Forced migration, citizenship, and space: the case of Syrian Kurdish refugees in İstanbul

Gülay Kılıçaslan

Abstract

The influx of hundreds of thousands of people from Syria to Turkey, especially into major cities such as İstanbul, together with the Turkish government's policies towards Syrian refugees, has led to various changes in urban spaces. This article has a twofold objective: it examines and discusses the everyday lives of these refugees with regards to the processes and mechanisms of their exclusion and inclusion in İstanbul, while employing a multiscalar analysis of migration in terms of combining nation-state policies of migration, citizenship, space, and the concept of the "right to the city." Relying upon interviews and participant observation in the Kanarya and Bayramtepe neighborhoods of İstanbul between 2011 and 2015, I outline the ways in which Syrian Kurdish refugees have been actively transforming İstanbul's peripheries through their interactions with the Kurds who were forcibly displaced from their rural homes in southeastern Turkey in the 1990s.

Keywords: *Forced migration; citizenship; right to the city; Syrian Kurdish refugees; internally displaced Kurds.*

Introduction

Between 2011 and 2015, Turkey implemented an open border policy for Syrian refugees, which allowed them to cross the border at designated border checkpoints. Following much debate concerning international security concerns along Turkey's border with Syria, the Öncüpınar and Cilvegözü border gates in Hatay Province were shut down on March 9, 2015, and as of January 8, 2016

Gülay Kılıçaslan, York University, Department of Sociology, 4700 Keele St, Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3, Canada, kilicaslangulay@gmail.com.

Turkey began to impose a visa regime for Syrians. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Turkey hosts 2,715,789 registered Syrian refugees,[1] though the total number of refugees may be even higher.

Suburban neighborhoods in major cities such as İstanbul have become the main sites of settlement for Syrian refugees. The influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria, among whom Syrian Kurds constitute a significant cluster in terms of both quantity and their cultural and social connections to Turkey, has brought about various changes in urban spaces. Those who have found shelter in urban areas are actively involved in the economic, social, and political spheres of the cities, along with the previous inhabitants. The multidimensional characteristics of migration have been discussed and studied by scholars within the context of spatial analysis, with a focus on the everyday lives and agency of migrants.[2] Drawing on this perspective, this article examines how Syrian Kurdish refugees have been actively involved in urban space-making in İstanbul's peripheries through their interactions with internally displaced Kurds (Kurdish IDPs), who were evicted from their rural homes in southern Turkey in the 1990s. Hence, this study engages with a multiscalar analysis of migration insofar as it analyzes the nation-state policies of migration, citizenship, space, and the "right to the city," with special attention being paid to these policies' interaction with one another.

Syrian Kurdish refugees actively engage in forming and transforming the sociospatial environment of their everyday life in İstanbul's periphery by challenging the mechanisms and processes of inclusion and exclusion. In this article, my primary emphasis is on the agency of the Syrian Kurdish refugees and their daily practices as non-citizens in İstanbul. I suggest that interactions between internally displaced Kurds and Syrian Kurdish refugees result in the emergence of new spaces in which new social dynamics based on contestations and solidarity emerge. Focusing on the interactions between Kurdish IDPs and Syrian Kurdish refugees in İstanbul allows us to examine how the active participation of Syrian Kurdish refugees in İstanbul's peripheries challenges existing socioeconomic and sociocultural processes and practices. In summary,

---

1   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Syria Regional Refugee Response: Turkey," http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224. Data through March 3, 2016.

2   See Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar, "Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality in Migration Studies: Migrant Incorporation and City Scale," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 177–202; Mette Louise Berg and Nando Sigona, "Ethnography, Diversity and Urban Space," *Identities* 20, no. 4 (2013): 347–360; Ares Kalandides and Dina Vaiou, "'Ethnic' Neighbourhoods? Practices of Belonging and Claims to the City," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 0969776412438328, doi:10.1177/0969776412438328; Nicholas P. De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 419–447.

my main findings are that Kurdish IDPs open up their solidarity networks to the Syrian Kurdish refugees arriving in İstanbul by referring to their shared identity, shared language, and shared stories of forced migration. In the predominantly Kurdish neighborhoods, existing networks, along with the creation of new networks, aids the survival ability of both groups in the immediate period after their arrival. However, the political orientation of Kurdish Syrian refugees *vis-à-vis* the Kurdish political movement creates a breaking point in the solidarity networks established by Kurdish IDPs and leads to the emergence of new contestations within the social, economic, and political spheres of the urban space. This space of contestations, accompanied by the legal precariousness of Syrian Kurdish refugees, has begun to transform these relations with Kurdish IDPs from solidarity-based ties toward increasingly exploitative economic relations.

Since İstanbul hosts a significant Kurdish IDP population who also served as a source of labor for the informal economy in the 1990s, it provides an ideal setting to explore the transformation of spaces through the everyday interactions of migrants affected by national migration policies. The main sites of the fieldwork were the Kanarya and Bayramtepe neighborhoods, peripheral areas of İstanbul that were established after the 1980s with the arrival of Kurdish IDPs and other rural-to-urban migrants from elsewhere in Turkey. Since 2011, these two districts have also become home to Syrian Kurdish refugees. Thus, these neighborhoods provide a heterogeneity of experiences both in terms of forced migration and for actively engaging in the changing of neighborhood spaces in İstanbul.

