometimes you hire someone, and one month later, he calls you from Greece!”

Rachel obviously found it difficult to get help in her restaurant. Not only as she said because people expected a higher salary than she could afford to pay, but also because people disappeared after a while, leaving her again in the position of looking for assistance. The constant flow of people was thus highly inconvenient when she attempted to help people look for a job through her heterogeneous so-
cial network, which included not only Nigerians and other African nationals but also Turkish and other nationalities. When the person in question then decided to leave Istanbul, she felt that it affected her credibility in front of the others negatively.

**Alternative trajectories in Istanbul**

As indicated already in Chapter 1, Istanbul as a transit location offers multiple pathways of mobility. Taking Kaufman et al.’s (2004) point of including social (upward) mobility into the perspectives of mobility (see Chapter 5) into consideration enables us to see more of the nuances of mobility that Sub-Saharan African migrants experience when they arrive in Istanbul in their quest to improve their lives. For example, they may find themselves able to socially advance without either becoming established in Istanbul or travelling further to Greece.

Let us return to Peter’s story in Chapter 2 to get an idea of the multiple pathways of migrant life that Istanbul as a transit location offers. Peter fits into the category of the semi-established. After the first few weeks of complete insecurity, he quickly started to develop an overview of life in Istanbul and was able to accumulate migrant capital. However, his precarious economic situation and his lack of valid papers meant that he was far from established. Peter was determined to establish himself through trade and his first strategy was to invest a very modest capital in a small-scale business. He bought a few items of clothing and paid a circulating trader to take them back to Nigeria, where the trader would sell them in his store. Then, in turn, another circulating trader transported Peter’s share of the profit back to Istanbul. For Peter, who was spatially immobile due to his irregular status, the existence of other circulatory Nigerian traders was his entry ticket into the realm of trade. The business proceeded slowly, but steadily. His long-term perspective was that once the business has reached a certain size and stability he would return to Nigeria, and then enter Turkey again on a valid tourist or business visa. After entering and exiting the country on valid visas – usually valid for one to three months – he would, as he understood from his compatriots, be able to get a one-year visa. Peter thus planned to establish himself in mobility and pursued concrete steps to reach that outcome.
In Peter’s case, Istanbul as a location of trade plays a multifaceted role: when I met him in March 2009, Peter listed the three ways in which he planned to generate an income, indicating that he was well aware of this labour market niche. His first step was to improve his own business. By establishing lasting relationships with circulatory traders, Peter hoped to increase the stability of his income. Furthermore, he also needed the services of these traders in order to start his own small-scale business. Secondly, by guiding Nigerian customers (circulating traders) to the places with the best selection at the best price, he hoped to secure their custom. For that service he received a small fee from the shop owners and one from the customers. Thirdly, he had plans to make his place available as accommodation (see Chapter 5). All this points to the interconnectedness of Peter’s strategies of establishment and the circulatory traders who can be conceptualised as already established in mobility. Without the presence of the African traders in Istanbul, semi-established migrants like Peter would have to find different channels for sustainable establishment. Established migrants like Nicole, Rachel and Vivienne would probably be forced to take their place in Turkish society to a greater extent than at present.

The very scarce literature on transit and trade presents another example of a transit location offering entrepreneurial careers. In their study of the Mauritanian city of Nouadhibou as a city of transit for Sub-Saharan migrants aspiring to travel to European countries, Joselyne Streiff-Fénart and Philippe Poutignat (2006) show that Nouadhibou similarly constitutes a place in which migrants’ aspirations are probed and eventually altered. A larger proportion of the migrants take (petty) jobs in order to survive and save up the sum necessary to cover a trip to Europe, while others divert their “adventurous” mobility into the mobility of an informal trader or a transnational entrepreneur (Streiff-Fénart & Poutignat, 2006:8). Thus, by harbouring opportunities to socially advance from a petty worker to an entrepreneur, the city sees many migrants turn around to direct their attention and efforts on economic prospects of trading (mainly fish) between Nouadhibou and their native countries (often Ghana and Nigeria). The maîtrise de savoir-faire circulatoire, i.e. the “knowhow of circulating” as it has been termed by French scholars (see Delos, 2003; Streiff-Fénart & Poutignat, 2006), does not only
imply actual and regular movement, but also the right contacts, and is of crucial importance for the maintenance or improvement of an individual’s social status in the home context. It can be related to the notion of migrant capital used in this thesis.

