

TRANSIT MIGRATION: AN UNNOTICED AREA IN ETHNOMUSICOLOGY¹

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Abstract: *As a result of the expanding human mobilization in the today's world due to wars, workforce markets, etc., the scope of migration and diaspora studies has increased in many areas. This is also true for musical studies, where a growing body of literature has been produced about these issues. However, by focusing mainly on settled communities and their musical productions, such as hybrid genres and forms created in the destination land, this literature does not adequately cover "transit migration". Transit migration, being a particular type of human mobility, refers to the migration that includes at least three or more steps. This means that transit migrants do not permanently inhabit the land they firstly enter as migrants, but are supposed to stay in this transit country for a while and then continue their journey in order to reach a final destination point.*

In this article, I deal with this specific type of migration based on my intense field study on the Chaldean-Iraqi migrant community in Istanbul. The Chaldean community in Iraq, as a religious minority, is one of the most affected groups in the ongoing situation in Iraq, especially after the US invasion in 2003. Turkey functions as a transit country on their way to their prospective destination points, mainly including the US, Canada, and Australia.

While dealing with the role of music during the indefinite time period that the participants are in the process of being temporary inhabitants in a foreign land, the applicability of the theoretical concepts of permanent migration to temporary migration is also discussed.

Keywords: *transit migration; Chaldean-Iraqi migrants; migration studies in ethnomusicology*

¹ This article is derived from the doctoral dissertation of the author, approved in March 2015, entitled "Music in Transit: Musical Practices of the Chaldean-Iraqi Migrants in Istanbul".

Timothy Rice (2010), in his article *Disciplining Ethnomusicology: A Call for a New Approach*, published in the Call and Response section of the journal *Ethnomusicology*, criticized the tendency of ethnomusicology to accept the paradigms that other disciplines in the social sciences offer instead of developing its own theoretical framework. Although Rice focused his criticism on the concept of identity, I believe that this critical point of view might also be applicable to the studies on migration in ethnomusicology. In this respect, this article, through the analysis of the musical practices of the Chaldean-Iraqi migrant community in Istanbul, aims to address this theoretical question directly in the context of transit migration by focusing on its specific nature.

Although human mobility is not unique to the 20th century, studies on folklore and musical folklore have tended to examine the effect of mass migration movements after World War II on community, region, nation, ethnicity, et cetera. Consequently, because of both the increase in human mobility and its visibility via the communication opportunities of a globalized and more technologically advanced world, migration has become one of the main interests of ethnomusicology since the 1970s (Bohlman 2011: 155–156). Aside from this fact, the effect of the paradigm shift in ethnomusicology due to postmodern tendencies (Barz and Cooley 1997: 11) has also made migration in the post-colonial world one of the new study areas in the discipline.

As might be expected, the interest of ethnomusicologists lies mainly in the musical production of settled migrant communities in various countries, usually the musical products of second and third generation migrants. Since these migrant communities, which are constantly in contact thanks to the growing effect of globalization, are generally spread out over many regions and countries, the literature on music and migration has appealed to a theoretical framework of diaspora studies and transnationalism.

During the expansion of migration studies in social science literature, temporary migration, namely transit migration, has become one of the main focal points in various fields of social science. But ethnomusicology has hardly paid any attention to this type of migratory processes, and transit migration has remained an unexplored area in the discipline.

Transit Migration and the Chaldean-Iraqi Migrant Community in Istanbul

The Chaldean-Iraqi community is a Catholic Christian ethno-religious community rooted in Mesopotamia. Even though Chaldean migration, beginning in the early twentieth century, has led to their establishment of economic and social networks spanning Europe and North America, the emigration of this group gained speed following the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s and the Gulf War in 1991, reaching its peak after the 2003 US invasion. Especially with the United Nations advisory in December 2006,² the ongoing violence in central and southern Iraq was officially recognized, and applicants from these regions were accepted as asylum seekers. Subsequently the number of Iraqis in Turkey rose to 10,000, with the Chaldean Christians comprising the majority of this flow.

