Dynamics of mobility-stasis in refugee journeys: Case of resettlement from Turkey to Canada

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Abstract

The refugee Odyssey is often not a linear, straightforward movement from point A to point B, from sending country to receiving one. Rather, it involves multiple paths, gateways, entry and exit points, and territories *en route* to the country of resettlement. Crucially, the journey involves not only mobility but also immobility and/or periods of stasis—breaks that are, in many cases, a natural part of the journey. Alongside this diversity of paths and movements, the refugee experience—understood in terms of the practices and acts of refugees en route—is also far from homogeneous. Each journey may well have an episodic character, where the course, direction, and periods of waiting for one asylum traveller can differ significantly from those of previous and/or future travellers—even if the departure point and destination are the same. Within this context, this article examines the breaks or periods of stasis that punctuate the refugee Odyssey, which we call *mobistasis*. We base our empirical findings on research conducted with people *en route* to resettlement in Canada via Turkey where they initially seek asylum and await resettlement. Drawing on fieldwork in Turkey and Canada between April 2014 and October 2016 and semi-structured interviews conducted with asylum travellers from non-European countries, the article illustrates how Turkey as the country of asylum is more than a space of mere 'transit'. It rather constitutes a space of *mobistasis*—stasis within movement—in the asylum voyage towards countries of resettlement.

Keywords: refugees, asylum-seeking, mobility, immobility, Turkey, resettlement

1. Introduction

This article seeks to contribute to the transit debate in migration, transnationalism, and refugee studies in the context of the mobility–immobility binary. It explores asylum

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journeys of refugees, which we call *asylum travellers*, towards Canada by seeking asylum in Turkey. The focus is on asylum travellers' journeys towards their final resettlement in Canada via Turkey, where they pause and wait to complete their resettlement process.[1] Throughout the article, we use the term asylum traveller to avoid the complicated notions such as asylum applicant, asylum seeker, convention refugee, non-convention refugee, secondary or temporary protection in the context of Turkey's asylum system. Our intention is to use a single attribution, as each applicant is labelled different bureaucratic interpellations from beginning to end of the asylum-resettlement process. This is an attempt to eschew 'categorical fetishism' in the domain of asylum (Crawley and Skleparis 2018).

In what follows, we call movement of refugees from their home country towards the countries of resettlement, via seeking asylum in Turkey, the *asylum journey*. The reason in claiming that asylum/migrant journeys is better coinage than transit is that the latter does not detail experiences and practices or significant encounters of individuals at spaces *en route* temporally and spatially. *Journey* here is used both as a form of narrative (BenEzer and Zetter 2015) and as an emic term that emerged out of our interviews. The notion enables us to take the process beginning from asylum-seeking in Turkey to resettlement in Canada as a processual, relational, and an assembled mobility for asylum travellers at stake. Our starting point to label the period from asylum-seeking to resettlement as asylum journeys is that the refugee journey is never a linear, straightforward movement from point A to point B, from sending country to receiving one. Rather, it involves multiple paths, gateways, entry and exit points, and territories en route to the country of resettlement. Crucially, the journey involves not only mobility but also immobility and/or periods of stasis (stillness)—breaks that, in many cases, form a natural part of the journey. We claim that asylum journeys with their stops and breaks, challenge the *transit* notion in migration studies as also criticized by others in the literature (see Oelgemoller 2011, 2017; Düvell 2012; Icduygu and Yükseker 2012). The key subject of analysis here is the role of resettlement and its function in states' regaining control over self-selected migration by subjecting the human agents to the power of the state, and in effect, enforcing some *stasis*, and thus, slowing down ('de-speeding') the entire journey (Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos 2008; Panagiotidis and Tsianos 2008).

Based on the stasis and mobility nexus, there is an intrinsic relation between mobility (mostly considered as forward movement) and immobility (stasis). In this relation, remaining in one place or being *immobile* 'stands as a counterpoint to the nomadic metaphysics of flow' (Bissell and Fuller 2011: 2). Journeys of asylum travellers in the context of seeking refuge via Turkey towards countries of resettlement, such as the USA, Canada, and Australia, are the meeting points of both mobility and immobility, especially considering the waiting and stop in Turkey for unknown periods. Taking the Canadian case as an example, we see that in the transnational refugee journeys via Turkey, execution of stasis and mobility depends upon the actualization of both. Based on their mutual dependence, can we really think of an asylum seeker as a 'transit' migrant arriving in one of the resettlement countries via Turkey? Or should we see her/him as someone seated still on a moving bus—a state of *stasis within mobility*? Similarly, can we really think of Turkey as a transit country or a stop en route? We show that Turkey is a liminal space in the migratory process of asylum travellers en route to the countries of resettlement and constitutes arguably the archetypal case for debates on questions about 'transit' conceptions. Determining whether Turkey is, in fact, best thought of as merely a transit or stepping

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stone for refugees on the way to resettlement countries proves quite a difficult task in practice.

In answering the above questions, we keep the following premise in mind: journeys involve not only mobility, but also immobility. The journey phenomenon also involves a metamorphosis of identity/identities, i.e. being an 'illegal/legal', 'documented/undocumented' migrant, asylum applicant, asylum seeker, and refugee on the route in which most respondents are not aware of what label he/she carries; when and where he/she is interpellated with the attributed label. Not only is the body on the move and in a state of stillness, but also the status is on a constant formation and interpellation or Kafkaesque metamorphosis as a result of migration and asylum regimes.

