

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN MIGRANTS IN TURKEY: A CASE STUDY ON SENEGALESE MIGRANTS IN İSTANBUL

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Abstract

Over the last two decades, Turkey has witnessed the arrival of people with different ethnic backgrounds including an increasing number of sub-Saharan African migrants. The presence of these migrants in Turkey has, however, largely been ignored academically. Based on only very scant empirical evidence, sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey are commonly presented as a homogenous group and all are assumed to be transit migrants on their way to Europe. These assumptions have formed the basis for a policy attitude of ignorance towards these migrants. Drawing from ethnographic data collected among Senegalese migrants in İstanbul between 2010 and 2011, the article sheds light on this disregarded migration reality in Turkey. Adopting a case study approach, the main research objective is to comprehend the presence of a specific group of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey through an analysis of their migration aspirations. The main findings challenge on two fronts the prevailing assumptions about sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey.

Keywords: Turkey, immigration, sub-Saharan African migrants, Senegalese migrants, transit migration

Türkiye'deki Sahra Altı Afrikalı Göçmenler: İstanbul'daki Senegalli Göçmenler Üzerine Bir Örnek Olay İncelemesi

Özet

Son 20 yıldan bu yana, Türkiye, sayıları giderek artan Sahra altı Afrikalı göçmenler dahil olmak üzere farklı etnik kökene sahip kişilerin gelişine tanıklık etmiştir. Ancak, Sahra altı Afrikalı göçmenlerin Türkiye'deki varlığı akademik açıdan büyük ölçüde göz ardı edilmiştir. Sadece çok sınırlı ampirik kanıta dayanılarak, Türkiye'deki Sahra altı Afrikalı göçmenler genelde homojen bir grup olarak takdim edilmiş ve hepsinin, Avrupa'ya ulaşmaya çalışan transit göçmenler olduğu varsayılmıştır. Söz konusu varsayımlar, Türkiye'deki Sahra altı Afrikalı göçmenlere yönelik bilgisizlik politikasının temellerini oluşturmuştur. 2010 ve 2011 yıllarında İstanbul'daki Senegalli göçmenler arasında toplanan etnografik verilere dayanarak, bu makale, Türkiye'de görmezden gelinen bu göç gerçeğine ışık tutmaktadır. Vaka çalışması yaklaşımını benimseyen bu çalışmanın temel hedefi, Türkiye'deki Sahra altı Afrikalı göçmenler arasındaki belirli bir grubun varlığını, göç emelleri analizi üzerinden anlamaya çalışmaktır. Senegalli göçmenler arasındaki temel araştırma bulguları, Türkiye'deki Sahra altı Afrikalı göçmenler hakkındaki mevcut varsayımları iki önemli seviyede sınamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Türkiye, göç, Sahra altı göçmenler, Senegalli göçmenler, transit göç

Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Turkey: A Case Study on Senegalese Migrants in İstanbul

Introduction

In the past decades, *old* immigration patterns in Turkey have been replaced by *new* immigration patterns. Whereas initially immigration to Turkey consisted mainly of the arrival of ethnically Turkish/Muslim migrants, from the 1980s onwards, people with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds started to immigrate increasingly to Turkey. These altered patterns led to the development of a new field of study of immigration to Turkey (Tolay, 2012: 1). Until now research in this area, however, has focused on the arrival of immigrants from Turkey's surrounding areas like Iraqi, Iranians and migrants from the former Soviet Union. The presence of immigrants from more remote regions like sub-Saharan Africa has largely passed unnoticed. Consequently, Turkish immigration research is currently lacking insight into the process of migration and the experiences, motives, aspirations and concrete livelihoods of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey. Instead, a number of preconceptions have been formed about these migrants such as the assumption that their presence in Turkey is merely determined by their aspiration to migrate further to Europe. All sub-Saharan African migrants are therefore commonly dubbed *transit migrants* and Turkey is not considered a country of destination for these migrants.

This article aims to contribute empirically to Turkish immigration research. Drawing on ethnographic data collected between autumn 2010 and winter 2011 among Senegalese migrants in İstanbul, the article offers insight into the migratory aspirations of this specific group of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey. Within the framework of this research, the author challenges on two fronts the prevailing assumption that all sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey are transit migrants based on their assumed onward migration aspirations.