Neighborhoods, citizenship, and the "right to the city"

Inasmuch as studies on transnational migration focus on citizenship, the practice of citizenship across the nation-state and its boundaries—especially as regards space and the spatial complexity of migration—has generally been studied in terms of the overlapping of diverse communities in relation to ethnicity, gender, religion, citizenship status, employment, and housing. Among these diverse communities, the idea of transnationality creates a shift toward a relational, dynamic, and agonistic understanding of urban space, as is largely denoted by the metaphors of the "meeting point" or the "arena."[3] In this sense, Massey et al. describe cities as "bringing together different worlds in diverse and often surprising ways: through the constant and successive rhythms by which people move in and across one another, through the displays of

---

3 Vassilis P. Arapoglou, "Diversity, Inequality and Urban Change," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 19, no. 3 (July 2012), 228; Doreen Massey et al., eds., *City Worlds* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 2.

indifference which pass for the negotiation of difference and, more pointedly, through the construction of high walls which serve both as a barrier between the different worlds and as a connecting link."[4] Among the geographical scales where migrants experience various relations of belonging, the city and the neighborhood constitute highly controversial concepts in urban studies. They also reappear as important spaces in the everyday lives of diverse urban populations, with meanings that "go far beyond its spatial determinants and furnish it with a renewed significance, distanced from old identifications with community and locality."[5] Therefore, in migration studies, cities "can serve as an important unit of analysis in exploring the interface between migrants' pathways of incorporation and the materialization of broader neoliberal processes."[6] At the same time, in addition to being the arenas of "tolerant encounters" and "incorporation," cities are also denoted by processes of exclusion, segregation, and repression.[7]

Everyday life in the city and neighborhood is characterized by a space in which people struggle to claim their "right to the city" and sustain their positions by transforming the city or the spaces they live in. Here, Lefebvre links the idea of citizenship with "the right to the city" and reformulates the foundation of membership and participation in the political community by basing it on inhabitance. Unlike the liberal-democratic model, in which nation-state membership is the basis for citizenship, the "right to the city" is predicated on the idea that those who inhabit the city have a "right to the city," a right that is developed so as to "gather the interests of the whole society […] and firstly of all those who *inhabit*."[8] Thus, this right is acquired simply by living in the city. In this sense, everyday life is the core axis of the right to the city: those who are living in and creating urban space through their daily routines in the city are those who possess a legitimate right to the city. Furthermore, the right to the city is positioned toward participation in the production of urban space and decisions thereupon, but also in constructing "the rhythms of everyday life and in producing and reproducing the social relations that frame it."[9] As such, cities are sites in which belonging is negotiated and rights are claimed and pursued

---

4   Massey et al., eds., *City Worlds*, 89.
5   Kalandides and Vaiou, "'Ethnic' Neighbourhoods?" 255; Arapoglou, "Diversity, Inequality and Urban Change," 228.
6   Glick Schiller and Çağlar, "Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality," 179.
7   See Susan Ruddick, "Constructing Difference in Public Spaces: Race, Class, and Gender as Interlocking Systems," *Urban Geography* 17, no. 2 (1996): 132–51 and Glick Schiller and Çağlar, "Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality."
8   Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, ed. and trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Labas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 158.
9   Mark Purcell, "Citizenship and the Right to the Global City: Reimagining the Capitalist World Order," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 3 (September 2003), 577.

that may be regarded as constitutive of meaning and the practice of citizenship.[10] Within this framework, neighborhoods, as everyday spaces of the city, are at stake in the struggle for the construction of belonging and for challenging the exclusionary mechanisms of citizenship imposed by the liberal-democratic model.

This study zooms in on everyday life in two neighborhoods in İstanbul as a way to demonstrate how various claims over urban space, and encounters between two different groups—namely, Kurdish IDPs and Syrian Kurdish refugees—can help us delineate patterns of inclusion and exclusion and of solidarity and contestations in the city. I suggest that the active participation of Syrian Kurdish refugees in urban space-making, based on the idea of the "right to the city," challenges the exclusionary mechanisms of citizenship in urban areas and forces us to rethink our existing conceptual tools on migrant incorporation.

The methodology and the research field: the Kanarya and Bayramtepe neighborhoods

This study builds upon my fieldwork in the Kanarya neighborhood, which traced the political mobilization of twenty internally displaced Kurds between 2011 and 2013,[11] and in the Bayramtepe neighborhood, where I participated in various NGO projects on Syrian refugees through December 2015. In 2013 and 2014, I conducted twenty interviews with Syrian Kurdish refugees for two different reporting projects[12] on the social and economic conditions of refugees in these two neighborhoods as a part of a research team of the Immigrants' Association for Social Cooperation and Culture (*Göç Edenlerle Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Kültür Derneği*, GÖÇ-DER).[13] Familiarity with these neighborhoods as a result of participation in the outreach activities of GÖÇ-DER and of the cultural association of Syrians in the Bayramtepe neighborhood has allowed me to observe the social relations of these two groups in their daily lives

10 Engin F. Isin, "Introduction: Democracy, Citizenship and the City," in *Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City*, ed. Engin F. Isin (London: Routledge, 2000), 6; Kalandides and Vaiou, "'Ethnic' Neighbourhoods?" 262.

11 For a book chapter based on my fieldwork in these neighborhoods, see Gülay Kılıçaslan, "Generational Differences in Political Mobilization among Kurdish Forced Migrants: The Case of İstanbul's Kanarya Mahallesi," in *The Kurdish Issue in Turkey: A Spatial Perspective*, ed. Zeynep Gambetti and Joost Jongerden (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2015): 157–184.

12 For detailed findings of these projects, see the reports at http://www.esithaklar.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/G%C3%B6z-Ard%C4%B1-Edilenler.pdf and at http://www.esithaklar.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Yok-Say%C4%B1lanlar-Raporu.pdf, accessed April 9, 2016.

