The Zonkey and the Devil Eye

Invisibilization, camouflage and control of migrants in Tijuana and Istanbul, cities of two so called 'transit countries'

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Turkey and Mexico, labelled as transit countries.

22,000 irregular crossers were intercepted in 2006 in the attempt to enter Greece from its land and sea borders with Turkey, a number that doubled to 44,600 two years later.[1] They were mainly from Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries, in particular Afghanistan and Iraq, followed by Palestine and Somalia, but also from Maghreb (Egypt), Ghana, Nigeria, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India. Experts estimate that among 90,000 and 200,000 migrants in transit enter the country each year.[2] Since 2004 it also continues to circulate the guesstimate that *there are 1 million illegal immigrants "in transit" from Turkey to Europe*. Although not scientifically grounded, this scaring figure has been periodically reported by the Media – both Turkish and international - and even cited by scholars and international organizations.

According to US border patrol, apprehensions of the so-called OTMs (Other Than Mexican nationals) at US-Mexican border passed from nearly 39,000 in the year 2000 to more than 170,000 in 2005. The main countries of origin of these migrants are Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador, but also South America (mostly Argentina, Colombia, and Peru), the Caribbean and, to a lesser extent, even Asia (principally China and Korea) and Africa.[3] An average of 3,000 Central Americans a day is believed to attempt to cross Mexico to reach the U.S. and Canada.[4]

Based on this kind of evidence and often amplified by alarming allegations regularly turned out to be grossly exaggerated, since a few years Mexico and Turkey, as well as all the other countries at the EU peripheries, began to be known as 'transit countries' and stigmatized accordingly.

Içduygu identifies four key factors making Turkey an 'hot spot' for transit movements: firstly, its strategic geographical position between Europe and the Middle East; secondly, the political turmoil and clashes occurring in the neighbouring countries, Iraq and Afghanistan in particular, that continue to push people away from their homelands; thirdly the policies of so-called 'fortress Europe' that, introducing highly restrictive admission procedures and exacerbating border controls, have diverted the EU-targeted immigration flows to the fringes of the Union; finally Turkey's relative economic prosperity, able to attract both migrants intentioned to earn their lives in the country and those looking just for income opportunities to fund their onward journey[5].

The same four factors easily fit to the case of Mexico too: its three thousand kilometres land border with the United States places this country at the geographic crossroads between the first and the third world; the major events that shook the social structures in Latin American countries during the 80s - namely the economic stagnation of the so called 'lost decade' and the subsequent decade of 'lights and Shadows' as well as the long civil wars which proved particularly cruel in Central America[6] – fuelled emigration flows from the most affected countries in the region; the extremely restrictive security-based immigration policies pursued in the US and the scarcity of legal-entry channels are driving would-be migrants to try their way to the 'American dream' through Mexico. Finally, during the last thirty years Mexico has grown with an annual average rate of 4%[7] with a stronger economic expansion of northern states that are increasingly attracting immigrants from the rest of the country and beyond.

Not to say that the long and permeable borders of these two states[8] make the task of patrolling either inward or outward migration movements definitively difficult, if not impossible.

If the first and the third factor - the geographic proximity with western countries notoriously attracting great numbers of international migrants, and their closed doors policies aimed at keeping them out – are somehow an easy to guess rationale behind the observed growth of migrants attempting to reach their target destinations in the Global North passing through the territory of neighbouring countries, the other two factors show how transit migration is a blurred and crosscutting issue, characterized by a substantial epistemological and methodological vacuum. In fact, it is a well known reality that wars and political instability might give rise to human movements, sometimes even massive, made up of people fleeing dangerous environments, but these are to be addressed at as asylum seeker, i.e. people entering a foreign country to look for protection and refuge. Some of them might indeed prefer to continue their journey and try to apply for refugee status in a richer country rather than in the one they first entered, but

this certainly does not apply to the great majority of asylum seekers. Turkey itself experienced a mass influx of almost half a million mostly Kurdish refugees from Iraq during the first Gulf war,[9] who mainly were provisionally settled in tent camps in the South-east of the country while a smaller share of them headed towards Istanbul in the hope of finding there better living conditions. Similarly, the fact that Mexican and Turkish growing economies attract foreign workers from poorer countries has to be read as 'economic immigration', often occurring on circular and seasonal basis, rather than 'transit'. As a matter of facts, transit migration overlaps with other existing migration movements, making unfeasible any effort to quantify and manage them independently.