The paper introduces two sections on the development of the immigration patterns of Turkey and argues that the presence of sub-Saharan African migrants has been a disregarded aspect of the changed immigration reality of Turkey. In the next section of the paper the prevailing academic and political assumption on sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey as transit migrants is problematized. The following section presents the case study of Senegalese migrants in İstanbul and the study's objectives and methodology. The last section is dedicated to the main research findings illustrated by the stories of five Senegalese migrants in İstanbul. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

A new immigration reality

Throughout history, Turkey has witnessed diverse forms of migration shaping its current population profile. Traditionally, the country has been regarded as *a country of emigration* because of the Turkish labour migration from the 1960s onwards and the subsequent family reunification, asylum and irregular migration. What is less well known is that Turkey has always been a *country of immigration* as well¹.

In the course of the early days of the country's existence as a Republic, immigration consisted mainly of Turks and Muslims from the former Ottoman territories in the Balkans migrating to Turkey. These flows were actively encouraged by the state to boost the population of the country and create a homogenous sense of national identity (Içduygu and Kirişçi, 2009: 10-11). Therefore, these migrants were not considered as 'foreigners', but were welcomed as 'compatriots returning home' (Tolay, 2012: 3, Içduygu and Biehl, 2009: 9). In the late 1980s, however, the country faced a *new immigration reality* with the arrival of ethnically non-Turkish migrants. Ever since, an increasing number of ethnically diverse people have migrated to Turkey with various intentions (Içduygu, 2009: 8). Unlike the 'compatriots', these ethnically non-Turkish migrants are generally considered 'uninvited foreigners' as their migration into Turkey is not actively supported by the state (Içduygu and Biehl, 2009: 9).

Developments at both domestic and international level have had a significant influence on the new immigration flows to Turkey. At domestic level, Içduygu and Biehl relate the growing number of foreigners arriving in Turkey from the 1980s onwards to the globalization of the country's economy

¹See among others: Kirişçi, Kemal (2003); Kirişçi, Kemal (2004); Içduygu, Ahmet and Biehl, Kristen (2009); Içduygu, Ahmet and Kemal Kirişçi (2009).

in the early 1980s leading to the arrival of international banks and trading companies and to the encouragement schemes developed to promote investments and tourism (Içduygu and Biehl, 2009: 8). The changes in the immigration flows to Turkey have also been attributed to a combination of interrelated international factors. Political and economic upheaval in both surroundings and far reaching regions of Turkey, combined with the increasingly stringent entry requirements and reinforced border controls of Western countries, as well as Turkey's geographical position between Asia, Europe and Africa, and its important sea routes led to a significant rise in the numbers of foreign migrants arriving in Turkey (Brewer and Deniz, 2006, Içduygu, 2003, Içduygu and Biehl, 2009).

Turkish immigration research has, however, predominantly focused on the events in the country's surrounding areas like the Iranian revolution, the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Far less attention has been given to immigrants from further afield as sub-Saharan Africa who as well found their way to Turkey since the late 1980s.

Sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey, a disregarded migration reality

It has been acknowledged that since the late 1980s – early 1990s, a growing number of people from diverse sub-Saharan African countries have arrived in Turkey (Brewer and Deniz, 2006: 6). The migration of sub-Saharan Africans to non-traditional receiving countries like Turkey can be related to the interplay of events that sub-Saharan African countries experienced since the 1980s. A persistent economic decline leading to severe poverty and human deprivation, combined with an unstable political landscape, escalating ethnic conflicts, worsening ecological conditions and the political and economic constraints on international migration in traditional – mostly European – receiving countries, forced sub-Saharan African migrants to diversify their migration destinations to other regions besides the traditional European countries (Adepoju, 2000: 1). In addition to these developments at international level, the migration of sub-Saharan African migrants to Turkey can also be related to the attraction of the above mentioned economic developments of Turkey in the early 1980s.

The increasing presence of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey has, however, largely escaped political and academic attention. Academically, so far only very few studies have particularly focused on the flow of sub-Saharan

Africans into Turkey². The lack of attention for sub-Saharan Africans in Turkey is even more remarkable given Turkey's long history of political and economic relations with Africa. Historically, Turkish relations with Africa date back to the Ottoman period, during which the Ottomans had close relations with different African countries. After a period of stagnation from 1923 to 1998, political and economic relations between Turkey and Africa have resumed in recent years. In 1998 Turkey adopted the Opening up to Africa Policy, declared 2005 as The Year of Africa and in 2008 hosted the first Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit³. Although the trends in sub-Saharan African migration to Turkey are undoubtedly closely related to the political and economic relations that the country maintains with Africa, the migration component is often ignored (Baird, 2012).