I conducted a long-term field study from September 2011 to September 2014 with the Chaldean transit migrant community in Istanbul, whose members emigrated from Iraq mainly in recent years. Members of this community have been granted or are seeking asylum status in order to migrate to a third country and to stay in Istanbul temporarily as transit migrants. My field research was mostly conducted with the young members of the community; considering age and gender as the basic axis, even if in a limited manner. I have tried to also deal with the participation in the musical practices of the older generations. My field research in Istanbul has also covered many formal and informal interviews with the members of the Chaldean-Turkish community³, with other Iraqi communities in Istanbul, and with the officials of some migrant organizations. The research also had a six-month phase, carried out in the US, which consisted of interviews with Chaldean families from Iraq who recently immigrated to Houston, Texas through Turkey. I have also interviewed second-generation Chaldean migrants who live in New York, USA and Toronto, Canada.

When I started to conduct my fieldwork in the church, I found the opportunity to participate in the services and rehearsals as an observer. But as soon as they learned I play the violin, they asked me to accompany them in their ceremonies. After playing in some services together, the community members accepted my presence as a member of the church. Thus, my starting to accompany them was a turning point for my position in the field. I not only

² “UNHCR Advisory and Position on International Protection Needs of Iraqis outside of Iraq”.

³ The Chaldean community that lives in Turkey as Turkish citizens.

went from the position of an observer to a participant-observer, I also became a “member” of the church choir, an object of my own study. Briefly stated, the respect I gained from them was not from being a researcher in a field they are not familiar with, but from the fact that I play the violin, an instrument that they really adore. Thus, my musical expertise allowed me to connect with them on a deep level.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN/ECE) defines the term “transit migration” as “the migration in one country with the intention of seeking the possibility there to emigrate to another country as the country of final destination” (1993: 7). Because of various cases in which migrants enter the transit land illegally or stay past the expiration date of their visas, transit migration is generally referred to as “irregular” and “illegal” in migration literature. Additionally, in other types of transit migratory processes, such as circular labor migration, asylum seekers and refugees constitute transit migrant groups in official literature.

Turkey, because of its geographical location, is a transit zone for the migrants from African, Asian, and Middle Eastern countries who intend to migrate to European and the other Western countries (İçduygu and Yükseler 2010). The Chaldean-Iraqi community is one of the asylum seeker/refugee communities in Turkey. Being members of one of the communities of Iraq that must leave the country due to ongoing violence, especially after the 2003 invasion, the Chaldean-Iraqi migrants enter Turkey in order to apply to the United Nations for formal refugee status. This will allow them to be sent to a final destination in the US, Canada, or Australia. Although the application process sends them to satellite cities in Turkey, because of the economic possibilities (informal job opportunities, et cetera) and the given social networks, such as the established community of Chaldean-Iraqi migrants, and religious networks, the Chaldean church, Christian organizations, et cetera, many find ways to stay in Istanbul, whether it is legal or not.

Kurtuluş⁴ and Dolapdere are two of the main areas of settlement in Istanbul for the Chaldean migrants from Iraq, as well as other Iraqi and non-Iraqi immigrant communities. However, since Istanbul is an expensive city, staying there brings financial difficulties in addition to the risks associated with living with an

⁴ These are two areas are in the center of the city in terms of their locality, but they have hosted religious and ethnic minorities and migrants throughout their history. Iraqi immigrants call Kurtuluş “Little Baghdad.”

illegal status. Unfortunately, the asylum seekers and the refugees in Istanbul, as well as in Turkey in general, face chronic unemployment. Even if they are lucky enough to find a job, they are usually paid less than Turkish citizens. Moreover, immigrants are often forced to work illegally, making them vulnerable to abuse. Because of the high numbers of illegal cases in transit migration, these migrants are usually portrayed “as victims as opposed to a threat” (Düvell 2006: 7). However, another perspective posits international migrants, especially transit or “irregular” ones, as infringers of the borders of the nation-state and of the order which it symbolizes. This perspective brings the aspect of security into the discourses and policies towards migrants. It is important to keep in mind that these approaches do not offer an adequate understanding of the given situation and ignore the fact that these migrants are indeed human agents that can develop strategies to integrate themselves into the cultural and economic life of the countries they live in, albeit unofficially.