Established in mobility

Many African traders move between Turkey, their native country and other countries on a regular basis. As presented in Chapter 4, although comparable research has highlighted informal trade practices of traders from post-Soviet (Keough, 2006; Piart, 2012; Yükseker, 2004) and North African countries (Delos, 2003; Peraldi, 1998), Sub-Saharan trading networks have not yet been paid sufficient attention. However, there are strong indications that the number of traders from Sub-Saharan African countries has substantially increased since the beginning of the 21st century. Various newspaper articles refer to their increased presence in Istanbul. The English-speaking Turkish newspaper Today’s Zaman (Sezgin, 2011) reports the presence of African traders in the inner-city district of Osmanbey in the footsteps of Arab traders. The Kenyan newspaper Business Daily (2011) points to Istanbul as one of the top destinations for Kenyan traders (along with cities like Amsterdam, Bangkok and Ghuangzhou – especially since Dubai restricts admission to the country (Maina, 23 August 2011). Also the Lagos-based newspaper The Daily Independent (Orupke, 2011) provides some evidence of the trading networks between Turkey and Nigeria. An article on 18 August 2011 reported that Turkish Airlines intended to open a route for cargo flights between Istanbul and Lagos from September 2011. Up to that time cargo flights were chartered. According to the Managing Director of Turkish Airlines in Nigeria (in Orupke, 2011), the aim was to offer up to three weekly cargo flights between Istanbul and Lagos.

Bob from Kenya was one of the Africans established in mobility. I met him one afternoon at the Kenyan house where he was chatting with Ruth and the other women. For the past three years Bob had done business with his native Kenya and Turkey as well as Dubai, Hong Kong, China and Thailand. Now, however, he only came to Istanbul. The goods he was interested in were “office suits for ladies and men” which were then shipped to Nairobi through Dubai by
cargo. He usually stayed for two weeks at a time and never came without orders from his customers. “Four years ago,” Bob said, “I came here in order to go to Sweden. I found out that it was impossible and survived by doing cabuk cabuk (petty jobs).” When talking about Turkey, he added: “They don’t treat us well here, they don’t like our colour, it is impossible to stay here” (7 December 2007).

Bob put me in contact with the informal head of the Kenyans in Istanbul, Steve. A few days after talking to Bob, I met Steve and his wife Sarah in Taksim Square on a Sunday afternoon. We went to a nearby Simit Sarayı, ordered three cups of tea at the ground-level desk and climbed the stairs to the second floor to sit at a table. Steve and Sarah had just come from church, and were eager to hear about my project. Steve, the former head of the Kenyan organisation, told me his story:

“I came here three years ago with the intention of continuing to Europe. I was told by the agent back home that I could just take a train to Greece, as easy as that. So when I came here and found out that this was not true, I found myself in big problems. I did not want to risk my life, so I stayed here. I went and looked for work. It was difficult, very difficult, the first year. I found some cabuk cabuk jobs to get by, really to survive only. In the beginning I had a job for one month. Then the next one for three months, then for six. I did not earn well but I learned a lot of Turkish from my boss – and he a bit English from me. Of course, I have to understand the boss, not the other way around. But the only way to survive in this country is to focus on the goal and ignore the problems; it is hard but that’s the only way to do it. I did cabuk jobs for almost two years. These jobs are underpaid, but we are desperate. A strategy is to work very well and try to keep a job over some months, because then they get used to you, and it is more likely that they want to keep you. That has also the advantage that you are then in a position to negotiate for better salary. Before coming here, I thought Turkey was a better country.” (Steve, 19 December 2007)