The presence of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey appears to be an academic and political largely disregarded aspect of the country's immigration reality. Consequently, there is an absence of complete and reliable figures on the volume of sub-Saharan African migratory flows to Turkey, and a lack in our understanding of the process of migration and the experiences, motives, aspirations and concrete livelihoods of the migrants themselves. Instead, there exist a number of preconceptions about sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey.

A problematic assumption about sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey

One preconception commonly expressed in both academic and political discourses is the categorization of all sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey as *transit migrants* on their way to Europe, based on assumptions about their onward migration aspirations⁴. As stated by IOM in its 1995 report: "Transit migration through Turkey can be viewed as one of the most common of all recently established mobility flows between Africa and countries of Europe. It has become clear that thousands of migrants from the developing world who enter Europe are using Turkey as a transit area on their way to their preferred destinations" (IOM, 1995: 4). Turkey is thus not considered a country of

²See Brewer, Kelly T. and Yüksekler, Deniz (2006) and Suter, Brigitte (2012).

³For an overview see, among others: Özkan, Mehmet (2010) and Baird, Theodore (2011).

⁴The categorization of sub-Saharan African migrants as transit migrants is expressed in, among others: İçduygu, "irregular migration in Turkey"; IOM, *op.cit.*; Mannaert, Celia, "Irregular migration and asylum in Turkey," *UNHCR Working Paper*, 2003.

destination for sub-Saharan African migrants, but merely a temporary stopover on their way to Europe. Based on these assumptions, the Turkish state seems to have adopted a *policy attitude of neglect* towards sub-Saharan African migrants and appears not to support their settlement and integration in the country.

The assumption that all sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey are transit migrants is, however, problematic on three levels. First, the assumption is only based on scant empirical evidence. For instance, it is still unclear to what extent and how sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey are involved in the process of settling and social and economic integration, and how this relates to their migration aspirations.

Moreover, the categorization of all sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey as transit migrants embodies the assumption of a homogenous group. The few existing reports on the issue⁵, however, indicate that sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey constitute a diverse group in terms of their country of origin with migrants from Eastern, Western, Southern and Central Africa, each with their own migratory history and motivations.

The final concern with the categorisation of sub-Saharan African in Turkey as transit migrants is that the term ‘transit migration’ is currently under debate. Although the concept has become increasingly applied since the 1990s, there does not exist a commonly agreed category or definition (Düvell, 2006: 4). The confusion about the concept arises from a lack of adequate evidence-based understanding of a number of factors that shape the movements of those who are referred to as transit migrants. But the main problem remains the interpretation of transit migration as linked to supposedly fixed aspirations of migrants and a fixed spatial outcome of migration that is, ending up at the destination (Collyer and de Haas, 2012: 9). Existing empirical evidence has cast considerable doubts on the appropriateness and usefulness of the term ‘transit migrants’ to characterise the experiences of the people based on their aspirations to migrate onward. Research has shown how migrants do not always reach their intended destination country at all but spend, voluntarily or involuntarily, longer periods in so-called transit countries. Some migrants settle in these transit zones on a more long-term basis as a ‘second best’ option, and aspirations to move on disappear or are not necessarily converted into actual movement. Intended transit countries consequently become countries of destination (Collyer, 2007; Schapendonk and van Moppes, 2007; de Haas, 2007; Bredeloup, 2012, Collyer and de Haas, 2012).

⁵For scholarly reports with references to African migrants in Turkey see, among others: IOM, *op.cit.*; Manneart, *op.cit.*; Brewer and Yökseker, *op.cit.*; İçduygu and Biehl, *op.cit.*

There is an urgent need for detailed empirical studies that can throw a more informed light upon the migration aspirations of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey. Are they all merely transit migrants aspiring onward migration to Europe? How do their migration aspirations relate to their settlement and integration in Turkey? The remaining part of this paper, therefore, offers field-based insight into the migration aspirations of one specific group of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey.

A case study on Senegalese migrants in İstanbul⁶

Objectives and methodology

The main objective of this study is to comprehend the presence of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey through an analysis of their migration related aspirations. The core research question is whether their presence in Turkey is merely determined by aspirations to migrate onward to Europe.

