# A NEW EPISODE OF DISPLACEMENT:
# THE PROTRACTED EXILE OF SYRIAN KURDS
# IN ISTANBUL'S DEMİRKAPI NEIGHBOURHOOD

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in Istanbul's Demirkapı Neighbourhood

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# DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Adnan Keği, certify that

- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
- this thesis contains no material that has been submitted or accepted for a degree or diploma in any other educational institution;
- this is a true copy of the thesis approved by my advisor and thesis committee at Boğaziçi University, including final revisions required by them.

Signature.....

Date .....20.09.2019.....

ABSTRACT

A New Episode of Displacement: The Protracted Exile of Syrian Kurds in Istanbul's Demirkapı Neighbourhood

Although this is not the first time Kurds are being displaced from the lands they live in, the recent mass displacement since the beginning of the Syrian civil war is unprecedented in scale, considering the resultant mass cross-border mobility. Dealing with the issue of displacement that has such a broader historical background, the present study is the result of an ethnographic field research with the Syrian Kurdish migrants living in Demirkapi neighbourhood of Bağcılar district in Istanbul. Demirkapı happens to be a neighbourhood densely populated by the Kurds displaced internally in the early 1990s. With a combination of observations from the neighbourhood, semi-structured in-depth interviews and narrative interviews carried out mostly with Syrian Kurdish neighbours -but also with a lesser number of 'local' Kurdish residents, this research mainly aims to scrutinize the complexity of the individual and collective experiences of forced displacement and exile across the nation state borders. The study also aims to develop a critique of humanitarian reductionism of refugee management and studies by focusing on everyday dynamics at a neighbourhood setting. Migratory trajectories of the migrants that have ended up in this specific urban space and everyday encounters are central in the scope of this study. The individual experiences under the "refugee" regime of Turkey as well as under the cheap and informal labour regime are also worked on throughout the study to give an account of the lives of Syrian Kurdish migrants in Istanbul.

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# ÖZET

## Yeni Bir Yerinden Edilme Dönemi: Istanbul'un Demirkapı Mahallesi'nde Suriyeli Kürtlerin Müzmin Sürgünlüğü

Kürtlerin yerlerinden edilmesinin ilk örneği olmamasına rağmen, özellikle yarattığı kitlesel sınır ötesi hareketlilik düşünüldüğünde, Suriye iç savaşından beridir süregelen yerinden edilmeler eşi görülmemiş boyuttadır. Böylesi geniş bir tarihsel arka planı olan yerinden edilme olgusuna bakan bu çalışma İstanbul Demirkapı'da yaşayan Suriyeli Kürt göçmenlerle gerçekleştirilen etnografik bir saha çalışmasının sonucudur. Demirkapı, 1990ların başlarında zorla yerinden edilen Kürt nüfusun da yoğun olarak yaşadığı bir mahalledir. Mahalleden gözlemler ve Suriyeli Kürt sakinleriyle -ayrıca daha az sayıda da yerli Kürt mahalleliyle- yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmeler ve mülakatlar yardımıyla, bu araştırma temel olarak ulus devlet sınırlarını aşan sürgün ve zorla yerinden edilme deneyimlerinin karmaşıklığını irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca, bir mahalle özelinde gündelik hayat dinamiklerine odaklanarak, mülteci çalışmaları ve idareciliğinde baskın olan insaniyetperverlik indirgemeciliğine bir eleştiri getirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Göçmenlerin, belirtilen kentsel mekâna uzanan yerinden edilme hikâyeleri ve gündelik karşılaşmaları bu tezin temelini oluşturmaktadır. İstanbul'daki Suriyeli Kürt göçmenlerin hayatlarına dair bir fikir vermek adına, Türkiye'nin mülteci politikalarının yanı sıra ucuz ve yasadışı emek politikalarına tabi olmaktan doğan kişisel deneyimler de bu araştırma içerisinde incelenmektedir.

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# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

*(...)*
*Heta kengî em ji hev bimînin dûr?*
*Çavên te birijin hey sînor!*
*(...)*[1]
A woman from Kobanê

The wars destroy lives, individual and community lives, the lives creation and development of which take moral and material labour of generations after generations. The civil war in Syria that started in 2011 has not been an exception, but a reaffirmation of this history of destruction. What immediately follows such disasters is usually the mobility of people in masses from the war zones and -would-be war zones- in search of safe locations inside national borders, but mostly across the borders. As such, the other side of the same history of destruction is usually of an insistence on endurance of life by people on the move. However, not much surprisingly, states, as responsible agents of the wars, strive to regulate and constrain the mobility of people in collaboration with the local and international, governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organizations. Still, the human condition leaks from the creaks of the boundaries imposed by states and regulatory organizations. No matter how challenging the conditions are, communities and individuals struggle to reclaim their trajectories, both on the move and at destinations.

1 "Till when should we remain separate?

Oh border, I wish you an endless torment!"

