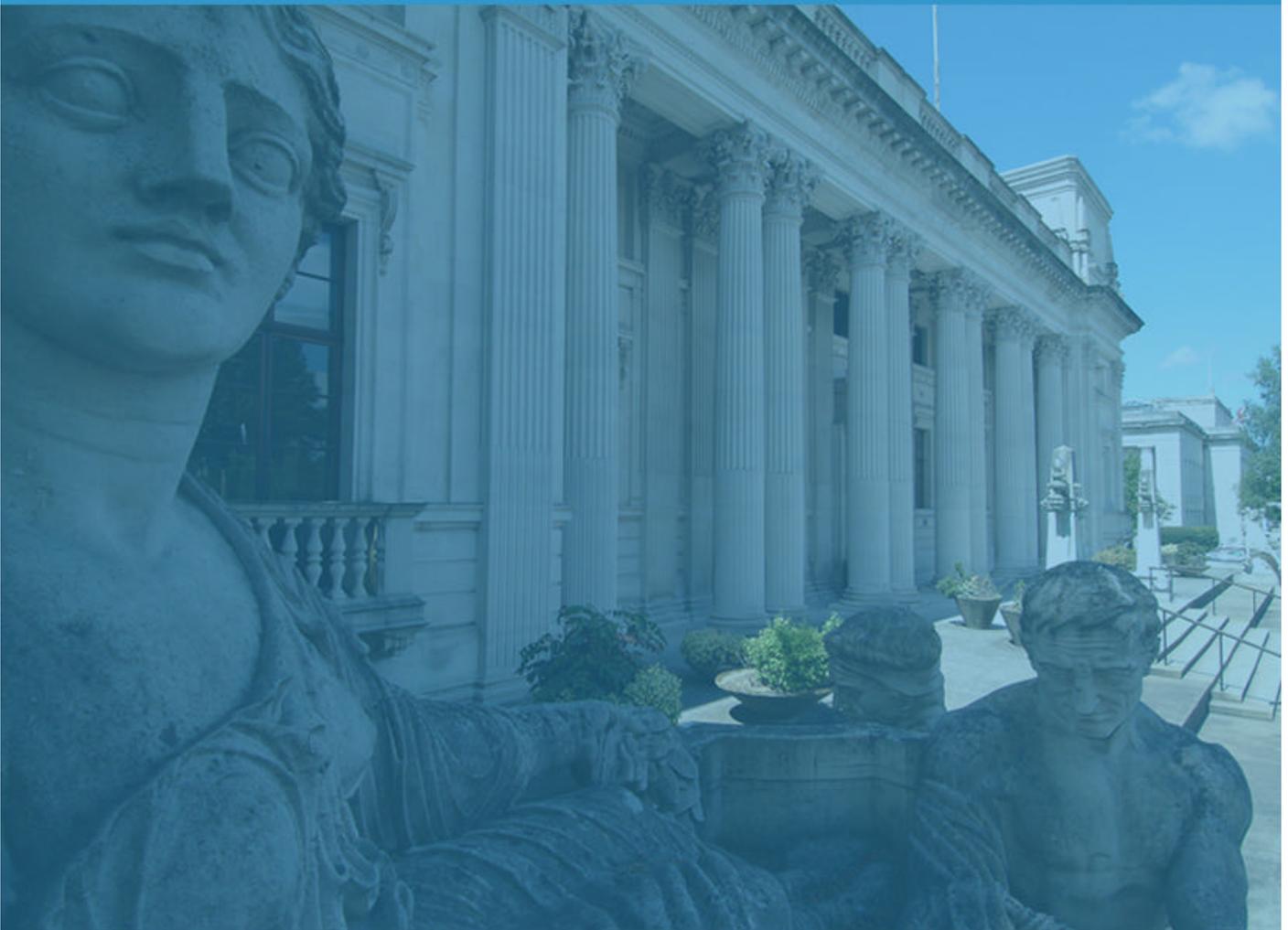


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Working Paper 143: Motivations, Ubiquitous Irrational and a Community of  
Migrant Workers - from Turkey

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## **Motivations, Ubiquitous Irrational and a Community of Migrant Workers –from Turkey**

**Abstract:** This study advances an ethnographic exploration into a community of migrant workers from Turkey. The paper revolves around a fairly straightforward question asking why these people migrate, but the answer turns out to be complicated: Research findings point to the importance of economic dynamics. However, it is not possible to neglect non-economic motivations either. In particular, social/cultural capital and identity formations require a greater recognition. A fuller understanding of migration also necessitates going beyond rationality: economic and non-economic motivations are ubiquitously interwoven with irrational interactions between individuals and structures in both coercive and preferential ways.