13 Initial access was gained through GÖÇ-DER, which is an NGO working in the field of forced migration. I also used my own personal networks and relationships established during the interviewing process in order to contact other potential participants.

and the transformation of these neighborhoods throughout the years. Additionally, participant observation of the daily activities of inhabitants in these two neighborhoods was conducted primarily at community gatherings, textile workshops, and local cultural association activities. My Kurdish informants from Syria were mostly from Afrin and Qamishlo, with the durations of their stay ranging between two and four years; most of them reported their time of arrival in İstanbul as between May 2011 and October 2013. Their arrival has facilitated the creation of networks in İstanbul to assist them in bringing their relatives to the city as well: all ten of the Syrian Kurdish refugee families whom I interviewed had migrated with their relatives to İstanbul and have planned to organize their relatives in Syria for hosting them in İstanbul later.[14]

There are an estimated 400,000 Syrian refugees in İstanbul, although it is not possible to know their exact number due to problems associated with registering refugees. When the armed conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partîya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK) intensified in the 1990s, many Kurdish IDPs migrated to İstanbul. Turkish security forces forcibly evacuated nearly 3,500 villages and hamlets, displacing an estimated 3,500,000 Kurds and others from their homes.[15] Although forced migration increased the incidence of poverty through dispossession, it did not prevent political mobilization: displaced Kurds became political subjects in urban life, especially in large metropolises such as İstanbul, where about 14.8 percent of the population now identify themselves as Kurds.[16] After the initial survival period, land occupations and informal housing construction by Kurds contributed to their physical integration into the city.

---

14 When I conducted structured interviews, they were not registered with any institution in Turkey; however, during the course of my fieldwork, four of my informants registered with the Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (*Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı*, AFAD). Except for three of my informants, all of my refugee informants had crossed the border without passports.

15 A report published in 2001 by Göç-Der estimated that 3,438 rural settlements were evacuated and 4 to 4.5 million Kurds resettled in this process; see Mehmet Barut, *Zorunlu Göçe Maruz Kalan Kürt Kökenli TC Vatandaşlarının Göç Öncesi ve Göç Sonrası Sosyo Ekonomik, Sosyo Kültürel Durumları, Askeri Çatışma ve Gerginlik Politikaları Sonucu Meydana Gelen Göçün Ortaya Çıkardığı Sorunlar ve Göç Mağduru Ailelerin Geriye Dönüş Eğilimlerinin Araştırılması ve Çözüm Önerileri*, unpublished report (İstanbul: Göç-Der, 2001). The Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP) puts the number at between 2.5 to 3 million Kurds. Another estimate, made by the Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies (*Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü*, HÜNEE) puts the number at between 953,680 and 1,201,200; see Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü, *Türkiye Göç ve Yerinden Olmuş Nüfus Araştırması* (Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü, 2006), accessed on April 23, 2016. http://www.hips.hacettepe.edu.tr/tgyona/TGYONA_rapor.pdf.

16 This figure comes from a survey by KONDA Research and Consultancy where people were asked how they perceived themselves; see KONDA, *Perceptions and Expectations in the Kurdish Issue* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2011).

The Kanarya and Bayramtepe neighborhoods were no exception to this process. Four- or five-storey buildings with satellite dishes used for watching Kurdish TV channels are common in these neighborhoods. Both also contain many small-scale workshops, since they form part of an important zone for textile manufacturing in İstanbul. Kanarya is an urban slum located near a lagoon in the district of Küçükçekmece; Bayramtepe is close to Kanarya but lies in the district of Başakşehir. These slum neighborhoods exhibit a heterogeneity of migrant experiences through a large number of Kurdish inhabitants, primarily from the provinces of Mardin, Şırnak, Malatya, and Bitlis; from Afrin and Qamishlo in Syria; and from the Balkans and Thrace as well.

In fact, the arrival of Syrian Kurdish refugees in Kanarya and Bayramtepe exhibits many similarities with the arrival of Kurdish IDPs. Some of the narrated similarities included being deprived of housing, healthcare, and education. Other similarities narrated by both groups included a hike in rents, limitations on access to job markets, and loss of networks in their prior settings due to civil war and forced migration.

However, there are significant differences in terms of the legal precariousness that Syrian refugees face. Temporary protection status defines the legal status of Syrian refugees and includes an unlimited stay, protection against forcible return (*non-refoulement*), and access to reception centers where urgent needs can be addressed. Assistance is provided in the refugee camps in a systematic way.[17] But, for non-camp refugees, assistance is provided on an ad hoc basis through government circulars (legal directives). However, the implementation of these circulars is not controlled by the government; rather, it is left to the authority of local administrators and depends on the discretionary power of governors. Thus, Syrian refugees are faced with differing policies depending on the province and even the neighborhood where they reside, which results in unpredictability and legal precariousness.

Largely due to their differing legal status, the everyday lives of Syrian Kurdish refugees also reflect crucial differences in terms of their interactions with the previous migrants—Kurdish IDPs and migrants from Thrace and the Balkans—in these neighborhoods. In everyday life, these refugees inevitably interact with both Kurdish IDPs and Turks in the social, economic, and political spheres of İstanbul. Indeed, they often live in close proximity to Turkish citizens, sometimes as spouses, frequently as extended family members, and also simply as neighbors, co-workers, and so on. Although they are

---

17 For a detailed overview of the temporary protection status, see the UNHCR reports at http://www.unhcr.org.tr/uploads/root/faqenglish.pdf and http://www.refugeeinturkey.org/en/dosya/faq_english.pdf. See also Meltem Ineli-Ciger, "Implications of the New Turkish Law on Foreigners and International Protection and Regulation No. 29153 on Temporary Protection for Syrians Seeking Protection in Turkey," *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration* 4, no. 2 (2015): 28–36.

not officially recognized and have an unstable legal status, they still get jobs, rent apartments, buy property, open their own shops, go to school, get married, have children, join in religious activities, found organizations, and develop social networks. Coutin describes this paradox between the legal precariousness of migrants and their presence in everyday life as follows:

> On a day-to-day basis, their illegality may be irrelevant to most of their activities, only becoming an issue in certain contexts, such as changing jobs, applying for college, or encountering an immigration official. The undocumented thus move in and out of existence. Much of the time they are undifferentiated from those around them, but suddenly, when legal reality is superimposed on daily life, they are once more in a space of non-existence. The borders between existence and non-existence remain blurred and permeable.[18]

 A similar paradox is at work for Syrian refugees. Legal precariousness does not hinder the physical presence, social participation, and subjectivity of the Syrian Kurdish refugees because the neighborhoods and their incorporation into these spaces provide them with the latitude to make themselves visible. Thus, urban neighborhoods provide migrants with diverse opportunities for inclusion into or exclusion from urban life.[19] At the same time, neighborhoods are transformed by the practices of migrants as active agents in the construction of urban life, and they are also (re-)situated into local and global relations.[20] Since the focus of this article is on the interactions between Kurdish IDPs and Syrian Kurdish refugees in two specific neighborhoods, it is important to first contextualize the issues of space, citizenship, and transnationality within the context of the everyday lives of migrants, as will be done in the following section.