(I do not translate it literally as it is an excerpt from a poem. Unless otherwise stated, all the translation from Kurdish and Turkish are by myself and all names of my interlocutors are pseudonyms in order to secure their identities.)

This study looks into a fragment of such a struggle from the perspective of those displaced. More specifically, this is the story of Syrian Kurdish migrants, mostly from Efrîn[2], who have settled and been building their lives anew in Demirkapı neighbourhood of Bağcılar in Istanbul[3], which is a neighbourhood already densely settled by the internally displaced Kurds since the 1990s. Here I will begin with sketching an outline of the main dimensions –perceptual and practical- of their exile.

Weysî[4] is one of the Efrînî residents in the neighbourhood. Like many other fellow Efrînîs, he said "Who could even imagine that one day we will live in Istanbul... Now it has been seven years we are living here and we do not know what is waiting for us tomorrow." Similarly, the 'local' residents I met never anticipated such a future for Demirkapı, as one of them said "If a few years ago one had said that one day you will hear people speaking Urdu or Arabic in Demirkapı, no way would I have believed."[5] Today, thousands of children born to the Syrian migrants in Istanbul has reached to the age of school and are now bilingual. Now that it has been quite some years the initial frustrating years are left behind, the Syrian Kurdish migrants has been forming a certain belonging, in some cases, even an emotional attachment to Demirkapı, despite ongoing serious problems and challenges they have to face on a daily basis. The problems are persistent as the migrants are subject to well established legal and social, thus practical and discursive power regimes that

[2] Throughout, I conform to the names the participants use for the places. Efrîn region is one of the three mainly Kurdish-populated regions in Syria together with Kobanê and Jezîre.
[3] Certainly, one should not expect clear-cut boundaries in settlement patterns of Syrian Kurds, particularly in a metropolis like Istanbul. As a 'local' neighbour pointed out, a considerable population of Efrînîs also live in Fatih neighbourhood of Bağcılar, whose boundaries with Demirkapı are blurred. However, because I made the first rapports in Demirkapı and for the sake of feasibility, I have stayed within the borders of Demirkapı. It is highly possible that Fatih among some other neighbourhoods in Istanbul might be hosting a higher population of the Efrînî exiles.
[4] Weysî and his family is introduced in detail in the third chapter.
[5] Like many other peripheral districts of Istanbul, Bağcılar hosts non-Syrian migrants as well, as it combines poor housing conditions and 'informal' labour markets, and thereby becomes a 'liveable' urban place for the marginalized poor citizen and invisible migrants.

constrain them and render their lives invisible. What happens, one can say, is an extension, to the urban spaces, of some practices usually thought to be peculiar to refugee camps. While the migrants have to "earn their lives" by themselves just like other residents[6], they are constantly reminded of their temporariness, both by the legal status called "Syrians Under Temporary Protection", a form of implementation of international refugee system in Turkish style, and by a public discourse which is put to work through the well-established label of "*misafir*" (guest). As such, Syrian migrants in cities of Turkey have to endure their efforts of building a community life under the shadow of an unknown future. In other words, a situation of "unclosed sojourn, the open interval" as Eric Tang (2015) uses to define the experience of Cambodian refugees 'granted' resettlement in urban America. (p. 6). In short, despite their 'protracted stay' and a considerable past here, by being "held captive" (p.6) as *misafir*, their efforts and imaginations for a dignified future are constantly being distorted.

On another level, their story overlaps with that of their neighbours, that is with displacement of internally displaced Kurds in Demirkapı, who happen to be mostly from Bitlîs province and its surrounding rural region. By "a new episode" in the title I hope to offer a framework in which the two instances of displacements of Kurds living under the two different nation states -Turkey and Syria- join each other and overlap in a peripheral urban space. With the cross-border displacement of Syrian Kurds, the artificial state borders dividing people on the Turkish-Syrian borderlands are being overstepped for the first in almost a century in such a mass scale. These processes are unfolding not at all in 'normal' conditions but in the middle of a civil war with complex regional and international entanglements and as

[6] The very small amounts of financial aid granted to those meeting the impossible criteria is not worth considering here.

disruptive incidences of displacement and exile. The case at hand here, thus, always speaks to the larger historical and geographical 'borderization', displacement and dispossession of Kurds. The background story of how the first arrivals of Efrînîs happened and how Bağcılar has become a destination for them itself is emblematic to show how the border regimes and the practice of displacement are strong determinant dimensions for the trajectories of displacement and ongoing exile of Efrînîs. As recounted by Efrînî residents, the local Kurdish 'smugglers' on the border had their relatives living in Bağcılar and working in textile business. That was taken as a 'solution' on the basic level to the first challenges Efrînî youth would face once arrived: language barrier, employment and housing. Moreover, what happens on and across the borders continue to deeply influence the life in exile even after the displacement. The displacement from Efrîn had endured a relatively smooth and circular character for the initial years thanks to the occasional visits back to home the Efrînî exiles were able to have. Yet, after the incursion into Efrîn in the early 2018 by the host-country-in-question, the displacement and exile of people out of Efrîn was exacerbated. The homeland is not that much reachable for exile as it was before, hence a feeling of being stuck in Demirkapı.

