

TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL FIELDS AND THE EXPERIENCE
OF TRANSIT MIGRANTS IN ISTANBUL, TURKEY

by

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ABSTRACT

Throughout history, Turkey has been a stop on numerous migration routes. The political implications of the current state of transit migration through Turkey have been analyzed, but little work has focused on the migrants themselves. My project focuses on a diverse group of transit migrants based at an Anglican parish in Istanbul. They interact within multiple transnational social fields to cope with the challenges of migration. These migrants must struggle with separation from family and friends, earning an income, finding ways out of Turkey, and other issues. To face these challenges, they rely on the resources of three transnational social fields: family and friends outside Turkey, their national community within Turkey, and the international community of governmental and non-governmental aid organizations. My analysis of the migrants' experience in Istanbul will highlight the human side of transit migration and the agency of a group of people often considered passive or dependent. Hopefully, my research can provide a useful perspective for aid organizations and others who confront issues of forced migration.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

My research project is a qualitative, anthropological study of a group of migrants in Istanbul, Turkey. They are connected in various ways to Christ Church Istanbul, the Anglican parish in the city. Although there are millions of foreigners in Turkey for myriad reasons at any one time (Içduyğu 2000), the population with whom I worked is composed mostly of forced migrants and asylum seekers. Because Turkey is not the ultimate goal for these migrants, they consider themselves to be *in transit* through the country. Turkey, at the crossroads of East/West and South/North, is often a final stop before attempting to enter “Fortress Europe” (Colson 2004:110). The borders between Turkey and Europe are more difficult to cross than Asian or African borders, so migrants often become stuck there in limbo—“betwixt and between” the countries of their transnational migration, a process which has already placed them “betwixt and between” their country of origin and their country of settlement (Turner 1967). Thus, these migrants are in a temporary and “liminal” stage of migration, which is a liminal situation in its own right (Turner 1967). Further, many of these migrants are applying, or have applied, for refugee status with Turkey’s branch office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), located in Ankara, the capital. Many migrants are trapped in liminality, not just with respect to their social and physical location, but also with respect to their legal status.

According to article IA(2) of the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees of 28 July 1951 (“1951 Convention”), a refugee is one who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such a fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (Shacknove 1985:275). The 1951 Convention was developed by the international community immediately following World War II and responds only to concerns arising from the situation in Europe during that period. To update the Convention by removing the geographical and temporal restrictions, the UN issued the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees on 31 January 1967 (“1967 Protocol”). Turkey ratified the 1951 Convention in 1962 and later accepted the 1967 Protocol but maintained the geographical limitation of the 1951 Convention: Turkey only grants asylum and permanently settles European refugees. Because migrant and refugee flows from Africa and Asia have increased since the 1980s (Frantz 2003:11), Turkey developed national guidelines to determine refugee status, grant temporary asylum, and assist in third country resettlement or repatriation (Turkey’s “1994 Asylum Regulation”). After determining the status of asylum seekers, national and international governmental bodies must find solutions for the individuals.

In 1984, the Executive Committee of the UNHCR stated that “refugee problems demand durable solutions” (Stein 1986:264). They propose three solutions to these problems: (1) voluntary repatriation, (2) temporary settlement, and (3) third country resettlement (Stein 1986:264). Voluntary repatriation to the country of origin is the most

desirable, according to the UNHCR; however, this policy has been questioned (Harrell-Bond 1989). A major issue regarding this first solution is the principle of *non-refoulement*, which ensures that refugees or asylum-seekers are not repatriated to countries in which conflicts are ongoing. Third country resettlement is the “least desirable” and most expensive solution, according to the UNHCR (Harrell-Bond and Voutira 1992:7), but is the solution that most asylum seekers in my study population pursued. Because the burden of responsibility falls upon the receiving (usually Western) country, many governments have strict procedures to limit the number of refugees that come to their country. Refugees are often unlikely to seek repatriation after they have just fled that country and many governments (such as Turkey’s) are loath to permanently settle refugees. Thus, temporary settlement, in camps or otherwise, is common, though its success has not been determined (Malkki 1995b:505).

None of the migrants with whom I worked have obtained refugee status, although some of them are seeking asylum. These Sri Lankans, Africans, and others are at some point in the asylum application process with UNHCR Ankara. Also a part of this migrant population are a number of migrants who are not applying for asylum. These migrants, therefore, are not technically “refugees” according to the UN or the Turkish authorities. All of them are “forced migrants,” having been forced to leave their home countries because of civil conflict, religious or political turmoil, economic difficulties, or any number of reasons. However, as al-Ali, Black, and Koser (2001:616) indicate, the lines delimiting political from economic migrants are extremely blurry because many different types of political and economic turmoil exist in the same regions and migrants often leave

for multiple reasons. Because of variation in the social and legal situation of these migrants, the terms that can be applied to them are diverse and confusing. Therefore, to describe all the individuals involved in this study, I will label them “migrants,” the term one of my population gave to this group.

The circumstances of migration through Turkey are contextualized by these legal guidelines and social situations. Many migrants traverse Turkey’s lands in the process of “transit migration” (Içduyğu 2000)—some seeking asylum and national or international assistance, while others simply make their own way. Turkey has a considerable influx of migrants but few legal services and almost no social services to offer these individuals. In her report on the status of refugees in Turkey, Frantz (2003:47) states, “very little independent research has examined how refugees are surviving. The living conditions, livelihoods and survival strategies for refugees and internally displaced people all need to be better understood.” My project, then, is one step in the process of solving this problem.

Significance and Purpose of Research

Over the course of eight weeks during the summer of 2005, I lived in the parsonage of Christ Church Istanbul, an Anglican parish which aids these migrants. Also in the church compound is a hostel, which housed a group of mostly Tamil men. Many Tamils and other migrants also spent much time on the church grounds. I participated in the asylum-seeking process with some migrants, contributing my proficiency in English, which most of them lacked, and thus was able to observe many aspects of migrants’ lives

in Istanbul. I was also in close contact with various organizations which offer aid to refugees and migrants, particularly Christ Church and the Refugee Legal Aid Project (RLAP). Therefore, I was also able to observe the types of aid offered to this population and the ways it was implemented. My purpose in this study is to offer some insight into the situation of migration (specifically, transit migration) in Istanbul and so contribute to the anthropological study of refugees and migration. Another outcome from my thesis project is data that may be useful to those people and organizations involved in offering aid to these migrants. To add to political, sociological, and other research on migration in Turkey, this ethnographic description of one population of migrants will help fill a gap in the anthropological and Turkish literature on migration and migrants in Istanbul and, hopefully, give further understanding of the circumstances within which aid organizations must operate.

Many methodological and theoretical perspectives have been brought to bear on migration studies. Much research in other disciplines is conducted with quantitative methods, and it offers a great deal of insight into migrant life for the purposes of policy making (e.g. Celano 1991, Montgomery 1996, Williams 1993). However, O'Neill and Spybey (2003:8) state that, among other things, "participatory action research methodologies" are important within refugee studies. My qualitative approach and use of participant-observation allow issues of interest and relevance to the migrants to come to the foreground. Drawing from these topics, I hope to present data that they themselves would want known to aid agencies for better and more effective services.

Within anthropology, a field that is largely qualitative in orientation, my study adds to the literature on refugee and migrant populations and movements. There has been little anthropological work with migrants in Istanbul. Much work with refugees focuses on large populations in cities or in refugee camps, often in Africa (Harrell-Bond 1989, Krulfeld 1993, Malkki 1995a, Sommers 1993). Further, most anthropologists working with refugees focus on more homogeneous ethnic or national groups (Fuglerund, 1999, Malkki 1995a, Sommers 1993). Within Turkey, much of the research on refugees and migrants has been conducted by scholars in the disciplines of political science and international relations (Abadan-Unat 1997, Kirisci 1991). Their focus is mainly on Turkey's national and international security (Aydin 2003, İçduyğu and Keyman 2000); therefore, little attention is paid to individual migrants or migrant groups and the effects of migration upon them. My thesis project is significant within anthropology because I studied a small population of migrants from two continents and six countries in transit through a large "global" city (Sassen 2004). The project is significant for Turkish research on migration because little qualitative or anthropological work has been conducted on the various refugee and migrant populations in the country. The purpose of my project and the gap in the literature that I am attempting to fill influenced the theoretical and methodological frameworks that guided my research.

CHAPTER II
THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL
FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

Before elaborating on my own theoretical and methodological frameworks , I will give a short literature review of research on transnational migration. Within the social sciences, many different perspectives concerning global processes are relevant to migration studies. Major concepts include globalization, immigration, diaspora, and transnationalism. I will review the relevant literature about these concepts to show that transnationalism (with special reference to transit migration) provides the most useful theoretical perspective for analyzing the situation of this migrant population in Turkey.

Globalization

Globalization holds a different meaning for almost every academic discipline that problematizes and studies it. Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo list three elements of the term for anthropological inquiry: (1) “a speeding up of the flows of capital, people, goods, images, and ideas across the world,” (2) “an intensification of the links..., meaning that ties across borders are not sporadic or haphazard but somewhat regularized,” and (3) “a stretching of social, cultural, political, and economic practices across frontiers so as to make possible action at a distance” (Inda and Rosaldo 2002:9). Indeed, these characteristics of global processes as they affect human interactions are

becoming more and more important. Global interconnectedness has increased since World War II and continues to increase today (Castles and Miller 1998:4). However, this globalizing process of the world is not a monolithic and unstoppable movement. Many parts of the world become cut off, or “abjected,” by global forces (Ferguson 2002:140-141), while others cut themselves off, “delinking” from the global system (Hannerz 1996:18). In anthropology, the focus of globalization studies has been on events and processes of identity and culture in this novel, yet not entirely new (Trouillot 2003:47) era of world history, characterized by increased volume and speed of all types of movement (Appadurai 1996:27). Friedman (2004:181-82) summarizes globalization as a theoretical perspective with three characteristics:

(1) the necessary movement from smaller to larger units and from simpler to more complex organizations; (2) following from the latter, the notion that globalization is about the global era that we are now entering, an era fraught with conflicts perhaps, but one which promises a new diasporic way of life that may well supersede the nation-state (Appadurai 1993); in the globalization perspective, the nation-state is understood as the source of most of the evils of modernity, especially essentialism and its twin offspring, nationalism and racism; (3) a new world conceived of as one of border crossing, hybridity, and experimental identification, but also (for some) of hypercapitalism, network society, and increasing exploitation, at least at the beginning.

This conception of globalization, according to Friedman, becomes an ideological construction of hegemonic powers—a “significant misrepresentation of reality” by the “cosmopolitan elite” (2004:189).

My research, then, is squarely within the realm of studies of globalization, as the field is delimited by Inda and Rosaldo, because my project investigates global processes relating to the movement of “people”—specifically, forced migrants. However, globalization theory provides a broad, top-down framework for analyzing (or

misrepresenting) processes of the modern era. Kearney's (1995:548) definition of globalization as "processes that take place within nations but also transcend them" and so occur in "global space," highlights the top-down nature of this perspective. However, Kearney also describes the focus of transnational studies—transnational processes that "are anchored in and transcend one or more nation-states" (1995:548). This distinction between globalization and transnationalism is mirrored in the distinction between "transnationalism from above" and "transnationalism from below" within transnational studies (Guarnizo and Smith 1998:3).

Mahler describes "transnationalism from above" as focused on global processes such as those embodied by Appadurai's "scapes" (1996:33) and echoes Friedman's (2004:189) claim that it is elitist. Therefore, it is similar to the globalization perspective discussed above. This she opposes to "transnationalism from below," which is a more empowering perspective on the daily and counterhegemonic practice of ordinary people, such as those we see in my micro-study. Because the macro-analysis of globalization (or transnationalism from above) works off the ground and abstracted from "the field" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:1), it is insufficient for analyzing agency within the experience of migrants in this intermediate step in the process of transnational migration.

Immigration Studies

Another possible way to understand the situation of this migrant population in Turkey is as an immigrant population. Indeed, two of the Sri Lankan Tamils I met have obtained status as legal residents of Turkey. They are thus immigrants to the country.

These men, however, are the exception rather than the rule. Miller et al. (2002) and Hein (1993) discuss the differences between immigrants and refugees. Miller et al. (2002:347) compares features of immigrants and refugees. Both are often from similar settings “characterized by the structural violence of chronic poverty and a lack of access to basic resources” (Miller et al. 2002:347). However, much of the difference between the two comes from differences in “valence of movement” and “urgency of departure.” Whereas immigrants move “*toward* a dream of a better life” and make decisions to move slowly, carefully, and “informed by the experience of others who have gone away,” refugees are “by definition moving away from situations of extreme violence” and must do so with haste and with little planning (Miller et al. 2002:347). Also, immigrants can participate in “circular migration” between home and host countries, but refugees are more restricted in their transnational movements (Hein 1993:55). Although not many of the migrants in my study population were officially “refugees,” as asylum-seekers they exhibit refugee characteristics as described by Miller et al. and Hein.

A prominent feature of immigration is the idea of “chain migration” or the following of well-worn migratory paths forged by kin or co-ethnics (Tsai and Palmer 1977:107). However, not all migrants follow this model. For instance, Kelly’s (2003:39) study of Bosnian refugees in Britain shows that they could not follow the paths of other family members because of the suddenness of their flight. Likewise, the migrants I studied did not come to Turkey because of some familial or other connection to Istanbul. As asylum seekers, often traveling illegally, their paths were determined by chance or the decisions of smugglers, or “agents,” rather than careful planning based on other travelers’

knowledge. Even among the relatively large Tamil population, no one knew any other Tamils in the city until after their arrival. Often they did not meet them until a few weeks or months after their arrival. Most of the migrants in this population, therefore, are not immigrants and, in spite of some overlap between the two types of migrants, their experiences cannot be adequately understood using theories of immigration.