Social and political interactions among internally displaced Kurds and Syrian Kurdish refugees: a case of solidarity?

After migrating to İstanbul, Kurdish IDPs were subjected to various exclusionary mechanisms in urban life, including difficulties in finding employment or a home and discrimination by Turkish co-workers or civil servants responsible for providing social services. It was through the

---

18 Susan Bibler Coutin, *Legalizing Moves: Salvadoran Immigrants' Struggle for U.S. Residency* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 40.

19 Glick Schiller and Çağlar, "Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality," 179.

20 Kalandides and Vaiou, "'Ethnic' Neighbourhoods?" 255.

deployment of urban "survival strategies"[21] that Kurdish IDPs managed to set up social and economic lives in the slums of İstanbul and establish their social networks. Among these strategies were efforts to maximize family income through participation in the formal and informal labor market, finding ways to minimize household expenditure, and sending their children to work in the textile sector.

The neighborhoods served as a space of both social exclusion and social inclusion during the processes of incorporation into the city and building social networks. As Glick Schiller and Çağlar aptly point out, social fields are conceived as systems of social relations composed of networks of networks that may be either locally situated or extend out nationally or transnationally; more importantly, these networks are embedded within power asymmetries.[22] Not surprisingly, networks served as a means through which Kurdish IDPs actualized their economic opportunities. As is commonly acknowledged in migration studies, these linkages are significant in regulating migrant flows, guaranteeing the early survival of migrants, finding jobs, and sustaining up-to-date information on economic conditions in both the home and the host country. As such, migration can be framed as a process of network building that relies on and in turn strengthens social relations across space.[23] In this sense, networks and the creation of networks are crucial elements of the survival period for both Syrian Kurdish refugees and Kurdish IDPs in İstanbul.

It was for this reason that Kurdish IDPs' choice of the Kanarya and Bayramtepe neighborhoods usually depended on the place of origin of the initial networks. After the initial networks had been established, the new immigrants found dwellings through these networks and gradually became integrated into the neighborhood and community. They established their own textile workshops in Kanarya and Bayramtepe, and new immigrants used their networks to obtain a job in these workshops. Therefore, the neighborhoods also served to provide a space for the "perpetuation of a residence-based informal economy."[24] This facilitated the exchange of work among neighbors and the finding of jobs for newcomers. The accumulation of social capital within these neighborhoods was thus the main source of survival for the Kurdish IDPs.

---

21 Mercedes González de la Rocha, *The Resources of Poverty: Women and Survival in a Mexican City* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994).

22 Glick Schiller and Çağlar, "Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality."

23 Alejandro Portes and Robert L. Bach, *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 10.

24 Çağlar Keyder, "Globalization and Social Exclusion in İstanbul," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, no. 1 (March 2005), 126.

Similarly, these networks and the accumulation of social capital have become the principal reasons for Syrian Kurdish refugees choosing Kanarya and Bayramtepe. This was confirmed by Syrian Kurdish refugee informants, who emphasized that they moved to Kanarya or Bayramtepe because they are mostly populated by Kurds, and that these Kurdish neighbors provide job opportunities in their textile workshops or informal shops. Roza, a 33-year-old-woman from Qamishlo, commented:

> Thanks to the Kurdish neighbors here; they found this house and brought blankets, clothes, and kitchen appliances when we arrived. They also found a job for my two sons in a textile shop near our place. We could not have survived if they had not helped us. *Mala Gel* [People's House] was very helpful at the beginning, so we go and ask for our needs whenever we are in trouble. Our Kurdish neighbors are always asking us if we need anything.

The *Mala Gel* were established within the local offices of the pro-Kurdish[25] People's Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi*, HDP), especially where the number of Syrian Kurdish refugees was high, in order to provide social assistance for Syrian Kurdish refugees at the time of their arrival. Since the social networks created a strategy for survival for the forced Kurdish migrants in the neighborhoods in the earlier period of migration,[26] they also became the main repositories for new Kurdish refugees from Syria in the peripheries of İstanbul in the initial stage of their arrival. Kurdish IDPs provided housing, either by sharing their homes or by finding shelter through their own networks, and they grounded these solidarity activities through reference to their shared identity, shared language, and shared stories of forced migration.

Asked for their ideas about the arrival of Syrian refugees, almost all of the Kurdish IDPs whom I interviewed in Kanarya and Bayramtepe referenced their own experiences of forced migration. Ahmet, a 41-year-old textile workshop

---

25 The "pro-Kurdish" description was common for the HDP, a union of numerous left-wing movements and parties, in order to associate them with the struggle for the rights of Kurds. However, the agenda of the HDP transcends this qualification. The HDP presents itself as having a leftist agenda and as voicing the problems of the Kurds, in addition to the demands of workers, women, the lesbian and gay movement, and the youth; that is, the demands of all oppressed groups in society.