What is more, almost all of Efrînî families and persons in Istanbul have at least one relative, a beloved one left behind. They are still dependant to the remittances from the exile Efrînîs as they were before but now their lives are in a constant danger under the joint control of the regular army forces and "armed oppositional groups".[7] While Efrînîs' future aspirations are being damaged by the

[7] According to a recent report by a civil society organization called IMPACT (previously known as Citizens for Syria): "(…) the situation in Afrin district, which came under de facto Turkish control after operation "Olive Branch" (January-March 2018), is characterized by high levels of instability. There, the displacement of local residents and the resettlement of IDPs have exacerbated pre-existing ethnic tensions. The situation is characterised by high discrepancies between local residents and IDPs in terms of access to personal security, livelihood, freedom of movement and the ability to practice

conditions of migrant-hood in urban setting, they are being trapped paradoxically in the home they are displaced from. Most of Efrînî residents prioritize this dimension and underline it. I again recount from Weysî:

> With the small amounts of money we earn, we have to look after our parents and brothers in Syria. This also makes impossible to save money for any future plans for our children. Worse, we now constantly keep an eye on Efrîn to make sure our relatives are alive. How can you enjoy here?

As I will return to it throughout the thesis, all these certainly further contribute to the foregrounding and strengthening an identity and belonging based on the place of origin, on being from Efrîn. Many of the Efrînî residents told me that now in Bağcılar as a community they know and they are close to each other better and more than before. It is further manifested in a neighbourhood context allowing for proximity and face to face relations between different 'communities' constituted by residents as "Turks", "Kurds of Turkey" –or of Istanbul-, Kurds of Jazîra, Kurds of Kobanê, "Arabs" or "Aleppians (kr.: Helebî)", to mention the ones I heard most. It should be noted that the process has now crossed the borders of the region. After the mentioned incursion, identification over and through Efrîn has taken a direction toward being a diasporic belonging tying relatives dispersed to Western resettlement countries, Istanbul and Efrîn, through remittances as well as advanced mobile communication technologies.

The fieldwork has brought and introduced my position into, more or less, such a locality and amalgam of identifications. Yet, I have a background that has gradually made my way to study forced migration in general and the present specific case. After I finished my course requirements in the graduate program, I was still

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one's own traditions. Local residents in Afrin district have also been the victims of serious human rights violations and discriminatory practices imposed by armed opposition groups (AOGs), who are also seen as giving privileges to IDPs with connections to AOGs." (IMPACT- Civil Society Research and Development, Socioeconomic Impact of Displacement Waves in Northern Syria, May 2019, p.9. See https://www.impact-csrd.org/socioeconomic-impact-of-displacement-waves-in-northern-syria/. Last accessed in 3.8.2019)

striving to specify and design my research topic for a master thesis, which then barely went beyond the rough idea of "the experiences of Kurdish teachers working under the education system of Turkey that denies their mother language." Around the same time, toward the end of 2017, I started to work as a translator/interpreter in the resettlement unit of one of the leading refugee agencies. With an invaluable encouragement from my advisor, I have started to think about my new research topic in accordance with my new professional work. In the largest operation of resettlement for Syrian refugees in Turkey[8], except one Kurdish-speaking caseworker, I have stayed as the single interpreter to attend resettlement interviews of the Syrian Kurdish refugees until I left in the early 2019. That has been my very first confrontation to realize how the working mentality of international humanitarian refugee management is determined according to the interests of states, sovereign nation states whose citizenship concept is still based on "(…) the very principle of the inscription of nativity as well as the trinity of state-nation-territory that is founded on that principle." (Agamben, 1996: p. 17). In such life-changing interviews, many Syrian Kurdish migrants could not access their right to communicate in their mother language. Yet, this was just one of the many failures of the international refugee agencies to its promises, which I was yet to witness at firsthand.

Most of my colleagues and I, we were aware that by working there, we were being part to the exclusionist operations of international refugee regime. We were confronting and witnessing firsthand and on a daily basis the reality that

[8] I say 'largest' according to the scope of international resettlement operations, which in total stays less than short to be a 'solution' for people out of place worldwide, even in quantitative terms. Indeed, while the population of refugees now in single host countries often exceeds 'millions', the resettlement quotes are defined in 'thousands'. Yet, throughout the thesis, if I give any numerical indications, they are for clarification. The study as a whole rather hopes to remain loyal to the truth that when it comes to the living beings "the difference is just that which is between zero and one". I owe this point to a conversation with my friend Sebastian.