On average over 100,000 Central Americans per year were apprehended in Mexican territory, compared to only 10,000 per year repatriated during the 1980s.[10] In the first decade of XXI century The number of irregular migrants intercepted continued to rose, reaching a peak of more than 240,000 in 2005. In the same period, also the number of irregular migrants apprehended in Turkey increased steadily. An annual average of 20 to 30 thousands apprehensions was registered before 1999, peaking in 2000 at 94,500 for then stabilizing around 60 thousand per year from 2004 onward.[11] Although such figures are often used for backing the concern about growing transit migration through these countries, they fail to be really representative of the phenomenon. On the one hand they only account for a limited proportion of actual migration flows and, on the other, they include also irregular immigrants not intentioned to move further North.

To the authorities of the so called "transit country" it is in fact practically impossible to distinguish a 'transit migrant' not only from other categories of migrants (i.e. an economic immigrant or an asylum seeker) but even from other foreigners not classified nor classifiable as migrants, i.e. those entered – as it is often the case - upon valid tourist or student visa. The main problem is that the "condition" under indictment (i.e. being in transit) refers to migrants' "personal intentions" of using a certain country as a gateway towards another. Therefore, the boundary between transit and immigration is impossible to be pinpointed, unless migrants themselves voice their desire to move into the territory of a different State.[12] If their target destination is an EU country or the US, where legal entry channels are today extremely limited, any intention to depart basically coincides with finding an illegal way to cross borders. It is thus highly improbable that transit migrants show up as such. And even if they express their intention to move further, it would be difficult to state if their project is really feasible or just a dream, and thus if they can really be classified as *transit migrants* or rather as *immigrants by default*. Not to say that people might even change their initial idea and, as a consequence of a combination of structural and individual factors, end up to decide to settle in the country they initially intended just to cross. In a nutshell, as Aspasia Papadopoulou observes 'Transit migration is not a different type of migration, nor is it a status – it is a process and a contingency".[13]

Instead, it has to be noted that one of the main reasons behind the growth in apprehensions of irregular migrants – mostly alleged to be in transit - is the exacerbation of migration controls by the so called 'transit countries' largely driven by exogenous political interests.

The emergence of transit migration as a policy (and politicized) issue, and its consequences at the local level

Transit migration is hard to define, practically impossible to measure and even trickier to stop. The concept has entered the migration policy discourse only since the early '90s, when "transit country" emerged in the migration lexicon as an intermediate category besides migrants' country of origin and destination.[14] Suddenly the issue of transit became of growing concern for most popular target destinations in the global North - the European Union and the United States in particular - and increasingly central in their migration policy making. Both the phenomenon itself and its political construction are strongly related to the increasing securitization of their migration regimes.

The restrictive policies and enhanced border controls for limiting unwanted immigration pursued by the EU and US since the '80s are indeed the main cause behind the emergence of transit flows through the territory of developing countries bordering them, as it is the case for Turkey and Mexico highlighted above. Although western countries labour markets' increasing demand for foreign workers to be employed in those known as "3Ds" jobs (dangerous, dirty and demeaning) that are largely eschewed by nationals, legal entry channels for unskilled migrants from developing countries have been progressively tightened up and are today extremely limited. Unable to obtain adequate permits to access their target destination through the front door, hundreds of thousands of would-be immigrants started to take long and dangerous roundabout routes. The tactic of passing through countries easier accessible given their usually more liberal visa regimes (immigration was not considered an issue in their political agenda), and find a way there to reach their final destination became a common practice. It is rather important to note that this new pattern of human mobility, which soon started to be called 'transit migration', was

not just the 'transit' through the territory of States placed between migrants' country of origin and destination – which might indeed happen in two directions, back and forth – but only the northbound one. And, most of all, not all the countries crossed by migrants in their way towards western countries are categorized as 'transit countries', but only the last ones, those bordering the EU and US.

In this framework, it becomes evident that the issue of transit migration is not just a new important feature of modern human mobility but rather a political construction aimed at influencing involved stakeholders and leading them to collaborate in a global strategy of migration management. In fact, EU and US governments' main reaction to a process they themselves have activated - as side effect of the closed doors policies they pursue - has been that of exercising strong political pressures on those they labeled as 'transit countries' to obtain their backing in stemming the tide of migration flows. First of all, countries found to be transited by migrants were increasing thought of as problematic.[15] Then, accused 'guilty of transit migration', they started to be held responsible for undertaking concrete measures to prevent migrants 'in transit' reaching the EU or the United States: enhancement of border controls, joint police operations, signature of readmission agreements entailing the commitment of accepting back intercepted irregular crossers, introduction of stricter visa systems and immigration policies, construction of detention centres for irregular migrants and so on.