Transit migration transcends the dichotomy that dominates the theoretical framework of migration studies between the country of origin and the destination point, as seen in migration theory based on pull-push factors. Instead, transit migration adds a third component: the transit phase/land. The best word to describe the essence of this transit phase as the core of this type of migration can be “uncertainty,” both in an economic and a psychological sense. The uncertainty felt today discourages migrants from creating permanent relationships with and developing expectations from the circumstances that surround them. Rather, these expectations and hopes are postponed to the future.⁵ In other words, the feeling of being “unsettled” restricts the social and cultural relationships that can be formed with the local culture⁶. For instance, Chaldean-Iraqi migrants in Turkey are reluctant to learn Turkish. Hence, the cultural production in this specific phase of migration has shown relatively limited interaction with the climate of the local culture. In this sense, the theoretical framework for migration in the ethnomusicology literature, which deals with settled communities, provides very limited insight.

⁵ Considering the extensive human mobility of today, one can assume that the concepts of settled and migrant become questionable; in this case, however, the knowledge of being unsettled provides a consciousness of the migrant’s own temporary situation.

⁶ Of course, this “local culture” cannot be seen as a united entity, but rather a fragmented whole, and migrants develop separate relationships with each unit. In this point, it is important to note that Istanbul is a cosmopolitan city, and the neighborhoods in which the Chaldean migrants live also host multiple other ethnic groups, such as Kurds, Romani people, Armenians, and Syrians, among others.

The Literature on Transit Migration in Ethnomusicology

Unlike the musical products of transit communities, those of settled migrant communities bear the traces of the interactions between the migrant and host cultures. This can create a newly visible, hybrid form of music. In this context, studying the change or re-shaping process of musical genres or styles that migrant communities have brought with them, and the “mimetic” reproduction of the given forms in the destination point, constitute the main tendencies of the field. On the other hand, transit communities have remained at the margins of migration studies in ethnomusicology, because they tend to not stay in the transit region long enough to create new musical styles or establish strong enough bonds with the host culture to create hybrid musical products that ethnomusicologists can study.

Literature on migration and music in general has expanded rapidly in the beginning of the 21st century, during the same years that the concept of diaspora emerged as a new paradigm in music and migration studies (Solomon 2014: 319). One of the earlier attempts in ethnomusicological literature that focused on migration was the special issue of *World of Music* in 1990, which had a particular emphasis on the term “exile” (Reyes 1990). This issue was a starting point for a few articles, but it did not cover any studies on transit migration. Until the 2000s, the interest in migration was further explored via individual articles and book chapters. In 2003, a book compilation, *Musical Migrations: Transnationalism and Cultural Hybridity in Latin/o America* (Aparicio and Jáques) was published. Thomas Turino’s book, *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities* built upon this work by shedding light on a wider artistic area. In 2006, the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (Bailey and Collyer) published a specific issue (vol. 32, No. 2). In 2007, Tina Ramnarine edited the book *Musical Performance in the Diaspora*, and in the following year, the journal *Ethnomusicology Forum* published an issue with her introduction.

The year 2010 was very prolific for migration studies in music. The special “Music and Migration” issue of *Migrações*, the Journal of the Portuguese Immigration Observatory, included thirty articles, and a book compilation was published in the same year. *Music and Displacement*, which mainly focuses on displacement after World War II in Europe (Scheding and Levi 2010), was also among the fruits of the increasing interest in migration. In 2011, another book compilation and a special issue of *Migrating Music* were published. It is

a compilation which covers a set of papers presented at the symposium entitled “Migrating Music,” which was held at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London in 2009 (Toynbee and Dueck 2011). *Music and Arts in Action* published the special issue “Music and Migration”, which mostly handles the transnational aspect of migration.

Within these special compilations on migration and music, the articles and chapters which tackle transit migration are very limited. Indeed, many of them, such as the chapter of Philip V. Bohlman in *Music and Displacement*, “‘Das Lied ist aus’: The Final Resting Place along Music’s Endless Journey,” which focuses on composed and performed music in the concentration camps erected by the Nazis, centers on the personal experiences of individual musicians, but not on the musical practices of the communities (Beckerman 2010, Bohlman 2010 etc.). Thus, these studies can be seen as a continuation of the *Exilforschung* (exile studies) of the post-war period in Europe (Scheding 2010: 123–126).