**Key Words:** Ethnographic, Motivations, Irrational, Migrant Workers

## ***Introduction***

Mitchell (1959) made an influential distinction between the 'incidence' and 'rate' of migration. The former refers to the set of unique circumstances which induces a particular migrant to leave whereas the latter underlines the factors which determine the volume, trends and patterns. This was a tribute to Durkheim's emphasis on the importance of statistical (rate) explanations for suicide (Durkheim, 1951). Equilibrium theory as the main framework of neo-classical economics also maintained that migration reduced populations in low-growth areas increasing the supplying of labour in growing zones (Portes and Walton, 1972). The poor economies of third world countries were named as the main push factor for international migration. It was indeed empirically evidenced that people migrate from poorer areas/nations to richer ones in order to acquire higher living standards (Blackburn and Mann, 1979; Castles and Miller, 1993).

More recently, economic growth in 'emerging market economies' has also been brought up as a major push factor. It was claimed that as mechanisation and restructuring in agriculture accelerated migration to cities, urban jobs failed to absorb rural immigrants adequately amid the exposure of automation processes and managerial practices to international competition (Harris, 1995; Luttwak, 1998). Meanwhile, the currencies of developed countries have become even stronger pull factors (Mann, 2005). In particular, liberalisation policies have made western labour markets more receptive to 'the reserve army of migrant workers' (Harris, 1995; Luttwak, 1998). Concerns over the disadvantaged work status of migrant workers were essentially rebuffed by policy makers citing remittances as a new source of international development (Datta *et al.* 2007): international transaction figures indicate that migrant workers send home substantial amounts of remittances –\$350bn in 2010 (IMF, 2011). However, the supremacy of economic accounts has faced both theoretical and empirical challenges in terms of explaining migration.

## Non-Economic Motivations

The idea of homo economicus in general was abandoned in favour of more conciliatory frameworks with cultural understandings (Bradley and Fenton, 1999). An increasing number of migration scholars have also begun to take a guarded approach to economic reductionism (Bach, 2007; Barak, 2007; Cohen, 1988; Gray and Johnson, 2008; Massey and Espinoza, 1997; McGovern, 2007). Cohen (1988) argued, for example, that equilibrium theory was flawed by market imperfection in so far as a fatal anarchy was avoided.

Approaches informed by context, structure and individual subjectivities appear to promise a better 'fit', especially with complex and diverse realities (Brannen and Nilsen, 2005). For instance, millions of people have fled homes for political conflicts and wars in recent decades (IOM, 2010). Ethical implications of heralding these people as economic migrants were highly detrimental (Hayter, 2004). In the UK, the government issued a memorandum in 2007 warning civil servants about stigmatisation, but refugees remain under studied.

It is also becoming clearer that migrant workers are no longer necessarily better off than their counterparts at home. Through foreign trade and investment, for example, emerging market economies keep creating urban jobs with viable pay rates relative to living cost (Gray and Johnson, 2008). Increasing inequalities in developed economies, on the other hand, have left precarious migrant workers with extremely low wages; and many of them have become stranded in dept-traps to Gangmasters (Anderson, 2010; Davidson, 2008).

Further, migrant workers are becoming more heterogeneous due to increases in the proportions of those who are coming from relatively better off sections of home countries (McGovern, 2007). Helped by the introduction of point system in Britain, for example, one in four new arrivals was recorded as a degree holder in 2010 (LFS, 2010). Migration of the well-educated has been conventionally studied within 'brain-drain' debates (Devitt, 2010), but many of them are nowadays reported to be overqualified for the jobs they fill. One in

ten migrant workers in elementary jobs, for example, was a degree holder in 2010 (LFS, 2010).

Variations among migrant workers raised academic interests into 'circulatory' (Oteanu, 2007) and 'temporary' migration (Dustmann and Weiss, 2007), although the return of immigrants had been long ignored. Reasons for return can be economic: after the start of recession, for example, the ratio of the outflows of foreign nationals from the EU 15 (as well as the UK) was recorded as high as fifty percent in 2009. However, it had not been too low before the recession either: forty-five percent in 2006 (OECD, 2010). That is, migrant workers may return for non-economic reasons as well (Razum *et al.*, 2005). Some returnees may have migrated temporarily in the first place for, for example, social/cultural capital such as learning English and gaining work experience to take back home (Dustmann and Weiss, 2007). They may also aim to meet people from different cultures, to have adventures or to fulfil their identities within new social settings (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009; Deener, 2010). All these suggest that the depiction of non-economic motivations as 'incidence' (Mitchell 1959) needs empirical and theoretical re-evaluations.

### Reasoning the Irrational

Scholars focused on economic and non-economic motivations of migration usually assumed the existence of a rational decision making process in which people weigh options and possibilities in an environment of free choice (bearing in mind that a freely-reached decision can only operate within the constraints of the opportunities on offer). However, a rationally constructed 'sociological imagination' (Mills, 1959) may fail to capture social complexities fully as irrationality displays a ubiquitous presence.

Irrationality is embedded within the economic and political foundations of contemporary societies. For example, an important aspect of Marx's (1971) critical description of capitalism was its irrationality. Capitalist irrational in his view included the creation of surplus by labour at its own expense (alienation); and sacrificing social benefits to individual profits for competition (anarchy). In

political terms, however, bureaucracy serves for the rationalization of irrational (Weber, 1947) as a way of securing the accomplishment of 'collectivised' goals (Nassehi, 2005). Post-modernist interlockers also emphasised methodological difficulties with a binary polarisation between rational and irrational as shown, for example, by Jackson and Scott (1997) in the case of sexuality: consciously constructed life styles are perceived as rational whereas special and spontaneous ones are perceived as irrational, but they often come together.