Diaspora

Diaspora studies are a relatively new field of inquiry, and this perspective can be used in the analysis of refugees (Wahlbeck 2002). A foundational description of “diaspora” is found in Safran’s (1991) article in the first volume of the journal *Diaspora*. Basing his definition on the Jewish diaspora as the ideal type, he limits the characteristics of a diaspora to six points: (1) a dispersal from an ancestral center to two or more peripheral locations, (2) a collective myth of the homeland, (3) separation or isolation from the host society, (4) a desire to return to that homeland, (5) a commitment to maintaining, restoring, or protecting the homeland, and (6) a continued relationship to the homeland (Safran 1991:83-84).

Other theorists have built upon Safran’s model. Clifford (1994) discusses the development of discourses of diaspora within anthropology, and Cohen reorganizes Safran’s model into nine points (1997:26) and devises a typology of five kinds—victim, labor, trade, imperial, and cultural diasporas (1997:x). Many works in migration studies have analyzed a diasporic community or identity. Cohen (1997) discusses many current diasporic societies or groups to illustrate her five types. Wahlbeck (1999) relies on

Safran's definition of diaspora as developed by Cohen to analyze the experience of Kurdish refugees in Britain and Finland. Wise (2004a; 2004b) uses the term to consider the impact of activities by East Timorese outside of Indonesia on politics in their homeland. Cox and Connell (2003) discuss the impact of exile upon the Palestinian diaspora in Australia. These ethnographers and theorists have used the concept of diaspora to analyze many refugee and other migrant situations. However, as he builds on Cohen's (1997) work, Van Hear (1998) broadens the focus of diaspora studies to encompass *transnational* communities. He explains that the latter term indicates "a more inclusive notion, which embraces diaspora, but also populations that are contiguous rather than scattered and may straddle just one border" (Van Hear 1998:6).

Although most of the migrants that I met in Istanbul do maintain connections to their family and friends in their home country and throughout the world, no individual's or group's experience is characterized by all of Safran's criteria. Safran, however, does state that few diasporic communities will have all six features. Thus, these migrants' dispersals and connections to their homelands make diaspora a seemingly useful analytic concept. However, they are not making decisions based upon long-term diasporic concerns such as building communities in host countries and maintaining financial and political ties with nation-building projects in a homeland. Instead, their temporary position in transit through Turkey militates against diasporic mentalities as the migrants must operate and make life choices based upon short-term and individual financial and political needs. Further, Spivak (1996:246) refers to "groups that cannot become diasporic" to show that there are large sections of the global population (women,

indigenous peoples, etc.—the subaltern classes) that are transnational but that are not studied or theorized, especially within diaspora studies. Also, Van Hear's (1998:6) reference to transnational communities indicates that diaspora may be too narrow a concept to use analytically. Because my research population does not fit most of the criteria of a diaspora, and because Spivak and Van Hear indicate that transnational concepts are more appropriate, I will not use diaspora as an analytical tool in this study.

Transnationalism

All of the above perspectives have been used in the analysis of the experiences of migrants and refugees. To adequately understand the experience of this migrant population in Istanbul, however, ideas coming out of work in transnationalism are most useful. Three theorists whose work has been foundational in this arena are Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (Basch et al. 1994). They provide an analytic framework for the study of transnational processes, and specifically of “transmigration” and “transmigrants,” in a report from a conference organized by the three (Szanton Blanc et al. 1995). They define “transmigrants” as “immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders” (Basch et al. 1994:7). Their analytical model for understanding these transnational processes includes four points: (1) a historical perspective, (2) a spatial perspective, (3) a focus on power regimes that control economic resources and populations, and (4) attention to the reconfiguring of global capital (Szanton Blanc, Basch, and Glick Schiller 1995:686).

Glick Schiller further lays out a framework for understanding transnationality in a recent article (Glick Schiller 2004). She moves from the term “transnational community” to thinking dynamically of “transnational process,” in order to understand the continuous movements and flows that characterize many lives and events (Glick Schiller 2004:455). Moving away from an older and more territorialized concept of “culture” (Gupta and Ferguson 2002:66, Malkki 1997:52), Glick Schiller discusses the transnational processes that affect populations and groups in terms of “transnational social fields” (2004:455). She defines these fields as “unbounded terrain[s] of multiple interlocking egocentric networks” that span national borders. Although there are myriad similar terms to describe these fields of interaction (see Mahler 1998), Mahler argues that “the topography of transnational social fields may be more bumpy and discontinuous than the ‘social field’ image represents” but that the concept is “the most useful metaphor and the most widely applicable of those proposed to date” (1998:76).

Glick Schiller discusses two types of people who live out their lives in these fields. First, there are those who have connections across nations because they are physically involved in migration. But, she points out, there is a second group of people “who have never themselves crossed borders but who are linked through social relations to people in distant and perhaps disparate locations” (Glick Schiller 2004:457). Her term “transmigrant” refers to both types of transnational actor (Basch et al. 1994:7), though my population is composed of the first type.

Also within transnational theory, she distinguishes between social practice (“transnational ways of being”) and identity (“transnational ways of belonging”) (Glick

Schiller 2004:458). Transnational ways of being refers to the “various quotidian acts through which people live their lives across borders” (Glick Schiller 2004:458) and encompasses the actions of both types of transmigrants. This analysis of social practice across borders leads to an understanding of the mundane aspects of lives that people translate into theories of identity, that is, transnational ways of belonging. Transnational ways of belonging refers to the “realm of cultural representation, ideology, and identity through which people reach out to distant lands or persons through memory, nostalgia, and imagination” (Glick Schiller 2004:458). Such studies focus on identity processes that are no longer rooted in territorialized cultural settings such as “long distance nationalism” (Wise 2004b) or “internationalism” (Malkki 1994). Another development within transnationalism is a focus upon the role of status as it influences transmigrants to participate in transnational social fields: the returns on social and monetary investments in transnational networks can encourage migrants to become transmigrants (Goldring 1998:189). al-Ali, Black, and Koser (2001) have recently analyzed the experience of refugee populations in Europe with transnational theory, thus applying the concepts to a type of migrant often overlooked in the study of transnationalism.

A final term to consider from a transnational theoretical perspective is “community.” As mentioned above, Glick Schiller replaces “transnational community” with “transnational social field” because she sees community as part of the territorialized conception of culture. However, she also states that “any social or cultural capital shared within kin networks or broader ethnic networks cannot be assumed to constitute a community of interest able to generate access to economic capital” (Glick Schiller

2004:461). She thus implies that “community” in the way anthropology has theorized it in the past does not reveal the most meaningful ways that groups organize themselves for social or economic betterment. Other relationships beyond simply kin and language or ethnic groups become more relevant to individuals in their transnational ways of being and belonging. Transnationalism and its accompanying theoretical concepts are useful for understanding many types of transnational migration, even refugees and asylum-seekers. For my study of asylum-seekers and migrants, these concepts will help me to analyze the experiences of transit migrants in Turkey.

Turkish Migration Studies

To further understand current issues of migration in Turkey, I contextualize my analysis with the work of Turkish scholars on international migration affecting Turkey (Içduyğu 2000, Içduyğu and Keyman 2000, Kirisci, 1991). Like most migration scholars and policymakers (Jacobsen 1996:671), these Turkish scholars emphasize the political and security implications of migratory flows throughout specific regions. Içduyğu (2000) presents some analysis of and direction for future research on what he terms “international migratory regimes.” Because Turkey is both a refugee sending and refugee receiving country and because of its unique historical and spatial positioning (a crossroads of both South-North and East-West migration currently and for thousands of years), Turkey is commonly subject to transit migration (Içduyğu 2000). Içduyğu lists six types of migrants: (1) permanent settlers, (2) temporary contract workers, (3) temporary professional employees, (4) clandestine and illegal workers, (5) asylum

seekers, and (6) refugees. To this typology, he adds another category, which is especially relevant to the Turkish situation and is a “mixture of various types of migrants”: “transit migrants” (Içduyğu 2000:358). He presents four major areas of research for studies on transit migration—“the origins of migratory flow, the determinants of their stability over time, the uses of migrant labour, and the adaptation of migrants into the receiving society” (Içduyğu, 2000:359). Further, researchers and human rights advocates outside of Turkey are beginning to focus on the situation of transnational migrants being “in transit” and, therefore, facing greater risks with fewer forms of protection or assistance (Coutin 2005:196).

Much of the work by these Turkish scholars focuses on policy and security issues; indeed, Içduyğu’s first three research areas are important from a policy perspective. The last topic—adaptation to the receiving society—is also important for policymakers, but this focus on the human dimensions of transnational migration is often overlooked. My anthropological study falls into this fourth category. “Transit migration” in Turkey as defined by Içduyğu is one type of “transmigration” as Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc use it. Therefore, I will use transit migration to refer to the experience of the people among whom I worked in Istanbul.

Theoretical framework

My research focuses on a unique situation of transit migration, involving mostly refugees and asylum seekers in Istanbul, Turkey. Almost every migrant that I met, whether residing in Turkey for two months or fifteen years, saw Turkey as a temporary

place of residence; these people considered themselves in transit. Turkey's position between Africa and Europe and between Asia and Europe makes it a logical stop for countless migrants searching for political, economic, social or religious freedom and stability. Because they maintain contact with family and friends from home as well as throughout the world, migrants live in many transnational social fields. Their past experiences, their future plans, and, most importantly in this study, their present challenges and coping strategies are all played out across national borders. Therefore, these individuals are all transmigrants (or transit migrants, to use the Turkish designation). To fully understand their experience, their localized actions have to be interpreted in terms of broader transnational processes suggested by Glick Schiller and other theorists. I will analyze their transnational ways of being, or social practice, within the Turkish context. Because my study is not broad enough to consider all aspects of transmigration, I will not consider transnational ways of belonging, or identity processes, as many others have. In discussing their social practices and the role of agency in the migratory process, my project falls into Içduyğu's fourth category of research: the adaptation of migrants into the (temporary) receiving society.

Because my purpose is to fill a gap in research on transit migration in Turkey, I am focusing my research and analysis on the immediate circumstances of these transit migrants' experiences in Istanbul. I will describe transnational social connections, cultural and linguistic issues, space and place, and movements of people, labor, and capital as they affect the immediate life experiences of the migrants en route through Istanbul. I will apply theoretical concepts of transnationalism to a population of migrants

often overlooked in such research. And through this analysis, I will provide some insight into the human factors of migration in a country that usually recognizes only the policy and security implications of migratory flows.

Methodological Framework

Participant Observation

My data collection combined two major anthropological tools: participant observation and interviewing strategies. Bernard's (2002) typology of fieldwork roles is useful in explaining my role in Istanbul during the summer of 2005. He describes three types of researchers: (1) the complete participant, (2) the participant observer, and (3) the complete observer (Bernard 2002:327). Because I am not a refugee or migrant nor an aid worker, I cannot be a complete participant in the Istanbul setting. Conversely, I did not go to simply observe refugee life or the role of aid agencies. Thus, I worked as a "participating observer" (Bernard 2002:327). I shared in church, social, and many other types of activities with Western expatriates and migrants alike and kept daily fieldnotes of my observations. However, my main role as "participant" in my fieldwork was to assist many of the asylum-seekers with applications and letters to the UNHCR in Ankara, and also to assist in interactions with aid agencies such as the Refugee Legal Aid Project (RLAP) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). By assisting the migrants (especially those seeking asylum), I was able to spend more time with them and directly observe the struggles that they face in Istanbul as they migrate through Turkey.

Through offering my assistance, I was able to gain a certain amount of rapport with the migrants, which is necessary for doing ethnography (Bernard 2002:346, Fontana and Frey 2003:78). Miller (2004:222) discusses rapport in terms of developing the trust of refugees and, thereby, gaining access to what Goffman describes as “backstage” behavior. In the surface-level, more performative “frontstage” behavior, participants may provide easy answers that they assume the researcher wants to hear, that are more “politically expedient,” or that avoid personal and social discomfort (Miller 2004:222). Through genuine participation in the lives and legal struggles of many of the migrants, I was in a position to witness some of the interactions among migrants and learn of their feelings for or about other migrants as well as Turks and others, which derives from “the realm of the backstage” (Miller 2004:222).

Interviewing

After building rapport, I was in a position to collect data through my second method: the interview. During the course of this summer, I conducted interviews on numerous levels. Bernard (2002) discusses types of interviews and interviewing strategies for qualitative data collection. He lists four types of interviewing techniques: (1) informal interviewing, (2) unstructured interviewing, (3) semistructured interviewing, and (4) structured interviewing (Bernard 2002:204-206). Informal interviewing consists of “a total lack of structure or control” (Bernard 2002:204). Such interviewing is akin to normal daily conversations with the interviewer remembering and later recording the information. During day-to-day interactions, I gathered the bulk of my data about the

histories and present experiences of the members of my research population. I kept a small notebook in my pocket at all times for “jottings” that I later developed into daily fieldnote entries (Emerson et al. 1995:20). Because I did not speak any of the languages of these migrants, English was the medium of communication. Those that spoke less English either used another as an interpreter or simply spoke to me less. However, because I spent ample time with some of them, I was able to communicate well with some (namely, Kannan) in spite of our limited abilities in each other’s native language. Others (especially the Africans) knew more English, and with them language was less limiting.

Unstructured interviewing is not “informal” in the sense of lacking planning, but it is also not structured and controlled by a list of questions, or “interview guide” (Bernard 2002:205). I incorporated this type of free-flowing dialogue, which both the researcher and the participant know to be a method of data collecting and not simple conversation, throughout the course of my fieldwork. I spent much social time with various individuals and groups of migrants acting in my role as anthropological researcher. During the course of daily activities (watching TV, going to church services, walking to the market, etc.), I asked questions about specific topics related to their life in Istanbul, their flight away from their homeland, their various social connections, and other issues, without following any set list of questions. I gained the majority of my interview data through these informal and unstructured interviews. I also conducted unstructured interviews with representatives of the office of the UNHCR in Ankara, the Istanbul office of the IOM, and RLAP in Istanbul. Although these interviews were not

lengthy, I did gain insight into the refugee situation in Turkey from the perspective of various officials and aid workers.