A case study approach was adopted focussing on one specific group of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey: Senegalese migrants in İstanbul⁷. Senegal is one of the largest emigration countries in West-Africa. In addition to a long tradition of migration within Africa, Senegalese international emigration began in the colonial period with the French enrolment of *Tirailleurs* at the end of the nineteenth century and during World War I. After the independence of French West Africa, there were increasing numbers of migrants, largely due to the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s in France and the resulting demand for unskilled foreign labour. Yet, in the mid-1980s, the downsizing and restructuring of industrial enterprises in France badly affected Senegalese workers. A new type of migration emerged which was characterised by family or individual initiatives, the importance of access to trade for the success of

⁶The study forms the basis of an on-going doctoral thesis.

⁷The choice for Senegal as case study was determined by the on-going EUMAGINE project. This project aims at investigating the impact of perceptions of human rights and democracy on migration aspirations and decisions. This is studied among people aged 18-39 in four countries of origin: Morocco, Senegal, Turkey and Ukraine. The project is undertaken by a consortium of eight institutions: (1) CeMIS, University of Antwerp, Belgium; (2) COMPAS, University of Oxford, United Kingdom; (3) IMI, University of Oxford, United Kingdom; (4) PRIO, Norway; (5) Koç University, Turkey; (6) UMVA, Morocco; (7) CSR, Ukraine; (8) UCAD, Senegal (<http://www.eumagine.org>). The doctoral thesis on Senegalese migrants in Turkey is being conducted as case study within the EUMAGINE project.

migratory strategies, and a widening range of destinations. The popularity of France as the main destination country for Senegalese people declined and they started leaving for other receiving countries as Spain, Italy, the USA, Morocco, but also Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and China (Pian, 2005; Riccio, 2008: 217-234). The presence of Senegalese migrants in these new receiving countries has, however, not been addressed by previous academic research.

The data on which this paper is based consist of ethnographic evidence collected between October 2010 and December 2011 among Senegalese migrants in İstanbul. Information gathered through in-depth interviews and informal talks with 25 male and 14 female Senegalese migrants in İstanbul⁸ was integrated with participative observations, the collection of newspaper articles and interviews with relevant representatives of national and international organizations in Turkey and Senegal. Interviewees were identified through snowball sampling. To minimize the limits of the snowball-method, the sample was inspired by the concepts of theoretical sampling, constant comparison, and saturation from the Grounded Theory Approach (Glaser and Anselm, 1967) and was compiled taking into consideration the distribution of age, sex, social background and duration of stay in Turkey. Finally, the choice of ethnography ensured access to a more socially embedded understanding of the actual livelihoods and complex and dynamic aspirations of the migrants (de Haas, 2008: 45).

In what follows the main research findings are presented, illustrated by the stories of five Senegalese informants in İstanbul. The findings challenge on two fronts the categorisation of all sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey as transit migrants based on their assumed onward migration aspirations to Europe.

Not all migrants aspire to migrate to Europe: the stories⁹ of Fatou and Gor¹⁰

Fatou is a 36 year old Senegalese woman. I met her for the first time in October 2010 in İstanbul. At the time of the fieldwork she was divorced and

⁸An overview of the Senegalese migrants interviewed in İstanbul is provided in Table 1.

⁹The stories presented here are abstracts from field notes of the author and citations from interviews with the migrants. These citations are translated from French.

¹⁰All names in this paper have been made anonymous. Background information about Fatou and Gor can be found in Table 1. Fatou is informant 2 and Gor is informant 1.

had no children. Before she came to Turkey she had a job in an export company.

“I had a job but I did not earn enough to have a good life. That is why I started thinking of migration, to earn more money.”

At that time she had no specific destination in mind. She had a cousin who worked as trader. She travelled to İstanbul every six months to buy merchandise such as clothes that she would sell back in Senegal. When Fatou talked with to cousin about her plans to migrate, her cousin suggested to go to İstanbul.

“My cousin told me that there are a lot of work opportunities in İstanbul. So I decided to go to İstanbul and try my luck there. My plan was to go to İstanbul and find a job that would pay enough.”

She applied for a tourist visa for Turkey and her application was accepted. She bought a flight ticket and arrived in İstanbul in 2009. She could stay at the apartment of a Senegalese friend who had been living in İstanbul for some years. She quickly found a job working in a handbag factory. However, due to back pains and a very low salary, Fatou quit this job after a few months. With no job, health problems and an expired visa, she was demotivated and thought of going back to Senegal.