In our daily lives, irrational may imply 'absurdities' associated with, for example, cultural symbols such as bikes and leather jackets with old style rock 'n' roll music as a manifestation of political deliberations (Willis, 2010). Irrational can also be a form of social anomy or pathology as pejoratively defined by Merton (1938), but it does not have to be like that always, and it may well be the way around. Crime, for example, may have its own rationale both economically (Luttwak, 1999) and socially as a way of safety and respectability (Garot, 2009), although this does not make crime more preferable. Likewise, irrational may refer to something that we casually label as 'stupid', but it does not have to be like that, and if anything it may be again the way around. For instance, as Bone (2006) pointed out, direct selling organisations irrationally sell their products without profit, but this is 'rationalised' by competitive purposes.

Irrational is by no means less relevant to migration. Xenophobic or racist attitudes, to start with, are frequently based on irrational fears since they reflect prejudices (Billig, 1978). Irrational behaviours are also observed at policy levels: in 2010, for example, a cap on non-EU migrants was introduced, despite the fact that it was dismissed as irrational by many commentators including Vince Cable the business secretary (Rigby *et al.*, 2010). Lack of flexibility in work permits is still prevalent, although it had long been criticised as irrational (Grant, 2007). Similarly, not legalising semi-compliant (Ruhs and Anderson, 2006) or illegal migrants were widely lamented as irrational, not least by the deputy prime minister Nick Clegg, due to tax losses (Dinwoodie, 2010).

Bearing all these issues in mind, I will explore the role of economic, non-economic and irrational factors in the migration decisions of a community of Kurdish and Turkish migrant workers. Despite being the largest group of immigrants across Europe, migrant workers from Turkey remain under researched, especially in the UK. Turkey's candidacy to EU as a Muslim country makes a better comprehension of these people's experiences even more important.

### ***Exploring a community of migrant workers***

Broader frame of this research is informed by life experiences since I joined the community in Cardiff following in the footsteps of 'organic public sociologists' (Burawoy, 2005). I became a community member and setter when it began to emerge in the early years of the millennium. My engagements started with assisting people as an interpreter, and then I added advocacy for official dealings, bureaucratic hurdles and legal matters. Later, I also gained confidence to advice on career and business prospects. Through a 'temporal continuum' (Katz, 2010), such experiences nurtured an empathetic insight into the community.

However, sometimes I could not understand apparently the simplest things: why a Turkish worker, for example, would drive thirty km, from Pentre to Cardiff, to buy lemon juice 'made in Turkey' or some other equally (as I perceived then) trivial things which were probably 'better valued' in the local Sainsbury's anyway. Or how come a woman could not speak a word of English after living some twenty odd years in the UK. To satisfy my curiosity, I embarked on an 'engaged listening' (Forsey, 2010) in the shape of target-oriented observations as well as conversations. Overtime, my ethnographic undertakings turned to systematic inquiries. Specific commentaries provided in this paper about migration motivations are largely based on such exploratory investigations.

Wider setting of my inquiries has a multi-sited character, but differently from the leading bi-spatial study of Bourdieu (2000), it dwells on a variety of

locations within the same and different cities as well as countries covering workplaces, domestic spheres and community organisations from mosques to night clubs. In doing so, this study particularly contributes to the efforts to bridge workplace and community divide (Fitzgerald and Hardy, 2010). My work also differs from most of the later examples of multi-spatial interventions (Wacquant, 2004) in that I studied with not only the same but also different individuals in various settings. The reason for such an accentuated 'multi-sited' approach is because community members are closely connected with relatives and friends in other cities including London, Birmingham and Manchester. They also have transnational links to Germany, Greece, Iraqi Kurdistan and Azerbaijan in addition to Turkey.

The most commonly used language is Turkish but some Kurds refuse to speak Turkish considering it to be an '*albatross of colonial assimilation*'. Instead, they prefer English or German as well as Kurdish. Nor are they impressed with being called 'Turkish (-speaking) Communities'. The war of Kurds for independence from Turkey feeds into some geographical and political divisions in London: Kurds mostly live in Hackney and Haringey whereas Turks have a higher density in Stoke Newington and surrounding boroughs. Bitter relations amount to stereotypes: Some Turks call Kurds '*terrorist*' (militants of PKK, Kurdish Workers' Party) and some Kurds call Turks '*fascist*'. They also mutually incriminate each other as '*sebeke*' – member of drug networks in Turkey accounting for seventy percent of heroin smuggled into Britain (Independent, 2011).