The last type of interviewing I employed was “semistructured interviewing” (Bernard 2002:205), in which I used an interview guide of questions and topics to discuss and tape record, when consent was given. I found informants through what Chavez (1991:264) calls the “snowball” sampling method: I used the connections of some of the first migrants I met and interviewed to find more potential interviewees. I asked a list of open-ended questions to allow the migrants to describe, in greater or lesser detail, the circumstances of their flight, their experiences in Turkey, and their plans for the future. I interviewed and recorded (either by taking notes, tape recording, or both) twelve migrants. Most of the interviews with Sri Lankans were conducted in their native language (either Tamil or Sinhalese) with the assistance of a Tamil immigrant who spoke English, Tamil and Sinhalese. During these interviews I explained my questions to the interpreter until he understood, and then he discussed the questions and the interviewees’ answers in their native language. After that dialogue, the interpreter answered my question for the interviewee, usually in a one- or two-sentence summary of rather lengthy Tamil or Sinhalese dialogues. Because of this process, I do not have many direct quotations from my informants, though I did gain insight into their thoughts about the subjects. On the other hand, the interviews with Africans, the Pakistani man, and some of the Tamils were conducted in English. Thus, I obtained more information and their thoughts through English dialogue. However, most of these interviewees knew and used the English language in ways that I was less able to comprehend. For example, the

Pakistani man used the same grammatical structure for English and Turkish, two unrelated languages that have very different grammatical systems.

A further complication of my interview data collection derives from the difference between “frontstage” and “backstage” behavior (Miller 2004). While I gained a large degree of access after building rapport with most of the migrants, as soon as a tape recording device entered the equation, the migrants immediately switched to giving the answers that they felt I (as a representative of Christ Church and Father Ian—a major source of emotional, financial and other support for many of the migrants) wanted to hear or that would not cause problems to the other refugees and migrants. Therefore, while I was able to learn much about these migrants through all the types of interviewing that I used, my recorded semistructured interviews provided the least useful data that I collected. My understanding of the experience of migrants and refugees in Istanbul is based largely on my participant observation and the informal and unstructured interviewing that accompanied it.

CHAPTER III
BACKGROUND DATA – PEOPLE, PLACES,
AND POSITIONING

My work focuses on the largest migrant group at Christ Church, the Tamils of Sri Lanka. However, this study highlights the roles of multiple actors—Tamils, Africans, Westerners, aid organizations—in analyzing transit migration in Turkey. In this section, I provide insight into the background and current situation of migrants such as the Tamils, the Congolese man who resided in the hostel, the Sinhalese migrants in Istanbul, and other migrants and refugees who regularly attend Christ Church. Through this description of the experience of migrants and refugees at Christ Church, I will show some of the challenges that different individuals face as transit migrants in Turkey, in order to set the stage for analyzing how these migrants cope with the challenges of transnational migration.

The challenges faced during this transitional period are many and varied, and, therefore, the migrants must develop coping strategies that are specifically tailored to their unique skills and position in Turkey. Further, these transit migrants are part of multiple transnational social fields composed of ethnic groups, aid organizations, and others. Within these social fields, the migrants employ the skills they have to compensate for the things they lack, and to develop mechanisms for coping with daily life in Istanbul and for future transnational movements. Now, to paint a portrait of the experiences of the transit migrants, I will begin by giving some description of Christ Church and its place

within Istanbul, and then I will introduce the migrants in my study population. In providing background information about the individuals and groups, I will introduce some of the social, financial, and legal issues that confront them as they migrate through Turkey.

Setting – Christ Church Istanbul

Located across the Golden Horn from the beautiful and historic old districts of this ancient, yet “global,” city is Christ Church Istanbul. The Anglican parish of Istanbul is over 400 years old and is a part of the British diplomatic mission, first to the Ottoman Empire and now to the secular Turkish Republic. The vicar, Canon Ian Sherwood, has resided in Istanbul for nearly 15 years, remodeling the neglected parsonage and church grounds and leading much work within the British and Anglican community of Istanbul. The church serves Western expatriates and many others in the city. Although attendance is much lower in the summer, most people at weekly services were expatriates—mainly British but also Australians, Americans, and others. However, another large and very faithful contingent of parishioners is comprised of refugees and migrants passing through Turkey. They have specific and obvious needs to which the church tries to respond. Father Ian distributes large amounts of money to the migrants to assist with things like food, eyeglasses, and bus tickets. He also provides work opportunities around the church and through his expatriate contacts.

The church compound is located in Beyoğlu district, between the historic areas of old Istanbul and Taksim Square, the center of modern Istanbul. Residents of the

neighborhood in which the church is situated are mostly low-income, working-class Turkish families. Many of the migrants live in the neighborhoods surrounding the church, though a large number of Africans that I met reside in Tarlabası, another neighborhood close to Taksim Square. Although most of my population lived in these neighborhoods close to Christ Church, migrants and refugees are a common sight in many inner city districts. In these “ghettos,” as one woman named them, migrants live much like the poor Turkish citizens: finding small jobs, shopping for produce or home items at street markets, contacting family and friends at local call shops and internet cafés, forming and interacting in localized and transnational social networks, and so on.

Below Istiklal Avenue, the main pedestrian thoroughfare in central Istanbul, sits the church compound. On the other side of Istiklal is an apartment containing the offices of RLAP. On Istiklal Avenue between the church and RLAP, the Istanbul Inter-parish Migrants Programme (IIMP) is located at the Union Chapel of the Dutch Reformed Church. These are three of the most important and most frequently visited sites for many of the migrants. Living in or near the church, they spend much of their time seeking assistance from these sources. The central location for these particular migrants, however, is Christ Church. Surrounded on three sides by housing blocks, one wall of the church compound separates the garden and the church bell tower from the courtyard of the neighboring mosque with its minaret. The two towers stand side by side to announce times of worship for their religion’s adherents. Within the church walls are the old Crimean Memorial chapel (see Figure 1), the parsonage where Ian lives and where I stayed, the sexton’s house at the front gate, and an expansive and well maintained garden.

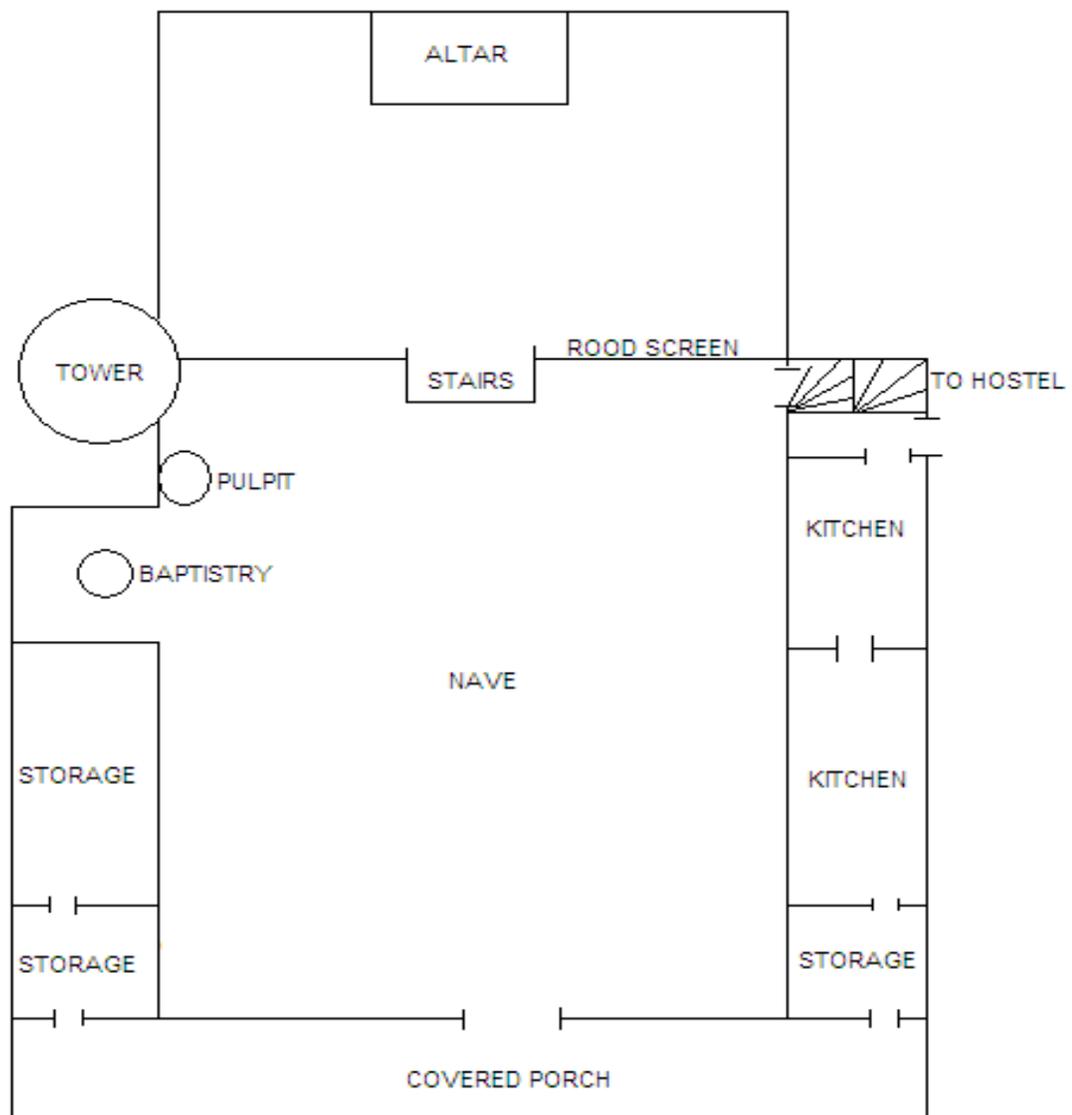
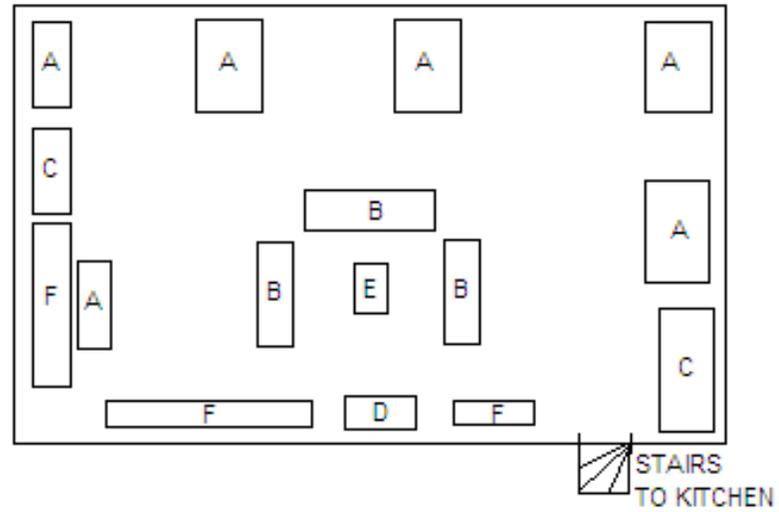


Figure 1:
Diagram of Christ Church Istanbul

The church hostel is located in the basement crypt of the building, directly below the church's altar area (see Figure 2).

The hostel is a large room with six beds around the walls. There are shelves, cabinets, and other furniture in which the residents can store their personal belongings. In the center of the room is a horseshoe of three couches facing a TV on the northwest wall. A coffee table sits in the middle of the couches and the supplies for the refugee school are locked in cabinets flanking the TV. The Congolese took the bed along the northeast wall away from the door, and the Tamils used the remaining beds lining the southeast and southwest walls of the hostel. Also in the hostel were some other items, such as a computer and an ironing board, used by the residents and other migrants.

Upstairs from the hostel and below the southwest side of the nave are two rooms for cooking and cleaning. The toilets are behind the church building, but a utility room with a shower and two sinks also contains the washing machine and stove. Between the stairs to the hostel and the utility room, the refrigerator, cupboards, counters, and large kitchen sinks fill up the main kitchen area. Directly outside the door to the hostel and kitchen and beneath the parsonage balcony, the hostel residents keep a few chairs underneath large shade trees for relaxing outdoors. Much of my fieldwork was conducted within the walls of the church compound. A stream of hostel residents and other migrants flowed constantly through the church and its facilities, while Father Ian and Mathew the sexton tended to the parish's spiritual and administrative matters. Many overlapping social fields centered on, included, or passed through the physical space of Christ Church Istanbul.



LEGEND	
A:	BEDS
B:	COUCHES
C:	DESKS
D:	TELEVISION
E:	COFFEE TABLE
F:	STORAGE CABINETS

Figure 2:
 Diagram of the Hostel at Christ Church Istanbul
 (The church basement beneath the altar area [Figure 1])

Migrant Population

My analysis of the experience of transit migrants in Turkey is based on the individuals' relationships to each other and to the various transnational social fields in which they live. My approach is similar to others who have used "network analysis" (Smart and Smart 1998). Because the group or the organization of the group is less important than the interactions among the members, I take an "actor-centric perspective" which recognizes that "there is no single group which encapsulates all of their activities and concerns" and that "regardless of how significant membership in a group is, interactions extend beyond that group" (Smart and Smart 1998:107). I will introduce the migrants in my population and give some background information about their journey to Turkey, their experiences in Istanbul, and their plans for the future. As Smart and Smart (1998:107) state, "without attending to those extra-group linkages, much that is important about daily experience and problem-solving is likely to be missed." Therefore, in my analysis of their lives in Istanbul, I will consider the multiple social fields in which they operate while emphasizing their positioning with respect to the fields and the other actors in each field.