A large literature, including the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) recent 2018 World Migration Report, examines migrant and refugee journeys, illustrating how these voyages are dynamic, complicated, and fragmented, with multiple stops, pauses and waiting periods (Collyer 2010; Brigden and Mainwaring 2016; Kaytaz 2016; IOM 2017). Brigden and Mainwaring (2016) call such fragmented voyages *matryoshka* journeys, which scholars have noted are directly related to increased border controls and the intensification of migration regulations in recent years (Andersson 2014, 2016; Brigden and Mainwaring 2016, Kaytaz 2016). Moreover, these journeys are not only fragmented in terms of migrant mobility and immobility, but have trajectories that evolve in relation to time and space and are thus subject to 'spatial frictions' and fragmentation as Schapendonk and Steel (2014) have demonstrated in the context of the mobility sub-Saharan Africans en route to Europe. Further, Khosravi's (2010) personal clandestine asylum voyage from Iran across multiple routes and countries undertaken en route to Sweden, and Andersson's (2014) clandestine journey with 'undocumented' migrants to Europe, have provided us with great insight on the production and reproduction of migration routes, as well as the exclusionary border mechanisms that condition them.

Drawing on these studies, we introduce a new concept, *mobistasis*, to analyse the asylum journey and *stasis within mobility*. *Mobistasis* offers significant purchase in contemporary debates in that it sheds light not only on the exclusionary and inclusionary aspects of the asylum journey but also its transformative dimensions (BenEzer and Zetter 2015). The state of immobility during mobility, and experiences and practices, as well as the flow of statuses, imposed upon and undertaken by asylum travellers in this state can be better captured and more fully understood with the concept of *mobistasis*.

What specifically, then, does this notion suggest to the current debates in migration, refugee, and transnationalism studies? By capturing the state of stasis in ongoing mobility in asylum journey, *mobistasis* aims to pose a direct challenge to the 'transit migration' and 'transit migrant' notions in the literature in four ways.

The first rationale of *mobistasis* conception is to reframe the 'transit' and 'destination' country—and 'transit migrant'—categorizations by focusing empirically on the refugee journeys towards Canada via Turkey. Transit notion as a blurred, arbitrary, politically loaded, and 'premature labelling' in Europe's migration governance rather freezes experiences and practices of migrants in so-called transit spaces (Oelgemoller 2011, 2017; Düvell 2012). *Mobistasis* notion, which is in line with asylum journey conception, is broader in a sense by moving beyond temporal limitation offered by the concept of transit migration.

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Most refugees who are being resettled to third countries spend more than two or sometimes more than seven years. In other words, Turkey is more than a transit space with stasis and mobility and a traveller more than a transit migrant. *Mobistasis* underlines an episodic passage of stillness and perpetual becoming in terms of legal statuses and social identit(ies), and the ongoing production, reproduction and diffusion of knowledge and transnational/translocal networks in a state of stasis/immobility during as-yet-not-concluded journeys. *Mobistasis*, thus, connotes not a total immobility, but hiatus and waiting during the asylum journey (i.e. en route to Canada and other resettlement countries).

Secondly, the term contributes to the discussion on how liminal space–time and movement–waiting can help us to see a given space in which refugees are living as more than simply a 'transit' state. Beyond the empirical case of Turkey, and the specific narratives of asylum travellers therein, that we present in this article, the notion has the theoretical potential to travel to other so-called 'transit' countries like Morocco or Libya.

Thirdly, *mobistasis* takes the transnational networks and established ties en route as the base, where it is related to transnational ties and established networks. The perpetuation of *mobistasis* in the context of asylum journeys to Canada via Turkey depends upon the established networks and ties on the route, in Turkey as the country of asylum and in Canada as the country of resettlement.

Finally, considering the 'being en route' aspect of asylum journeys, we also draw on cognate frames of understanding in the literature under the rubric of *viapolitics*, as explored in the work on the 'via' phase of migrant journeys, in which passages, routes, roads, and vehicles have importance in the course of migration (Walters 2015). 'Via Turkey' includes not only a transit mobility towards 'destination' countries but also temporal and spatial waiting(s) within the country that must be unpacked if we are to fully understand the lived experiences and practices of refugees.

In doing so, the article consists of six parts. Section 2 briefly introduces the research methods. Section 3 provides a concise sketch of Turkey's asylum politics and Canada's 'via Turkey' resettlement programme in order to outline the complex series of interactions, encounters, and negotiations that mark the process from asylum to resettlement. Section 4 presents claims as to why it is important to move beyond the 'transit' conceptualization, highlighting its politically loaded nature and arbitrariness of the notion's usage. Section 5 is presenting the empirical discussion. Section 6 concludes.

2. Methods

The fieldwork of this study took place between April 2014 and October 2016. The method employed was a qualitative, multi-sited ethnographic approach. Data collection and analysis through 46 semi-structured interviews with asylum travellers from Iran (34), Iraq (6), Afghanistan (1), Ethiopia (2), Ghana (1), Sudan (1), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (1) were conducted in Istanbul and Ottawa, as well as a field trip to Tehran. Twenty-two interviews were conducted with female respondents and 24 with male respondents. Regarding age composition, respondents varied from 18 to 40 years of age. Sampling was based mainly on the author's participation to the IOM Cultural

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Orientation for the group of Iranian travellers before their flight to their resettlement country—Canada. Interviews covered five main topics: pre-journey experiences and perceptions, migratory background and mapping the journey, knowledge about migration-asylum system, experiences and encounters in Turkey and Canada, and transnational activities and cross-border interactions.

For the first phase of fieldwork in 2014 in Istanbul, we mostly reached our respondents via IOM's Turkey Office. The IOM conducts a three-day cultural orientation programme in Istanbul for those leaving for Australia and Canada in the final three days that asylum travellers are in Turkey. Sponsored by the Canadian government, the orientation for Canada begins on a Friday and ends on a Sunday, when the IOM escorts travellers to Istanbul's Ataturk Airport for departure to their country of resettlement. Participating in the orientation programme provided the authors with a crucial window into what asylum travellers learn about resettlement in Canada and a chance to gather information on the length of their stay in Turkey prior to resettlement there.

To find further informants, we also benefited from our personal networks and connections with asylum applicants, asylum seekers and refugees, as well as non-governmental organizations related to asylum and refugee domain such as the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM). Each semi-structured interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. At the end of each interview, we asked our informants to reach out to another, thus, employing a snowball technique. During this first phase of fieldwork, our questions were about their connections and networks in the countries of resettlement, specifically in Canada.