However, the community in Cardiff as the core source of findings reported in this paper mainly lacks such divisions. Although it is a relatively small one, the community is scattered across the city. This is not a neighbourhood community. As opposed to London-based communities with similar backgrounds, only a few community members in Cardiff work in the kebab sector. They work in a variety of jobs from waitressing in Café Rouge to running international property agencies. Yet symbiosis is unmistakable as

firmly stated by a fishmonger<sup>1</sup>: *'we are only few in Wales and we need to be social. Therefore we often see each other. We eat kebab or Chinese together or seek help from each other to find a job or to barrow'*.

## ***Economic Motivations***

Historically, international migration from Turkey has two distinct stages: The first one came in the 1960s and 1970s when hundreds of thousands of people migrated, especially to Germany as 'guest workers'. A high level of poverty and the rarity of opportunities to improve living standards in Turkey had been blamed for the migration (White, 1997). Since the mid-1980s, on the other hand, Turkey has had one of the fastest growing economies in the World. The growth paradoxically gave a further momentum to migration because of the exclusion of people from economic life, especially for agricultural mechanisation, industrial automation and managerial rationalisation (Cam, 2007). This second wave widened the presence of migrant workers from Turkey across Europe and Britain (including Wales more recently).

Many members of the community in Cardiff emphasised that they left home for economic reasons. A Kurdish plumber said that his family had to move from their village giving up husbandry because of cheaper meat imports. When they went to Diyarbakir, they realised that *'there was no way to support the family'*, and *'things did not get any better after moving to Istanbul'*. Once the opportunity emerged to come to Europe, they decided *'to have a go in England'*. His wife said that *'I would not leave home if it were not for sending money to my father-in-law'*. Economic motivations were evident among Turkish participants as well: A bar tender typically noted that *'more and more young people like me want to escape to other countries for jobs'*.

Economic factors in deciding to migrate are so pronounced that migration itself turns out to be a business investment in some cases. A taxi driver said that *'you should pay traffickers around £10K'*. A cleaner also pointed out that

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, personal information about participants is limited by the terms of anonymity and confidentiality for their consent

*'...or you should show a handsome balance in your account to convince Home Office that you will be able to support yourself without benefit.'* Sometimes the money required can be obtained from relatives but *'you have to pay it back with a ridiculous interest rate, especially if you barrow from small lenders'*. Kemal who runs an upholstery workshop sarcastically uttered that *'you have to be rich to come to rich countries'*.

Economic motivations are also evident among asylum seekers, and this consolidates ethnic tensions. A Turkish carer, for example, critically argued that *'asylum seekers are mostly Kurdish people who lie to blacken our homeland for the sake of living on the dole in England'*. However, defensiveness is not ambiguous either: after some heated debates around a raki table, discussants established that *'when the West imposed visa restrictions on economic migrants, especially unemployed Kurds were left with no choice other than applying for asylum... this is a shame on imperialist powers and comprador bourgeoisie, but not on the victims'*. Criticism was deepened for the ban on employing asylum seekers: *'because of this restriction, people are trapped in illegal exploitation with no rights for minimum wage or anything else.'* In response to my intervention to remind that Home Office provided accommodation and support in asylum centres, a refugee who could not go home for seven years snapped at me: *'government talks about human rights, but it is silent about suicides in refugee concentration camps'*.

Members of the community send remittances for helping relatives back home, but participants usually reported that *'larger parts of the money go for buying a home, a summer house or small investments'*. To prevent such savings from leaving the country, the British government has encouraged visa applications in recent years as a businessperson under the provisions of the European Community Association Agreement with Turkey (known as 'Ankara Agreement' within the community). The policy also aims to attract small savings from Turkey whilst prioritising the relatives of immigrants. During our conversations, small savers deemed the UK *'a good place for investment, especially for its strong currency'*.

Although it is difficult to give a reliable number about those who came to Britain through the Ankara Agreement, it apparently helped the expansion of businesses from kebab takeaways to restaurants and franchised big brands such as McDonalds, KFC and Beef Eater, especially in London and Manchester. Further, a variety of businesses has emerged beyond the food industry, from jewellery shops and car dealers to running bars/pubs and cinemas. Such developments witnessed a considerable increase in economic migrants in recent years. In particular, as an instance of chain migration (Castles and Miller, 1993), employers mostly indicated that *'we prefer fellow migrant workers from Turkey'*. The spreading of companies has also made it more difficult to talk about an 'ethnic economy' as defined by a mono-cultural homogeneity among customers (Edward and Ram, 2006). Even so, economic spectrums do not seem to be enough to understand the diversity within the community in terms of migration motivations.

### ***Beyond Economic Motivations***

Non-economic migration motivations vary from the long-term care of an autistic child, for example, to seeking asylum. Asylum seekers are usually under estimated due to those who have economic motivations. However, daily clashes of protestors with the police in the eastern provinces of Turkey like Diyarbakir and Batman, as well as the on-going war between the army and PKK guerrillas in rural mountains are an arresting indicator of political unrest. Tensions are also exacerbated by the heavy-handed strategies of the government: A waiter at Hilton, for example, said that *'to block logistic supports to guerrillas, the state forced us to evacuate our village. For the safety of my family, PKK brought us to England'*. There are also cases in which people are not officially asylum seekers but they effectively take refuge in the UK. A decorator who was a columnist back in Turkey said that *'I am waiting for the enactment of the freedom of thought bill as part of the Copenhagen Criterion'*(EU stipulations for accession).