“But without money to take back to Senegal I was afraid that I would disappoint my mother, so I told myself to be brave and I decided to stay in İstanbul.”

With the help of her Senegalese friend, she got in contact with a French-Turkish family that was looking for a French-speaking nanny. Fatou got the job and has been working for this family ever since. At the end of the month she sends a part of her salary to her mother in Senegal. During one of our conversations I asked Fatou if she had ever thought of migrating onward to Europe since she arrived in İstanbul. She said:

“When I was in Senegal I never thought of Europe, I wanted to go to Turkey because my cousin told me that it was easy to earn money in Turkey. And here in Turkey going to Europe has never crossed my mind either. I have been in İstanbul for 2 years now, I have a job and I can speak a little bit of Turkish, why would I go to Europe? There is nothing in Europe, life is hard there, there is the economic crisis. In İstanbul life is ok, there is work.”

Gor is a Senegalese man I met for the first time in October 2010 in İstanbul. At the time of the fieldwork he was 40 years old and had been in İstanbul since 2001. Before coming to Turkey he owned a small cosmetics shop in Senegal.

“Although my business was going well, I did not earn enough money to support my family and the family of my brothers. Family in Senegal is everything you know”.

His two brothers left a few years ago for Italy leaving their wives and children behind. As his brothers did not earn enough money in Italy, Gor, being the oldest brother, had to support his brothers’ family too. At that time Gor also had friends who had migrated to Turkey a few years ago.

“That is what pushed me to leave Senegal, to earn more money and help the family. When I talked to my brothers in Italy and told them I wanted to leave Senegal, they told me not to come to Italy because in Europe there is nothing, it is difficult to find work.”

“Every time my friends from Turkey came back to Senegal for vacation they were very rich and could build a nice big house and buy nice cars. They also got all the beautiful girls of the town. Everyone was jealous.”

Discouraged by his brothers to go to Europe and encouraged by his friends’ experiences in Turkey, Gor applied in 2000 for a tourist visa for Turkey. His application was accepted and a year later he arrived by plane in İstanbul. He found a place to stay at his Senegalese friends’ apartment. With the help of his friends he soon found a job. When I met him he was working for a small export company owned by a Turkish man. After all those years spent in İstanbul Gor managed to speak Turkish fluently. Since he has been in İstanbul his visa expired.

“I never went back to Senegal because I am afraid that I would not be able to come back to Turkey”.

The stories of Fatou and Gor clearly illustrate that not all sub-Saharan African migrants come to Turkey with the aspiration to migrate onward to Europe. On the contrary, when asked about their migration aspirations, the majority of the Senegalese migrants interviewed in İstanbul stated that they never aspired onward migration to Europe through Turkey, neither when they were still in Senegal, nor since they have been in İstanbul. For them, Turkey is not a country of so-called transit, but a country of destination. Their aspiration

is to stay in Turkey, not to migrate onward to Europe¹¹. This evidence therefore presents a first major challenge to the prevailing assumption that all sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey are only in the country to migrate further to Europe.

When asked about the reasons why they left their country of origin, most of the migrants, like Fatou and Gor, with no onward migration aspirations expressed economic reasons. As one Senegalese migrant stated:

“Africa is underdeveloped and that’s why life is difficult there. With development I mean economic development. Even if you earn a good living in Africa and you invest your money, still you have to support your family which is why you end up with nothing.”

The economic opportunities of Turkey were the main reason why they chose Turkey as destination. As one informant stated:

“In Turkey life is better than in Europe. İstanbul offers many economic possibilities, you can find everything. Before, life in Europe was good, but now life is more expensive there. In Turkey everything is cheaper.”

And according to another informant:

“In the past Senegalese didn’t know much about Turkey, but once they came here they started to see that it was a big developed country with possibilities. The trade relations between Turkey and Senegal also got better, before both countries only had difficult diplomatic relations.”

This group of Senegalese migrants with no aspirations to migrate onward to Europe consisted of both men and women between 20 and 43 years old (see Table 1). The majority had an – informal – job in İstanbul as among others a street vendor, nanny, hairdresser, house maid or factory worker. A large number worked in the export and trade business. The time they spent in Turkey varied from one month to 14 years. Almost all of the Senegalese migrants with no aspirations to migrate onward to Europe entered Turkey by plane with legal documents. But at the time of the fieldwork the majority had an undocumented residence status in Turkey because their visa had expired. A few were still legally residing in Turkey because their visa was still valid or because they returned to Senegal every three months to renew their visa.