The research continued in Ottawa, where semi-structured interviews with resettled refugees were conducted. Informants here were recruited based on information gathered in Turkey about ties and transnational networks in Canada. Subsequently, we returned to Istanbul in 2015, and from Istanbul to Kayseri, which is one of the 'satellite cities' designated by Turkey's Ministry of Interior, mostly for Iranian asylum travellers. Again the snowball technique was employed.

Fieldwork also included travelling from Ankara to Tehran and back via train, a significant means of transportation for potential Iranian asylum travellers and their family members living in Turkey and waiting for resettlement. This ethnographic excursion allowed us to observe the entire journey of potential asylum travellers from Iran, including their border-crossing practices and interactions with other travellers on the train.

The research concluded in Ottawa, where we conducted further interviews, and participated in cultural activities like concerts and conferences organized by and for resettled refugees. Attending such events enabled us to observe not only cultural and social practices and experiences of asylum travellers who have been resettled to Canada, but also their interaction and encounters with the host society.

3. Turkey's asylum system: a historical overview

The history of migration to Turkey has shifted significantly over time; once a source of out migration, especially to Europe, Turkey is now a major immigration destination (Kirisci 2007; Sert and Yildiz 2016). The subject of this research is asylum-seeking and resettlement

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so the article does not dwell on emigration (e.g. the Turkish guest worker diaspora in Europe and elsewhere). We focus on Turkey's 'immigration present', which began in the early 1980s, when significant numbers of migrants seeking asylum, especially from Iran, arrived and undocumented migrants from other places—Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan among others—took place.

In the domain of asylum, Turkey ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (hereafter the Geneva Convention), introduced after the establishment of the UNHCR in 1950. The Geneva Convention was incorporated in national law in 1961, following the opening of a UNHCR office in Ankara in 1960 (Kirisci 2001). Until the late 1960s, Turkey's asylum system was in harmony with both the Convention and the UNHCR system. The definition of the term 'refugee', as laid out in the original Convention document, was limited in terms of geography, referring then to any person escaping from European countries due to events prior to 1951.

The UNHCR sought to revise the 1951 definition to remove these limits of time and geography through the 1967 Additional Protocol, however, leaving the decision to remove the limitations to signatory states. While Turkey ratified the Protocol, and removed the time limitation, it—along with Monaco, Congo and Madagascar—maintained the geographical limitation (Kirisci 2007; Soykan 2012). By retaining this latter restriction, Turkey was simply exercising its 'sovereign right' to decide as laid out in the 1967 document. The upshot under Turkish law is that a person from a European state seeking political asylum can be granted refugee status in Turkey (and resettled permanently on that basis), while someone from outside Europe pursuing asylum cannot be recognized as such.

Considering the impact of the 1967 Protocol on Turkey's asylum regime, it had little practical effect until the early 1980s. Turkey simply did not encounter large numbers of refugees from non-European countries up until that time. The first significant flow came after the Iranian Revolution in 1979 when many Iranian nationals sought refuge from the Khomeini regime, which was actively repressing communists and other political dissidents and religious minorities—mostly Baha'is, Christians, and Jews. In 1980, more than a million Iranian nationals arrived in Turkey under such conditions. Soon after, the Iran–Iraq War broke out, prompting many more thousands of Iranian and Iraqi nationals to flee to Turkey. The 1991–2 Gulf War and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 produced yet another wave, with hundreds of thousand refugees fleeing Iraq to neighbouring countries, mainly Turkey. The recent crisis in Syria beginning in 2011 has triggered the most striking flow of all, with over 5 million Syrians escaping to neighbouring countries, mainly Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, which alone hosts more than 3.3 million Syrian nationals (UNHCR 2016). In addition to nationals from Iran, Iraq and Syria, Turkey receives migrants from Sudan, Somalia, Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan.

Increasing flows of refugees from non-European countries to Turkey have brought the country's asylum system and its policy of geographical limitation into serious question. This has been especially true since the Gulf War and Saddam Hussein's repression of Iraq's Kurdish population in the early 1990s, which saw hundreds of thousands of Iraqi nationals move across the border to Turkey. An attempt to address these arrivals, by forming a 'safe' zone at the Turkey–Iraq border, illustrated the need to update Turkey's asylum regulations, which were laid out in the 1934 Law on Settlement (Sert and Yildiz 2016). Good working relations with the UNHCR during the 1960s and 1970s soured as Turkey's policy of geographical

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limitation restricting the legal stay and status of non-European asylum seekers, or non-convention refugees, produced tensions. This was exacerbated by Turkey's expectation that the UNHCR would take responsibility for resettling non-convention refugees to third countries (Kirisci 1991,1996). Under pressure to update the outdated 1934 legal regime, Turkey passed the 1994 Asylum Regulation to manage the increasing numbers of arrivals from non-European states and lay out the role that the UNHCR would take in determining refugee status handling the departure of UNHCR-recognized non-European refugees from Turkey.

Migration policy changed again in the 2000s, this time within the context of the legal and regulatory harmonization required as part of Turkey's accession to the European Union. Put differently, Turkey agreed to harmonize its migration and asylum regulations in line with European Union standards as part of the country's aspiration for full membership (Kirisci 2007). The 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP)[2], and the foundation of Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) under the Ministry of Interior are important developments in this context, which have also been central to institutionalize the blurred and ambiguous definitions in Turkey's asylum regime, and in defining the temporary status of Syrian nationals. In its current form, Turkey's LFIP defines a refugee as follows:

> A person who as a result of occurring in European countries and owing to a well-founded fear of being executed for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her citizenship and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his/her former residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to return to it, shall be granted refugee status upon completion of the refugee status determination process (LFIP, Article 61).