Nor does everyone whose visa is based on *'Ankara Agreement'* actually have economic motivations. To be sure, people in such positions sign up for the agreement to set up businesses and appear to have started businesses. They comply with legal niceties, from opening business accounts to renting shops and paying all taxes as well as using professional accountancy services. However, they do not necessarily operate businesses. A chartered accountant highlighted that *'there is a legal complication because of fake trades. Home Office is aware of the issue, but it is difficult to press for the charges since paper-works are done properly'*. In an attempt to crackdown on such schemes, the government made it compulsory in March 2011 to apply only from within Turkey, hoping that this would reduce the use of personal contacts to organise *'imaginary businesses'*. However, the plan largely remains on hold due to strong criticisms for obstructing investments from within the UK.

It is sociologically meaningful to ask why these people are not actually running their shops. As a general pattern, *'the important thing'*, in the words of Rojda who is a freelance journalist, *'is to stay in the UK as long as necessary'*. Such businesses are regarded as *'a way of buying visa'* rather than worthy enterprises per se. Another participant reaffirmed this in a striking way: *'there is more to life than selling watermelons'*. Such failures to conform to conventional economic theories are not peculiar to those who signed up for the Ankara Agreement to operate *'imaginary businesses'*. It is a more common phenomenon among the community members.

Many people said that *'I am here just temporarily... I am planning to go back sometime soon'*. Some of the community members want to stay in the UK in order to gain *'right to stay'* (indefinite leave to remain) or to become citizen. One should keep in mind that the desire to go back is occasionally set back by the scarcity of job opportunities in Turkey, especially for the better educated (Fearn, 2011). However, owing to language barriers, for example, those who had been educated in Turkey (other than in Britain) are less likely to get a job in the UK that would pay off on a par with alternative jobs in Turkey. Indeed, even those who have become British citizen tend go back to Turkey *'soon after finding a good-enough job for a decent life'*.

Well educated members of the community usually work in low pay jobs: *'I am a survey engineer by training but I am doing the dishes in Pizza Hot'* said one of them. Another one complained that *'I have master degree in journalism but I am working as a babysitter'*. A computer engineer added that *'I keep finding excuses to postpone my mother's visit because she may have heart attack if she learns that I am working as a fetch-boy in a grocery shop'*. These highly educated people are also involved in a wider range of works which do not require their skills at all, such as gardening, body-guarding and bus driving.

Notion of the 'relative value of penny' (Mann, 2005) does not work for the better educated: First of all, those who signed up for the Ankara Agreement are allowed only to run their own businesses. Therefore, *'the operators of imaginary businesses'* actually work illegally in temporary jobs. Many more members of the community are also semi-compliant (Ruhs and Anderson, 2006) due to lack of work permit. As a result, their pay is often below the minimum wage. Nevertheless, another commonly suggested reason for this was the *'westernised life style of educated people'*. A participant said that *'I fancy eating out, clubbing and trendy brands. Because I cannot afford any of these, my family supports me from Turkey'*. Such occasional incidents of financial support from home are obviously at odds with the economic explanations of migration.

Many of those who do not fit into a typology of economic migrant want to go to language schools or study for master, but only few of them can manage this: a typical response was *'I feel frustrated by limited funding opportunities and expensive tuition fees... It would be cheaper if Turkey were in the EU'*. Participants also critically commented on the removal of public funds for free English courses, ESOL in 2009; and the tightening of attendance controls in language schools by Home Office since 2010 in order to combat fake studentship visas. They argued that such policies *'put people off the language'*. However, some participants also see the community's itself as a *'honey trap'*. A gardener said that *'it is fun to hang around with Turkish people but it slows down my progress in English'*. Instead, they try to make British friends yet this is often denied by a *'racist exclusion'*. *'Even if you have*

*friends*; a call-on nurse furthered, *'English people [she meant the British] are cold. They never invite me to Xmas dinners'*. English learners also become friends with other foreigners to practice, but in the words of a teacher, *'pragmatism limits the continuity of friendships'*.

Identity politics plays a central role in terms of non-economic motivations: community members, for example, speak very highly of *'the opportunities provided by the British multi-culturalism for self-realisation'* within ethnic, gender and religious realms. Such a perception is most prevalent among gay and lesbian groups. Lesbian communities, for example, have nation-wide and international networks. They occasionally gather in exclusive pubs and clubs in London and Manchester for Turkish, Kurdish, Iranian, Azeri and Greek lesbians, but a few white British also join them. A Kurdish lesbian said that *'if I were in Istanbul, I would not feel safe even in the streets of Beyoglu, although it is the most relaxed district in Turkey. Everyday we hear the news of a women getting scar-faced or nitric acid thrown to'*.