Although such a strategy, known as *externalization of migration controls*, entails a de facto interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, "transit countries" governments soon realized the importance of migration control as a means for "parallel diplomacy"[16] and did not hesitate in exploiting the unexpected bargaining power this situation was offering to them, using their possible cooperation in controlling transit flows to bring ahead other key political objectives. Mexico drastically increased its efforts to curb transit migration in order to enter the NAFTA agreement, by militarizing its southern border, until the 90s known as the "frontera olvidada" (the forgotten frontier). Since then, it went on to embrace the gatekeeper role becoming *de facto* a vertical border to the US, with the aim of achieving the free movement of labour within North America as well as the regularization of its irregular migrants living in the States. Similarly, better migration management is becoming a trump card for Turkey's EU accession negotiations.[17]

This seemingly win-win situation, with the EU and US externalizing migration controls and transit countries pushing forward strategic objectives for acting as buffer zones, significantly affects migrants' personal security. The exponential reinforcement of controls is forcing growing numbers of migrants to take longer and longer routes and rely on the services provided by smugglers and criminal networks to overcome the new obstacles, thus exposing them to high risks and costs both in human and economic terms. Furthermore, the devolution of migration controls to countries where the institutional framework is still weak and human rights protection is not always guaranteed often leads to undemocratic policies and practices against migrants. In a nutshell, the growing securitization of migration regimes transformed transit into an insecure type of long-term settlement, with growing numbers of migrants stranded at some point of their trip, as it is the case for Istanbul and Tijuana, two of the last stops in migration routes crossing Turkey and Mexico. Points of contact and interface between economic, political and geopolitical worlds, these cities are staging posts for stays of varying length, hubs for international mobility, migration and traffic.[18]

There is evidence that international geopolitical interests targeting transit migration are strongly affecting the way in which cities problematize the presence of international migrants and react to it. The issue of their urban inclusion is practically absent from the political agenda, not just because – as is the case in other developing countries – the number of foreign residents is still not so relevant (1 or 2% of the total urban population) even if growing, but also, and mainly, because – as a consequence of the 'transit' rhetoric - it is taken for granted that there are no immigrant residents in these cities. On the one side, the widespread prejudice that migrants mean just to pass through, prevents i) looking at international immigration as a structural element of the urban society and ii) the development of any public policy or initiative to cope with the challenges their integration might pose to urban governance. Hence, as Annah Arendt observed for stateless people, migrants in transit - or those considered as such - are de facto deprived of the 'right to have rights', first of all that of existing and being part of a community. Their plight is not that they are not equal before the law, but that no law exists for them.[19]

The pressures from outside to curb 'irregular' flows compel local governments to enforce national guidelines against transit migration, by introducing repressive measures and controls against migrants staying in their cities. Within a globalized attitude of criminalizing undocumented migration, the authorities responsible for curbing irregular immigration feel almost legitimized to take excessive action to combat it. Given the impunity ensured by victims' fear of deportation if they take action, abuse of power and extortion against migrants is a common practice. African migrants living in Istanbul have self-imposed a sort of curfew: they generally

remain confined in their shanty lodgings after eight in the night in order to avoid police harassment. An analogous situation exists in Tijuana where nearly every day the municipal police comb the streets in front of the city's hostels for migrants, threatening those found without documents with incarceration or deportation as a means to obtain bribes.[20]

The efforts and resources employed in fighting irregular migration are noticeable in both cities. The role of Tijuana as US gatekeeper is palpable: migration controls are strict at all the main points of entry to the city from the south, namely the motorway tollbooth, the central bus station and the airport. In the latter, even foreigners (and those coming from developing countries in particular) holding a valid tourist visa for Mexico often risk being rejected if they don't provide a "reasonable motivation for coming to Tijuana".[21] In contrast, only random controls are made on people entering the city through San Ysidro official point of entry in a southerly direction. Since a "migratory station" for detaining irregular migrants was built in Tijuana in 2003, more than 10 thousand foreigners have been jailed there before being deported.