> (…) the humanitarianism of the international refugee regime is about containment and that containment is about sovereignty, nativism, and racism. It is about the question of who can legally cross borders, who belongs, who is worthy, who fits in, and who gets to make choices about their future. (Besteman, 2015: p. 198)

No matter to what extent our work was effective or complicit in masking structural violence and inequality, and social injustice, it was eventually fulfilling on an individual and emotional level, thanks mostly to the face-to-face exchanges with those considered for resettlement. Besides, we were witnessing in each interview the obvious enthusiasm of migrants for resettlement and we were aware that in most of the "third countries" they would be provided with better living conditions and definite legal statuses than those they have in Turkey. Although these interactions were bounded to the strictly defined rules and regulations of professional 'work ethics', I thereby had an invaluable opportunity to know the individuals and communities who has rarely been represented as more than objects and figures in politics, media and by a considerable milieu in academia. In short, the individual condition of emotion -not collective compassion of humanitarian reason- and knowing subjects with their life stories -not suffering victims in need of humanitarian aid-, these two conditions has allowed me, and maybe many other "humanitarian workers", to bear the burden of working under the humanitarian mind-set and practice.

Just like most of people living in Turkey, I used to lack a considerable knowledge on the Syrian Kurds. This might be a proof of the success of the long border cutting the two countries. When it comes to the Efrînîs –and the larger Kurdish population living in Aleppo and Damascus- the ignorance is doubled. With the job I was doing, I found myself listening to and translating the risky journeys and war-time and exile stories of people I did not know before -which has most of the

time been an emotionally burdensome task to perform. I was gradually gaining an insight on their lives prior to the displacement, their ways of thinking and living, and the inside story of what it might feel to be a Syrian/Kurdish migrant in Turkey. The most significant mediator was obviously language. The dialect we were speaking was the same but I have acquired in time a considerable knowledge of the subtle local differences of Kurmancî they speak, including many adopted Arabic words. What is more, I had gained quite a familiarity with places they were now out of, including neighbours of Aleppo and numerous villages in Efrîn. Later on in spring of 2019, when I started to wander in the neighbourhood for the fieldwork, once again I realized that I could say, for instance, who is from Efrîn and who is not, upon hearing a migrant resident speaking. All this has been a background knowledge which had manifested itself further when we went deep in our conversations with Efrînîs. During almost each of one to one exchanges, I felt how this familiarity positively influenced our conversations as it served to fulfil a crucial lack that any migrant in the context of Turkey might feel: The unfulfilled need of the migrants to be asked, listened and understood. Once in the fieldwork, all these overall –that is having a knowledge on and about Efrîn, its people and the nuances of their Kurmancî and such- has probably contributed to my blurred position of being in between insider and outsider in favour of the former.

For a time, my potential participants of the research were from a category as vast as 'Kurdish migrants from Syria living in Istanbul'. I was desperate for finding a specific neighbourhood in Istanbul that would allow me for a feasible fieldwork with Kurdish migrants from Syria. Then at one point, the 'overlapping displacements'[9] I

[9] Throughout, I develop my contemplations on the condition of the displacements of the Kurds from Turkey's Kurdistan and of Efrînîs being overlapped in Demirkapı with the help of inspirations from Elena Fiddian Qasmiyeh's piece "Refugee-Refugee Relations in Contexts of Overlapping Displacement" in which she suggests that "(…) refugees are increasingly experiencing overlapping

touched upon above began to play its role in the research. Hoping to find a way into a 'suitable' location, I asked help from an NGO based in Istanbul and working mainly for internally displaced Kurds, knowing that the ways of these people out of place are intersected in certain districts of Istanbul. One of the volunteers in the NGO happen to have a Bitlîsî relative living in Demirkapı: Apê Abbas. In my very first day in the neighbourhood, I found myself in a focus group-like context, sharing my research topic with Apê Abbas and his extended family, and taking my first fieldwork notes. Therefore, I have included in the research the perceptions of Bitlîsî residents as a 'local' host community on their Syrian Kurdish neighbours, mostly in the fourth chapter.

Not much surprisingly, in almost all of my attempts for a conversation in the fieldwork, one of the basic initial questions I had been asked was "Where are you from?" What is asked as such is the city of origin by default. My answer "I am from Gever."[10] led to different reactions from Efrînîs and Bitlîsîs, thereby to a confrontation and intersection of dispossessions and state violence from different locations and times of Kurdish geography. During the fieldwork, I have interviewed two Bitlîsî middle-aged residents. Both of them, upon learning where I am from, shared with me the stories of their young relatives who lost their lives in the clashes between the PKK and state's security forces, in different times in Gever or its surrounding region -an area that has long been a major hotspot of the mentioned clashes. Efrînîs I met also generally showed that they are aware of Gever's "reputation". Apê Heme, a 52-year-old Efrînî whom I introduce in the fourth chapter, went a step further when he said:

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displacement in the sense that they often physically share spaces with other displaced people in diverse spaces of asylum. (Qasmiyeh, 2016).

[10] The original name of the town officially called Yüksekova.

> You the Kurds of North, in Diyarbekir, Cizîr and Gever, you did not witness maybe even one percent of what we had witnessed in the war of Syria. There is at least one martyr from each family. I remember once, in a single street of Eşrefîye neighbourhood in Aleppo, sixty-five people died.