A year ago he took the step into the export business. He now travels frequently between Kenya and Turkey and enters the country on a valid visa – usually business or tourist. Looking back on his experi-
ence, he said that he only stayed in Turkey because he did not want to risk his life – and because he found a way to make a living. His advice for survival and improvement in Turkey was to adapt: “Once you are here you have to learn how to survive. Either you can look how other people do it and learn from them, or you find your own way. You need to learn the language and learn how to proceed here in Turkey, you have to know how things work. The problem is the language and the high expectation of people. Istanbul is very, very hard in the beginning, in the first year. But you have to mix with people, Turkish and other Africans, benefit from their experience, take any job in the beginning. Once you know the language you can get better jobs.” He referred to a Kenyan saying “If you want to climb a tree, you have to start from the bottom.” This was what Istanbul is about, according to Steve: “you have to start at the bottom, you have to learn, you have to be stubborn and hard-headed – and you have to adapt.” And with references to Christianity and spirituality, he concluded that “challenges are everywhere, but you need to focus and keep on positive thinking.”

African traders who regularly come to Istanbul in order to conduct some business usually stay for a couple of months, during which time they make contact with shop owners, factories and other African nationals in Istanbul. The literature on transnational social fields enables us to grasp that some of them have managed to establish transnational economic networks between Turkey and some African countries (often their country of origin) and often have a transnational lifestyle. Other researchers have shown that homeland ties are potential social and economic tools to circumvent discrimination or “closed doors” in the labour market in new countries of residence (see also Levitt, 2001:20; Portes, 1999). Furthermore, Karen F. Olwig and Ninna N. Sørensen’s (2002) conceptualisation of mobile livelihoods across a variety of spaces is highly useful inasmuch as it extends our analytical focus from the place to the movements involved in sustaining a livelihood, i.e. in becoming established in mobility. It depends to a great extent on the knowhow of circulating (Delos, 2003:6), which appears to be an equivalent or even a part of migrant capital. Due to the absence of equal formal rights with Turkish citizens, these people cannot be described as established in a Turkish context, but can be conceptualised as the fourth category in my categorisation along the axis of (im)mobility, legal status
and the knowledge of circulating, a sort of ‘mobile’ migrant capital. Repeated short-term mobility within transnational networks is conceptualised as “an entrepreneurial tool that has been made possible through histories of migration, shifting immigration regulations and economic restructuring” (Morokvasic, 2004:9). Moreover, short-term transnational mobility has been found to constitute a way of alleviating social status at home (or at least preserve it), and can thus be seen as an alternative to emigration (J. Carling & Åkesson, 2009; Morokvasic, 2004).

The essence of establishment

The essence of establishment, both in settlement and in mobility, has to be seen as a relative degree of financial, legal and social stability along a continuum (Suter & Baird, 2011). The concept can be seen as a rather pragmatic application of integration or incorporation, focusing on the relative stability of economic income, and acknowledging the importance of trusting social relations. Crucially, in contrast to other modes of incorporation, it implies emancipation and independence from an already existing social entity. It furthermore focuses on a migrant’s making use of strategies in order to reach an economically stable living situation, thereby highlighting individual agency. Having said that, establishment goes beyond mere economic gains inasmuch as it acknowledges two things: firstly, that for economic gains to take place individuals need a social network that can support their economic endeavours and secondly, it recognises that for economic gains to be relatively sustainable, local knowledge, and therefore migrant capital (or its equivalent), has to be obtained. For the establishment taking place in situ it is knowledge about legal regulations as much as informal knowledge of “how the system works” and “how to fight with them”, while for the establishment in mobility it concerns knowledge and skills about how to (legally and geographically) circulate, as well as informal knowledge about how to establish and maintain stable transnational economic networks.

Thus, transnational mobility among Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul opens for opportunities towards establishment that are difficult to match otherwise. Establishment thus can be seen as a highly valuable factor in the distinction between transit and settlement, following Papadopoulou-Kourkoula’s (2008b) suggestion
to identify “improved conditions, stabilization of living and working conditions, and, most importantly, the fading of uncertainty and insecurity” as a definitional line between transit and settlement.