In Turkey, irregular migrants' apprehensions go up and down accordingly to the advances and setbacks to negotiations for accessing the EU. Around 15 to 25 per cent of all apprehended irregular migrants in Turkey are caught in Istanbul.[22] In 2001, nearly 11 thousand irregular migrants were apprehended in the city and 9,250 in 2007.[23] Istanbul too is provided with a detention centre for migrants, opened in 2007 in Kumkapi, one of the most central neighbourhoods of the historic peninsula known for the high concentration of migrant residents of African origin, and famous for being crowded with small traditional Turkish restaurants serving fish to tourists. Side by side.

The only formal support for migrants in transit and newcomers is provided by civil society organizations and international NGOs. In Tijuana these are mainly oriented to assist Mexican migrants in transit, while in Istanbul asylum seekers are the official target population. However, in both cases transit migrants are not discriminated against and receive the same help.

In the Mexican city the main service offered is temporary shelter. There are several hostels for migrants next to "the wall", the principal ones run by Catholic organizations. On average, 15 to 20 per cent of migrants hosted in these structures are of foreign origin. A few years ago some of these organizations associated into the *Coalicion pro defensa del migrante* (Coalition for migrants' protection), which advocates migrants' rights and often coordinates with international NGOs to implement projects addressing migrant needs.

In Istanbul the situation is different. The government carefully avoid any interference from outsiders in domestic affairs, hence NGOs are tolerated only until they carry out their actions in the background and keeping a low profile while even local offices of IOM (International Organization for Migration) and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) have restricted autonomy. The most active stakeholders on the ground are those linked to Catholic, Protestant and evangelical churches, participating in the *Istanbul Interparish Migrant Program* (IIMP). Not legally recognised as a proper association they have very limited freedom of action, i.e. they cannot fundraise nor campaign to increase awareness. However local authorities turn a blind eye to their activities, since they provide essential services for which the government is not intentioned to take responsibility. IIMP offers migrants help in terms of health assistance, material resources (food and clothes), information and legal aid. They also run a course for migrant mothers and their children and, when feasible, provide training by organizing computer or language classes. As for Turkish NGOs, their level of involvement remains low and the aid they offer to migrants in Istanbul is marginal.[24]

The Zonkey and the Devil Eye[25]

The Zonkey is a donkey painted with black stripes as to look like a zebra. It is an artificial hybrid that one can find in each corner of the main touristic street in Tijuana, since some bright entrepreneur in the '30s had the idea of introducing this practice to attract *gringos* (US visitors) ready to pay some dollars to have themselves photographed wearing chick Mexican sombreros and ponchos riding these striped animals.

The evil eye is a very popular widespread talisman in Istanbul. It's everywhere. Despite the belief is that it protects against the devil's look by mirroring it, it gives any foreigner the impression of being always observed and constantly controlled all around the city. On the other way round, few Turks have blue eyes, so it is thought it was the mistrust of foreigners which gave rise to the traditional blue color of the devil eye.

The zonkey and the devil eye are two metaphors that well fit to represent how camouflage and invisibilization are the main survival strategy for international migrants in Tijuana and Istanbul.

The neglect of 'immigration' as one of the components of urban society, coupled with the increasing criminalization of irregular migration, leaves migrants living in these cities - whether on a temporary or permanent basis - with few other options other than keeping a low profile and trying to be invisible. This translates into a sort of vicious circle in which *institutional invisibility* feeds *intentional invisibility* and vice-versa. The

former is the result of lack of problematization of 'immigration'. Most immigrants are never counted in official statistics, there is little awareness of, nor interest for, their presence hence they are not taken into consideration as part of the urban population in local policy-making and are de facto excluded from the 'right to the city'. Intentional invisibility is, on the other hand, the principal strategy adopted by migrants themselves who, being under constant fear of apprehension, internment and deportation, have to devise unconventional practices of incorporation into the local society,[26] which mainly occur within the informal spheres.

Not being conspicuous is the main concern for all migrants with uncertain legal status: those in transit who intend to leave as soon as possible, those who arrived with the intention of moving on but ended up stranded, those who voluntarily choose the city where they are as their target destination but are unable to gain a permit to stay. Their constant efforts not to be recognized as what they are, i.e. immigrants, generate unconventional modes of integration, belonging and socialization. In this framework, Istanbul and Tijuana became sort of laboratories in which the art of surviving is experimented daily through 'invisibilization' and the strategy of 'pretending to be'.