Hostel Residents

The Tamils' field of interaction is centered at the hostel and those residents (all male) form the core members of the Tamil ethnic group at Christ Church. Aravinth (I use real names for those migrants that gave consent; otherwise, I set off pseudonyms with quotation marks the first time it appears) is the youngest Tamil at 25 years of age. He left

Sri Lanka and, after a trek that included such places as Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Laos, he has spent the past four years living in Istanbul in the hostel. He, like many others, was supported financially by his family in Sri Lanka. A family friend arranged airplane travel to Europe and escorted Aravinth as far as Turkey, when the man became frightened of authorities and left him stranded in Istanbul. Aravinth's family hopes that he has the opportunity to study abroad, since his flight interrupted his schooling. However, he is forced to work long hours at various odd jobs to support himself and help the rest of the Tamils. Thus he has no time to enroll in academic programs, even though his legal status would prohibit such enrollment. He was not granted refugee status by the UNHCR. Now, he is applying through the Canadian consulate to settle with an uncle in that country.

“Chandra” is in a situation similar to Aravinth's. They both traveled through many Asian countries before coming to Turkey; they have lived in the hostel for about the same length of time; they are both working long hours to support themselves and the others in the hostel; and neither received refugee status. He is in his late twenties and took a job as the night watchman at a large suburban house that has been divided into four flats. Father Ian is a friend of one of the residents, and Chandra accepted the job that Ian offered to the migrants. His schedule (sleeping during the day and traveling one to two hours by bus to work all night) prevented me from spending much time with him this summer.

Kannan is 31 years old and has serious medical problems stemming from ill treatment at the hands of Sri Lankan government forces. He has been in Turkey for about

a year and a half, living in the hostel for most of that time. He cleans the parsonage two mornings a week for the same wage that he formerly received for working six 13-hour days in a Turkish factory. Since his work is minimal, he has plenty of free time. This schedule allows him to spend more time tending to duties around the hostel. He vacuums the hostel and has a bigger hand in preparing meals than some of the Tamils who work outside the church grounds more. Like most refugees who are not Iranian or Iraqi, his asylum appeal at the UNHCR has been “pending” for well over one year. He is anxious for a decision, either in his favor or not, so that he can resettle or return—anything but “waste time” in Turkey, he told me.

“Krishna” is 35 years old and does not have any work. Like Kannan, who has no work to pull him outside and whose fear of Turks and authorities pushes him inside, he spends most of his time on the church grounds or at friends’ houses nearby. He does odd jobs around the church grounds for spending money (e.g. chopping firewood) and is involved to a great degree in preparing the hostel meals. Before he came to Turkey in 2004, he lived in India, along with his mother, wife, and daughter, to avoid the civil conflict in Sri Lanka. He had a brother in England who recently passed away. He has been in Turkey for a little over one year and is looking for a way to move to the West to find work. Lacking a clear case for asylum from the UNHCR, he has not attempted to gain refugee status and is, therefore, quite circumspect about his presence in Istanbul.

Another hostel resident for part of this summer was Aya from Tamilnadu—the predominantly Tamil southern tip of India. Aya means “grandmother” in the Tamil language, and it was Ramachandran’s nickname (many Tamils used diminutives in place

of their multisyllabic given names). His nickname was a constant source of humor among the Tamils. Ramachandran is a grandfather in his fifties who had spent the past five years working in Lebanon to support his family in India and elsewhere before coming to Turkey. He lost his savings to an African (probably a smuggler) in Syria and so was unable to return to India straight away. He was only in Turkey a few months before IOM finally helped him to return home in July. He did not work in Turkey, and he spent his time in the hostel with the Tamils, where he helped with cooking duties.

The other man in the hostel was not Tamil, but a recently arrived Congolese. “Ike” had traveled from Africa and, after losing his business in the Congo during civil strife, he hoped to get back on his feet financially by making business contacts in Europe. He found little work outside the church and interacted with the Tamils as little as possible. He spoke French (his first language) and English fluently, but did not communicate much with the Tamils. Only a few of them (Aravinth, Chandra, and, to a lesser extent, Kannan) spoke some English while Krishna and Ramachandran spoke practically none. The difference in language, as well as other factors (e.g. religion, diet, class), limited Ike’s ability to fit into the Tamil community in the hostel.

Tamils in the City

These individuals in the hostel form the core of the Tamil community. As I lived in the church parsonage, I interacted with them often and observed their own interactions. In addition to these core individuals, I watched many other Sri Lankans socialize with the group. Other Tamils included Siva and his wife Dhamayanthee, “Sanjeevan” and his

wife and son, Nimal, and “Ajinth.” Siva has lived in Turkey for nearly 15 years—as have Nimal and some others—and has thus earned the title “Old Siva.” He traveled with a group of Tamils to Kuwait to work in the late 1980s. However, the Gulf War sent him and his compatriots through Iraq and into Turkey. Now, he works with Kannan in the parsonage twice a week, and his Tamil wife Dhamayanthee does domestic work for a few families in Turkey. She came to Turkey from Lebanon along with Sanjeevan and his family. She lived with them in their flat around the corner from the church for about a year, and then she and Siva were married in June of this year. They barely support themselves in Turkey, and, although Dhamayanthee’s asylum application is still “pending,” they plan to leave Turkey as soon as possible.

Sanjeevan worked in Lebanon for a period of time then traveled to Turkey to seek better opportunities, hopefully in the West. He applied for asylum but was rejected by the UNHCR in Ankara. His appeals were unsuccessful and he still has little work in Istanbul or hope of traveling, at least legally, to the West. His wife works while he cares for their son. Sanjeevan often accompanies his son to classes at Christ Church’s refugee school while it is in session.

Nimal is one of a few middle-aged Tamil immigrants to Turkey. He does not share the legal predicaments of Aravinth, Dhamayanthee and others because he obtained legal residency by marrying a Filipina immigrant. Whereas Sri Lankans and other migrants are usually unable to settle in Turkey, Filipinas, according to Nimal, have few problems immigrating to Turkey and procuring passports. The common language of these Tamil speakers and their Filipina wives is English, and Nimal’s daughter also

speaks primarily English in the home. Nimal helped some of “the boys,” as he calls the younger hostel residents, by occasionally writing letters or interpreting in situations which require English. He also served as my interpreter as I interviewed the Sinhalese and the monolingual Tamils. These men talk of enjoying time in the hostel where they can partake of Tamil culture through their language and their cuisine (curries instead of their wives’ soy-based Filipino cuisine).

Ajinth left Sri Lanka years ago to study in Germany. He stayed there, obtained legal residency, and now works in a factory painting ceramics during the week and cooks in an Italian restaurant on the weekends. He is also a partner in his brother’s Sri Lankan grocery store in Paris. A friend from his hometown in Sri Lanka formerly lived in Istanbul, so he knows the hostel residents and some others in the city. This summer, to save on living expenses while the restaurant was closed for a few weeks, Ajinth vacationed in Istanbul.

The Sinhalese

The core group in the hostel and their Tamil friends seldom socialize with other ethnic groups. Although their interactions are limited, church activities do bring them into regular contact with other churchgoers at Christ Church. Of the church attendees, the main group with whom they related was the Sinhalese of Sri Lanka. Because the Sinhalese are the numerically and politically dominant group in Sri Lanka, they are not usually considered “persecuted.” The Sinhalese in Istanbul, therefore, did not seek asylum from the UNHCR. At Christ Church there are five Sinhalese: Janet, Lalita, and

Nimal with his wife and daughter. Sinhalese Nimal and his family and Janet came from Lebanon where they had been working. Nimal and family have been looking for better employment by leaving Sri Lanka. Toward the end of the summer, Nimal's pregnant wife took their daughter and returned home to her family to have the baby. Janet is a grandmother and has worked abroad to support her family since her husband had a debilitating accident in Sri Lanka. Lalita has residency in Turkey and is married to a Tamil man, Aziz, who was in Sri Lanka with their daughter because of visa problems in Turkey. By the end of the summer, he had worked out his visa issues and was planning to reunite with his wife in Turkey soon.

The main thing the Tamils and the Sinhalese had in common was their country of origin. According to Aravinth and Tamil Nimal, their languages are not very similar, and they use English to communicate. Some Tamils such as Nimal spoke a little Sinhalese. Although the civil war in Sri Lanka has pitted the Sinhalese government against the Tamil minority since the early 1980s, all the Sri Lankans I interviewed stated that, outside of Sri Lanka, Tamils and Sinhalese got along well. The shared cultural heritage and homeland, as well as the immediate struggles of life as migrants in Turkey, are more important factors in uniting the Sri Lankans than the civil struggle back home is in dividing them. The Sinhalese seemed unconcerned with the ethnic difference, and Tamils such as Kannan indicated that what they found problematic was Sinhalese governance, not Sinhalese people.

Other Migrants at Christ Church

There are various other migrants who are a part of the Anglican church community. To understand the situation of transit migration, I will compare and contrast the migrants' different coping strategies. The other transit migrants with whom I spent much time are three Sudanese, one Nigerian, and a Pakistani. Matthew is the church's sexton, so he lives in the gatehouse on the church grounds. He left the Sudan many years ago and spent some time in Syria before coming to Turkey over 10 years ago. Following his Anglican upbringing, he wanted to study theology but was unable to afford university in the Sudan. He hopes to find some way to study theology, preferably in Europe, and become a priest. He was not accepted by the UNHCR and so he has no documentation or money to travel to the West. He became the church sexton last year after the former Tamil sexton returned to Sri Lanka with his wife. Matthew's wife left earlier this year to care for her elderly mother in Madagascar. He has little social interaction except with migrants and other church members that he encounters through his duties at the church. Since Arabic is the official language of the Sudan, he speaks it fluently. He also knows English well because of his Anglican schooling and upbringing. His position at the church and his language proficiency allows him to act as a mediator between many, especially African, migrants, and Father Ian, as they seek assistance from the church.

Two Sudanese migrants with whom Matthew spends time are "Daniel" and "Mariam." Daniel has been in Turkey for 15 years and, lacking refugee status, has little work or hope of leaving Turkey. He cleans the church on Fridays to prepare for the Sunday service and he works in the refugee school while it is in session during the year.

Daniel lived in the hostel for many years but moved into a small basement flat in 2004. Mariam arrived in Turkey at the beginning of the summer with her French-speaking husband. They have been unable to find work or much assistance in Istanbul, and Mariam has time to walk from her home to the church to attend daily prayers regularly. Although I did not know Mariam well enough to learn her plans for the future, Matthew and Daniel did not have any plans to move on from Turkey and saw repatriation to the Sudan as unlikely to occur any time soon.

An Ibo woman from Nigeria, “Anulika” has been in Turkey for about a year. She left a daughter in Lebanon with the child’s father as she continued traveling to the West, and her one year old daughter “Adama” is with her. She lives among numerous other African migrants in Tarlabaşı, the ghetto that she called “the financial center of Istanbul.” She is unable to work because of her young child, but, ironically, she also makes a living because of this young child. She is well situated within the African community in her neighborhood. Many of the men there do business on the black market and are financially, if not legally, secure. She also attends church services at Christ Church and other churches regularly. Whereas one might expect that having a daughter to raise would cause financial strain in her situation, she actually receives more aid because she is a single mother with a young daughter. She receives money and resources to help support Adama from a wide variety of African friends as well as aid organizations. Anulika speaks little Turkish and relies on English in most situations. Anulika is applying for asylum through the UNHCR; however, she has attempted to “travel” to

Europe before, and she told me that she will likely not wait for the UNHCR's decision before she makes another attempt.

Francis (his Christian family name) is from Pakistan and has spent five years in Iran and two in Istanbul fleeing political and religious persecution in his home country. He was a prominent businessman in the hospital industry as well as a ranking politician in his Christian hometown. Following the 1998 death of his Roman Catholic bishop John Joseph, he participated in protests against the Pakistani government and its blasphemy laws and became a man marked by Sipa-e-Sahaba, a militant Islamic organization. After they attempted to murder him, he fled to Iran and his family went into hiding with assistance from his parish. He did not apply for asylum through the UNHCR in Tehran because he felt they were biased against Christians. He applied for asylum in Ankara and his case is still "pending" after more than a year. He lived in the hostel for a year but, like Daniel, did not get along well with the Tamils and moved to Cağlayan, an almost entirely Turkish industrial district seven kilometres from the church. Francis had learned a good deal of Turkish in his short time in the country and appears to speak English at about the same level. Being the only Pakistani at Christ Church and knowing few others in the city, Francis has to rely on people of other nationalities and languages to survive. Francis is well connected to other Turks in his neighborhood. He goes by his given name—Fayyaz—with Turks to conceal his religion and socializes with many Turks and Turkish businessmen, who occasionally help him with money or resources. Thus, this lone Pakistani is able to survive by building his own support networks as he waits to resettle in a Christian country.

The migrants in this small yet diverse population are not a representative sample of migrants or asylum seekers in Turkey. However, they are the majority of the regular attendees of Christ Church during the summer of 2005. My analysis of the situation of transit migrants in the following section is limited to this small subset of migrants at Christ Church. Other migrants and asylum seekers seek the aid of other churches and organizations in the city, and there are probably many migrants who do not utilize any social services. My discussion and generalizations are necessarily limited to my research population. However, this ethnographic analysis of these migrants in Istanbul provides insight into some of the ways that transit migrants cope with the challenges of migration.

CHAPTER IV
THE ROLE OF TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL FIELDS FOR
TRANSIT MIGRANTS

There are many challenges that the migrants at Christ Church Istanbul must face during this transitional period of migration through Turkey, and there are many strategies that they use to cope with these struggles. As we have seen, these transit migrants are part of multiple transnational social fields (Glick Schiller 2004:455). These include ethnic groups, the church community, and others. To contextualize their situation as transit migrants (Içduyğu 2000:358) in Turkey, I have first given some background information about the main participants in my research population. I discussed reasons why individuals ended up in Turkey, some of their experiences in that country, and their varying plans for the future. Now, I will describe their lives in Turkey and some of the challenges that they face in migration.