Community members occasionally associate their identity with places (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009; Deener, 2010). Accessibility of international transport made it less of trouble for people who wish to travel to other countries without an economic rational. Taking the opportunity of inexpensive tickets, some participants want to acquire, for example, multi-spatial identities. A council worker said that *'I don't have to live in either Istanbul or London. I am not a millionaire, but I can live in both cities at the same time thanks to Easy Jet'*. Further, several respondents argued that *'staying in the UK even for a short while is what defines you when you go back home'*. One of them added that *'people may not know your name but they will know that you are the one who came from England. You instantly become a local fame'*.

Crucially, original motivations for migration sometimes do not shed light on the big picture, especially when they are set aside over time in favour of new considerations. Abandoning economic goals after their attainment to certain degree, for example, is often the case among migrant workers who want to go back home due to, for example, lack of integration, racism or sentimental

reasons (Razum *et al.*, 2005). Sehriban, mother of a two-year old toddler said that *'I want to go back before the boy starts to school. I don't want to throw my baby at the mercy of racist teachers or drug dealers'*. Such concerns confirm previous research findings on challenges to children's academic development (Enneli *et al.*, 2005).

Likewise, the reasons for coming to Britain may no longer be the same reasons for wishing to remain in the country. Younger men among 'economic migrants', for instance, frequently underlined that although they would like to go back to Turkey, they could not do so because of conscription. A Kurdish man said that *'I might get drafted to the war against my people if I go back'*. Some Turks also refuse national service on the basis of *'conscientious responsibilities'*. The following section will focus on various motivations for migrating to, or remaining in the UK that lack a straightforward rational.

### ***Ubiquitous Irrational and Motivations***

*I came here believing that this country was a paradise...I was not the only one who thought so...Do I know what the heck for I am still here..? I came here ten years ago. The person who came here is not me any more... I am still trying to find a way to clear up her mess ...'*

A dietician

The findings of this research point to a multi-faceted irrationality: sometimes my observations fell into a grey area between rational and irrational; sometimes the irrational emerged as a structural as well as an individual/personal occurrence. Sometimes it turned out to be either coercive or preferential as well as both. What follows will explore such ubiquitous characteristics of the irrational in the day-to-day life of the community for a fuller understanding of migration motivations.

To distinguish the irrational from the rational is not always easy. It does not make perfect sense, for example, if some pious Muslims say that they live in Britain for religious freedom, although they came from a Muslim country with an explicitly pro-Islamic party in office over the past decade. However, this can also be seen as a 'plausible' response to the state of affairs: after

complaining about the political influence of secular military and judiciary, an imam added that *'I don't want my daughter to get educated in Turkey... those powerful infidels don't allow headscarves in schools'*.

Irrational may occur within the terrains of personal choices as revealed by some conversations on marriage. Despite clamorous policy rhetorics about 'the industry of con marriages', marriage for money is quite unusual within the community. However, what a participant called the *'marriage of convenience'* is more common. She stipulated that *'it is a real marriage but romance is blended with a promise of UK passport for the spouse'*. In particular, the most telling, if not incredible, tales are missed out amid the moral panic about 'fake marriages': the hope of finding the true love of life, for example, is sometimes the main drive for coming to Britain. In a gathering of mixed-race couples, a woman said that *'when I was a teenager, I asked my granny to pray for me to find an English husband. But she refused it saying that they were gavur (non-Muslim). Then I promised her that I would ask him to convert to Islam. Her preys were accepted (well, partly: he is Welsh, but then again I was lying about the conversion stuff, anyway)'*. Because I could not hide my scepticism about such stories, a 'house-husband' –with a PhD in mathematics– asked me to remember the *'usual funniness of manners in which people may decide to become a soldier or doctor when they grow up'*.

### Educational Irrational as a Social/Cultural Capital

Irrational may encapsulate individual and institutional realms together as exemplified in the case of education. Quite a few participants reported that they had decided to come to Britain for, in the words of one of them, *'educated bull-shitting'*. A hairdresser who is a distance learner in one of the fashion and design colleges in London said that *'when I was in Turkey, I used to admire models educated in Europe. That's why, I came here, but when I started to study, I realised that most of the girls like me went to schools which distributed certificates simply for money, rather than providing a proper education. Then I also figured out that the top models featuring talk shows on Turkish TVs had done the same... Who cares about the quality of education as long as you*

*have the etiquette from London or Paris...? What actually matters is torpil* (Turkish for supporter): *Who do you know and how well do they know you, if you know what I mean?*

Irrationality is also related to different types of training/education programmes. Most respondents, for example, said that *'when you go back home, people think that your English is perfect, no matter how good or bad it actually is'* A participant particularly commented that *'even if your English is very competent, it is irrelevant to most of the jobs you may get anyway. I don't know why companies prefer English speakers when it is not necessary'*. During our conversations, it was acknowledged that although proficiency in English may not be useful for specific tasks at work, *'employers prefer people with international experience'* since it helps raise employee profile. Nevertheless, *'wasting so much money, time and effort to learn English abroad'* for the impression management of companies is deemed *'unjustifiable'* by participants.