For individuals fleeing their non-European country of origin, Turkey's asylum system uses the label conditional refugee. Accordingly, a conditional refugee is defined as follows:

> A person who as a result of events occurring outside European countries and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group. . . . Conditional refugees shall be allowed to reside in Turkey temporarily until they are resettled to a third country (LFIP, Article 62).

Syrians are de facto refugees recognized by UNHCR; therefore, there is an immense difference between asylum seeker and refugee numbers. The critical point regarding Syrians is that even though UNHCR's data and documents admit arrivals from Syria as *de facto* refugees, Turkey, as in the case of Iraqi Kurds in early1990s, constructed refugee camps near to its Syrian border and labelled Syrian arrivals as 'guests' in order to send them back once the conflict is resolved. The label 'guest', changed recently to 'subsidiary protection', illustrates the willingness of Turkey to exclude Syrians, since the term does not connote any legal, political, and social category at the national level. Most Syrians are currently living in Istanbul and dispersed across the country, and the current discourse in Turkey is more on integration of Syrians. Accordingly, subsidiary protection involves someone as follows:

> A foreigner or a stateless person, who neither could be qualified as a refugee nor as a conditional refugee, shall nevertheless be granted subsidiary protection upon the

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> status determination because if returned to the country of origin or country of [former] habitual residence would: (a) be sentenced to death or face the execution of the death penalty; (b) face torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; (c) face serious threat to himself or herself by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of international or nationwide armed conflict ... (LFIP, Article 63).

The article addresses Syrians arriving in Turkey with the statement of 'neither ... as a refugee' and 'nor as a conditional refugee', which can be interpreted as Turkey's strategy to differentiate UNHCR's *de facto* Syrian refugees from others.

4. *Mobistasis* in refugee journeys: theoretical discussion

The '*Transit* country' notion was first introduced by the initiatives of European countries following an UNHCR meeting in 1987 for the prevention of 'illegal' movements to Europe via Turkey, in which the country attracted more than a million Iranian asylum seekers due to the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Oelgemoller 2011). The notion in migration studies has become popular in academic and policy discussions in mid-1990s, especially with the IOM's initiative 'to recognize transit migration as an important matter in international migration and in particular in irregular and asylum migration' by classifying Turkey, Morocco, Ukraine, Hungary, and Bulgaria as transit countries for mostly undocumented/irregular migrants *en route* to Europe (Düvell 2012: 416; see IOM country reports on the topic 1994a, 1994b, 1994c, 1994d, 1995a, 1995b; Suter 2017). It has a certain political function in the context of European migration governance to avoid calling individuals who arrive in Europe as potential asylum seekers by automatically leading them to be considered as 'illegal' migrants (Oelgemoller 2017).

Thus, the emergence of the concept of transit migration is linked to irregular migration, and the official discourse and documents in Turkey build upon this link, which is regenerating the EU-centric definition explained above. Within this context, one might argue, it is those asylum seekers, refugees, and other migrants, who do not have the option of regular travel out of Turkey, that potentially fall under this concept, as those who are being resettled out of Turkey are, and have to be, regular in status by the very fact that they are being resettled. While this is a valid criticism, our research also shows how an international protection system can stir status: one can easily become an irregular migrant, given their asylum application is rejected the first time, or an applicant can become an irregular migrant spending his/her wait time shuttle trading between Tehran and Istanbul.

Here, we consider transit migrants as individuals on the move who 'are defined as aliens who stay in the country for some period of time while seeking to migrate permanently to another country' (Düvell 2012: 417). This undefined 'period of time' is nevertheless assumed to be short, a temporary stay where the most significant element is the intention that a person will endeavour to continue her/his journey (Icduygu 2005). Based on the given definition, temporal dimensions and the individual's intention to settle permanently elsewhere are crucial signifiers in conceptualizing the transit notion. However, these signifiers—intention and segment of time—are ambiguous and blurred.

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In addition to temporariness and intention, travelling without proper documents has become the main determinant in labelling a traveller as a transit migrant. In other words, the 'transit migrant' notion has become an alternative label for 'illegal/irregular/undocumented' travellers, and the term 'transit country' a marker for those states deemed responsible for tackling the 'transit migration' phenomenon by increasing controls and securitizing their borders at the edge of Europe. Düvell (2012: 418) problematizes the arbitrary usage of these categories, stressing how European countries such as France, Poland and Italy in policy documents are not considered transit countries, even though many migrants move through them under similar conditions. In so doing, he highlights the biased way the concept emerged in migration policy reports. The political loading of the term is reinforced by the very fact that the mobility of formally documented migrants is not generally included within the category of transit migration.

Are the categories of transit migrant and transit migration country—as well as destination country—based only on the desire and intention of actors within a certain segment of time? The vagueness and arbitrariness in the 'transit' categorization, in the case of refugee mobility from Turkey to Canada, produces a picture of Turkey as a transit country and Canada as a destination country. The question can be further extended to consider what makes an individual mobile and/or immobile and what puts a person into a state of stasis (i.e. a period of pause or waiting in time and space)? Think of an 'irregular' migrant who has arrived in Greece via Turkey with the intention of permanently staying in Turkey. Should we still stick to the temporal and intentional dimensions in the transit migration concept? We can imagine another scenario, one in which a migrant has the intention to pass to Canada or Germany via Turkey. However, if this person's stay in Turkey extends to, say, 10 years and sees the individual living in the same apartment for two years or more, but still with the desire and intention to pass to Canada or Germany, can—and indeed *should*—we still label her/him a 'transit' migrant?

These are important questions that give us pause to rethink the transit migrant and transit-destination country notions in mobility's relation to stasis and stasis' relation to mobility. Empirically speaking, these two scenarios are not merely hypothetical—they are general instances that we have encountered during our interviews with 'irregular' migrants and asylum travellers in Turkey and Canada. In other words, the transit migrant and transit country categorizations—and the cognate idea of destination country—pose problems from the perspective of stasis and mobility in the migratory domain.