In their study of the mental health of Bosnian refugees settled in Chicago, Miller et al. (2002) produce a list of six major problems: (1) social isolation and the loss of community, (2) the loss of life projects, (3) a lack of environmental mastery, (4) the loss of social roles and the corresponding loss of meaningful activities, (5) a lack of sufficient income for adequate housing and other basic necessities, (6) health problems not previously experienced in Bosnia. Also, Tsai and Palmer (1977) give a list of the types of issues that confront “sojourners” who emigrate from China to work in New York. They list five main issues: (1) communication, (2) separation from family, (3) sending

money back home, (4) internal conflict among the Chinese workers, and (5) fear of being caught and deported. We will see that the migrants in Istanbul face many of these same challenges, though their impact and significance differs in the context of transit migration. Further, there are other concerns of these transit migrants that are not mentioned in those two studies. Some of the issues I will discuss are separation from family and friends and the accompanying loneliness; alcohol consumption; building social networks with compatriots, Turks, and others; the effects of a multilingual environment; the impact of fear; the emotional and social support of the church community; and the financial support provided by family, friends, the church, IIMP, and other sources of aid.

To discuss these issues, I will analyze coping strategies in the various transnational social fields in which the transit migrants operate. Each migrant has multiple fields of interaction. The main fields that I will describe and analyze are (1) “social networks abroad”—the migrant’s family and friends outside of Turkey, (2) “social networks in Turkey”—networks of a migrant’s co-nationals or other groups in Turkey, and (3) “aid organizations in Turkey”—groups that offer social services to migrants (Christ Church Istanbul and others). These three fields represent the sections into which I will organize my data. In each section, I will explain the struggles and challenges that confront the transit migrants in Istanbul and the ways that they employ the resources of that particular transnational social field to cope with the challenges of migration.

Social Networks Abroad

A major transnational social field in which these migrants move is that composed of their relatives, friends, and other contacts throughout the world. Most of the Sri Lankans have family members and many friends and acquaintances in Sri Lanka; indeed, almost all the migrants I spoke to indicated that they maintain some form of contact with their country of origin. Also, nearly every migrant in my study population had transnational connections to other places around the world. Anulika, Kannan, and others who have family or friends in the United States spoke especially proudly of those connections to me (though I am not sure if it was because of the grandeur of the United States or because it is my home country). The main connection between these migrants abroad and their social circle at home is through telecommunications. The migrants frequent call centers and internet cafés near their homes, and almost every migrant that I met owns a cell phone. Although international calls are too expensive by cell phone, at least Kannan used his *cep telefonu* (“pocket telephone” in Turkish parlance) as a pager—he went to the call center after his wife in Sri Lanka called his cell phone to indicate that she was waiting for his return call. The migrants used their connections with family and friends abroad to help with needs for daily life in Turkey and for making the expensive journey to the West.

All of the migrants that I met over the summer spoke of how hard life in Turkey is for them. Many, such as Kannan and Daniel, contrasted the busy, crowded, dirty city life of Istanbul with the natural, idyllic beauty of their homelands. Daniel longingly described the rushing waters of the Nile and numerous varieties of fresh mangos, and

Kannan waxed nostalgic while speaking of his father's farmland in Sri Lanka. The main thing that they lack in Turkey is, of course, their families and friends. All of the migrants have family members they have not seen in many years and who are scattered throughout their home country and around the world. In fact, Daniel and Francis have a sibling and a child, respectively, whom they have never even met. In addition to family, many have friends that have fled their homelands, maybe even traveling with them for parts of their journey, from whom they have not heard in years. This separation from their family and close friends is the major stressor that the migrants face in Turkey (Miller et al. 2002:345). The lack of psychological and emotional support causes many to deal with depression.

However, one of the beneficial processes of globalization is new telecommunications technology, which facilitates the rapid and voluminous movement of images and ideas across the world (Appadurai, 1996:35). Because communications networks are increasing in speed and in coverage, the migrants can communicate more easily with the people from whom they are separated. Call centers and internet cafés are numerous, and I observed Tamils and others going out to call or email relatives and friends daily. Glancing down any street in the city, it seems that everyone in Istanbul has a cell phone, and all but a few of the migrants I met had one, too. Although cell phones are not used to call internationally, Aravinth pointed out that they are useful for text messaging—a text message (or SMS) costs the same amount whether the recipient is across a room or across an ocean. Through modern telecommunications technology, the

migrants are able, with relative ease and low cost, to remain in touch with their families and friends and cope with the strain of loneliness and separation.

Another way to stay in contact with relatives abroad is through other migrants who are traveling. During the summer two migrants returned to their homes—Ramachandran to India and one of the Sinhalese women to Sri Lanka. As each was to carry bags and luggage, others in Turkey sent items with them. Because Krishna's Sri Lankan family was living in India, he was able to send letters and gifts to his wife and family through Ramachandran. The Sinhalese packed three or four bags and boxes of things (including a television) to carry home to some of the Tamils' mutual friends back home. Unfortunately, she packed nearly 90 kilograms of luggage, 60 kilos over the passenger limit, and was unable to take all of the items (namely, the television) with her.

Another issue with which the migrant and those in this social field must deal is the consumption of alcohol. Some migrants, in the absence of family and friends, drink alcohol. During my social interactions with various migrant groups we drank alcohol on a number of occasions. At times of celebration, we often had some wine. On my first night in Istanbul, Matthew bought some wine that we shared. When there was a birthday, such as Aravinth's, or a departure, such as Ajinth's, Ramachandran's, and mine, the Tamils made large meals of curries, vegetables and rice and also served wine. On a few cool summer nights, I relaxed in the church garden with some of the Tamils to snack on curries and drink a few beers. When I met Anulika's African friends in Tarlabaşı one evening, we ate and drank, talking and laughing for a few hours at a Nigerian restaurant. Although I heard of one problem in the hostel prior to my arrival in 2005, I did not see

alcohol being abused or any serious problems. In his study of Vietnamese refugees in the Phillipines Refugee Processing Center, Geiger (1993:72) observed that the men avoided troubles if they followed two rules when drinking alcohol: (1) always serve food before drinking, and (2) confine the party to a small group of close friends. Unknowingly, we always followed these two “rules”: we drank with a meal or some snacks and only a few people attended the gatherings.

However, the Tamils told me that adherents of the Hindu religion, which is dominant in Sri Lanka, are not supposed to drink alcohol or use tobacco. These Tamils who consumed alcohol and cigarettes while in Turkey (not all of them did) said that they never partook of either while in Sri Lanka. Kannan said that a friend in Sri Lanka worked in a liquor store, but, even with such easy access to alcohol, he never drank it. On his last night in Turkey—the only time I witnessed him drinking alcohol, Ramachandran had a few glasses of wine with the others. He told me (through Kannan) that his wife would never allow him to drink back home in India. Then Ramachandran made a motion as though she were beating him, and we all laughed heartily. Clearly, some of the migrants were taking advantage of being away from authority structures (their religious and familial relationships) to do things that they would at home. But also, some indicated that they were hoping to fill the void of those missing relationships by consuming alcohol and cigarettes.

Besides the separation from family and friends, life in Istanbul is hard because it is an expensive, metropolitan city, especially for those with low or no income. In Turkey, there are few jobs for Turks, even fewer for foreigners. The work (illegal, of

course) that many do find is hard manual labor with little pay and no benefits. Kannan, for example, worked in a factory thirteen hours a day, six days a week, for a monthly wage of 200 YTL (Yeni Turk Lirası—New Turkish Lira), or about \$150. Francis had a similar factory job with the same wage. These wages do not even cover daily expenses when rent for a tiny room and toilet is at least 100 YTL per month. Any unexpected expense such as a doctor’s visit or replacement eyeglasses becomes unaffordable. To defray the cost of life abroad, many of the migrants sought remittances to support themselves in Turkey and in transit. Others that had some income, however, supported family at home through remittances.

Some of these migrants left their conflict-ridden homelands to find work to support their families. Many in the international community would call these people “economic migrants.” However, the distinction between voluntary or economic migrants and involuntary migrants or refugees is being questioned (al-Ali et al. 2001:615-616). Castles (2003:17) states that regions or states with poor economic conditions are also likely to develop “predatory ruling cliques and human rights abuse.” Thus, economic (i.e. invalid) and political, religious, or other (i.e. acceptable) motivations are impossible to separate and often coexist within any specific migration decision. Therefore, while distinguishing “economic migrants” from refugees or asylum seekers may be politically expedient for isolationist policymakers, it denies the multiple troubles that many migrants face in their homelands and adds legal problems to the burdens of transnational migration.

Siva and other migrants that left home to work in Kuwait became caught between the civil conflict in Sri Lanka and the brewing Gulf War in the Middle East. Their only recourse was to flee to Turkey. Sanjeevan, Dhamayanthee, and most of the Sinhalese first worked in Lebanon and moved on to Turkey because it is en route to Europe. These migrants talk of the lower wages and harder work in Turkey as compared to other countries. These people have to work hard and live as cheaply as possible in order to send remittances to their wives, husbands, or families. Also, those who have been supported by family or friends or who are seeking asylum also send remittances home irregularly if they happen to have some extra money. However, these migrants are more often the recipients of remittances than the senders. Kannan has a friend from his school days in Sri Lanka who sometimes sends him money, some of which he sends home to his wife and daughter. One of Francis' relatives lives in Europe and has offered monetary support on occasion.

A major financial concern for these migrants is gathering money to "travel." For many, the international community has withheld its support in the asylum seeking and resettlement process. However, "legal and bureaucratic obstacles to migration and settlement have been seen not as absolute barriers, but as factors to be taken into account in personal strategies, migration networks, and community infrastructures" (Castles 2002:1146). Thus, migrants have other options that are not legal and are much more expensive. To travel to Greece, Italy, or another, usually European, country, they rely primarily on their family and friends outside of Turkey for financial support. Many migrants have spent \$2000 or more on a single journey, whether they reached their

destination or not. Besides the expense, there is also the high probability of someone taking the traveling money and disappearing, leaving the migrant stranded where they are or in some country other than they were planning. This is how Aravinth, among others, found himself in Turkey. Finding funds is difficult, especially if a migrant has lost money before to someone who failed them. Family and close friends are the most reliable source of money for this purpose. Some of the younger Sri Lankans told me that their families procured the money for their passage abroad. Kannan's father sold some of his land and Aravinth's father paid a friend so that these two could flee the country. The Sinhalese Nimal borrowed money from his sister, and Krishna was waiting for money to be sent to him. Francis, Krishna, and Janet, among others, are in Turkey waiting, usually on family, until they have enough money to leave the country. All of the migrants spoke of their connections (again, those in America were especially mentioned) from whom they hoped to receive financial assistance in traveling.

Discussion

As we have seen, some of the major concerns of these migrants in transit through Turkey are separation from their loved ones, loneliness, earning money to live on, and gathering the money to continue their journey West. By maintaining connections and lines of communication with their families back home, other relatives who are also abroad, and friends throughout the world, the migrants are able to cope, at least to some degree, with the loneliness of separation. This use of multiple communications media (telephone, internet, letters, messages and gifts carried by travelers) is a major coping

mechanism for the transit migrants. It shrinks the distance between them and their family and friends and so helps them to deal with separation. Because many migrants said that loneliness and isolation are the primary challenges to transnational migration, this transnational social field acts to provide the social and emotional support the migrants need.

However, without financial support from this social field, few migrants would be able to make the expensive and strenuous journey abroad. Money from family members and friends in the home country and throughout the world helps to defray the high cost of this “hard” life in Turkey. Kannan, Francis, and the others would struggle even more without the financial assistance of this social field. Further, traveling transnationally would be entirely impossible: Kannan and Aravinth only made it away from Sri Lanka because of the financial support of their families, and Krishna cannot leave Turkey until he has monetary assistance for traveling.

Monetary flows among the actors in this transnational social field were interesting to observe. Money traveled in many directions: from the home country to Turkey, from abroad to Turkey, from Turkey back to the home country. Wherever it was needed by whomever, someone sent it there. If a penniless migrant in Turkey needs some cash, a relative in Sri Lanka or Nigeria may send it. If the migrant receives a large sum from one family member, she or he may send part of it to another. My observations of money flows among migrants in Turkey show that there is not one major direction of exchange, such as from the working migrant to the impoverished homeland (Orozco 2002:43). Rather, there is always exchange from those who have resources to those who do not.

Wherever money comes from or goes to, financial assistance is flowing continually within this transnational social field.

The social and financial support of those family and friends from whom the migrants are separated are the most important contributions from this transnational social field. Another transnational social field, which is of much more immediate importance, is that made up of their countrymen and women in Turkey. We will now examine some national communities of transit migrants in Turkey. We will also consider the experience of Francis, a lone Pakistani man, to understand the challenges of moving through Turkey in the absence of such a community.

Social Networks in Turkey

Because they came to Turkey without any prior contacts, most of these transit migrants, like Bosnians in Britain, “had to create networks almost from scratch” (Kelly 2003:44). None of the migrants had kin who they followed to Istanbul, though some traveled with family members. Upon arriving, the migrants had to find some contact to help them survive in Istanbul and plan for the future. Often these contacts were with groups of co-nationals and developed into important social networks. New Tamils in Istanbul eventually found the community at Christ Church. As a comparatively large group of Tamils, they were better able to organize and utilize social and economic bonds (cf. Glick Schiller 2004:461). A smaller national group was composed of the three Sudanese who are from different tribes of Southern Sudan. The two men in this group have been in Turkey for many years and they maintain close contact. They accepted and

assisted Mariam, the recent arrival from the Sudan. These three did not seem to be as closely connected as the Tamils, but they did offer each other some emotional and social, but little financial, support.

The other two migrants in my study population, Anulika and Francis, were not parts of any substantial community at Christ Church. However, they did utilize their own social networks to survive in Istanbul. Anulika of Nigeria was one of the few Nigerians who attended services at Christ Church; however, I met and interacted with many Nigerians and other Africans that she knows from her neighborhood in Istanbul. She is very well situated in the Nigerian and the African communities, and she uses these connections to survive and support her one-year old daughter even though she is unable to work in Turkey. Francis is the exception to the rule with respect to support from a national or ethnic community. Whereas the other migrants in this population gravitate towards those of similar linguistic or cultural heritage, Francis seems to know few Pakistanis in Turkey. If others are present, he does not socialize with them. Because of this ethnic solitude, he sought social and other bonds with those who are of different backgrounds. He, unlike the majority of other migrants, learned the Turkish language. Also unlike many migrants in Turkey and other host countries (Korac 2003:57), Francis developed friendships and partnerships with local Turks. Francis' coping strategies provided a revealing contrast to those of the Tamils and highlight the role and importance of national communities to migrants in Istanbul.