This has been a revealing remark for me to see that the shared identity based on the violence faced under the nation states not necessarily and not always leads to an empathy or a solidarity. Or to put it more explicitly, such a feeling of belonging not necessarily leaves tensions outside. Eventually, Apê Heme's comparison was an articulated reaction to one of the many anti-migrant questions frequently directed to Syrian migrants: "Why did not you remain in your land to fight?" Even if a 'local' Kurd try to justify asking such a question by embracing resistance, defence and liberation discourses –on the side of the oppressed, it does not change the reality that it would be felt by the 'migrant' as an exclusionary gesture by the 'local' against her presence now at the next door. Hitherto, I have tried to point to one side of the controversial and multifaceted condition of the migrants shaped around migrant-hood, identifications, namings and belongings, and mostly vis-à-vis the locals.

From here, I return back to another confrontation I had during my work experience in the refugee agency, to touch upon my material -class- position with respect to the research and research participants, as well as some other significant dimensions of being an urban migrant: While Syrian migrants are left to live in shared urban conditions which are highly disempowering economically and socially, their accesses to basic rights -such as work permit and social insurance, freedom of mobility out of the city of residence, a secure and definite legal status among many others- are strictly prohibited or made impossible procedurally. Resettlement processes, the most effective long-term solution offered to the refugees as humanitarian discourse usually suggests, on the other hand, are lengthy ones that may in some cases last for years because of the lengthy paper work and endless

evaluation stages. Certainly, not all of them result in admission. Some families are 'lucky' at least to be called and informed that their cases are evaluated negatively, for some confidential reasons that even we the agency workers do not know. Such feedbacks were certainly in Arabic, the official language of the nation. In some rare cases my colleagues would ask for my native language so that I would better console the applicant on the phone. Once in such an instance, upon learning that his case is dismissed for resettlement, the applicant, a young father living with his family in Istanbul, has explained his frustration and exhaustion by comparing his living conditions to any 'humanitarian worker'. In our conversation, it obviously happened to be my conditions: receiving a salary that would afford some minimum conditions for a decent life, social insurance, a secure legal status and no constant threat of deportation. We the helpers and caregivers were enjoying these conditions while the ones we claim to care for were barely surviving. These are how I recount his reprehension in my own words and as far as I remember. His tone was certainly more straightforward and coherent, as well as angry. Done by someone "cared for" by the caregivers of a humanitarian agency, for me, it has been the most articulate exposition of the refugee regime of the humanitarian reason and practice.

The field research and the whole study has allowed me to contemplate retrospectively on the experiences I had during my personal work experience, which while working was difficult for me to do due not only to the emotional intensity of what I was witnessing but also due to the demanding complex and multifaceted dimensions of forced displacement and humanitarian intervention/management. Just as humanitarian refugee management fails to comprehend, and initiate structural long-term solutions to the issues of the people "lumped into mass, stereotyped group" (Feldman, 2015: p.4) under the name 'refugees', no research attempt can

homogenise displaced people under any grouping – 'migrant' or 'refugee' among others- and speak *for* the group. Keeping this in mind, I strive throughout the study to convey the accounts, narratives and testimonies as they are recounted to me by the migrant neighbours themselves. Yet still, I bring my commentaries and argumentations. Knowing that no research attempt would do complete justice to the complex dynamics of being a migrant in the urban spatiality and temporality, to reach the best depth and breadth possible within the boundaries of the present study, I have relied on the ethnographic practices of fieldwork, such as informal conversations, non-participant observation and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. As such, the study as a whole strives to position itself against the humanitarian discourse and practice –specifically, the refugee paradigm and practice-, not only through the fieldwork it relies on but also by benefiting from a cohort of "critical refugee studies" (Tang, 2015: p.5) and some ethnographic works introduced in the next chapter. However, it has to be noted that the extensive critique of what I call "humanitarian reason" I engage in throughout the thesis targets not the humanitarianism in macro sense and all together but rather the refugee management system and refugee studies. More specifically, the first one is criticized mostly for the structural cooperation with the international state system and the second one for its reductionist tendencies.

Once arrived somewhere relatively 'liveable' compared to the place of departure, people out of place try very hard to rebuilt their destroyed lives. The Syrian Kurdish migrants have been building their lives anew now for the last eight years in Istanbul. Yet, this thesis does not aim to portray Efrînî residents of Demirkapı neither as heroic examples out of a tragedy nor as the victims of a disaster, although the reader would find many instances of both situations

throughout. The thesis rather prioritizes to focus on the narratives of displacement, the processes of settlement and the ongoing emplacement in the neighbourhood. I try to convey the minute but revealing details –outpouring usually from the encounters/confrontations with the 'local' neighbours- of everyday dynamics to better comprehend the conditions -material, sociocultural and political- of being Syrian Kurdish migrant in a neighbourhood in Istanbul.