In Tijuana, although the Chinese are estimated to be the most numerous immigrant group, reaching up to 9 thousand people, the 2000 census did not register a single person born in China. It is believed that most of them simply avoided the officials in charge of the door-to-door census questionnaire, while others probably refused to speak Spanish or denied being foreigners.[27] Chinese born residents in Tijuana also keep carefully away from any form of public manifestation of their presence. Their neighborhoods do not show evident ethnic traits nor the traditional symbols that might lead to identify these areas as 'Chinatowns'. They do not use public space for their national or religious celebrations. The most important of their traditional holidays, the Chinese New Year Eve which congregates in Tijuana more than 1,000 participants every year, is organized indoor rather than along the streets. Indeed, their presence is visible only for the 250 Chinese restaurants in the city.[28]

Instead, either when attempting to cross illegally to the US or falling back to live in Tijuana, pretending to be Mexican is the most adopted strategy by Latin American migrants, facilitated in their *camouflage* by their cultural, racial and linguistic background which is very similar to that of local people. Since Mexico did not sign a readmission agreement with the US, being apprehended by the US border patrol would mean being directly repatriated to the country of origin. Pretending to be Mexican provides the opportunity of being sent back just to the other side of the wall, in Tijuana, where they stay until the next attempt at crossing.

Much more than the US border patrol agents, 'fake Mexican migrants' fear being unmasked by INM officers at San Ysidro port of entry, who are in charge of controlling the nationality of those forcibly 'returned' by the US. In order to cheat Mexican officers, migrants learn the Mexican national hymn, the typical words and traditional foods of the Mexican city they declare they come from. Often it is the smugglers themselves who provide key instructions or even a sort of 'intensive course' on how to pretend to be a Mexican. They also advise on the city migrants should state as their place of origin, depending on their physical and ethnic traits, i.e. Acapulco for Cubans since people there have darker skin or Oaxaca for those with indigenous traits.

INM (Mexican National Institute for Immigration) officers usually prefer to turn a blind eye to suspected non Mexicans, and interrogations to determine the real nationalities of deported migrants are quite uncommon. This *tacitly acknowledged mutual misunderstanding* - i.e. we both know this is not the truth but we both pretend we believe it is the truth[29] - is deeply embedded in this borderland space. For example, once returned to the Mexican side all migrants are offered medical aid and support (i.e. food, water, information on where they can find temporary shelter, etc.) by NGOs as well as social services, which do not question the declared identity or nationality of the people they assist, even when it is noticeably false.

For those who end up settling in Tijuana permanently, stating they are Mexican continues to be the easiest way to avoid migration controls and to skip the complicate bureaucracy required for regularizing their status. Most of them buy a forged Mexican ID and smoothly mix in with the local population, or simply vanish by living in the widespread squats and working in the informal market.[30] Like the donkey, forced by external factors (in that case the hand of its owner painting black stripes on it) to become a zebra, immigrants are forced by circumstances to give up their real identity and paint themselves as somebody else.

While in Tijuana it is the similarity of most immigrants with the local population that makes camouflage easy, in Istanbul becoming invisible might be even simpler given the diversity and crowdedness of this large metropolis. But it is not a comfortable invisibility because of that pervasive impression that the 'devil eye', similar to the Orwell big brother, is always controlling you and sooner or later a policeman will stop you asking for your documents.

The fundamental law that shapes migration and asylum policy in Turkey is still the Law on Settlement, which dates back to the '30s, according

to which only individuals of 'Turkish race or culture' can legally immigrate to the country while all the others are ineligible for permanent immigration. From a legal point of view, passing as a tourist or an asylum seeker are thus the only practicable ways of getting an authorization to stay, even if temporarily. Obtaining residence and work permits in Turkey is so complicated and expensive that even highly skilled immigrants usually prefer to use a tourist visa, which they renew every 3 months by leaving and re-entering the country. The same strategy is adopted by the numerous 'suitcase traders' from the former Soviet bloc who, since the 80s, fuel significant circular migration flows between Turkey and their countries of origin. They de facto reside in Istanbul, employed by or running their own business in the flourishing textile industry, but never show up nor are counted as 'immigrants'.[31]