Of Tamils I interviewed, almost all stated that language and cultural heritage were the most important factors in choosing other people with whom to socialize. In fact,

many of the hostel residents first came to Christ Church with other Tamils. Aravinth, Krishna, and Kannan all heard the Tamil language on the streets of the city and so met Tamils who had been living at the church. Although Kannan, Siva, Sanjeevan, and some of the other Tamils traveled to Istanbul with other Sri Lankans, none of them seemed aware of a Tamil community in Istanbul until weeks or months after their arrival. After an introduction to Father Ian through their new Tamil acquaintances, they moved into the hostel, where they could live cheaply and feel somewhat at home with their compatriots.

In Turkey, therefore, the Tamils were most likely to live, work, and socialize with other Tamils. Some of these people, such as Krishna and Ramachandran, were monolingual Tamil speakers. They spent the least amount of time outside of the church compound or with non-Tamils. These two, as well as Kannan to a lesser degree, relied on the Tamils with some English or Turkish proficiency for many daily interactions. Issues with Father Ian, visitors to the church, or shopkeepers and others on the outside were mostly handled by Aravinth and Chandra, both of whom were comfortable in Turkish and had some knowledge of English. Also, Nimal and the other Tamil immigrants to Turkey spent much of their free time in the company of the Tamils in the hostel or near the church. As mentioned above, these men use English to communicate and eat Filipino foods with their families at home. Because of this blending of cultures in their families, these men maintained ties to the Tamil migrants and stated that they enjoyed coming to Christ Church and to the hostel to speak their language and eat their style of food.

Because five of the Tamils lived in the hostel, community life for the Tamils revolved around the hostel and its kitchen. Besides Nimal and the other residents of Turkey, the Tamil migrants from outside often came by the hostel during their spare time or while passing through the neighborhood. Siva, Sanjeevan, and their families came by most frequently because they lived so close, but Tamils from all over the city were constantly coming and going.

These visits mostly coincided with meal times. They cooked together and cooked large portions. They had enough to feed the hostel residents and others who came by (including me), and saved the leftovers to eat until the next evening they cooked. Krishna and Ramachandran almost always had KP duty. Because they did not work outside, they had plenty of free time in the afternoons and evenings to prepare the rice, vegetables, and curries. Kannan, who cleaned the hostel and watered the church garden, frequently helped with meals as well. Chandra was an accomplished chef, so he offered his hand in the kitchen. However, his night watchman job required him to pack his meal and leave before the others ate dinner. Aravinth had the most work outside, and, according to Francis, he was also the Tamil leader of the hostel. Aravinth was the primary mediator between Tamils and others, including Father Ian and the other migrants at the church. He did the least amount of work in the church compound, though he did undertake the repairs of the hostel shower and the water pump in the garden well. He also paid for Krishna's hospital visit when he cut his hand early in the summer.

I came to realize that a division of labor had developed in the hostel. With no women residents, there was no sexual division of labor. However, since only those with

Turkish or English proficiency could find decent jobs, the division of labor was based on language. Aravinth told me that the hostel functions like a surrogate family, with some of the Tamils doing different tasks around the church and others working outside. Those Tamils that did little work outside the hostel did the most work inside it, and vice versa. Krishna, Ramachandran, and to some extent Kannan did not earn much money in Istanbul, so they did most of the cleaning and cooking at the hostel. On the other hand, Chandra and Aravinth worked long hours outside and brought in modest incomes to financially support the Tamil community; therefore, they had little time to fulfill duties in the hostel. Father Ian told me that the hostel residents were supposed to share duties in the church, but he added that it was best to leave them alone and let them work things out without much interference. Although some Tamils seemed not to be doing their required work in the church compound, the division of labor amongst the group generally allowed responsibilities to be met to Father Ian's satisfaction.

Aravinth told me a story from his country to illustrate life in the hostel: There are two types of frog, one of them lives in a well and the other lives on the outside. The well frog never knows anything else because he is all closed up, living down in the well, and thinking, "I am a king." But the other frog knows everything and jumps everywhere, so he thinks, "This is a big world." Then Aravinth told me, "Same like we are here, you know, in the well like a frog. Just because we don't hear anything. We are still Sri Lanka people so this is our small Sri Lanka." Aravinth's story shows that there are drawbacks to having a well-established community: new arrivals such as Ramachandran and Krishna are not forced by necessity to learn Turkish and they have more trouble

finding work or moving on than some of the others. However, as many indicated, the presence of a close-knit Tamil community is very beneficial, especially to those newly arrived Tamils who do not know how to function in the country. Indeed, the presence of other Tamils, Tamil food, and Tamil language is a very comforting aspect of life in the hostel. Without it, they would be much more isolated and lonely.

The other part of the Sri Lankan national community involves a small number of Sinhalese migrants (less than ten). Because of their similar social and cultural heritages and in spite of the lack of a common language, the Tamils and Sinhalese seemed more likely to relate to each other than to other groups. Although in Sri Lanka there is civil conflict and fighting off and on between Sri Lankan government forces and the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Kannan told me that the Tamil minority does not have any problems with the Sinhalese people; the problem is with the government of Sri Lanka, which is controlled by Sinhalese at the expense of the Tamils. However, the immediate struggles for survival and the need for emotional and social support are more pressing to the migrants in Turkey. As the Tamil Nimal said, “Sri Lanka unites us”—the national and cultural connections between the Sri Lankans in the context of a foreign and hostile land are more important than a far-removed political struggle. At church for prayers and services, Nimal and the other Sinhalese socialized with the Tamils. As mentioned earlier, when the Sinhalese woman flew back to Sri Lanka, Aravinth and other Tamils helped get her luggage to the airport and deal with IOM. Also, when Ajinth, the Tamil living in Germany, vacationed in Istanbul, he rented a room from the Sinhalese family and brought Tamil visitors such as Kannan back to their home. The strongest

national community at Christ Church is that of Sri Lankans because, as we have seen, they are the majority group in the hostel, and they do most of the work around the church.

A smaller and much less cohesive community is the Sudanese. Although there are myriad Africans in the city, only a small portion of the migrants attending Christ Church were African, and they did not appear to socialize or be united beyond their connection to Christ Church. The three Sudanese attended the church regularly because they were Christians (some specifically Anglican) from Southern Sudan. At prayers, they sat next to each other, and they exchanged pleasantries and assistance afterward. Daniel and Matthew have been friends and supported each other for many years in Turkey, although I did not witness them spending much time together outside of the church. Mariam, newer to Turkey, needed more immediate assistance. Matthew gave her some old clothes to take to her husband and she received some home items from the church. This community did not share meals, expenses, and time as extensively as the Sri Lankans. They were from different Sudanese tribes and spoke different languages, but they communicated in both Arabic and English. Also, they were somewhat connected to the broader Sudanese community, though Daniel and Matthew stated that they had no friends in Turkey. The three learned of the arrival of a Sudanese within a few weeks of his coming to Turkey. Matthew went out one night to visit him and get the latest news from Sudan. Daniel told me later that new arrivals always carry news of friends and family, who has died and where people are now. Though they seemed somewhat detached from any broader Sudanese community, the Sudanese at Christ Church did offer

each other some emotional support to cope with life in Turkey and separation from their homeland.

Another national community that touched, but was not based at, Christ Church was that of the Nigerians. Anulika was one of a few Nigerians that I met through attending services. However, she did not spend much free time on the church grounds. She lived, as she told me, “on the other side of the ghetto” in Tarlabası. Many Africans lived in the area and the community met at two businesses—an internet and phone center and a neighboring African restaurant. She knew Africans from many countries but was closer to Nigerians and people from her Ibo tribe. Anulika’s situation in Turkey was like that of most migrants, difficult. She had been in the country for about a year and was trying to raise a one-year old daughter. Because of her daughter she could not work to earn an income, but her daughter actually helped to support the two of them. She told me that she was forced to beg from African migrant businessmen to get enough money for food, diapers, and other necessities. And she always had Adama with her. Everywhere she went, many people doted on the little girl. To my amazement, even a group of policeman played with the girl and gave Anulika no trouble. Many of the men she knew, and one in particular, were especially fond of little Adama, and they would never let her go hungry or without some necessity. Anulika told me that these men, who would probably not give her assistance, will make sure that Adama has pampers and food. Thus, Anulika eats because Adama receives these gifts. Ironically, as Anulika raises and cares for her daughter, little Adama provides an income to support her out-of-work mother. I observed Anulika using connections to her national and regional community

both for financial assistance and for socializing. She found a place to live near her compatriots and survived by their largess.

Like Anulika, Francis made ends meet by maintaining social connections, although he was forced to do so with non-Pakistanis. Because he could not rely, as new Tamil arrivals did, on an established national community, he learned Turkish relatively quickly. When I asked if he knew Turkish, he told me, “Of course I speak Turkish; I am here two years.” Knowing Tamils who had been in Turkey for about that long but still had not learned much of the language, I knew that learning the Turkish language in two years was not a matter “of course.” However, Francis learned Farsi to survive during his five years in Iran, and now he uses Turkish to socialize and build connections with Turks in Turkey.

Krishna, Anulika, and other migrants stated that they were afraid of Turks and others on the streets. Like Burundi refugees in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania (Sommers 1993:13), fear had a major impact on the interactions of these migrants with the other inhabitants of Istanbul. Francis, however, had become accustomed to living as a foreigner while in Iran and was not fearful in Turkey like most others. Unlike the Tamils and Anulika, Francis had many Turkish friends. He even roomed with a Turkish man, who was from the Anatolian town of Kahramanmaras and had come to the big city to support his family back home. Further, Francis introduced me one day to another man in Turkey from whom he gained assistance—his boss, a Jewish businessman who ran a furniture factory. Francis told me he was a good man who helped him often, but his boss was not his only ally in Turkey.

Another “patron,” as Francis called them, was the owner of his roommate’s textile factory. When I visited one Saturday, Francis did not have any money to prepare a meal for us. So we went to the factory to say “hi” (or “merhaba”) to his roommate while Francis ironed his church clothes. As the factory was shutting down and the workers were leaving for the weekend, the owner welcomed Francis (whom he called Fayyaz—Francis obviously did not give him his Christian name) and me, giving us something to eat and drink in good Turkish style. Francis asked him (in a broken Turkish that I could follow) for some money, a loan that both knew would not be repaid. I got the impression that Francis had received some help from him and probably other businessmen in the past. The man showed us his bills for the week and the income that would barely cover them—he could not spare any for Francis. Not to send us away empty-handed, he sent one of his managers to buy yogurt for fresh ayran (a thick yogurt drink) and lahmacun (Turkish pizza). The owner and a few managers stayed and ate a late afternoon meal with Francis and me. Meanwhile the businessman tried to interest me in his wares and, hopefully, to make a business connection with a new American acquaintance. Francis was able to use these and other connections with Turks and others to supplement his poor income in Turkey. Although these connections helped him survive day to day, he still struggled with the pain of separation from his wife and six children. Francis, unlike many of the others, developed his Turkish language proficiency and maintained a network of friendships with Turks and Turkish businessmen to survive. However, in the absence of a national community, he still lacked the emotional support and encouragement provided by the communities of Sri Lankans, Sudanese, or Nigerians.

Discussion

Like social networks outside of Turkey, the migrants' ethnic or national community in the country provided mostly social and emotional support (Miller et al. 2002:345). Especially for the Tamils and Anulika whose ethnic communities were relatively large and well established, this transnational social field helped the transit migrants to cope with loneliness and the separation from loved ones. Of course, Kannan stated, these surrogate families could never replace the missing partners, children, or other family and friends, but their presence made the separation more bearable. Thus, a strong national community provides valuable, even necessary, social and emotional support in dealing with loneliness, isolation, or depression. However, not all of the migrants at Christ Church have such a community.

The Sudanese and Francis did not benefit from such strong social networks. These migrants, who found Christ Church in their search for a house of worship in Istanbul, found solace more in the daily office and weekly Eucharist than the social aspects of life at Christ Church. Matthew and Daniel spoke often of how isolated they felt in Turkey. They had contacts among the other Sudanese in the city, but they did not seem very connected to any sort of community. Francis, lacking co-nationals in Istanbul, seemed to be very socially disconnected. He told me many times how he missed having "a colored life"—an active life surrounded by his wife, children, and friends.

Although the social support that it can offer is invaluable for the migrants, the presence of a national community also hinders transit migrants in some respects. Pohjola (1991:437) describes how, although helpful in many ways, the social networks of Finnish

migrants to Sweden “ultimately restricted the options available to migrants.” As Aravinth told me and Pohjola (1991:439) indicates, the established networks could help the new arrivals to deal with initial difficulties. However, because of “so-called positive segregation,” the Finnish migrants did not make acquaintances or friends with the Swedish locals, and thus did not have much success developing a Swedish social network that could provide social support or assistance in finding possible jobs. Pohjola’s study corresponds with my observations of the Tamils, especially in contrast to Francis. The new Tamils were not required to learn a new language (either Turkish or English) because of the close-knit Tamil community (Miller et al. 2002:348). While this served to provide social support, it ultimately became a handicap for finding potential work. Francis, on the other hand, was not afforded such social benefits, but he did become passably proficient in Turkish. Thus, Francis compensated for the absence of a national or ethnic community by building contacts with Turks to find jobs and make ends meet.

The financial support of these ethnic communities was a major help for the immediate needs of life in Istanbul. The Tamils in the hostel pooled their resources for groceries, hospital visits, and other necessities, and they shared these resources with Tamils from outside and other migrants. The other migrants did not gain as much financial assistance from co-nationals.