¹¹See Table 1: informants 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 37, 38 and 39.

Migration aspirations can change: the stories of Diop, Pap and Mohammed¹²

Diop is a 36 year old Senegalese man I met for the first time in October 2010 in İstanbul. He was born and raised in Senegal. After high school he started working in the fishing industry, like his father. During one of our conversations I asked him how life was in Senegal before he left for Turkey. He said:

“Life was good, I had my family, I had my job. I did not want to leave for Europe like my brothers; I thought I would make it in Senegal.”

When I asked him why he left in spite of his good life in Senegal, he said:

“Many of my friends started leaving and their situation got better. I was working hard but did not earn as much as those who left for Europe. So I decided to take my chances too.”

He decided he wanted to join his brothers who migrated a few years ago to Spain to earn money. He applied for a visa for Spain, but it was denied.

“I was hopeless when I did not get a visa for Spain. But then a friend told me to go to Turkey because from there it would be easy to go to Spain. I had nothing to lose so I applied for a tourist visa for Turkey and it was accepted.”

He bought a plane ticket for İstanbul and arrived in the city in 2003. Upon his arrival he stayed in a hotel for four days and then decided to try to go to Greece from where he would travel to Spain.

“With other Africans I travelled to Izmir but we were soon caught by the police. So I came back to İstanbul. I tried to reach Greece via Izmir twice. Both times I was caught again by the police. I went back to İstanbul but I was out of money. So I decided to stay in İstanbul and find a job.”

After a few weeks he found a job as a street vendor and later in a small export company.

“After I found a job here in İstanbul, I never tried to go to Spain again.”

¹²Background information about Diop, Pap and Mohammed can be found in Table 1. Diop is informant 3, Pap is informant 26 and Mohammed is informant 36.

In 2007 he went back to Senegal to visit his family. He stayed in Senegal for a year. He applied for another tourist visa for Turkey and his application was accepted. He went back to İstanbul in 2009. For the past 2 years he has been living in İstanbul. In the meantime his tourist visa expired. During one of our conversations Diop told me that he is still hoping to be regularised one day.

“Me and many other Senegalese have been here in Turkey for so long now and we contribute to the economy, but still they do not want to give us papers.”

When I asked him if he would go to Spain if he was given the opportunity, he said:

“No, I have been here in İstanbul for so long now, I have a job and I speak Turkish. Going to Spain would mean that I would have to start all over again, learn the language and find a job. When I speak with my brothers in Spain on the phone, they tell me how difficult the situation in Spain has become with the crisis. There are no opportunities there. In İstanbul life is better because there is work and the police leaves you alone if you do not cause problems.”

Like Diop, **Pap** left Senegal for Turkey with the aspiration to migrate onward to Europe. I met Pap for the first time in November 2011 in İstanbul. At the time of the fieldwork he was 44 years old. He arrived in İstanbul by the end of 1997. Before he migrated to Turkey, he worked in the fishing industry. The year before he arrived in İstanbul, his father died, leaving him as the oldest son responsible for his family. The money he earned with his job and the money left by his father was not enough to support his mother and many siblings.

“So I decided to go abroad to earn more money. Initially, I wanted to leave for Spain, where I have some relatives. I applied for a visa for Spain twice and was rejected both times. One day, returning from the Spanish embassy I met a friend and told him about my rejected application for a visa for Spain. My friend advised me to apply for a visa for Turkey because it is easy to go to Europe via Turkey”.

So Pap applied for a visa for Turkey and his application was accepted. His aspiration was to go to Turkey and from there he would try to reach Spain. He took the plane for İstanbul. He did not know anybody in İstanbul. He stayed a few days in a hotel. Soon, he met a Senegalese migrant who proposed him to stay with him in a small apartment he rented with other Senegalese migrants. Because he had not enough money to pay the people who would take him to Greece, Pap decided to find a job in İstanbul to save some money for his trip.

He found a job as labourer in a fabric. Pap has been in İstanbul for more than 10 years now.

“After a few months I was earning enough to live in the city and to send money to my family. But as the months passed by I was hardly thinking about going to Europe. My priority was to earn more money. I had a job and I heard about other Africans who were put in jail when they tried to go to Greece. I never tried to go to Spain. It was not necessary anymore; I had already found in İstanbul what I was looking for, money. So I decided to stay in İstanbul.”