Low skilled economic migrants and those intending just to pass through who have ended up stranded in Istanbul, generally cannot afford frequent journeys to the border. They have hence little choice but to overstay their tourism visa and settle irregularly. Pretending to be an asylum seeker is the only available alternative, a condition which is however becoming more and more uncomfortable. In fact, besides the risk of being deported if not eligible for refugee status, asylum seekers are forbidden to settle in Istanbul. Migrants try to avoid the first obstacle once again through a camouflage, a sort of 'camouflage within the camouflage': since some nationalities cannot be deported – i.e. Afghans, Palestinians, Burmese and Somali – all Asians usually claim to be Burmese when applying for asylum; apprehended Iraqis and Iranians declare they are Palestinian, Africans that they are Somali. However, Turkish police are often reported to use strong-arm tactics to establish the real national identity of intercepted irregular migrants.[32]

The dynamism as well as the ethnic and cultural mixture of Istanbul, enhanced by the large number of tourists visiting it every day of the year, can indeed provide a sense of anonymity and relative protection to irregular migrants. However, contrary to what happens in Tijuana, incorporation within the local society is all but smooth for them. Their racial, linguistic and religious background is quite different from that of Turkish people and very few opportunities exist for them to interact with locals and create cross-cultural relationships with them. Xenophobia, racism and fear spread among natives, especially the low-income population, who perceive poor foreigners settling in the city as undesirable competitors for scarce resources.[33] Prejudice against those that are depicted and perceived as 'illegal' and 'criminals', hence potentially dangerous, drive the middle-class to avoid any contact with them.

As a consequence, migrants tend to cluster in run-down neighbourhoods in central districts where other marginal groups are also confined, contributing to the existing spatial and social fragmentation of the urban space. Kumkapi, the central neighbourhood where the detention centre for migrants is located, is traditionally mainly inhabited by Kurds, which constitute a highly excluded minority. During the last few years also growing numbers of migrants from African started to find lodging there. Many other Africans, mainly from Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and Togo are settled in Tarlabaşı and Kurtuluş, two neighbourhoods within the central Beyoğlu district, where Iraqi Arab refugees also cluster besides Kurds, gypsies as well as transsexuals and transvestites who are absolutely unaccepted and persecuted in other parts of the city.

These neighbourhoods are strategic places not just for finding anonymous accommodation, but also for the bulk of opportunities they offer to get in contact with providers of employment in the widespread informal market, as well as with the smuggling networks. Due to their undocumented status and lack of knowledge of the Turkish language, it is hard for newcomers to get a proper job even in the widespread informal market. Most of them just find sporadic occupation in the construction or textile sectors, usually paid well below the minimum wage. In many cases middlemen stop up to 20 per cent out of their poor wages, and it frequently happens that unscrupulous employers do not pay them at all. Hardly making enough money to pay for their daily necessities, their living conditions in these marginal neighbourhoods are quite precarious. The building stock of these densely populated mazes of narrow streets, consisting of decaying Ottoman-era houses built on hillsides, is in a crumbling state. Migrants are generally given the basement or entrance level flats, which are very small, have very little ventilation and often lack heating, electricity and even plumbing. Private landlords informally rent them these miserable lodgings for exorbitant prices, far higher than what Turkish people would pay. In order to share costs, migrants end up living in overcrowded and unhealthy conditions. A two room flat is usually rented for no less than 300 Euros per month, and is typically shared by 8 to 10 people.

Most Turks consider neighbourhoods such as Tarlabaşı no-go zones. Their reputation as dangerous places of drug dealing, crime and prostitution keeps 'respectable people', and even the police, out. On the other hand, for its inhabitants it is the semblance of marginality, irregularity and sometimes illegality that provides a sort of protection and security. At Tarlabaşı's busy Sunday market where food is sold at 20% of the price in surrounding areas, Turkish is not spoken at all. It's either Kurdish or Arabic, the same languages as

many of the hand-written signs of the small shops, groceries and internet cafés in the neighbourhood.[34] Here, migrants don't need to be invisible or pretend to be someone else. Despite its location at less than a mile from Istanbul's five-star hotels, just beside the commercial and cultural heart of the city, Tarlabaşı is a sort of marginal city within the city, inhabited by a diverse population made up of subgroups sharing the same space but far from merging into a community.