These categories and labels serve in effect to produce a conceptual fixation. Consider how, temporally and spatially speaking, these arbitrary and politically loaded labels assume the experiences and practices of asylum travellers and 'irregular' migrants in so-called transit and liminal spaces as frozen. These labels immobilize what are in fact very dynamic processes of production, reproduction and diffusion of knowledge, and interaction both among asylum travellers themselves and between them and the bureaucratic mechanisms they encounter along the way. There is a growing literature that illustrates the precariousness, temporal dimensions, and uncertainty of transit settings and the agency of migrants in negotiating the challenges of the migration regimes that create these contexts.[3] The conceptual fixation engendered in the 'transit' notion overshadows and indeed obscures important aspects of lived reality—the experiences and practices generated and maintained by migrants in and across space over often indeterminate periods of time. Transit notion

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overlooks experiences and practices of 'transit migrants' and undermines the significance of transnational networks and social ties established on the route and in liminal spaces due to the literature's major focus on the 'destination' countries. It skips en route practices, encounters, negotiations, and interactions.

5. *Mobistasis* in refugee journeys: empirical discussion

Returning to the discussion of the lived experiences of asylum travellers in Turkey, there are, as of 2017, 62 satellite cities throughout Turkey's 81 provinces, up from fewer than 20 cities in the early 2000s. The increase is due to vast expansion in asylum applications following events like the US intervention in Iraq and the ongoing crisis in Syria. It is important to note that metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Bursa, Antalya and the like are formally excluded as satellite cities on national security grounds according to Turkey's official discourse on the regulation. It is significant to note that only asylum applicants fall under the requirement to reside in satellite cities. Syrians who do not apply for asylum are regulated under the temporary protection status in which they register with the DGMM in the city where they reside.

Practically speaking, once a non-European asylum traveller registers with the UNHCR Turkey in Ankara, he/she is directed to one of the satellite cities designated by the Ministry of Interior. She/he must reside in that satellite city until departure to the country of resettlement. The average stay/waiting in a satellite city varies for asylum travellers from different countries of origin and based on contingent events, especially crises—and the massive flows they generate. Such crises were witnessed in the 1980s for Iranians, in the 1990s and 2000s for Iraqis, and most recently for Syrians. Before the arrival of Syrian nationals, while an average wait for Iranians in satellite cities is around two years, for Iraqis it is around a year. Whereas asylum travellers from Afghanistan wait more than five years by noting that UNHCR has recently almost stopped resettlement operation (if it is a vulnerable case, the person may be referred for resettlement), a stay in satellite cities takes more than five years for asylum travellers arriving from Africa countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and so on. In other words, for those asylum travellers granted resettlement status through the UNHCR, satellite cities are like a platform change at a train station, yet with no idea how many weeks, months—or even years—before the connecting train departs or even which platform it will leave from.

Asylum travellers are fully apprised of the temporal uncertainty around the stay/waiting period in Turkey since they have prior information, and misinformation. Asylum travellers who have experienced and/or are experiencing the asylum journey provide ample information about Turkey and the possible satellite city that prospective applicants may be settled in. That said, the experiences of *mobistasis* can differ for nationals from one country-of-origin to another. It is also true that each asylum traveller may experience the state of *mobistasis* in different ways. For instance, while Travis, an Iranian asylum traveller who has been resettled to Canada via Turkey summarized his experience of *mobistasis* positively as 'living [my] life in a present tense' (he was able to benefit and live fully from 'illegally' working at a photography studio), he noted that 'if you talk to my mom, she will say more negative things about her experience in Turkey since she stayed at home all the time doing

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nothing [*sic*]'.[4] Travis' identity in the course of his asylum journey has metamorphosed several times from a 'regular migrant' with a tourist visa to an 'asylum applicant' when he visited the UNHCR Office in Ankara, from asylum applicant to an 'asylum seeker' when he participated in the UNHCR's main interview for the status determination, from an 'asylum seeker' to a 'refugee' when he was recognized by UNHCR, from a 'refugee' to a 'permanent migrant' when he was accepted for resettlement to Canada. Once again, through 'transit' notion it is hard to capture not only spatial and temporal moments but also flow of identities during the journey.

Deciding which satellite city to seek settlement in is generally up to the preference stated by the asylum traveller during her/his first encounter with the UNHCR in Ankara. While Iranian applicants generally prefer Kayseri, Eskisehir, and Denizli, Iraqi applicants tend to stay in Istanbul—even though it is not officially a satellite city—Tokat, Nevsehir, Cankiri, and Afyon. For asylum travellers who can choose, that choice will be directly linked to established social and trans-local ties and the produced and reproduced knowledge drawn from previous travellers from the same country of origin. For instance, Kayseri used to be a target satellite city among potential asylum applicants. This is first of all about logistics: Kayseri is the biggest satellite city on the Tehran–Ankara train route. The logic is clear enough: a traveller can alight the train in Kayseri and leave her/his luggage at a friend or relative's apartment then board the next train to Ankara where the UNHCR office is located to seek asylum there. The logistics of such a process have become remarkably routinized. During our train journey from Tehran to Ankara, we witnessed almost all passengers alighting in Kayseri around 4 a.m. to be greeted by social workers at the station wearing T-shirts with Persian letters to help 'newcomers' quickly find their way.

The second rationale for Kayseri is the highly elaborated networks established in the city and the knowledge produced about it that facilitate the newcomers' transition. For instance, our informant Stephanie told us that she had already decided which satellite city to nominate before leaving her home country, Iran. She expressed her feeling of surprise when she arrived in Kayseri, where she spent more than 30 months, because she expected Kayseri to be a small village based on information she obtained from her friends.[5]

Lena, another Iranian asylum traveller, arrived in Kayseri via train with the intention to settle in Kayseri. However, after spending several days in Kayseri and having her first interview with the UNHCR in Ankara, she was settled in Adana, where she stayed around 13 months until her resettlement to Canada. Lena told us she had to move to Adana 'because there were many refugees in Kayseri [and] the quota was full'.[6] However, settling in Adana posed no problem for her since her cousin had already settled there.