Mohammed is a 28 year old Senegalese man I met in April 2011 in İstanbul while he was selling watches on the street. At that time he had been in İstanbul for a few months. He told me that he left Senegal with the aspiration to go to Italy via Turkey.

“Like many of my friends I wanted to go to Italy to earn money. I had a job in Senegal, but I did not earn much.”

He had a Senegalese friend who had been living in İstanbul for 2 years and who proposed to help him to get to Italy via Turkey. Mohammed applied for a tourist visa for Turkey and his application was accepted. His family helped him to buy his plane ticket and he arrived early 2011 in İstanbul, leaving his wife behind in Senegal. As promised, his friend helped him to reach Greece from where he would try to travel further to Italy.

“I went to Izmir and from there I was able to reach Greece. Once in Greece I did not manage to leave for Italy. There was a lot of police control and on one occasion I was caught and put in jail. Once released I had a hard time finding work to survive and to pay my trip to Italy. So after a few weeks I was discouraged and decided to go back to İstanbul. I never tried to leave Turkey again because I know that it is hard to get to Europe.”

Ever since he has been living in İstanbul and found a job as a street vendor. Now he hopes to realise his aspirations in İstanbul.

“İstanbul is much better than Europe. I was in Greece and saw how difficult it is to find a job there and to go to Italy. In İstanbul if you try hard you can earn some money. I want to save some money here in İstanbul and support my family.”

The stories of Diop, Pap and Mohammed present a second challenge to the assumption that all sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey are so-called transit migrants on their way to Europe. Although Diop, Pap and Mohammed

did initially come to Turkey to migrate further to Europe, their aspiration changed after their arrival in Turkey. This finding is in line with the existing empirical evidence that aspirations to move on can disappear or are not necessarily converted into actual movement. Intend transit countries consequently become countries of destination (Collyer, 2007; Schapendonk and van Moppes, 2007; de Haas, 2007; Bredeloup, 2012; Collyer and de Haas, 2012). Therefore, these research findings cast considerable doubts on the appropriateness to characterize all sub-Saharan African migrants as so-called transit migrants.

The stories of Diop, Pap and Mohammed do not stand alone. Among the Senegalese migrants interviewed in İstanbul who stated that they initially came to Turkey with the aspiration to migrate further to Europe, the majority no longer aspired this¹³. This group of interviewees consisted of men and women aged between 28 and 44 years old. When asked about the reasons why they left Senegal, these informants mentioned economic reasons as well. The most cited reason why they decided to try to reach Europe via Turkey was, as stated by one of the informants,

“because it was easy to get a visa for Turkey and from Turkey it is easy to go to Europe”.

During a conversation with a male informant, I asked how he ended up in İstanbul. He told me:

“When I decided to leave Senegal I went to different embassies. One of them was the embassy of Argentine because I had Senegalese friends there. I did not get a visa for Argentine. One day I met a friend who just received a visa for Turkey. So I also tried and it worked, it was easy to get a visa for Turkey”.

Like Diop, Pap and Mohammed, the majority of the migrants who came to Turkey to migrate further to Europe entered Turkey by plane with legal documents. The time they spent in Turkey varies between 4 months and 16 years. When asked about their current migration aspirations, all but one migrant who came to Turkey with the initial intention to migrate further to Europe stated to no longer aspire onward migration. Most of them attributed the change in their migration aspirations to their failed attempts to migrate further. Like one informant explained:

¹³ See Table 1: informants 3, 5, 10, 21, 26, 27, 32, 34, 35 and 36.

“When I left Senegal I wanted to go to Turkey to go to Europe. Once I arrived in Turkey I tried to reach Greece three times, it never worked, each time the police was there. It was very hard, I was scared. So I decided to stay. I never tried to go to Greece anymore. I started looking for a job and found one. I sell watches on the streets and markets of İstanbul. I have been in Turkey for 16 years now. Life is hard but I have a job now, there is no need to go to Europe anymore.”