26 See Keyder, "Globalization and Social Exclusion in İstanbul"; Ayşe Buğra and Çağlar Keyder, *New Poverty and the Changing Welfare Regime of Turkey* (Ankara: United Nations Development Programme, 2003); Ayşe Betül Çelik, "Migrating Onto Identity: Kurdish Mobilization through Associations in Istanbul" (PhD dissertation, SUNY Binghamton, 2002); Sema Erder, *Kentsel Gerilim: Enformel İlişki Ağları Alan Araştırması* (Ankara: Um:ag, 1997); and Deniz Yükseker, "Internal Displacement and Social Exclusion: Problems Encountered by Internally Displaced Persons in the Provinces of İstanbul and Diyarbakır," in *Coming to Terms with Forced Migration: Post-Displacement Restitution of Citizenship Rights in Turkey*, ed. Elif Kalaycıoğlu and Josee Lavoie, trans. Leyla Tonguç Basmacı (İstanbul: TESEV, 2006): 257–276.

owner in Kanarya, said: "We witnessed the same scenes and we remembered our stories when we saw them, so we collected all the necessary stuff that we could share with them and tried to help them." Regarding the initial period, the shared experiences of Kurdish IDPs have helped them to understand and open up their solidarity networks for Syrian Kurdish refugees to be settled. Syrian Kurdish refugees, in turn, feel secure when they have Kurdish neighbors, and are in contact with them in the social and economic realms.

Although Syrian Kurdish refugees have positive relationships with both their Kurdish and Turkish neighbors, they feel closer to the Kurdish neighbors due to their common native language and similar cultural practices. Having the same language also facilitates finding a job in these neighborhoods. While none of the refugee participants complained about everyday social relations with their neighbors, interviews with Kurdish IDPs demonstrated that certain negative impressions have begun to arise among Syrian refugee youth and the children of the earlier migrants. Most of the Kurdish IDPs implied that, in the initial period, they helped the Syrian Kurdish refugees and that they had positive relations with them. However, some of the Kurdish IDP participants in the neighborhoods stated that, after being settled and earning money, the Syrian Kurdish refugees began to behave as if they were the neighborhood's owners and original settlers. They considered the Syrian refugees to be "guests," and thus perceived themselves as the owners of the neighborhood, thus rejecting the Syrian Kurdish refugees' visibility in terms of their "right to the city," in the Lefebvrian sense.

Furthermore, some of the Kurdish IDPs attempted to establish hierarchical relations by means of a discourse predicated on who was an old and who was a new inhabitant of the neighborhoods, as well as with reference to the different legal statuses of the two groups. Some of the Kurdish IDPs referred to their citizenship status as the reason for their being the main inhabitants of the neighborhoods. Hence, the precarious legal status of the Syrian Kurdish refugees strengthened hierarchical relations among the social networks. It is striking that, although Kurdish networks did provide mechanisms of inclusion, some Kurdish IDPs found the incorporation of the refugees to be problematic. Referring to the political disengagement of Syrian Kurdish refugees in the neighborhood and the perceived cultural differences between Kurdish IDPs and Syrian Kurdish refugees—the way they dressed, their behavior, their religious practices—most of the Kurdish IDPs underlined their discontent with the lifestyle of the Syrian Kurdish refugees. Bülent, a 49-year-old male Kurdish IDP, said:

> They [Syrian Kurdish refugees] are very different from us. We thought they were the same as us but they dress in an inappropriate way. They do not have our foods because they like a luxurious life. They even look down on us. They also never go to Friday prayers at the mosque. They are really different from us.

These cultural and political tensions resulted in two serious clashes in these neighborhoods, as reported by an officer of the HDP. Following the clashes between the two groups, local people attacked some of the Syrian Kurdish refugees' houses and shops.[27] The HDP officer told me that they are there to provide support for solving the social problems arising between the Syrian Kurdish refugees and local people, by means of their "Rojava Committees," established within certain local HDP offices.

As is the case in the narratives of the Kurdish IDPs and Syrian Kurdish refugees, state policy has intervened, affecting even Kurdish IDPs who have constructed their relations based on shared identity and experiences. In other words, the exclusionary mechanism that the state's temporary protection policy constructs has affected social relations between new and old settlers of the city. However, the Syrian Kurdish refugees, through their active participation in the social and economic spheres of the neighborhoods, continue to challenge these exclusionary practices by the Kurdish IDPs. Even though the early settlers of Kanarya and Bayramtepe attempt to obstruct Syrian refugees' attempts to reconstruct the neighborhood in line with their own social and cultural dynamics, the refugees are still actively transforming the physical structure of these neighborhoods. Once their livelihoods are secured, they (re-)establish living spaces similar to those in their homeland, while at the same time their participation in the social life of the neighborhoods also increases. They open their own grocery stores, bakeries, barbershops, textile workshops, associations, and schools. They have established an association that includes two primary schools for Syrian refugees, and they have created solidarity networks in Bayramtepe. Asked about the transformations taking place in the neighborhoods, Zine, a 37-year-old Syrian Kurdish refugee woman, answered by laughing that "soon there'll be a small Rojava [Western Kurdistan] here." Zine's answer implies the transformation of the demographic and physical characteristics of the neighborhood, a change that is clearly observable in daily life. Consequently, Zine emphasized this transformation as a basic reason for feeling secure in Bayramtepe, as it provided a sense of familiarity.

At the beginning of my field visit in 2012, all of the Syrian Kurdish families wished to return to their homeland once the war had ended. However, my last visit, in December 2015, demonstrated that those who have better conditions in terms of finding a place in the labor market and who have incorporated themselves into the neighborhoods to some extent no longer want to return home. However, the level of political activism is also an important determinant

---

27 For news dealing with these clashes, see http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/276453/ Guvercintepe_deki_Suriyelilere_saldiri_BBC_de.html#.

that impacts the desire to return home. For instance, those with social and political connections to the alternative regime in the cantons of Rojava—which is governed by a political system based on autonomy and democratic confederalism[28]—indicate that, should conditions in Rojava stabilize and become secure, they would return without hesitation. Xece, a 43-year-old refugee woman from Afrin, answered the question of whether she would want to return to home in the following words:

> Of course I am going to return. My mom and my brother, my house, all of my belongings are there [in Afrin]. I came with a small bag. My uncle is a member of the neighborhood assembly in Afrin and they are working very hard to rebuild Afrin. I send them money every month. I cannot leave them there.

Most of the refugees still have family in Syria to whom they send money, and these remittances also maintain a link with their home country.