Some students also tend to think that the *'stuff'* they do in master classes does not give a sense of specialisation, especially in social sciences. They hardly believe that they will be able to offer their future employers some skills that they obtain through master programmes. Nor do they, however, expect those employers to ask for *'a great deal of skills mastered in courses'*. A master student said that *'our teachers in Turkey can offer programs for specific skill requirements'*. Such participants occasionally accused the ruling parties of cronyism for *'rewarding their men's children with education in the West'*. Pertinently, this view also resonates the reservations of Higher Education Council about funding international master education (MEB, 2010), although one might see some potentials in sending students abroad.

### Economic Irrational

In the world of migrant workers, the irrational may well be interwoven with economic rational. Using a conventional wisdom, for example, banks charge remittance fees to their best (Datta *et al.*, 2007), but this in effect means the loss of potential profits: A worker said that *'banks get thirty quid for five*

*hundred pounds. That's why we usually send our monies with friends or relatives'.*

Irrational behaviours of economic institutions have more tangible impacts on migrant workers, especially at recessionary times since they may trigger, for example, a forced return: Indeed, a Kurdish woman selling tinsel articles came to the brink of deportation. She said that *'all stores are closing in this shopping centre one by one because of the recession. The arcade management refuses a temporary reduction on rents. A little bit flexibility would benefit the shopping centre as well as individual shop owners. I could also avoid bankruptcy and deportation.'*

Irrational sometimes becomes an economically rational response of individuals to coercive structures. Some shop owners, for instance, said that *'we show artificially higher profits on the book to pay more tax, although we are at the brink of bankruptcy'*. Yusuf lent his story to solve this puzzle: *'I started to run an off-licence four years ago, but two months later a Tesco-Express came to the street. And then it got licence to remain open till late. It can sell a lot cheaper with no middle-men for imports. I lost most of my customers during the recession. But I have to apply for visa extension: I will pretend that business is doing very well to avoid deportation.'*

When deportation actually looms over, the rational may give the way to desperate measures. As the budget for free legal aid has been tightened in recent years, for example, private legal services have expanded substantially (KeyNote, 2009). Several members of the community are using private law firms to avoid deportation, but these firms are often so expensive that some of them are even based in the City. In response to the paradox of the poorest using the most expensive law firms, a solicitor said that *'desperate people go under huge debts to pay lawyers, especially if the case is hopeless'*.

The very presence of economic migrants in the UK is sometimes resulted from what one might call 'organised irrational'. During the last decade, there were increases in the number of betting shops, especially in poorer areas led by oligopolistic companies such as Ladbroke and William Hill (KeyNote,

2010). Traditional café houses which are exclusively for men also provide informal gambling avenues for the community members. Players occasionally gamble over what is left after losing for a while. However, the individual who wagers his life savings on a roll of the dice and wins is at most twice as happy as before; should he lose, he is psychologically destroyed (Sallaz, 2008). Kept out of a male dominated industry of gambling, some wives complained that *'we were ready to go back home after saving for years, but the husband has lost everything at gambling'*.

Economic rationale of being in the UK may also turn to something irrational because of intrinsic ambiguities in 'self' and 'self-interest': after a long pause to choose the right words, one of many unpaid woman workers (Erel and Tomlinson, 2005) sighed that *'my husband may leave me with nothing if we get a divorce, but he would have to look after the kids.'* When I said *'children are not you'*, her reply was *'I am everything for them'*. Blurred boundaries between 'self' and others may prolong the stay of migrant workers in the UK since the irrational and destructive antonyms are deeply rooted in 'self-interest' (DuGay, 2005). Some migrant workers, for instance, send home remittances at their own expenses. To make savings, they work every day with only couple of hours of sleep by turn in shared rooms with several beds. A delivery man living in one of these kinds of places on top of a takeaway shop said that *'I am going to get a marble grave for my father and then maybe we can start a restaurant in Turkey... I don't want to live here too long like my father... I should spend some time at home to enjoy myself before I die... But Allah knows maybe the council will sort me in a crematory if I work even longer to please everybody in the family.'*

### Becoming British is a 'tough-craft'

Politics of identity also has its own irrational components that influence people's decisions on migration, survival strategies and return. A graduate said that *'I came to this country for white wash... I have the chance to claim to top of the food chain. My children can become white Welsh or English even if I am married to a Turk'*. Such a perception has historical roots across Turkey-

originated migrant workers around the World, although not all community members consider themselves white: The British government, for example, introduced 'other white' into the 1972 census to cover migrant workers from Turkey, and they were officially recognised as 'white' by the 1986 racial pay discrimination act in Australia.

Community members also play to racial irrationalities as a survival strategy in the UK. Restaurants, for example, improvise manoeuvres to reverse white reticence (Modood, 2011): a manager remarked that *'after nine/eleven, it took years to recover because of Islamphobia...customers penalised us for terrorist attacks. That's why we started to sell alcohol'*. The owner of another restaurant said that *'since the beginning of the recession, only the rich eat out, but most of them want nothing more exotic than continental food. Although our chief makes the best kebab in Britain* (she referred to a recent survey result by the Times), *they hardly come here because of our Ottoman style decoration. We have to dress up the shop with a European outlook to survive'*. Indeed, the turnover of a third restaurant posing as Italian *'didn't fall so badly during the recession'*, and another restaurant advertising *'Genuine English Cosine'* managed to get away *'with a few scratches'*.