Clearly, situations may occur in which efforts towards increased stability can easily be crushed. One of them is of course if the individual is deceived by a business partner for a large sum of money. Apart from the money having disappeared, it might also be unclear how or even impossible to proceed with the business. Another situation which might destroy valuable (yet fragile) business contacts (economic social ties) is being sentenced to jail. When Ruth told me about her rather difficult relationship with her on-off boyfriend and father of her child, she highlighted the importance of contacts: “A couple of months ago, he got into trouble and he was at yabancı for four months, he just came out three weeks ago. Now his business is going bad because he lost many customers when he was in jail.” On another occasion, she told me that she had threatened to call the police if he did not return something that belonged to her. She told me: “Last night I sent him a text message saying that he should give back my stuff. Otherwise, I told him, ‘I will give your number and house to the police.’” On that day she told me that both his phones were turned off, probably because he feared that she would go to the police. “This is really bad for his business, because the customers cannot reach him,” she said, with a weak smile.

**Discussion**

This chapter has dealt with the theoretical question of how trajectories of mobility and the formation, maintenance and functions of social networks are conditioned in the situation of transit. Six main findings were discussed:

Firstly, it was pointed out that the conditions of transit following the logic of anticipated temporariness and onward movement can be understood as forming a transit space. This space, which exceeds geographical boundaries, refers to the impact of transit on social, economic and political relations in a location and transit and beyond.

Secondly, a social stratification among Sub-Saharan African migrants in Istanbul was identified and largely seen as constituted at the intersection of (im)mobility, migrant capital and legal status
(citizenship). The different accumulation levels of social capital (as a stratifying mechanism) within the migrant networks are the main factors accounting for this social stratification. It was shown that, in combination with the relevant legislative framework, this social stratification is on the one hand produced by transit movements, while on the other hand the stratification itself works in such a way as to facilitate and thereby reproduce transit movement. It could possibly also transform such transit movements into immigration. The best example of this is the established migrants’ common practice of re-marrying a person from the same country or region.

Thirdly, and very much connected to this intra-group stratification, immobility in transit was discussed and migrant capital was pointed to as a major decelerator of physical movement in transit. While local knowledge is necessary for survival in the transit location and for organising onward movement, it also increases the opportunity costs of onward travel and encourages the exploitation of opportunities in Istanbul. By extending our focus from migration theories to theoretical perspectives on mobility, the symbiotic role of immobility in processes of mobility becomes clear (Elliott & Urry, 2010; Sheller & Urry, 2006). This understanding enables us to see the immobile as a part of the infrastructure that facilitates and encourages the mobility of others.

Fourthly, the crucial role of trade relations between Sub-Saharan Africa and Istanbul has been pointed out, because they offer a pathway to social mobility and above all to establishment in mobility, i.e. the relative stabilisation of economic conditions through transnational mobility circuits. It is mobility as such that leads to establishment, and, as pointed out by Olwig and Sørensen (2002), not the place. Nevertheless, this thesis has shown that the impact of place cannot be fully neglected, because it offers anchorage for the social and economic relations that are produced by and, in turn, lead to mobility.

The fifth finding is the importance of the temporal dimension of the findings mentioned above. As explained in Chapter 6, time slots for reciprocal exchange are rather narrow due to the high level of distrust in the location of transit, which is in turn connected to the scarcity of resources. The observed social stratification is simultaneously also a stratification of time: due to their accumulated high social capital, the established (whether in situ or in mobility) have
longer time spans in which to repay a service or favour. This allows someone like Peter to extend relative trust towards some traders to transport his goods back to Nigeria and send his share of the profit back to Istanbul. By presenting a path towards financial stability and eventual (legal) mobility, trade offers a potential way towards establishment in mobility, and a viable alternative to hazardous journeys and durable emigration.