The migrants’ social networks in Istanbul were of the most immediate importance because these were the individuals with whom they interacted most often. Socializing in this transnational social field helped the migrants cope with loneliness and separation from family, and with the language differences and accompanying fear of the local Turks.

These social connections, then, can be mobilized for financial assistance and resource distribution, which are much needed in the absence of steady or well-paying jobs. While not all migrants at Christ Church benefit from strong national communities (e.g. Daniel, Matthew, and Francis), those that do (namely, the Tamils and Anulika) seemed to deal with social and financial struggles more easily. The final transnational social field in which the migrants move is that composed of various individuals and agencies in Istanbul that provide aid to transit migrants.

Aid Sources in Turkey

The migrants' main source of assistance for daily needs is Christ Church Istanbul and, primarily, Father Ian. Besides the spiritual uplift provided by worship services, the church community offers social and emotional support and financial assistance. Another major contribution to the migrants is the cheap and comfortable housing in the hostel. In addition to the church, IIMP provides aid for the migrants to obtain food, shelter, medical care, and, occasionally, assistance in repatriation. Two other NGOs that assist the migrants are RLAP and IOM. These organizations assist in legal (RLAP) and logistical (IOM) matters relating to asylum seeking and temporary or permanent resettlement. All of these organizations and the individuals that comprise them are important sources of assistance in a country that, like others (Korac 2003:60), offers almost no social services to migrants. In addition to these NGOs, I unwittingly became an aid source. I will describe my interaction with them as an academic researcher and show how I became a

potential asset for surviving in Istanbul and achieving their aims of migration and resettlement.

Christ Church

As mentioned above, this Anglican parish serves British, American, and other expatriates as well as Turkish citizens. By being a part of this church, migrants receive much assistance from a transnational community with connections around the world. Father Ian provides a great deal of support, both spiritually and financially, to those of his congregation who are in need. Because most of the hostel residents regularly attend the daily office (matins and evensong), they comprise a majority of attendees at daily prayers; also, a large proportion of the congregants at Sunday Eucharist are migrants. Besides being a large contingent of the congregation, the migrants have numerous urgent needs. Father Ian directs a good deal of church support to migrants. The church offers assistance to the hostel residents, to regular church attendees, and to those migrants who happen to find their way to the church during a service. Also, Father Ian spends much of his personal finances to help with the migrants' expenses. Apart from Father Ian, many church members also help the migrants financially and offer emotional support and friendship to those with whom they have become acquainted.

The primary form of assistance provided by Christ Church is financial. Migrants need money for basic necessities in Turkey, and they often come to the church when in need. Because the church runs almost exclusively from the donations of its members, Father Ian often helps migrants and others with his own money. Using the church's and

his funds, he has given Francis money for eyeglasses, Mariam support to pay rent, Kannan help with medical expenses when requests from the UNHCR and IIMP were fruitless, and much more. Further, the church purchases two bags of basic foodstuffs (flour, sugar, tea, etc.) from a local market to distribute to migrants and migrant families at Sunday Eucharist. Francis, friends of Francis, Anulika, and others have benefited from these donations. All requests for assistance are channeled by the migrants and other church members to Father Ian. However, problems have arisen concerning these weekly donations. Some migrants have simply walked to the back of the church or the church storeroom and helped themselves to food bags or other supplies. Church members help police the distribution process to ensure that the church's resources are shared fairly and evenly among the numerous migrants seeking assistance.

Besides offering supplies or money, the church is also a source of small jobs to allow migrants to earn an income. The position of sexton at the church has been held by a migrant for many years. Currently, Matthew attends to the church grounds, handles much of the church's business (paying bills, maintaining buildings and supplies, and so on), and receives a stipend and a house in the compound. Prior to his appointment, a Tamil migrant occupied the position and the sexton's quarters. The parsonage is cleaned twice weekly by Kannan and Siva. They split the chores and receive tips from guests (such as myself) in addition to their weekly wages. Father Ian also gives opportunities for work around the church grounds as it is needed. This summer Father Ian (through Matthew) offered the hostel residents a job clearing branches and chopping it up for firewood for the upcoming winter. Krishna, who never found work outside, took the job

and spent a day or two with hand tools (and, occasionally, a power tool from the carpenter down the street) to earn a little money toward the hostel Tamils' expenses.

Daniel earned his keep in Turkey by assisting the refugee school with supplies and set-up and with monitoring the twenty-something students during its Tuesday and Thursday meetings. Finally, many expatriate members of the church find domestic workers among the migrants. Aravinth, Kannan, Matthew, and others cleaned many church members' flats, and Chandra found his job as a night watchman through Father Ian's connections.

The financial support for individual migrants is extensive, but the church also organizes or participates in programs to help migrants of Istanbul. One program at Christ Church is the refugee school. Most migrants and migrant families are offered very little assistance from the Turkish state while they are in transit through Turkey. Therefore, many migrant and refugee children may stay in Turkey for years with no access to basic schooling. To help those children between the ages of five and fifteen, the church provides a meeting place and school supplies for volunteers of various nationalities to teach basic math, English reading and writing, and other subjects. The school year begins in September and runs through May, leaving the summer as a vacation for the students and the volunteers. Daniel, whose only income is through this work, receives a retainer during these off months. The school was not in session during my fieldwork; however, I volunteered for the school during an earlier trip to Istanbul in May 2003, and I discussed the program with its outgoing headmaster Andy Pritchard and with Daniel during my summer fieldwork.

The refugee school provides basic schooling for migrant children, but it also serves other functions within the church community. Sometimes, volunteers take an active role in students' lives outside of the school. Some of these teachers told me that they use their personal resources (emotional, monetary, etc.) to assist students and their families in Turkey as well as in moving to other countries. The school, therefore, allows relationships to develop that benefit the migrants in the process of migration. Also, the school brings together students and families from all over Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The atmosphere and use of the English language at the school encourage relationships among migrants from different countries and linguistic backgrounds. Students and families have transnational connections across the Global South, and the church and volunteer community has similar connections within the Global North. Therefore, the school provides another arena of financial, emotional and educational assistance for migrants of varied backgrounds.

The church community, however, does not consist solely of Western church members who provide outreach services for migrants. Migrants of many nationalities attend the daily office, the weekly Eucharist, and even work in the programs that assist migrants. Thus, the migrants themselves form a vibrant part of the church community at Christ Church. This is especially meaningful in one of the many countries that “approaches refugees as a problem rather than as whole beings” (Hucklesby and Travis 2002:98). Here, migrants are included in a community that values their personhood and acts to help them as fellow community members. As the migrants and refugees interact

through church programs, communal bonds develop among them to a greater degree than among Westerners and migrants.

Although they are welcomed into church services and functions, most migrants sit towards the back of the chapel and, after services, mingle with each other away from the porch where the expatriate church members socialize. This is not to say that the migrants are excluded, rather they simply choose to remain apart. Krishna, Tamil Nimal, and others stated that they considered themselves a part of the broader church community and felt that it served an important role in their experience in Turkey. They indicated that they valued the emotional support the church community provided and the friendships they maintained at the church. Francis, again the exception, said that he did not seek help from migrants or others at the church. As we have seen, he received assistance from other connections, and he said he did not need support from others—“I have my Father [Ian]” was his statement.

When I asked Matthew and many of the Tamils about friends in Istanbul, most said that they had few or none. When I asked if the experience of migration helped the migrants to form bonds with each other, most seemed to think not. As Sørensen stated (1998:241), in referring to Dominicans in New York City and elsewhere, “the only experience they share is their common participation in migration.” However, at the church the migrants have the opportunity to meet and interact with people on a regular basis. Although Matthew did not consider the Tamils “friends,” he spent more time with them and other church-going migrants than with others in the city. Similarly, Krishna

told me that Matthew and Daniel were his only non-Sri Lankan acquaintances or friends in Istanbul.

Although the migrants I met were in very different circumstances, their connection with Christ Church (rather than shared experiences in migration) provided them relationships with other migrants. Through these relationships, the migrants were able to offer each other financial and emotional support. I witnessed people using their migrant connections at Christ Church as often as seeking assistance from Father Ian or other expatriate church members. As sexton, many migrants came to Matthew when they needed support from the church. Matthew brought many of them to present their requests to Father Ian. For instance, when Anulika needed a bus ticket to a UNHCR interview in Ankara, she first talked to Matthew, who informed Father Ian that she needed help. However, Matthew told me that sometimes he gave of his own resources so as not to bother Father Ian constantly, and I witnessed him talking to many African or Arab migrants on the church grounds. Other migrants assisted each other in similar ways. On one occasion, Chandra borrowed 20YTL from me because he did not have cash to loan a friend some money.

Christ Church offered financial support for these transit migrants and emotional and spiritual support for foreigners in a hostile environment. It provided a place for migrants to interact and develop relationships among themselves. All the migrants that I met at the church spoke very highly of Father Ian and the church community. They felt it provided many things that they lacked in Turkey; it was a bright spot in a situation where despair and hopelessness can easily develop. IIMP, the other main program in the city

that provided assistance, was not as important for this group of migrants, but it did support many different groups of migrants in Istanbul.

Istanbul Inter-Parish Migrants Programme

IIMP is a project located at the Union Chapel (Dutch Reformed Church) and provides assistance to refugees in the form of food, clothing, funds for medical treatment, and other social services. When it was founded in 1992, IIMP also offered legal assistance to asylum seekers. Recently, RLAP took over the legal aspects of refugee aid from IIMP. A flyer calling for donations to IIMP posted on the church door explains the role of the program: “The IIMP is an invaluable help in helping displaced people return home, sometimes to obtain refugee status, to get medical assistance, with children’s education, and other assistance not offered guests of this country by the state.”

Being a collective program of about eight local churches, migrants who wish to gain some assistance from IIMP must bring a referral slip from one of those churches. Since Christ Church Istanbul is a founding member, church attendees and others seek referrals to IIMP from Father Ian. Further, IIMP helps all types of migrants, unlike the Istanbul Catholic Migrants Commission (ICMC) and the UNHCR, which only assist those migrants who have obtained refugee status. The summer coordinator for the program, a Rwandan refugee, informed me that IIMP provides medical supplies; money for hospital visits, food, and clothing; and, for women in especially difficult situations, rent money or housing. Formerly, the program offered educational services for adult migrants to learn skills including languages (French and English) that would be useful in

finding employment in Turkey or elsewhere. Also, the program was in the process of training an expatriate volunteer to replace the out-going director.

Some of the migrants I knew sought assistance from IIMP. When Kannan had severe pain from his injuries in Sri Lanka, he contacted IIMP to pay for hospital expenses, when the UNHCR in Ankara did not help. Also, Dhamayanthee tried to get medicine for a skin rash through IIMP. Unfortunately, neither of these Tamils received any help from IIMP, perhaps because of a lack of available funds. Since many of the migrants did not obtain assistance from IIMP and its operations were much limited during the summer months, I did not observe the workings of IIMP during my fieldwork.

Refugee Legal Aid Project

Founded in March 2005 by Helen Bartlett, a former director of IIMP, RLAP in Istanbul is a non-profit organization that deals with many aspects of refugee legal needs in Turkey. The project works with migrants, international and national authorities, and aid organizations on many levels to assist refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey. By August 2005, RLAP had 260 clients representing twenty-two countries. The office provides free legal advice to these current or potential asylum seekers. It also represents migrants whose asylum cases are still pending, as well as those refugees appealing their rejection, to the UNHCR in Ankara. RLAP also works closely with the UNHCR and Turkey's government to promote humane treatment of refugees and migrants in Turkey. They help to train interpreters (e.g. the Tamil Nimal) to work in the UNHCR's interviewing process. They produce annual advocacy reports on the status of refugees in

Turkey and the effectiveness of the UNHCR Ankara. Kannan, Dhamayanthee, and Francis meet regularly with Helen because they are currently being represented by RLAP as their cases are pending. The project has helped some of the Tamils who were rejected by the UNHCR (e.g. Siva and Sanjeevan). Another mediator between refugees and the UN is the ICMC. The ICMC functions as the official arm of the UNHCR in Istanbul. Therefore, Kannan and others deal with the Ankara office through the ICMC.

International Organization for Migration

IOM is another NGO that assists refugees in Turkey and throughout the world. IOM is a non-profit organization and one of its primary functions is to facilitate the movement of refugees throughout the world, in accordance with UNHCR policies and guidelines. IOM enters the picture after asylum seekers have been accepted as refugees or when a refugee chooses to be repatriated to her or his home country. The organization regularly books flights from Turkey to destinations such as Australia, Canada, and the United States for refugees who have been accepted by the UNHCR in Ankara. IOM helps mostly Iranian and Iraqi refugees because they comprise the vast majority of those accepted by the UNHCR in Ankara. The two groups comprised 75% of the registered asylum seekers in Turkey in 2004, according to Metin Çorabatır, a UNHCR officer (personal communication, 26 July 2005). IOM, which assists in voluntary repatriation, supported two people from Christ Church to return to their home countries this summer—Ramachandran and the wife of Sinhalese Nimal. Before these two illegal residents could return to the Indian subcontinent, they had to have legal assistance to

comply with Turkey's migration policies. IOM deals constantly with Turkish government, especially the immigration police, so it was possible to arrange documents to allow Ramachandran and the Sinhalese woman to leave Turkey.

"The Ethnographer"

A final source of aid that these migrants utilized was "the ethnographer." I chose Turkey as a research site because I knew some church members and migrants at Christ Church from an earlier trip. As I was a researcher during the summer of 2005, my position in relation to the migrants was unclear to me during most of my fieldwork. I went to Turkey not realizing that anyone there would consider me to be an asset. I saw myself as a *young American master's student* who was simply trying to work on a large research/fieldwork project. And as I interacted with the various officials at aid organizations, I was seen as just that. However, the migrants with whom I worked saw me as a young *American master's student* who was interested in their situation and also in good political standing to provide them money, resources, and, most significantly, connection to and hopefully entry into the United States. Unknown to me, my social capital was a major asset in gaining access and building rapport with this population.