Rejecting non-white neighbours with a –gendered– racism, some community members prefer *'clean districts'*, a crypto for white neighbourhoods: women were *'essentially indifferent'*, for example, about black neighbours, but several men blatantly stereotyped black men for *'failing to take up family responsibilities'* along with some anecdotes of *'street-fights against them'*. In the case of Arab neighbours, on the other hand, many men displayed 'conspiratorial irrational' (Locke, 2006) condemning the historical war of Arabs for independence from the Ottoman as an *'act of betrayal'*. Even so, they boast having *'sympathy toward Arabs as internationally suppressed Muslim brothers.'* Against this, some women, especially the ones who tended to define themselves as *'laik'* (secular) had no qualm in caricaturing Arab men as *'sexist and oppressive influence on women hiding behind twisted interpretations of Quran'*.

Consequently, the racist rejection of non-white communities counter-couples 'a pride-bruising exclusion' of themselves by the white British, paving the way for a sense of isolation. Most community members respond to this by creating 'replica-home-islands' at smaller scales in the UK: they are tapped into a transnational existence through cyber networks. Social gatherings are also dominated by celebrity gossips, TV series and premier league news from home. Thus, staying in the UK 'to become British' is hollowed down to a presumed 'temporary period of hunting universal privileges'. A housewife said that 'I look forward to returning home after getting the red (British passport) as an insurance policy for the kids'. The final word, however, usually belongs to coffee-fortune in telling whether or not somebody will bankrupt and/or 'end up with the shame of failure back at home'.

## **Conclusions**

This paper explored motivations behind migration in the case of a migrant workers' community from Turkey, and thereby sought to rectify the lack of systematic research in this area. Our findings suggest that migration is much influenced by economic dynamics. It had been historically propelled by Turkey's poverty (Blackburn and Mann, 1979; Castles and Miller, 1993), but economic growth in recent decades has also given a further momentum (Cam, 2007; Harris, 1995; Luttwak, 1998).

Even so, motivations beyond economic factors can no longer be reduced to 'incidents' as opposed to the 'rate' of migration (Mitchell 1959). Indeed, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to see migration simply as a matter of making money abroad (Bach, 2007; Barak, 2007; Cohen, 1988; Gray and Johnson, 2008; Massey and Espinoza, 1997; McGovern, 2007). As a product of economic growth in Turkey, for example, middle classes have also joined migration convoys with motivations beyond economic determinants. They may work abroad but they do not necessarily send remittances to home. On the contrary, they receive financial support from Turkey. They migrate to obtain social/cultural capital or to identify themselves within new spatial and

social environments (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009). Above all, Kurds' war for independence is a non-economic push factor for asylum seekers, substantiating the UN's concerns further over global displacements (Hayter, 2004).

Studies on both economic and non-economic motivations have overlooked the importance of irrational. The role of irrational has been underlined in various areas including economics (Bone, 2006; Garot, 2009; Luttwak, 1999; Marx, 1971) and politics (Nassehi, 2005; Weber, 1947) as well as culture (Jackson and Scott 1997; Willis, 2010). It is, however, neglected in terms of migration, although the experience of migration may compel people to use their potentials to a maximum capacity. This includes the utilisation of 'irrational' responses to 'rational' situations as well as the way around. Thus, migration provides yet another social setting for the rationalisation of irrational by structures (Weber, 1947). Even so, sometimes irrational simply mirrors an exaggerated notion of 'reflexive workers' (Atkinson, 2010). Such multi-faceted appearances in general point to the ubiquitous nature of irrational.

Certain issues highlighted in this paper have policy implications. Migrant workers' skills, for example, are wasted due to over qualification. Potential tax revenues are also lost since people send their remittances to home through personal channels to avoid punitively expensive transaction fees in the loophole of under regulated financial services. The same applies to inflexible visa and work permit procedures for pushing migrant workers to a semi-compliant (Ruhs and Anderson, 2006) or illegal status (Anderson, 2011). Further, preventative measures to limit gambling should be considered as it curbs potential returns and reinvestments. Finally, addressing the deficiencies in free legal aid provisions would not only mitigate against the exploitation of vulnerable people by unscrupulous law firms but also the loss of public resources for the clog of appeal hearings.

There should be further explorations into motivations as a dynamic process. It is important to understand the limits of original migration motivations in

explaining a migrant worker's presence in the host society: the reasons for deciding to migrate in the first place may become overridden by different reasons for remaining or returning home. Accordingly, temporality and, hence, continual investigations are essential for a fuller insight into migration. To advance better-fitting sociological models for migration, however, there is also a need for the recognition of irrational as a ubiquitous counterpart of rational behaviours by individuals and structures.

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