Like Lena, Ahoo had intended to nominate Kayseri as her satellite city based on information she had obtained from her cousin. In choosing Kayseri, Ahoo was hoping to share the apartment of her cousin's parents, who were to resettle to the USA at the time of her arrival in Turkey. After the first interview, she was informed by the UNHCR that 'Kayseri is closed for refugees'.[7] She was then settled in another satellite city, Nevsehir, and reached out to find a contact person living there. During our chat, she told us that one of her best friends in her home country had been in Nevsehir; Ahoo was not sure but thought her best friend had possibly left Turkey for resettlement in a third country. In addition, Ahoo already knew that her mother's cousin and his family had been living in the city; however, as far as she was aware they had all been resettled in Australia.

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What happened next highlights the complexity of the condition of *mobistasis* in Turkey for many. Ahoo and her daughter needed to find an apartment in Nevsehir. While house hunting, Ahoo ran into a friend who told her that, in fact, one of her cousin's children had not been resettled in Australia with the rest of the family and that she should seek her out to share her apartment. Ahoo told us she was curious to know how the relative had been left behind. She learned that the daughter had gone to the airport with the rest of the family, but that because she is over 18 years of age, her case had been separated from her parents' and she could not board. She would have to wait two months more to join them. While challenging, this meant, however, that Ahoo and her child could move in with the stranded relative as she waited for her chance to fly to Australia.

Based on an interview with a field worker, before the arrival of Syrians and the USA's recent decision on not to implement resettlement, *mobistasis* in Turkey for Iraqis was rather shorter than for Iranian and Afghani asylum travellers and those from African countries.[8] The reason was the US resettlement programme implemented for Iraqi asylum travellers following the US intervention of Iraq in 2003. Like Iranians, upon the arrival in Turkey, Iraqi asylum travellers prefer to settle in satellite cities where friends and family members have already settled. Even though Istanbul is not officially a satellite city for non-European asylum travellers, Iraqis tend to live there, especially in the Kurtulus neighbourhood, due to the existence of an established Iraqi community.

This does not mean that all Iraqis seeking asylum in Turkey experience *mobistasis* in Istanbul since waiting/staying in Istanbul instead of a satellite city has a financial cost. As stated before, each asylum traveller is supposed to regularly report to a police station in her/his designated satellite city to prove they remain resident there. If they miss an appointment, they are subject to a fine. Some Iraqi informants stated that they had stayed in Istanbul around six months. For the resettlement process to begin, asylum travellers must obtain an exit document from the police station in their designated satellite city and pay the fine. Our informants told us how, once they were informed by the UNHCR about resettlement and invited to attend the IOM's cultural orientation programme, they were no longer able to put this off as they could not complete the process without the paperwork. For those who have stayed in Istanbul, this, according to a field worker and interviews with Iraqi asylum travellers who waited in Istanbul, can fall anywhere between CAD1000 and CAD5000, which must be paid prior to resettlement.[9] It is clear then that satellite city regulations function as 'internal border work' through probation in governing the mobility and/or immobility of asylum travellers (Moffette 2014: 266).

Why, then, would Iraqis elect to stay in Istanbul at all? The principal reason is the established trans-local and social networks—or more precisely, the benefits these provide. During our fieldwork, a traveller who has now been resettled in Canada told us that he had travelled to Istanbul to see his friends and relatives waiting for resettlement. As mentioned and interviews confirmed, the stay of Iraqis in Turkey has been relatively shorter—from six to 12 months—than those from other countries. It is for this reason that the financial burden has been manageable. Drawing on all their savings and staying with friends and relatives makes this possible. Moreover, most Iraqis who come are of Christian background and Istanbul offers these minority groups important opportunities in regard to solidarity and social networks. Only in Istanbul are there a variety of civil society organizations for this group, including solidarity systems, and church-based networks and organizations.[10]

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For travellers arriving in Turkey from African countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan, the experience of *mobistasis* is not always about seeking asylum. As this list shows, the African countries from which travellers come to Turkey is rather heterogeneous. Like asylum travellers from Iran and Iraq, prior information and established social networks play an important role for travellers from African countries arriving in Turkey. However, whereas Iraqis and Iranians are almost always en route to Turkey to seek asylum, travellers from African countries do not necessarily arrive with this purpose in mind.

Sonia's case is a good example. For instance, Sonia left Eritrea, her country of origin, to work in Saudi Arabia. After working for a couple of years, she passed to Syria through human smugglers and spent several years there. In 2008, she decided to move to Europe via Turkey, again through human smugglers. However, the smugglers demanded more money, which she could not afford to pay, when they arrived in Istanbul. She, therefore, had to stay in Istanbul to save more money before continuing her journey. In Istanbul, she went to the Aksaray neighbourhood, home to a significant number of 'illegal' and 'legal' African migrants, where she found a job in a restaurant. Almost a year later, her friends from Ethiopia recommended Sonia 'to register UN [*sic*]' in order to 'legalize' her stay in Turkey and move to Europe via a resettlement process.[11] Upon the recommendation and information she obtained from her friends, she applied for asylum in 2009 by keeping her intention to pass to Greece. Her intention in travelling to Europe should not be considered as 'transit' migration since her resettlement process was completed to the USA in 2016 when, according to her, she did not have any hope for resettlement. Regarding metamorphosis of identities imposed on Sonia, she was a 'legal' migrant when she arrived in Saudi Arabia. Then she turned to an 'illegal' migrant upon her arrival to Syria without documents. Sonia was once again an 'illegal' or 'transit' migrant when she arrived in Turkey and decided to pass to Europe via Turkey. Then her decision to seek asylum in Turkey regularized her stay in Turkey, and she became an 'asylum seeker' until the completion of UNHCR's refugee status determination. In the end, she has been resettled in the USA as a 'permanent migrant'.