The Tarlabaşı experienced by stranded migrants is an example of individualization of relationships and dissolution of traditional forms of association. Urban fragmentation here reaches the point that social interactions are often more virtual than physical for them. A part from a very limited number of acquaintances, often from the same country of origin, the relations migrants are able to establish with the urban society outside their neighbourhood, or even with the same marginal people they meet every day crossing the street or bump into at the Sunday market, are weaker than the connections they have with relatives at home or friends in Europe. Hardly able to make enough money in this city to pay for their daily necessities, many migrants continue to rely on relatively regular or *forfait* sums that family and friends in Europe, or relatives at home, send them through money transfer agencies. While stranded in Istanbul, the translocal connections these migrants keep with their places of origin and those where they plan to go, dilate their territory of action in a cross-border space linking punctual nodes. The impossibility of being formally included[35] prevents the development of any sense of belonging to the host urban community and deters them from pursuing any form of real integration. Informal incorporation into the local society is used to assure mere survival, while interactions that occur by maintaining multiple local ties in different countries appear a fundamental feature of the migrant's life.

These spatial practices cast a question mark upon the bond between identity and citizenship, individual and place, neighborhood and belonging.[36] The same questions apply to the effectiveness of shaping migration policies on the container model of a territorially determined society. Migration is prompting newly-emerging spatial dimensions. Maybe the reconstruction of social cohesion in increasingly diverse urban societies depends on the capacity to connect global networks with local existence.

Conclusions

Capital cities and others principal urban conurbations at the doors of Europe and of the United States offer many opportunities and an infinitely diverse supply of legal and illegal services facilitating international mobility. These are strong pulling factors for different 'types' of international migrants: those looking for better life conditions, those willing to reach their European or American dream with any possible mean as well as those fleeing conflicts or persecution. Due to the inadequate problematization of this complex and mixed social phenomenon there is an evident lack of coherent immigration (national level) and immigrant (local level) policies, which in turn push into irregularity many foreigners settled, either temporary or permanently, in these cities.

The risks of irregular migration are both minimized and fairly well understood by would-be emigrants, who weigh them up against their current situation. The rationale behind their decision to leave is a bid to improve their own living conditions as well as to strengthen the livelihoods of those who stay at home through remittances and their potential to broaden the asset base. International migration, once started, is a self-sustaining process. As such, it is bound to endure in the future unless effective distributive policies are implemented between richer and poorer countries, and between dynamic and stagnant or declining cities in different countries.

The emphasis put on "the control against clandestine migration" in the EU and US political agendas leading to increasing pressures on transit countries' authorities to collaborate in filtering migration flows, not only demonstrated to be an illusory and unrealistic strategy but also produced 'unexpected' side effects seriously affecting the way in which migration is perceived and governed there. With each new border closure, migrants have applied original tactics to get around the obstacles, and, what is even worse, migration has become criminalized with the expansion of smuggling networks.

Most of all, such an approach is having serious impacts in the main cities of the countries accused of transit, where international im-migration is taking place in the very absence of explicit policies addressing it. Local authorities, without even having had the time to problematize the real nature of the migration flows affecting their cities, have been compelled to consider it as 'transit' overall and introduce accordingly new prohibitions, restrictions and controls. The main result has been worsening the living conditions of all migrant residents, not just of those eventually intentioned to migrate further. Due to their frequently uncertain legal status, they are extremely vulnerable to iniquity and marginalisation and they are *de facto* deprived of the most fundamental rights such as to live in adequate housing, to be free to meet in public spaces, to access healthcare services, to work in safe and respectable conditions. Of course, this situation does not affect only foreign residents. The failure to address the multifaceted needs emerging

from an increasingly diverse urban society increases the risks of conflicts and decay in civic values. The arrival of new groups of migrants, many of whom settling permanently, might have strong impacts on the behaviour of urban population, fluctuating between solidarity and rejection, which may sometimes be violent.

A more pragmatic approach to the issue would be needed by recognizing that, whether because they mean to settle there or are forced to stay by circumstances, increasing numbers of migrants live in cities of transit countries in very vulnerable conditions. In order to raise international and national awareness about this issue as well as to push local authorities to make informed choices, there is a need for information and data on i) who is there, for how long, in what conditions, doing what and ii) what challenges the presence of these migrants poses to urban governance, who (if anybody) is responding to the needs of this invisible population, how the local residents are reacting, and so on.

Quantitave research would be a priority since official surveys, censuses and registration instruments fail to register the target population itself, largely made up of irregular immigrants. In most cases, not even a broad estimate of the number of foreign residents is possible with existing data. Qualitative research, as was the case for Tijuana and Istanbul, would however provide useful insights on the emerging urban issues, the existing inclusive initiatives and innovative practices. All this may, in turn, foster broader evidence-based decision-making and lead to the promotion of more coherent migration policies, locally, nationally and internationally.

(Endnotes)

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