Most of the Syrian Kurdish refugees are familiar with the Kurdish political movement and have family members within the guerrilla movement in Kobane, a city in Rojava. However, it is difficult to discuss or pose political questions to the Syrian Kurdish refugees. Because they have experienced civil war in Syria and are aware of the political tensions regarding the Kurdish question in Turkey, they do not engage in political discussions. Nevertheless, some of my participants clearly stated their support for the Kurdish political movement and its contribution to the democratic self-rule of the autonomous cantons of Rojava. In this context, such political stances increased the level of cooperation with Kurdish IDPs in certain respects. That is, political relations between these two Kurdish groups are based on their shared stance towards the Kurdish political movement in the broader region.

Regarding the possible contentious space between Kurdish IDPs and Syrian Kurdish refugees, political activities constitute one of the basic determinants of the interactions between these two groups. Almost all of the Kurdish IDPs in both neighborhoods have blamed Syrian Kurdish refugees for not participating in the neighborhood's pro-Kurdish political activities and for being "dishonest" to the Kurdish political movement. Though the HDP provides social and economic assistance to the Kurdish refugees through the *Mala Gel* in both neighborhoods, some party members whom I interviewed complained about the apathetic stance of Syrian Kurdish refugees toward the Kurdish political movement. Servet, a 51-year-old Kurdish IDP, said that the

---

28 For a detailed description of the structure of the Rojava cantons, see "Charter of the Social Contract in Rojava (Syria)," http://www.kurdishinstitute.be/charter-of-the-social-contract/ (accessed February 5, 2016).

Syrian Kurdish youth "never participate in any of our protests. They just care about having luxurious lives—wearing beautiful clothes, putting on make-up, and having fun in the parks. They are not patriots; I see what they are doing. So why should I help them?"[29] He proposed this political tension as a reason for ceasing to support them following the initial survival period.

Economic ties in the neighborhoods: from solidarity to exploitation?

As mentioned above, the major source of employment in the shantytowns of İstanbul is in the textiles and apparel sector.[30] This is true for Kanarya and Bayramtepe as well. As a part of the informal sector, textile workshops in the lived spaces provide job opportunities for the inhabitants of Kanarya and Bayramtepe, primarily for young women. They offer lower wages, and people are able to easily switch between factories, workshops, subcontracting, and housework. Before the arrival of the Syrian Kurdish refugees, finding a job in the textile workshops for an earlier migrant was not difficult. However, the influx of Syrian refugees has increased the supply of low-wage labor, and as a result job opportunities have diminished, though the textile workshops were already far from offering stable, formal wage employment for male breadwinners. Such a proliferation of the informal sector in these İstanbul neighborhoods has contributed to the integration of the Kurdish IDPs into the neighborhoods. Moreover, their political mobilization through the articulation of the Kurdish political movement in these neighborhoods has helped them to remake the urban space and to practice their citizenship rights while simultaneously increasing their level of belonging in the city.

Changes in the global economy have also affected this social and economic transformation of İstanbul. Calling this transformation "the end of the era of successful developmentalism," Çağlar Keyder refers to the complex but unitary phenomenon of "de-industrialization, post-Fordism, globalization and, perhaps the most comprehensive rubric, the transition from national developmentalism to neoliberal capitalism."[31] The structural transformation of the market for labor under neoliberal capitalism, new pressures on and demands from the land market and the property regime, and shifts in the patterns of migration and the profile of the immigrants have all shaped these social transformations in İstanbul.[32] In this sense, the neoliberal policies of privatization, flexibilization, informalization, and deregulation that were already reshaping Turkey's

---

29 These two neighborhoods are politically active and almost every week local Kurds organize protests to condemn Turkish state policies towards Kurds. While visiting both neighborhoods, I have seen many signs and graffiti on the walls expressing support for the Kurdish political movement.

30 Keyder, "Globalization and Social Exclusion in İstanbul," 129.

31 Ibid., 127.

32 See Keyder, "Globalization and Social Exclusion in İstanbul" and Buğra and Keyder, New Poverty.

economy also contributed to the expansion of the informal sector. This sector became filled with Kurdish IDPs, resulting in the growth of a large, dispossessed, and proletarianized urban Kurdish population after the 1990s.[33] This multilevel transformation in İstanbul has led to an economic and social polarization that, ever since, has been evolving into new forms of social exclusion for the new forced migrants.[34] Buğra and Keyder suggest that the urbanization process has deteriorated the settlement and housing conditions for the latest wave of Kurdish migrants and made their social integration into the urban sphere especially difficult. Even so, in contrast to Buğra and Keyder's rather pessimistic arguments regarding the social exclusion of the new migrants, Kurdish IDPs have actually organized themselves politically throughout their time in urban centers. Despite their integration into the economy through the informal sector, their political activism has provided them with some leeway to combat the exclusionary characteristics of the social transformation in urban areas.[35] In short, political solidarity among Kurdish IDPs has helped to mediate some of the economic vulnerabilities and informal, uncertain markets faced by the workers.

A similar point can be made for the newly arriving Syrian refugees. All Syrian Kurdish refugee family members older than ten were obliged to work in textile workshops or do piecework in Kanarya and Bayramtepe in order to survive. The need for the women of the family to work for wages is a new phenomenon for Syrian Kurdish refugees. Fatma, a 34-year-old Syrian Kurdish refugee woman in Bayramtepe, stated:

> When we were in Afrin we never worked outside, but war and migration forced us to work outside of the home and contribute to the household. I do not complain about our current conditions here, for sure. Thank God! We are alive and we can work and earn money to survive.

By becoming breadwinners, participating in the public life of the neighborhood, and simultaneously taking care of their parents and/or spouses, such women have challenged the patriarchal family structure and the traditional role of women. This, in turn, has contributed to female refugees becoming more visible and powerful than they were in Syria before their displacement. However, this is not a voluntary transformation within their social life; rather, it is a sort of forced adjustment arising as a result of civil war and displacement.