In the limited literature on music and migration, the book of Adelaida Reyes (1999) *Songs of the Caged, Songs of the Free*, which focuses on the musical practices of Vietnamese refugees in refugee camps, is a noteworthy contribution to the literature on transit migration and refugee studies. Similarly, Tania Kaiser’s 2006 article on the music and dance practices of Sudanese refugees deals with the music in refugee camps in which people temporarily stay. In addition, Carolyn Landau’s 2011 chapter in *Music and Displacement* focuses on the music consumption of individuals and the relation of this consumption with the multiple features of their identity, or identity formation. During the three phases of the migratory journey of her protagonist, Mohamed, Landau’s work contributes to the small extent of literature focusing on transit migration in the ethnomusicology discipline.

Despite the limited literature on transit migration, musical relationships among transnational migrant or diaspora networks have a greater presence in the ethnomusicology literature. In this respect, two specific writings of Dan Lundberg on the musical creation of the Assyrian diaspora, “Assyria – a Land in Cyberspace” (2003) and “Trans-local Communities: Music as an Identity Marker in the Assyrian Diaspora” (2010), are directly related to Chaldean-Assyrian migrant networks. Even though Lundberg’s study is specifically on the Assyrian community and not on the Chaldean community, due to the common history and roots of these two groups, these articles provide a rich understanding on the diaspora networks of the two communities.

Music in Transit

In migration and music studies, the strongest theoretical discussions mostly involve two basic concepts: diaspora and transnationalism. In this respect, stating some critical points on both concepts will help in the discussion of their usefulness regarding the transit community that this article is focused on.

For the diaspora communities that spread out to more than one geographical region, the interrelation with the homeland constitutes one of the major interests. At this point, it can be useful to remember that immigrant and diaspora communities are contrasted according to the sites with which they are connected; while immigrant communities refer to the connection between two specific places, the homeland and the host society, and diaspora communities are characterized by multiple connections with various sites (Turino 2004: 6). A characteristic feature of diaspora communities is the interaction with the homeland, such as having affinity towards being aware of and being active in the social and political issues of the homeland, or being willing to return to the homeland. However, it is obvious that the level of desire to return to the homeland is not the same for each community or for each generation. Indeed, “home” is a disputable concept taking into consideration that for some diaspora communities, such as the Romani community, there is no “home” to go back to; similarly, Dan Lundberg assumes a virtual “homeland,” which is created through the Internet for the Assyrian diaspora (2003). Furthermore, as Bailey and Collyer (2010) remind us, even if it were possible to go back home, it would not be the same “home” they are referring to anymore (170–171).

The discussion on the cultural behavior of diaspora communities assumes two main tendencies: one is accentuating the identity, and the second is negotiating with the other in social interactions. While the former emphasizes the nostalgia, the collective memory, and protection of the culture, the latter asserts the change and an exchange in which “new musical repertoires and practices emerge, yielding processes of hybridization” (Bohlman 2001).

In regards to these basic features of diaspora communities, it can be called into question whether the Chaldean migrant community in Istanbul can be considered to be a diaspora community or not. Even though the Chaldean migrant community in Istanbul can be seen as a part of a wide Chaldean diaspora around the world, as a transit community, it is deprived of the opportunities to behave like a diaspora community. For instance, some Chaldean-Iraqi communities in Europe or in the US are willing to be active in political issues both in their

settled country and in the homeland. The attempts to procure the acceptance of the Assyrian-Chaldean genocide in the Parliament of Sweden and the call for voting in the elections in the homeland are some of the examples I have witnessed in a church in Houston, Texas, USA. But because of some practical reasons and the ambiguity of their legal status, the migrants in Istanbul are essentially not capable of doing that.