When I discussed conducting my thesis interviews with migrants, I was thinking about the rather erudite conception of "community formation" that I had entered the field to study. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the migrants, especially the current or former asylum seekers, had already encountered a type of interview through the UNHCR's asylum application process in Ankara. "First instance interview" is the term the UNHCR

uses to describe one of the first steps in the asylum process. Because of this experience, the migrants had preconceived notions about my role and saw me as a resource in solving their legal problems. Francis even called himself my “client” after he signed my innocuous consent to interview form. This situation posed a problem for my data collection: when I attempted to set up and conduct interviews for my research questions, my informants were loath to discuss the issues that interested me, but more than willing to discuss their legal predicaments. However, because I was attempting to gain rapport with potential informants, I persisted. I even volunteered my English writing and composition skills by composing letters and faxes to the UNHCR office in Ankara and by speaking for or with some of the migrants to Father Ian and Helen Bartlett at RLAP. Only over the course of many weeks of being served and courted by many of the migrants (especially Anulika and Francis) did I come to see the difference between my own conception of my position (as academic researcher) and their view of my position (as a potential resource in moving on from Turkey).

While I was in Turkey, I spent much of my spare time in the hostel with Tamils and other migrants. I developed friendships with many of them, especially Kannan, with whom I spent more time than with others. On numerous occasions I shared meals, watched television, and otherwise socialized with the hostel residents and others, including Francis and Anulika. Although the language barriers with Francis, Kannan, and other Tamils prevented me from going into too much depth, I was able to learn about their experiences and their feelings towards their situations on a more personal level. Because I had a more stable political and financial situation, I was willing to help pay for

food and other resources. However, I was prohibited on almost every occasion from doing any labor or paying for any expenses. At meat and vegetable markets, Kannan, Chandra, and Ajinth carried the bags of groceries and refused my monetary contributions. During afternoons of watching the Tour de France in the hostel, I was served tea, coffee, or lemonade by Kannan, Krishna, or Ramachandran. After finishing a meal, if I stood up to take my plate and trash from the hostel into the kitchen, a Tamil would quickly leave his food or task to take my dish from me. When I visited Francis at his home, he always insisted that I stay for a meal or two, and then he escorted me to the center of his neighborhood where a Turkish friend of his would find a cab for the normal price of about five dollars instead of the foreigner or tourist price of nearly twenty dollars. Further, during my last five days in Istanbul, I was hosted to three enormous Sri Lankan meals with different families or groups of Tamils. I had become yet another expense for people with few resources, living in an expensive country.

At first, I felt awkward to never lift a finger and be constantly waited upon. When I mentioned being a burden to Kannan or Francis, they told me that having spending money or food or money for transportation was unimportant: “Money—no problem,” Francis told me repeatedly. Lacking resources was, apparently, a condition to which they had grown accustomed. Spending money when they had it on friends and connections was an investment that they were constantly willing to make. However, when it came to writing a letter to the UNHCR or speaking with Father Ian or Helen or in some other way assisting a migrant with her or his situation, the migrants were not shy about asking for my assistance. Unfortunately, I was in the relatively powerless position of “student

worker” (Father Ian’s term) in the parish in Istanbul. I could accompany Kannan or Dhamayanthee to RLAP or ICMC, but the officials in those offices could do no more for me than they could for the migrants. I could write letters, possibly with a better understanding of their situation and a firm grasp of English composition, but that did not ensure more careful consideration by the organizations to whom I wrote. Regardless of whether or not my efforts were effective, the migrants valued their connection to me and worked to maintain my indebtedness to them. Because of my interest in their experience and desire to accompany them to meetings with various agencies, I was not considered a liability, although they did spend their truly hard-earned resources on me. To some degree I did become an asset—Francis had a further interview after RLAP faxed my letter to the UNHCR and I helped defray the cost of the trip by accompanying Anulika and Adama to their UNHCR interview in Ankara. Thus, I unwittingly became another source of aid to the migrants at least in terms of their plans for migration.

Discussion

Christ Church Istanbul, by providing a safe place to congregate and worship, allows the migrants to benefit from the spiritual and social resources of a religious community. These communal bonds, along with the other social bonds discussed above, help the transit migrants to cope with social and psychological stressors of migration such as separation from loved ones, isolation, depression and fear. Also, both Christ Church and IIMP offer much financial assistance for daily life in Istanbul. Beyond the immediate needs of surviving in Turkey, the migrants struggle to leave Turkey and

continue the process of transnational migration. RLAP and IOM are NGOs of great importance to the migrants in this realm. Even I, as a student ethnographer, became a resource to help some of the migrants in their political and legal predicaments. All of these organizations with members, volunteers, donors, and other supporters from all over the world form a transnational social field that the migrants relied upon for many types of aid. Because no one aid source could support the migrants with all their needs, these transit migrants, like most migrant and refugee populations, make ends meet by “blend[ing] income from multiple sources” (Hein 1993:52). Each migrant utilizes the assistance of many individuals and organizations to cope with the challenges of transnational migration.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The Challenges of Transit Migration

As we have seen, these transit migrants face many challenges in their transnational journeys. Besides the obvious legal difficulties that accompany illegal border crossings, the social, psychological, and financial strain of moving around the world proves to be great. To summarize the major issues of concern for the migrants, I will refer back to the studies of migrants by Miller et al. (2002) and Tsai and Palmer (1977).

Miller et al. (2002:345-351) listed six main problems of refugees settled in Chicago, which are very similar to those experienced in Turkey. All the migrants in Istanbul spoke of the pain of “social isolation and the loss of community” as they were separated from most of their closest relatives and friends. “The loss of life projects” affected most of the migrants as many were unable to continue schooling because of their flight (e.g. Aravinth, Kannan, Dhamayanthee) and the prospects for careers or marriages dissipated for other (e.g. Matthew, Daniel, Ike). “Lacking environmental mastery” was a major concern for new arrivals, as Aravinth said and Krishna, Ramachandran, and Mariam showed. Not knowing the language, using the transportation system, and trying to find legal, social, or other aid, all combined to make life in a new country exceedingly difficult. Francis had the most environmental mastery and the least fear, while new arrivals and some of the Tamils were in opposite circumstances. While this continued to

be a major issue for some Tamils (i.e. Krishna, Ramachandran, and Kannan), others such as Francis coped with learning the Turkish system more easily.

Further, I observed many migrants struggle with “the loss of social roles and the corresponding loss of meaningful activities.” In the hostel, the male residents had to do all of the cooking and cleaning—jobs they were less accustomed to doing in their home countries. Also, many men (Sanjeevan, Siva, Nimal) stayed home with the family or did small work, while their wives were the major breadwinners with stable, mainly domestic, jobs. As mentioned above, with the loss of life projects, many migrants were unable to find meaningful activities to occupy their time. Some of the hostel residents stayed in the compound much of the day because they had few prospects for future work or activities. Further, some that did find work struggled with the fact that they were wasting time in Turkey instead of pursuing those goals they had when they were younger and in their homelands (e.g. Aravinth and Dhamayanthee). Not the most *important* concern to these migrants, but the most *immediate* concern was “a lack of sufficient income for adequate housing and other basic necessities.” None of the migrants had adequate housing. Single men lived in the group hostel or in small, run-down basement or ground floor flats. One family put their sofa and master bed beside each other in their one-room flats. Further, these small accommodations stretched the migrants’ budgets almost too far, leaving little money to live on each month and making saving nearly impossible. Any sudden and unexpected expense (a hospital visit, lost eyeglasses, etc.) became a devastating burden. Miller et al.’s (2002) last problem, “health problems not previously experienced,” was not something I observed. Kannan had constant medical problems, but these were a

direct result of his experiences with the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Dhamayanthee's skin problem and Krishna's injured hand seemed to be normal sorts of medical issues.

Tsai and Palmer (1997:111-113) generated a slightly different, yet equally applicable, list of issues migrants face. "Communication" was clearly an issue for these migrants. Many could not speak Turkish or English, which greatly restricted their work opportunities. Tsai and Palmer (1997:111) state that, for the Chinese migrants, "work became extremely routinized." If not for the reoccurrence of common issues and themes, Father Ian and others would not have been able to make their thoughts known to many of the migrants. Indeed, miscommunication often occurred as a migrant would nod and say yes, Father Ian assumed his message was understood, and later he would become aware that it had not been. "Separation from family" and "sending money back home" are issues which I have discussed in depth. Isolation and loneliness and financial concerns are mentioned by both studies, and, combined, they prove to be the greatest stressors facing the migrants. Tsai and Palmer (1977:112) also discuss "internal conflict among the Chinese workers." Because the Tamils, like the Chinese, are a large community, internal conflict is inevitable. Just as in Sri Lanka, there are different people in different circumstances who hold different political or religious views. Problems can easily develop when these Tamils are in close proximity to each other in such difficult situations. Lastly, many of the migrants live constantly with fear: fear of Turkish people, fear for the future, and "fear of being caught and deported." The less environmental mastery (language, social skills with locals, job experience, understanding of

transportation systems and markets, etc.) that a migrant has, the more fear and the more self-restricted her or his movements.

The Transit Migrants' Survival Strategies

Building on my research in Turkey and these two studies, I present a list of concerns for transit migrants in Istanbul. My list of challenges (not problems) in migration highlights the fact that the migrants work proactively within the system of governments and aid organizations to gain the most benefits in their difficult circumstances. The migrants' primary concerns, as listed above, are: separation from family and friends and the accompanying loneliness; alcohol consumption; building social networks with compatriots, Turks, and others; the effects of a multilingual environment; the impact of fear; the emotional and social support of the church community; and the financial support provided by family, friends, the church, IIMP, and other sources of aid.

The transit migrants at Christ Church confront these challenges with myriad strategies, which are based primarily on interactions within several transnational social fields. The migrants are able to maintain a much greater degree of connection to family and friends abroad because of telecommunications technology, and their co-nationals and church friends in Istanbul assist greatly in combating loneliness and isolation. Their social networks in Turkey provide daily emotional and financial support, and through these they are able to work against fear and language difficulties. The multiple sources of aid (monetary, social, legal, or otherwise) help the migrants deal with the things that

neither they nor their families could handle. By working to connect themselves to more politically powerful or financially stable individuals and groups, the migrants are able to survive in Turkey and plan for their futures.

As I have shown, these migrants face numerous challenges to living transnationally. Not only do they confront legal barriers at every turn, but these legal issues exacerbate the social and financial strain of transit migration. However, by discussing the experience of transit migration from the perspective of the migrants themselves, I hope to show that they are not passive and helpless—subject to the whims of macro-level forces. Instead, they are active agents working for their future and not afflicted by a “dependency syndrome,” which places them at the mercy of others (Hucklesby and Travis 2002:99-100).

Many policymakers, however, do conceptualize refugees and migrants as merely passive subjects. Writing against this view of policymakers, Kelly (2003:42) states that “refugees are not merely objects of policy, but are social actors in their own right.” Even academic researchers may hold similar perspectives. As Smith (1998:198-199) states, “migrants are conceived of mainly as passive subjects coerced by states and marginalized by markets. Rarely are they seen as active agents who can significantly shape their destiny, even within circumscribed limits.” However, some researchers are now working to combat this view by emphasizing the agency exhibited by migrants in many situations (Adler 2000, Castles 2002, Hucklesby and Travis 2002, Kelly 2003).

Within their multiple transnational social fields, the migrants show their agency, and, further, their flexibility. Ong (1999), discussing a rather different situation of

migration (that of Hong Kong entrepreneurs in the United States), shows how migrants are able to work systems for their own benefit. She shows how they use the notion of citizenship in novel and flexible ways for capital accumulation in a very transnational world. She states that “flexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced or resisted, have become practices to strive for rather than stability” (Ong 1999:19). These forced migrants do not have the same political and financial assets as Ong’s Asian entrepreneurs. Therefore, they may not *welcome* migrations and relocations and they are ultimately striving for stability. However, as Ong highlights in her work, these migrants actively choose migration to better their situation and work flexibly within the transnational social fields that shape their lives.

Agency and flexibility, concepts usually reserved for entrepreneurs or others in high positions, can now be used to understand and describe the activities of many types of transnational migrants—even forced migrants. By moving among transnational social fields comprised of kin networks throughout the world, co-nationals and co-ethnics in Istanbul, and aid systems located in most of the nations of the world, these transit migrants in Turkey are capable of making a better life for themselves.

Final Remarks

In this description and analysis of the experience of transit migrants in Turkey, I have attempted to fill a gap in both anthropological literature and Turkish migration literature. Focusing on a migrant population in transit, I applied transnational theory to a situation often overlooked in anthropological studies of migration and transnationalism.

My research, however, was limited by a number of factors. The major constraints upon my fieldwork were temporal and linguistic. I spent only two months in Istanbul collecting data. Given a longer time period I could have observed the migrants in more situations and delved more deeply into their experiences. Following migrants from their arrival in Turkey, through the entire asylum process, and to their time of departure from the country would have allowed me to see a more complete picture of life in Turkey. Also, because I speak little Turkish, and I do not speak Tamil, Sinhalese, Arabic, or any of the other migrants' native languages, I could not question the migrants on many issues of their experience in much detail. By limiting myself to migrants that are based at one church, my sample size was small and may not be representative of all transit migrants in Istanbul or Turkey.

In spite of these limitations, I gave a human face to transit migrants in Turkey—a substantial section of the country that is usually considered as a homogeneous whole and solely from a policy or security perspective. My presentation of ethnographic data that highlights the human dimensions of transit migration in Turkey emphasizes agency and flexibility, and hopefully assists policymakers and aid workers in Istanbul and elsewhere to have a better grasp of this large and growing constituency. Transit migrants are not passive and dependent; they have plans and goals, and they proactively seek to obtain them. By pursuing multiple types of aid, they can quickly regroup when one source fails. The roles played by social networks and aid organizations are invaluable in confronting the many challenges that accompany transnational migration. In countries, indeed a world, that minimizes the human factors of migration and often ignores the struggles of

migrants, continued focus on the people themselves will help to find solutions to the dilemmas of migration.

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