I have preferred to include 'local' Kurds despite being aware of the risk to seem favouring a "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer, A. & Glick Schiller, N., 2002). However, the locality of the neighbourhood requires the research to consider the next door neighbour. Also, it would be seen how the presence of internally displaced Kurds in Istanbul influences the exile of Syrian Kurds in Istanbul. My non-researcher self and positionality has certainly contributed to such a research direction, as I contemplate on throughout the thesis. As for the theoretical terms and argumentation, the direction I took proved to be useful. Here, on an analytical level, the intersection of Kurdish-ness and migrant-hood is useful to explain the illusionary protection believed to be granted by citizenry and to expose how disempowering structural conditions are shared by citizens and migrants alike. (Feldman, 2015: p. 10-12). Kurds in Turkey must be the most representative figure of "generic national citizens and exchangeable abstract labourers (…) on whom national sovereignty is imposed and from whom labour power is extracted" (p. 12). Kurdish language, long-denied in public spheres and still ignored officially, is lingua franca in construction sides and textile workshops, maybe now more than any time since the arrival of Syrian Kurdish migrants. In another context, "non-migrant" Kurds on the move in the lands -that have become border regions between Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran- are killed frequently upon being mistaken for "terrorists". A similar border regime, that

is kind of ‘exclusionary inclusion’ is extended to and endured in urban spaces, maybe in subtler ways, as alluded in the following short remark: A Bitlîsî man I met in the neighbourhood once said “You see, my hair turned grey here in Istanbul. But Istanbul is not ours. Istanbul is not theirs (Syrian Kurds) as well.” The conditions that renders everyone migrants should be countered first. Istanbul, or anywhere else, should be of everybody living in it. On the principle of equal residency, the conditions of living together can be negotiated and constituted.

The thesis opposes the short term, emergency-based, victimizing and paternalistic discourses of humanitarianism. Similarly, the thesis aims to expose how governance policies related to Syrian migrants are determined according to the geopolitical interests and constituency-based priorities of the state or the governing elite. The policies are implemented under the well-established discourse of “guest”, “dependent war victims” and “migrants under temporary protection”. By focusing on the experiences and perspectives of migrants as active ‘agents’ of the ongoing local transformation and dynamic process of emplacement, the study suggests that the presence of migrants in the neighbourhood still has the potential, in the long run, for a social change toward equal residency if restrictive and indefinite government policies and paternalistic and short term humanitarian approaches are abandoned.

Before going on to introducing the core chapters, I will give a short review of the recent history of (forced) migration in Turkey, how it was, in social and legal terms, before the Syrian civil war and how it has been transforming since the arrival of the Syrian asylum seekers. I also engage in a dialogue with a research carried on a few years ago in two other predominantly Kurdish neighbourhoods of Istanbul, very similar to Demirkapı socio-spatially.

Turkey, migration and displacements of Kurds

Since particularly the 1980s, Turkey has increasingly become "a regional hub for receiving continuous flows of forced migration" (Canefe, 2016: p. 9) due to the endless civil wars in the Middle East and turmoil in its surrounding region, from Eastern Europe to Africa. Started from the 1960s, indeed, Turkey was an emigration country due particularly to the labour migrations to Europe (Castles, Haas & Miller: 2014: p.179). With some positive socioeconomic transformations inside, and historical events outside (such as the end of the Soviet Union and the Iranian revolution), Turkey has in time become, first, a transit country for "irregular" migrants heading to Europe, and then also an asylum country of the refugees from the Middle Eastern countries (Kirişçi, 2007: p. 91; Sert, 2016: p.97). The first "mass influx" was of the Kurdish refugees from today's Kurdistan region of Iraq between 1988 and 1991, which Kemal Kirişçi suggests "amounted to almost half a million" population. (2007: p. 95). Upon such incidences, Turkey had developed the Asylum Regulations in 1994 (Kirişçi, 2007: p.95). The displacements of Kurds, it seems, has been shaping, from the very beginning, the history of forced migration in Turkey and the related legal developments.

The Syrian war that has started in 2011 has made Turkey the country that hosts the biggest population of refugees in the world now in 2019. The legal sphere in Turkey significantly shapes the life of Syrian refugees in social and economic spheres. The legal regulations regarding the Syrians residing in Turkey has come to be known for its ambiguity, hence a vulnerable socio-legal status. That is why any take on the Syrian migrants first includes an overview of the legal situation almost instinctively. Turkey has signed the 1951 Geneva Convention that regulates the status of forced migrants or refugees. However, it is also among the few signatories

that reserves a geographical limitation, which excludes non-European asylum seekers from access to the right of the refugee status. Although the geographical limitation is being kept in effect, in 2014 and 2016 the government has brought some "regulations" to the legal ambiguity exacerbated by the boom of the asylum seekers:

> (…) the government finally issued the Temporary Protection Directive in 2014, aimed at reducing this ambiguity by granting Syrian "guests"—once they are registered—indefinite residence, emergency access to basic needs, and no forcible returns (non-refoulement), as well as access to healthcare and education. The 2016 Regulation on Work Permit of Refugees under Temporary Protection also created ways to obtain work permits, particularly for Arabic-speaking doctors, nurses, and teachers. (Mine Eder & Derya Özkul, 2016: p. 5)