Transit communities staying for a short period of time in the transit country do not live in the host country for sufficient generations to create new cultural forms and fusions. Furthermore, being a transit community brings limitations to the possible cultural relationships and bonds formed with the host culture. Even though these conditions make the creation of hybrid forms of music almost impossible, this does not mean that transit communities are static communities closed to cultural interrelations and change. Change in the cultural productions of the Chaldean community is easily tracked in the repertoire of religious music. In the transit land, the change in this repertoire occurs in two ways: firstly, in a continuum with the globalization process of the community that has started much earlier, while the group was still in the homeland, and secondly, it can be seen as the result of practical necessity in the process of maintaining cultural practices.

The former can be exemplified with the samples of the religious hymns of the Chaldean culture that can be found widely on the Internet. Regardless of whether they are produced in the homeland or in the diaspora countries, these examples are based on “modernized” and “westernized” musical backgrounds with various musical styles. The accompanists of the church choir (usually a keyboard player) maintain this kind of innovative application in the transit phase mostly by choosing various musical styles for the basis of their accompaniment on their electronic keyboards (Fig. 1).

Additionally, Chaldean-Iraqi people continue to create new hymns in the homeland and the diaspora, most of which are based on popular songs from the region, and in some cases on songs from the soundtracks of Turkish TV series. But it should be noted that these creation processes are not seen in the transit phase; the migrants in the transit zone are mostly the performers and the mediators of the transmission of these newly composed hymns.

Because of the constant circulation of the members and the small size of the community,⁷ the instrumental accompaniment of the church choir was not

⁷ We do not have reliable data on the numbers of the community members in Istanbul, but the number has fluctuated between two to five thousand, depending on various impulses, such as the current situation in the homeland.

stable, although it was almost indispensable for the members. As I have mentioned above, during my long-term field research and with the invitation of the Chaldean-Iraqi community members, I attended the church music performances as an accompanist. As a foreigner who has a Western polyphonic music background, I was obviously not an ideal musician for that ritual repertoire, and my presence affected the musical outcome with a loss of subtle details intrinsic to this *maqam*-based musical tradition. Obviously in the conditions of the homeland and of some of the diaspora countries in which the community widely settled, such as of Detroit, Michigan, USA, my presence would not be desirable by the members. But in the case of the transit experience, the attention of the community members is mostly on maintaining their cultural practices until they reach a final destination that offers knowledgeable and talented Chaldean musicians.

Since one of the major criticisms of the efficiency of the diaspora concept is its overemphasis of relations with the homeland, transnationalism can be thought of as a term that creates room for multiple horizontal relationships among the migrant societies in which the domination of the homeland is overthrown. As one of the tools to explain the circulation of capital around the world in the new economic climate that arose in the 1960s and 70s, the term transnationalism has been used to signal the ideas, people, and political institutions that cross national boundaries in several disciplines, emphasizing the diminished significance of national borders in our globalized world. In the case of Chaldean migration, the concept of transnationalism is a useful tool to understand the transnational migrant networks in terms of the creation of a common musical universe among the Chaldean communities in various geographical regions.

“[T]he systematic interconnection of formerly remote parts of the world is clearly a precondition for many musical migrations. And it is capitalism and its precursor, mercantilism, that have been major engines in creating these networks, and in encouraging the circulation of European musical genres and instruments within them” (Toynbee and Dueck 2012: 3–4). In this respect, the political economy behind those relations, in the neo-liberal phase, constitutes one of the recent interests in migration studies. This interest has a largely critical point of view, and it can be seen in ethno-musicological literature on migration as well. But in transit migration, the economic activity of the migrant community is likely to be temporarily interrupted⁸. In the case of the musical practices of

⁸ Iraqi migrants have to sell their properties and bring an amount of money with them, but in many cases in the post-2003 period, they did not have the time or the opportunity to sell their properties. During their stay in Istanbul, most of the young male migrants that I interviewed work as carriers in

بيات Re^{xx} ان مريا لا باني بيتا
 ان مريا لاباني بيتا ... سريقانيث لان بناياو (سبب قر)
 ان مريا لاناظر قريثا ... سريقانيث شهرين ناطوري (سبب قر)
 (سريقين انون أولين دمقدمين) 4(صوت ثاني شباب)
 (لم قم موحرين لمتاو أخلاي لحما بخيوي) 2(صوت ثاني شباب)
 ها خن نتل لحببواو شنثا