Sixth, and finally, the relative economic and social stability offered both by establishment *in situ* and in mobility can be seen as the definitional line between transit and settlement.
SUMMING UP THE RESULTS

This dissertation has presented the experiences of individuals of Sub-Saharan African origin in the Turkish metropolis of Istanbul. The thesis has paid attention to the various nuances of human movement and has shown that Istanbul, as a location of transit for many Sub-Saharan Africans, constitutes a crossroads of mobility. Furthermore, the crucial importance of social networks for the modes and trajectories of mobility in and from transit has been highlighted, analysed and discussed. As such, the main goal of this empirically rich thesis has been to critically approach and discuss the concept of transit with the aid of the theoretical perspectives of mobility and social networks analysis, with an explicit focus on individual perceptions and experiences.

After the introductory Chapter 1, Chapter 2 outlines Peter’s story on the basis of his own narratives and my fieldwork observations. Peter’s story, which is far from unique, follows his path after his arrival in the city and provides us with a deeper insight into the situation of (Nigerian) undocumented migrants in the Turkish metropolis. Furthermore, it serves as an illustration of the material-driven character of this thesis, and aims at help the reader to come closer to the field from which the material informing this thesis has emerged.

Chapter 3 takes the principles of transparency and reflexivity to heart and provides insight into the settings in which the material emerged. It presents and discusses ethnography as a methodology, and gives the reader access to the individuals’ narratives that have informed much of this thesis.

The specificities of Istanbul as the location of fieldwork are dealt with in Chapter 4. The first section deals with migration issues in Turkey in general and Istanbul in particular, and the second section
deals with the migrant landscape in the Bosporus city with a particular focus on migrants from Sub-Saharan African countries. The third section looks into negotiations and contestations of boundary-making issues along the line of race and ethnicity, and depicts the relations between the Turkish majority population and Sub-Saharan African migrants as perceived and narrated from the perspective of the latter, thereby largely ‘returning the gaze’. The fourth section highlights and discusses the room to manoeuvre in the everyday life situations recognised by irregularised migrants and ends with narrated experiences and tactics of self-identification.

In the first section of Chapter 5, theoretical perspectives on migration and mobility are presented around the three central topics of irregularity, motivations for emigration and immobility. The second section presents and analyses fieldwork material. Extending the classical theories of migration with perspectives on mobility proved useful, because the latter account for different nuances and kinds of human movement. For this dissertation, apart from spatial mobility, the concepts of social and existential mobility provide a deeper understanding, and as such have contributed to a more comprehensive theoretical framework from which to grasp the situation of migrants in transit. However, attention is also devoted to the people who experience involuntary and voluntary immobility; irregular immigration status is claimed to be a crucial explanation of immobility inasmuch as it leads to a costly and also very dangerous onward spatial movement. Attention is also paid to the ‘situated gaze’ through which one’s reality is perceived and through which decisions are taken. The chapter points to a logic of transit, i.e. the anticipation of a limited stay followed by further physical movement, which is seen to permeate many vital aspects of the migrants’ social and economic lives. The chapter furthermore holds that the decision leading up to spatial mobility or immobility in transit is not a clear-cut one but a process that is highly dependent on external factors as well as the very personal living situation in which different social categories intersect and affect people’s agency. This finding blurs the distinction between voluntary and involuntary immobility from a situation of transit, and highlights the close interrelation of social networks to trajectories of mobility and immobility respectively.

Chapter 6 highlights social networks as facilitators of assistance and support. Following the structure of the previous chapter, the
first section presents the theoretical strand of social networks, while the second section presents and analyses fieldwork material related to the topic. By addressing practices of exploitation and deception, the chapter also accounts for, analyses and discusses the darker sides of social networks formation. Trust and distrust are widely discussed in this chapter, and migrant capital, in terms of acquired local knowledge, is presented as one of the factor that facilitates the recognition of trustworthy relations. Such local-knowledge-based migrant capital is seen as a form of cultural capital and as an asset stratifying the social relations among individuals in Istanbul. Furthermore, social capital is presented and discussed as the major socially stratifying mechanism. In terms of social network formation, the chapter shows that in the initial stages of transit, social network formations are closely related to ethnicity and, above all, to nationality. In addition, the chapter offers an understanding of the network relations over time, and explains that many individuals have made social ties with people perceived as socially different, by using their (general) cultural capital. Turkish tourist destinations, the venues of the support organisations in Istanbul as well as the various international and African churches, have been pointed to as locations in which cultural capital is most fruitfully applied. Different skills, such as knowledge of other languages and cultures and manual and educational skills have proven to be essential for establishing those (bridging) ties.