---

33 Erdem Yörük, "Welfare Provision as Political Containment: The Politics of Social Assistance and the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey," *Politics & Society* 40, no. 4 (December 2012), 521.

34 See Keyder, "Globalization and Social Exclusion in İstanbul" and Buğra and Keyder, *New Poverty*.

35 For a thorough analysis of Kurdish IDPs' political activism in the sense of combating exclusion in urban areas, see Kılıçaslan, "Generational Differences."

As mentioned above, the informal sector had expanded through the establishment of textile workshops, contributing to the employment and survival strategies of Syrian refugees in Kanarya and Bayramtepe. Most of the refugee participants to whom I spoke work in textile workshops or the construction sector. Those who are more experienced with sewing machines get higher wages than those who do cleaning, ironing, and packaging in the workshops. While the former receive around 400–450 dollars per month, which is just below the official minimum wage, the latter receive around 250 dollars per month. All of them stated that they work the same hours and receive the same wages as the other workers in their workshops. However, my interviews with the owners of the textile workshops revealed that the Syrian Kurdish refugees there are in fact paid less than the other workers, and also that the employers' contribution to the social security payments cannot be paid, since Syrians do not have work permits.[36] Moreover, HDP officers in both neighborhoods reported that, in the initial period after their migration, many Syrian Kurds were not paid wages by their Kurdish employers, and so had to ask for help from the HDP in order to receive their payment. Here we see how mechanisms of exploitation are reproduced by the Kurdish IDPs in these districts, even though they have themselves experienced the very same process of economic exclusion.

Those Syrian Kurdish refugees familiar with the HDP's political role attempted to find a solution to their precarious working conditions. While the Kurdish networks established on the basis of shared identity and experiences were very welcoming in the initial period, in terms of constructing a livable space and showing solidarity with the Syrian Kurdish people, they later came to view the Syrian refugees as a source of cheap labor, and this increased the level of precariousness for Syrian Kurdish refugees in the economic sphere. Lacking legal citizenship and subject to temporary protection status, Syrian refugees in urban areas are more open to exploitation in the labor market.

One of my participants, Ahmet, the owner of a textile workshop in Kanarya and a Kurdish IDP who arrived in the neighborhood in 1994, explained the similarities between the Kurdish IDPs and the Syrian Kurdish refugees in terms of practices of social exclusion. He described how other workshop owners could exploit Syrian Kurdish refugees in his neighborhood owing to the latter's legal status. However, when he talked about his own workshop, he said that all of the 21 workers were from Rojava and that he paid them the same

---

36 With a recent change in Law No. 6458, on the international protection of foreigners, the work permit has also been added to the temporary protection status' regulations, with certain preconditions and limitations; see the full text of the law at http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/3.5.20168375.pdf (accessed February 7, 2016).

wage as he paid workers who were citizens. He explained that his reason for recruiting Syrian refugees was a way of helping them survive. However, the truth behind his story was different. Since his workshop was unofficial, he did not provide his workers with social security contributions, nor did he pay taxes. He benefited from being unofficial by recruiting Syrian Kurdish refugees. Nonetheless, through interviews with some of the workers in his workshop, I was able to confirm that they received the average amount paid for this type of labor in the neighborhood. In this case, it can be inferred that the arrival of the Syrian Kurdish refugees contributed to an increase in the proletarianized urban Kurdish population. That is to say, Syrian Kurdish refugees engage in the social and economic life of the neighborhood by being a part of the circle of poverty in the informal sector.

Currently, the Syrian Kurdish refugees who arrived at the beginning of 2011 have begun to open their own textile workshops in order to recruit other Syrian Kurdish refugees and to resist the exploitation of migrants from their own community. This also contributes to their visibility in Kanarya and Bayramtepe, and thereby they become more active in the transformation of the urban space. However, this change in their social and economic positions in these neighborhoods causes social tensions among the other inhabitants in terms of limiting the economic gains of the earlier migrants.

Conclusion

The arrival of Syrian Kurdish refugees has changed İstanbul's peripheral neighborhoods through the new arrivals' interactions with earlier Kurdish migrants. I have explored these changes by focusing on everyday relations and on the idea of belonging to urban spaces among Kurdish IDPs and Syrian Kurdish refugees, particularly with regards to the concept and practices of the "right to the city." By providing a dynamic meeting point for various groups with diverse backgrounds, neighborhoods in urban areas offer a significant analytical tool that allows us to discuss this diversity from a multiscalar perspective. As this study has aimed to demonstrate through a focus on the everyday lives of migrants with different backgrounds and legal statuses, the Kanarya and Bayramtepe neighborhoods offer a significant example that enables us to map out how different migrant groups' interactions—especially as affected by migration policies at the national and global levels—have transformed urban spaces.

The Kanarya and Bayramtepe neighborhoods have become sites of encounters and incorporation for Syrian Kurdish refugees. But at the same time, they also reflect processes of exclusion, segregation, and repression for those same refugees. The social networks of the Kurdish IDPs in these

neighborhoods serve as the ground of a survival strategy for the integration of the Syrian Kurdish refugees, while Kurdish IDPs also develop their solidarity networks through the sense of shared experiences in terms of forced migration, kinships, and ethnic identities. However, the impact of local and global economic developments, along with the social transformations taking place in the urban areas in question, have conditioned the relations of the Kurdish IDPs with the Syrian Kurdish refugees on the basis of market and economic needs. As a result, some of the Kurdish employers see the arrival of Syrian Kurdish refugees as an opportunity for cheap labor in the informal sector, and the precarious legal status of the refugees only exacerbates these exploitative relations. Even though the legal rights of Syrian refugees in terms of working conditions have been extended in practice by new regulations at the national level, as this study shows, these exploitative relations are not likely to be resolved in the short run. In sum, these interactions among diverse groups—predicated on increasing tension between social exclusion and inclusion among the earlier Kurdish settlers and the new migrants in these neighborhoods—have resulted in the emergence of new spaces and new social dynamics where both contestations and solidarities arise. The political sphere is one of the spaces in which tension between the two groups has increased and, consequently, affected their relations in the economic and social sphere. These various interactions have been transforming urban spaces socially, economically, and politically. My purpose in this study has been to show the ways in which the active participation of Syrian Kurdish refugees in urban space-making, based on the idea of the "right to the city," challenges the exclusionary mechanisms of citizenship in urban areas. In fact, this study is only a first step toward understanding the increasingly complicated social and political dynamics that Syrian refugees bring with them into the new centers of settlement, and the many mechanisms that they develop with the inhabitants of these places outside of the legal regime of regulating refugee arrivals, especially in the urban centers. After all, it will still be in "everyday life" and through reconciling multiple claims over the "right to the city" where migrant incorporation will ultimately have to take place.