Despite ethnic and cultural diversity of Turkey and its initial experience with the Kurdish refugees from Iraq in the early 1990s, its "traditional immigration policy was shaped very much by nation-building concerns as well as efforts to sustain a homogenous national identity", as Kirişçi suggests. (2007: p. 5) The idea of a homogenous national identity has always been a failed political project in Turkey. Yet, it has been endured stubbornly and with high human and material costs. The arrival of millions of Syrian refugees in the recent years is arguably the biggest challenge to the age-old ethnic-nationalist determinations of citizenry in Turkey.

To better understand the conditions of Syrian refugees in Turkey today, it is crucial to remember how the migratory context was before the arrival of the Syrian migrants and how it has transformed after the initial years of their stay. It might also give an idea about the main discussions on the migration in Turkey. Kirişçi (2007) also informs us that the enduring migration and asylum policies in Turkey that had been shaped by the "traditional conception of Turkishness" were not compatible with the negotiations with the EU, which were then lively and supposed to include a "common immigration policy". The traditional conception was not solely based on Turkish ethnic identity but also on a cultural belonging defined by the Muslim Sunni

historical background, which would exclude non-Muslim minorities of the Ottoman-times Anatolia as well as "unassimilated Kurds and Alevis." (Kirişçi, 2007: pp. 96-97) Due to then ongoing negotiations with the EU, back in 2007, Kirişçi acknowledges the possibility of positive developments. However, he refrains from an over-optimism as he concludes with a harbingering remark: "The key element (for Turkey becoming a migration transition country), however, will be making sure that the Turkish economy continues to grow and that Turkey stays on a course of democratization." (p.97)

Much has changed since 2007. Despite all distorting efforts to represent otherwise, Turkey is now going through an economic crisis. The Syrian refugees have become the source of cheap labour in the exploitative informal markets. The lives of the Syrian migrants in Turkey are defined by highly precarious socioeconomic conditions. The most recurrent issues throughout the interviews I had with the Syrian Kurdish residents had been the low wages, long working hours, heavy workloads and pressuring livelihood demands. Most of them would put it by a comparison to the livelihood conditions back in Syria: "One working individual was sufficient to look after a family of ten. Here, women and children, we all have to work and it is still not enough." Such a sentence might be emblematic of not only the interviews of my field research but of any conversation one would have with a Syrian resident in Istanbul. "Uncertainty, precarity, and economic vulnerability" are the most repeated terms used to define the harsh living conditions of the Syrian migrants in the academic works attentive to the problems the refugees foreground (Eder & Özkul, 2016: p. 7). The situation is not all about the different economic regimes of Syria and Turkey. It is more related to an intersection and combination of migration regime and neoliberal transformations in the specific context of Turkey,

which is certainly not isolated from the overall regional as well as global transformations. Nergis Canefe (2016) suggests that we need "a more nuanced notion of precarity" for the contexts like Turkey which are situated in between the Global North and the Global South. (p.12). She takes away our attention from the most uttered dimensions of irregular migration in Turkey, such as "the restrictive legislation and reinforced control mechanisms introduced by the Turkish state." (p. 12). Canefe rightly claims that "(…) migratory flows actually fit well into the overall neoliberalization of Turkey's political economy with its need for cheap, semi-qualified, and flexible labor." (p. 9-10). The flows are indeed *made* to fit to the economic system with the concrete involvement of state through "the legalization of flexible labor and precarity" (p. 10). The rule of neoliberal terms certainly did not start with the Syrian refugees but their mass entry to the precarious labour force has been a "turning point" in the process as "the dispossessed of Syria constituted the tipping point for the fine tuning of this particular model (of precarity), with its vast potential for application." (p. 28).

Although it might seem unnecessary to repeat, it is worth remembering what Sinem Kavak (2016) reminds us, as there is still the risk that it might be taken for granted by some: "(…) integration into the labor market does not necessarily end one's precarity—it might actually worsen it." (p.34). Most of the arguments and analyses that she builds through a specific focus on the seasonal agricultural labour force in Turkey, are relevant for the urban labour market of textile as well, which is similarly one of the "lower echelons of labor market" (p.31) in Turkey like the former one. She uses the conception of "hyper-precarity", which would be helpful to understand the living and working conditions of Syrian Kurdish refugees working in the small textile workshops located in the peripheral neighbourhoods of Istanbul like

Demirkapı. The vulnerable socio-legal status and inhumanely demanding livelihood conditions constitute a circular dynamic of exploitation and impoverishment for the refugees. As a result, the need remains urgent on a daily basis "to tackle short term livelihood pressures at the expense of long-term saving and social reproduction strategies." (Kavak, 2016, p.52) That is arguably the most significant aspect that forms the everyday of the Syrian residents in Istanbul. In most of our conversations an expected and almost pre-given point that I had to strive to go beyond was an immediate statement by most of the interlocutors, more or less like the following sentences: "How can our life be? What can we say? It is all about work and home."