Pop Ballad - 70 bpm اقبل تقدمتنا Re هالون
 1. اقبل تقدمتنا بارك جمعنا ... نطلب رضاك من أعماق القلب
 هذا القربان صنع أيدينا ... فاجعله زادا للسانرين (صوت ثاني)
 2. خيزنا وخمرنا من ثمار الأرض نقدّمها لك قدسها يا رب
 3. يا رب بدونك نحن في عناء بارك واحفظ شعبك وامنحه الرجاء
 750 bpm *****

English waltz - 3/4 bpm في ليلة العشاء الأخير Re كرد
 في ليلة العشاء الأخير بارك الرب الخبز والخمر
 قال اصنعوا هذا لذكري كلما اجتمعتم للابد
 (ونحن اليوم ... نجتمع ... نعيد ذكرى ... ما صنعته) 2
 هذا الخبز من أرضنا وهذه الخمر من كرمنا
 نقدمها لربنا فبارك يا رب قرباننا
 (هذا القربان ... هذا القربان ... رمز المحبة ... رمز الغفران) 2

Love song 7/4 bpm تشبوحنا وأيقارا Re هالون
 1. تشبوحنا وأيقارا : تا مشيحا كبارا : ألاها خيلانا : مريا شاريرا :
 (بكاوذ لهما وخمرا : كباش طميثا برخا)
 مشبوخليه ميقر وخليه : وهم شوحا مسقوخليه : دلا بطالا بكل زونا :
 تودينا مز مروخليه *

Figure 1: Notes of a keyboard player, Sadeer, taken during the rehearsals of a special ceremony on a page that includes the lyrics of the hymns. On the right-hand side there is the name of the *maqam* and the tonic of the scale. On the left-hand side there is the tempo and the style he chooses from the musical backgrounds preset on his electronic keyboard.

Chaldean migrants in Istanbul, this disruption can clearly be seen. There is a developed Chaldean music market both in the homeland and in third countries, which includes musicians who perform live music and make recordings, record labels, studios, and listeners who consume these products regularly. But in Istanbul, several intrinsic features of transit migration become prominent, such as temporality, uncertainty – not just in the economical sense, but emotionally and physically as well, and the smallness of the community. Because of these factors, it is almost impossible to develop a market for music or to provide a live music scene.⁹ In addition to the lack of professional musicianship during the course of my three years of field research, I have only encountered one situation in which migrants make their livelihood through music; the consumption of the music has become possible mostly through free facilities via the Internet, producing little or no profit.¹⁰ In other words, bearing in mind that even the use of those facilities refers to this type of relations, the transit community in Istanbul is relatively far away from such market relations, and in this context, they seem to be invisible.

Conclusion

A close examination of the musical practices of the Chaldean-Iraqi migrant community in Istanbul shows that the economic strictness and small size of the community, as well as the lack of professional musicians, determine various features and the quality of performances. In addition, the vulnerability of their legal status and the awareness of their uncertain conditions affect the musical behaviors of transit migrants. It mostly directs them to create *ad hoc* strategies in order to cope with the difficulties they face in the “limbo” of unsettledness.

As these practices differ from the ones of settled migrant communities, the theoretical framework that music and migrant studies widely apply may be inadequate to discuss the transit communities. Thus, widening ethnomusicological studies focusing on temporary migration and bringing out proper theoretical tools for a deeper understanding are necessary to deal with this lesser-known but widespread phenomenon.

textile firms and the young women as unqualified textile workers in small studios. It is important to note that jobs can be deemed as mere drudgery, and all my interviewees have complaints about the long working hours, bad working conditions, low payment, and the precarious nature of these jobs.

⁹ Even though there are well-known Assyrian-Chaldean singers such as Janan Sawa who travel to various countries to give live concerts during the special events of a community, the community in Istanbul is unable, or unwilling – because of the uncertainty surrounding them – to afford the expenses of these trips.

¹⁰ On the other hand, these new media create their own market relations.

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