References

Arapoglou, Vassilis P. "Diversity, Inequality and Urban Change." *European Urban and Regional Studies* 19, no. 3 (July 2012): 223–237. doi:10.1177/0969776412451800.

Barut, Mehmet. *Zorunlu Göçe Maruz Kalan Kürt Kökenli TC Vatandaşlarının Göç Öncesi ve Göç Sonrası Sosyo Ekonomik, Sosyo Kültürel Durumları, Askeri Çatışma ve Gerginlik Politikaları Sonucu Meydana Gelen Göçün Ortaya Çıkardığı Sorunlar ve Göç Mağduru Ailelerin Geriye Dönüş Eğilimlerinin Araştırılması ve Çözüm Önerileri*. Unpublished report. İstanbul: Göç-Der, 2001.

Berg, Mette Louise and Nando Sigona. "Ethnography, Diversity and Urban Space." *Identities* 20, no. 4 (2013): 347–360. doi:10.1080/1070289X.2013.822382.

Buğra, Ayşe and Çağlar Keyder. *New Poverty and the Changing Welfare Regime of Turkey*. Ankara: United Nations Development Programme, 2003.

Coutin, Susan Bibler. *Legalizing Moves: Salvadoran Immigrants' Struggle for U.S. Residency*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

De Genova, Nicholas P. "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability in Everyday Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 419–447. doi:10.1146/annurev.anthro.31.040402.085432.

De la Rocha, Mercedes González. *The Resources of Poverty: Women and Survival in a Mexican City*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994.

Erder, Sema. *Kentsel Gerilim: Enformel İlişki Ağları Alan Araştırması*. Ankara: Um:ag, 1997.

Glick Schiller, Nina and Ayşe Çağlar. "Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality in Migration Studies: Migrant Incorporation and City Scale." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35, no. 2 (2009): 177–202. doi:10.1080/13691830802586179.

Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü (HÜNEE). *Türkiye Göç ve Yerinden Olmuş Nüfus Araştırması*. Ankara: Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü, 2006. Accessed on April 23, 2016. http://www.hips.hacettepe.edu.tr/tgyona/TGYONA_rapor.pdf.

Ineli-Ciger, Meltem. "Implications of the New Turkish Law on Foreigners and International Protection and Regulation No. 29153 on Temporary Protection for Syrians Seeking Protection in Turkey." *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration* 4, no. 2 (2015): 28–36.

Isin, Engin F. "Introduction: Democracy, Citizenship and the City." In *Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City*. Edited by Engin F. Isin. London: Routledge, 2000. 1–22.

Kalandides, Ares and Dina Vaiou. "'Ethnic' Neighbourhoods? Practices of Belonging and Claims to the City." *European Urban and Regional Studies* 0969776412438328. doi:10.1177/0969776412438328.

Keyder, Çağlar. "Globalization and Social Exclusion in İstanbul." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, no. 1 (March 2005): 124–134. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2427.2005.00574.

Kılıçaslan, Gülay. Generational Differences in Political Mobilization among Kurdish Forced Migrants: The Case of İstanbul's Kanarya Mahallesi." In *The Kurdish Issue in Turkey: A Spatial Perspective*. Edited by Zeynep Gambetti and Joost Jongerden. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2015. 157–184.

KONDA. *Perceptions and Expectations in the Kurdish Issue*. İstanbul: İletişimYayınları, 2011.

Lefebvre, Henri. *Writings on Cities*. Edited and translated by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Labas. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Leitner, Helga and Patricia Ehrkamp. "Transnationalism and Migrants' Imaginings of Citizenship." *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 9 (September 2006): 1615–1632. doi:10.1068/a37409.

Massey, Doreen, John Allen, and Steve Pile, eds. *City Worlds*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999.

Portes, Alejandro and Robert L. Bach. *Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

Purcell, Mark. "Citizenship and the Right to the Global City: Reimagining the Capitalist World Order." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 3 (September 2003): 564–590. doi:10.1111/1468-2427.00467.

Ruddick, Susan. "Constructing Difference in Public Spaces: Race, Class, and Gender as Interlocking Systems." *Urban Geography* 17, no. 2 (1996): 132–51. doi:10.2747/0272-3638.17.2.132.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). "Syria Regional Refugee Response: Turkey." http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224.

Yılmaz, Halim. *"Türkiye'de Suriyeli Mülteciler, İstanbul Örneği: Tespitler, İhtiyaçlar ve Öneriler."* İstanbul: MAZLUMDER, 2013.

Yörük, Erdem. "Welfare Provision as Political Containment: The Politics of Social Assistance and the Kurdish Conflict in Turkey." *Politics & Society* 40, no. 4 (December 2012): 517–547. doi:10.1177/0032329212461130.

Yükseker, Deniz. "Internal Displacement and Social Exclusion: Problems Encountered by Internally Displaced Persons in the Provinces of İstanbul and Diyarbakır." In *Coming to Terms with Forced Migration: Post-Displacement Restitution of Citizenship Rights in Turkey*. Edited by Elif Kalaycıoğlu and Josee Lavoie. Translated by Leyla Tonguç Basmacı. İstanbul: TESEV, 2006. 257–276.