Concluding remarks

This article has offered insights into the migratory aspirations of Senegalese migrants in İstanbul challenging on two fronts the prevailing preconception that all sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey are so-called *transit migrants* based on their assumed aspirations to migrate further to Europe. First, the presented evidence shows that not all sub-Saharan African migrants come to Turkey with the aspiration to migrate further to Europe. Second, the research findings illustrate that migration aspirations can change. Although some Senegalese migrants did come to Turkey to migrate onward to Europe, this initial aspiration disappeared. Therefore, the article argues that the categorisation of every sub-Saharan African migrant in Turkey as a transit migrant fails to capture the migratory experiences of a substantial number of sub-Saharan African migrants. There are sub-Saharan African migrants who come to Turkey to stay, not to move further to Europe. Others come to Turkey to migrate further to Europe but eventually stay. Thus, the assumption that Turkey cannot be a country of destination but must be a transit country for all sub-Saharan African migrants does not seem justified. And this is exactly what seems to escape academic and political attention. It is assumed that sub-Saharan African migrants do not want to stay in Turkey but intend to move. This has led to an attitude of neglect towards sub-Saharan African migrants. However, what the research findings illustrate is that signs of settlement and integration can actually be observed. There are Senegalese migrants who have been living in Turkey for more than 10 years, found a job and learned Turkish, which are all aspects of a process of settlement. These conclusions therefore corroborate an *attitude of acknowledgement* towards the presence of sub-Saharan African migrants in Turkey on both an academic and political level.

Table 1. Overview Senegalese migrants interviewed in Istanbul.

Informant	Gender	Age	Migration mode	Current residence status	Time spent in Turkey	Employed in Istanbul	Initial migration aspiration	Aspiration changed	Migration aspiration at the time of the interview
1	Male	40	Legal	Undocumented	9 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
2	Female	36	Legal	Undocumented	2 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
3	Male	36	Legal	Undocumented	6 years	Yes	Onward migration	Yes	Turkey as destination
4	Male	40	Legal	Undocumented	2 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
5	Female	37	Illegal	Undocumented	8 years	Yes	Onward migration	Yes	Turkey as destination
6	Male	43	Legal	Undocumented	6 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
7	Female	32	Legal	Documented	3 weeks	No	Turkey as destination	Yes	Onward migration
8	Male	32	Legal	Undocumented	3 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
9	Male	34	Legal	Undocumented	2 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
10	Male	36	Legal	Undocumented	7 years	Yes	Onward migration	Yes	Turkey as destination
11	Male	32	Legal	Undocumented	2 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
12	Female	35	Legal	Undocumented	2 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	Undecided	Undecided
13	Male	33	Legal	Undocumented	2 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
14	Male	27	Legal	Undocumented	3 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
15	Female	29	Legal	Undocumented	3 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
16	Male	23	Legal	Undocumented	1 year	No	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
17	Female	22	Legal	Undocumented	2 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
18	Female	23	Legal	Undocumented	2 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
19	Female	23	Legal	Documented	1 month	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination

Informant	Gender	Age	Migration mode	Current residence status	Time spent in Turkey	Employed in Istanbul	Initial migration aspiration	Aspiration changed	Migration aspiration at the time of the interview
20	Female	22	Legal	Documented	1 month	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
21	Male	29	Illegal	Undocumented	2 years	Yes	Onward migration	Yes	Turkey as destination
22	Female	30	Legal	Documented	2 weeks	Yes	Onward migration	No	Onward migration
23	Male	30	Legal	Undocumented	2 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
24	Male	34	Legal	Undocumented	3 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
25	Male	20	Legal	Undocumented	8 months	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
26	Male	44	Legal	Undocumented	14 years	Yes	Onward migration	Yes	Turkey as destination
27	Male	40	Legal	Undocumented	16 years	Yes	Onward migration	Yes	Turkey as destination
28	Female	20	Legal	Undocumented	3 months	No	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
29	Female	24	Legal	Undocumented	5 months	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
30	Female	35	Legal	Undocumented	5 months	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
31	Male	40	Legal	Documented	10 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
32	Female	30	Illegal	Undocumented	2 years	No	Onward migration	Yes	Turkey as destination
33	Male	38	Legal	Undocumented	7 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
34	Male	35	Legal	Documented	11 years	Yes	Onward migration	Yes	Turkey as destination
35	Male	30	Legal	Undocumented	9 years	Yes	Onward migration	Yes	Turkey as destination
36	Male	28	Legal	Undocumented	4 months	Yes	Onward migration	Yes	Turkey as destination
37	Male	39	Legal	Undocumented	14 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
38	Male	39	Legal	Undocumented	12 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination
39	Male	38	Legal	Undocumented	14 years	Yes	Turkey as destination	No	Turkey as destination

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