Chapter 7 synthesises the two previous chapters and looks at how conditions of transit impact trajectories of mobility and social networks. It points to the transit conditions that follow from logic of transit. Furthermore, the aspect of immobility in transit is discussed and it is pointed out that migrant capital is the major decelerator of physical movement in transit. A general lack of trust and a constant in and outflow of people are common characteristics of a transit location. As a result of this, the social networks that develop in transit are fragile, highly unstable and can often only provide very limited access to the receiving society, often in the areas of the labour market and accommodation (and sometimes marriage partners). In such a situation of constant fluctuation, the immobility of people appears as a trust-inducing mechanism. Individuals who can increase their trustworthiness through their immobility are able to acquire social
capital, and therefore not only significantly increase their social position within their (ethnic) social network, but also their relative economic and social stability (establishment). Immobility in transit can have several sources, such as Turkish citizenship and other types of legal document that allow a person to stay, to start up and maintain a successful business, bring up a child or a combination of these things.

One of this thesis’ main findings is that a pattern of social stratification emerges along the node of immobility, legal status and migrant capital (a form of cultural capital). Trust as a product of immobility increases the time slots of reciprocity, while the ability to offer a salary (economic capital) or information (cultural capital) increases social capital. Another factor is legal status, with Turkish citizenship as the prize with which one is able to offer economic advantages, such as employing others, issuing letters of invitation to potential migrants and traders, acting as a representative towards the Turkish state and so on. Migrant capital, i.e. local knowledge related in particular to the migrant experience and acquired over time through personal experiences and hearsay, constitutes the third beneficial factor in this social grid of power. Together, these three factors lead to a tremendous increase in an individual’s social capital and thereby improves their leverage vis-à-vis their ethnic social network substantially. I have come to term the evolving social categories as established, semi-established and newcomers. The circular African traders that I refer to as ‘established in mobility’ are included in the category of the established. This stratification partly upholds the transit movements: while many of the semi-established try to advance their circumstances by either offering services to newcomers in quasi-formal occupations (acting as connection men) or under the auspices of ethnic solidarity, many of the established migrants’ services gear the transit movement by offering a meal for free, by paying a salary or by acting as a guarantor. Due to their largely marginalised positions in Turkish society, many of the established, and above all the semi-established migrants are largely dependent on the constant inflow of newcomers for their own economic and social advancement. Many of their economic activities involve services to their ethnic social network and especially to those people intending to proceed to other European countries. However this stratification
also has another impact: it facilitates circular migration as well as immigration. Up to now, among Sub-Saharan Africans immigration has only occurred to a very limited extent through marriage and re-marriage. Over time, these transit movements might well turn into immigration trajectories – given that the ethnic social networks are able to offer prospects of relative economic stability. However, social relations and economic practices notwithstanding, this development is very much dependent on a corresponding legislative framework that would allow for easier access to residence and employment rights for people of non-Turkic background, including nationals from Sub-Saharan African countries.
REFERENCES


This book presents the transit experiences of migrants from Sub-Saharan African countries in the Turkish metropolis of Istanbul. On the basis of ethnographic fieldwork, the peculiarities of a state of transit and its impact on everyday life are presented. These issues are discussed with the aid of the theoretical perspectives of social networks analysis on the one hand and migration and mobility on the other. Insecurity, uncertainty and an overall precariousness crystallise as constitutive of the state of transit. The thesis highlights the processual nature of mobility and immobility strategies. The issue of migrant capital, conceptualised as local knowledge with a particular focus on the migrant experience, is found to be a crucial aspect accounting for immobility in transit. The thesis further identifies a pattern of social stratification based on immobility intersected with legal status and migrant capital. It argues that this stratification is produced by transit movements and, in turn, that it reproduces transit movements. Related to this social stratification is the presentation of Istanbul as the socio-economic context offering conditions for both establishment \textit{in situ} and for establishment in mobility.