Sophie from Ethiopia arrived in Istanbul through legal ways in accordance with state's migration documentation and impositions. Before her journey, she obtained a 15-day tourist visa for Turkey along with an invitation letter from a friend living in Istanbul. However, her intention is based on the journey of her best friend's boyfriend to Greece via Turkey through human smugglers. In our conversation, Sophie told us that she decided not to go to Greece since 'the way [referring to crossing to Greece via small boat] is not legal. . . . Police are everywhere, and they can shoot'.[12] In the meantime, it was suggested she 'register at the UN [*sic*]' to legalize her stay in Turkey by an Ethiopian recognized refugee with whom she shares a place. At the time of our interview, she was waiting for the expiration of her 15-day tourist visa to go to Ankara to seek asylum.

Contingency, in particular around the vagaries of human smugglers and legal travel documents, can play a crucial role as well in the experience of mobistasis. This is especially true for travellers from Africa arriving in Turkey. For instance, Turkey was not the intended destination of Jalal from Sudan. His journey, starting in Libya with people smugglers, was supposed to end in Italy. However, when very close to the coastline, the boat's captain told the passengers they had arrived in Italy and to disembark into the sea and swim to the shore. To Jalal's surprise, however, he had been misled and dropped close to Izmir, Turkey, and

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not Italy. After spending a couple weeks in Izmir, he along with his friend travelled to Istanbul's Aksaray neighbourhood. After spending several months there, he applied for asylum. His stay in Turkey lasted around five years with the completion of his resettlement to the USA in 2014.

Mark from the Democratic Republic of Congo arrived in Istanbul via plane when he was 16 years old. As he told us during our conversation, he did not have any idea of seeking asylum and/or being an 'illegal' traveller. Rather, upon the assassination of Mark's father, his uncle had arranged the travel. According to Mark, it was cheaper to get a flight ticket and easier to obtain a visa for Turkey than the European states, Canada, USA or Australia. Upon his arrival in Istanbul, he followed his uncle's instructions to find a police station at the airport and seek asylum.[13] What is important to highlight in the case of asylum travellers from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan (and the African continent in general) is that that their journey and experiences under conditions of *mobistasis* are based more on contingencies than dedicated strategy. The act of seeking asylum is more a situational tactic to be in Turkey and to legalize their wait in the country with the hope of resettlement soon after. However, as stated before, their stay can take more than four to five years and even some cases eight years.

As the narratives above demonstrate, social, familial, and friendship networks—along with the trans-local ties established *en route*—are important in 'easing the unpredictability' of the asylum Odyssey (Bagelman 2016: 39). Not only do social ties help ease potential problems that can be faced during 'temporary' waiting or hiatus in Turkey, but they also provide certain benefits—financial, psychological, and social—along with knowledge about asylum and resettlement processes, civil society and non-governmental organizations, and financial, legal, social support channels. They can share the rent of an apartment, reducing the cost, and can find information about social life in a satellite city. Moreover, they can access psychological support if they encounter any troubles.

The knowledge obtained through the production, reproduction, and diffusion of information is what has been referred to as *mobile knowledge* (Brigden 2013), since the asylum journey is ongoing even during the phase of immobility within it. The established transnational networks are discussed in the literature through the highlighting of the importance of social capital in the context of country of origin and destination or resettlement country (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Brees 2009). The case of Turkey shows that transnationalism in this context is not merely about cross-border economic activities. Social and transnational networks in temporary spaces are also important and far from being static (Akcapar 2010). More importantly, the dynamism and comprehensiveness of transnational practices highlighted in transnationalism studies (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Vertovec 2006) are based more on temporary solidarity during the state of *mobistasis* in Turkey. The main signifier in this temporary solidarity occurring among past (experienced), present (experiencing), and future (will experience) asylum travellers is the exchange and perpetuation of knowledge, ongoing mobility, and the continuity of the asylum-resettlement nexus.

The temporary solidarity based on knowledge provides asylum travellers crucial ideas on a range of crucial social dynamics. These include: where to stay/wait; how to seek asylum; what words to say (and to avoid saying) during interviews with the UNHCR and Turkey's bureaucratic administration and resettlement agencies and embassy officers; what to avoid

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saying in encounters with local people; and how to behave and not to behave during both the asylum and resettlement processes.

Information obtained by asylum travellers is not static and fixed. Rather, it is flexible and dynamic, as well as open to metamorphosis and transformation based on failed and successful instances experienced by previous asylum travellers. In other words, if an asylum traveller practices a certain mode and/or narrative that bears fruit (i.e. results in a successful refugee claim), her/his narrative has the potential to inform a current (or future) asylum traveller's conduct. If this current asylum traveller's attempt then fails, a future asylum traveller avoids using a similar narrative in her/his quest for refugee and/or resettlement status, and so on. For instance, almost all Baha'i Iranians are able to obtain refugee status due to the denial of fundamental rights in Iran. One of our informants failed to obtain refugee status because the informant's claim to being from this group was rejected when she/he could not satisfactorily answer the UNHCR's questions about aspects of Baha'i teachings during the interview.

6. By way of conclusion

This article has focused on what an asylum journey involves in terms of practices and experiences in the context of waiting/stop/immobility in Turkey during the ongoing asylum journey towards the country of resettlement. It has, following Mainwaring and Brigden (2016: 244), cast the asylum journey as a series of practices and experiences with 'indeterminate beginnings and ends'. The asylum voyage is, furthermore, both the state of being mobile *en route* and the state of immobility/stasis or waiting/stopping, the latter forming a 'natural' part of an ongoing journey (Brigden and Mainwaring 2016).

In approaching the mobility–immobility nexus, the article has introduced a new conceptual frame—*mobistasis*—to rethink the 'transit' notion. By focusing on the asylum journey towards Canada via Turkey, and specifically taking the satellite city experiences and practices as our empirical case, the rationale of this new term is to contemplate spaces of transition and the states of wait/stop/immobility. With *mobistasis*, we overcome the 'transit' conception's emphasis on intention and temporality, as well as the concept's arbitrariness in its usage and its politically loaded nature (Düvell 2012). *Mobistasis* reframes what the transit migration conception does through conceptual fixation, which freezes and immobilizes practices and experiences of migrants in spaces of transition. It provides a better aspect to capture transnational networks and social ties established on the route, in the country of asylum, and in the country of resettlement.

Regarding the findings of the research, the article suggests that whether an individual is forced to flee the country of origin, or decides to leave in a calculated decision-making process, the journey is a nonlinear, heterogeneous, and complicated phenomenon. The journey contains not only multiple routes, passages, and sites but also a multitude of labels attributed to both the mode of journey and traveller by the global migratory regime. Refugee journeys are more than a transfer from a refugee-producing country to a refugee-receiving one. The article has illustrated how asylum travellers from different countries of origin have different expectations and motivations for their journeys. While Iraqis imagine resettlement in the USA, the Iranian vision is more likely to be Canada or Australia. For both, Turkey is the country of asylum and the second country on the move towards the

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country of resettlement. Since they are largely aware that they will have to stop/wait/stay in Turkey, they can calculate what assets to bring in Turkey before their arrival and their preferred satellite city during that wait.

For travellers arriving from Africa, countries like Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, the act of seeking asylum is more likely to be learned upon their arrival in Turkey and upon their encounters with other migrants. While the initial motivation in choosing Turkey is to pass to Europe via Turkey through human smugglers, obtaining information about asylum-seeking shows them how to be 'legal' during their stay in Turkey and to have an opportunity of resettlement to third countries. However, considering the temporal dimensions of the stay in *mobistasis*, African asylum travellers spend more than four to five years, while Iraqis stay between six and 12 months, and Iranians wait around 20 months.

This temporal difference and convergence in stay and differences/similarities in backgrounds have led asylum travellers to experience and engage in practices in the state of *mobistasis* in different ways. That difference between travellers from different countries of origin and convergence among travellers having similar backgrounds are intimately linked to the established trans-local networks and social ties during their state of *mobistasis*. The established trans-local networks are largely fluid and dynamic rather than static and based more on information en route to the resettlement country in the form of mobile knowledge. The mobile knowledge en route to the resettlement country emerges through the production, reproduction and diffusion of information among past, present and future asylum travellers.

This knowledge interaction has tremendous impact on the decision-making process that asylum travellers engage in during their decision to leave the country of origin: which vehicle and which road to take; where to arrive in Turkey; which satellite city to stay in; what to say and not to say during interviews with the UNHCR; and how to behave and not to behave in their satellite cities until the completion of the resettlement process. More importantly, it leads to the establishment of *asylum know-how* between travellers who obtain the information from experienced travellers and pass the accumulated knowledge on to new travellers. The production, reproduction and diffusion of knowledge leads to the perpetuation of established trans-local networks and social ties.

Conflict of interest statement: None declared.

Notes

1. It is important to note that resettlement is not a certainty for recognized refugees in Turkey. Globally, resettlement is available to approximately 1 per cent of refugees. In Turkey, between 2014 and 2018, the numbers of resettlement averaged around 10,000 a year, where Syrians, Iraqis, and Iranians were given preference. Afghans, for example, the second largest group of asylum seekers in Turkey after Syrians (around 170,000 as of March 2018), were resettled much more rarely. (For the numbers of resettlement from Turkey to Canada, see Table 1.) In the article, we cover mostly Iranian and Iraqi resettlement journeys due to their relatively higher numbers and their historically established transnational ties in the county of resettlement. Given that those who can

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Table 1. Number of asylum travellers resettled from Turkey to Canada (2014–18)

Year	Afghanistan	Syria	Iran	Iraq	Other
2014	15	4	1,019	892	19
2015	20	52	352	687	–
2016	–	2,438	193	279	–
2017	–	742	121	327	–
2018	9	132	57	41	–
Total	44	3,368	1,742	2,226	19

Source: UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency, http://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#D2al

access resettlement represent a very small proportion of asylum seekers and refugees in Turkey, we understand the limitations of the research for understanding journeys and transit migration more broadly. However, we also believe that the formal context that the process of resettlement takes place also provides many clues about the disadvantages and advantages of the system, possibly with important policy implications at a time where there are steps for a global governance of refugees and migration.

2. Law on Foreigners and International Protection was published in the *Official Gazette* in April 2013. The Law is translated to 11 languages including Turkish, English, Russian, Italian, Bulgarian, German, Spanish, French, Greek, Persian, and Arabic and documents can be accessed at http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/the-law-on-foreigners-and-international-protection-in-10-languages_914_1017_1405_icerik. English version of LFIP is available at http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/eng_minikanun_5_son.pdf.
3. See, for example, Phillips and Missbach 2017; more specifically, on Turkey, see Biehl 2015, Suter 2017, Wissink et al. 2013; on South America, Basok et al. 2015; Schapendonk 2018 for Italy/Greece.
4. Interview, 25 February 2015. Ottawa, Canada.
5. Interview, 8 January 2015. Ottawa, Canada.
6. Interview, 2 February 2015. Ottawa, Canada.
7. Interview, 2 February 2015. Ottawa, Canada.
8. Interview, 11 July 2014. Istanbul, Turkey.
9. Interview, 10 July 2014. Istanbul, Turkey.
10. Chaldean Assyrian International Humanitarian Association (KADER) is one of the most important organizations for asylum travellers from Iraq. For more detail, see http://kader-turkey.org/.
11. Interview, 26 May 2014. Istanbul, Turkey.
12. Interview, 5 July 2014. Istanbul, Turkey.
13. Interview, 20 February 2012. Istanbul, Turkey; and 5 April 2014. Ottawa, Canada.

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