The course of democratization once believed to be happening by some did not continue into the second decade of 2000s. Nobody would have foreseen that in a decade Turkey would be the leading country in the world for its population of the refugees. In 2016, the journal of New Perspectives on Turkey in a special issue[11] on the Syrian refugees in Turkey confirmed that "after the initial humanitarian response, and with the growing recognition that Syrian refugees are no longer "temporary guests" and are likely to settle, anti-immigrant sentiments and xenophobia appear to be on the rise" (Eder and Özkul, p. 5) Despite all the processes the country went through and despite 'hosting' the highest population of refugees in the world, not much has changed regarding the legal ambiguity of the Syrian refugees. What is worse, an economic crisis that was not yet acknowledged back in 2016 but has been growing since then, is now further disempowering the migrant and the citizen poor who were already living in precarity. The economic crisis was not yet experienced on the micro level back in 2016 but there were already some other problems that I believe were harbingers of today's deteriorated conditions, particularly for the

[11] New Perspectives on Turkey, vol. 54. Published online by Cambridge University Press: 03 August 2016. ISSN: 0896-6346 (Print), 1305-3299 (Online). Available on https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2016.5

migrants. Similar to Kirişçi's suggestion, Eder and Özkul underlined the need of democratization to improve the conditions of refugees and asylum seekers. They also framed the major problems on the way toward a future that would offer descent legal and socioeconomic conditions for the refugees. The time passed has unfortunately proven the accuracy of the problems. Therefore, I would quote a long excerpt to remind how we have reached to today's conditions:

> The escalation of the Kurdish conflict and the intense violence in the southeast of the country, rising urban terrorist attacks, the regional and international entanglements of the Kurdish problem with the Syrian war, and instability in the Middle East all clearly create serious pressures. But the rapid drift of the country toward an authoritarianism with an excessive concentration of executive power, serious curbs on the freedom of expression and the press, along with a rising nationalism, all raise serious questions as to whether such democratization is possible. Even more problematic is the excessive polarization in the country over a wide range of issues. Under these conditions, a full-fledged political and social dialogue on migration and/ or refugees, their rights, and their incorporation into the country becomes impossible (Eder and Özkul, 2016: p. 7).

These remarks are in a sense historical remarks registering the general atmosphere of Turkey of that time. The indispensable dialogue they mention is still impossible, now that Turkey is involved in the Syrian civil war with a direct presence on the ground. The direction away from democratisation and dialogue toward authoritarianisms and conflict, both inside and outside, is still dominant. Now that the population of the Syrian asylum seekers is doubled, what is crucially needed in Turkey for a life together for migrants and citizens based on equal residency is still a political and public dialogue that would counter the false beliefs and sentiments feeding the rising xenophobia and anti-migrant attitudes.

Eder and Özkul (2016) make these descriptions to point out to the larger obstacles on the way of the contexts similar to Demirkapı to be generalized across the country, the contexts they define as "'living together' at the micro level", which, they suggest, "ultimately necessitates a political and social environment that

promotes mutual understanding, tolerance and human encounters." (p. 7) The micro level examples they mean are two neighbourhoods of Istanbul, very close and similar to Demirkapı, spatially as well as socially. In another article, Gülay Kılıçaslan specifically focuses on the everyday interactions of Syrian Kurdish migrants and forcibly displaced Kurds of 1990s, living together in Bayramtepe of Başakşehir and Kanarya of Küçükçekmece districts, both having municipal borders with Bağcılar district in which Demirkapı lies. Kılıçaslan's work gives a useful context of Demirkapı and the issue of forced migration.

As I claim throughout the thesis, the lives of Syrian migrants are shaped by ambiguous and sometimes even paradoxical dimensions and terms in Turkey. Deniz Ş. Sert (2016) claims that constrained by the highly precarious social and economic conditions, "the only mechanism that actually supports migrants' continuous existence in Turkey seems to be their social networks." (p. 115) For migrants, the capital of social networks is, indeed, the main source to build and endure a life. What is more, in our case, the presence of citizen Kurds displaced to Istanbul earlier, with whom Syrian Kurds live side by side in the neighbourhoods like Demirkapı, broadens their social networks and constitutes a contact point with the receiving society. All the same, there occurs "the risk of "urban segregation," where Syrian refugees either live in their own quarters or, even if they live side by side with the locals, do not really socialize or engage in social interaction." as Eder and Özkul (2016: p. 5) predict. Just as economic precariousness has a history that predates the arrival of the Syrian refugees, so does the "lack of human interaction", as again Eder and Özkul (2016) inform us: "Unfortunately, systematically low levels of interpersonal trust in Turkish society, as well as already low levels of civil society engagement and non-conventional political participation, suggest that this lack of

human interaction is not exclusive to Syrian refugees."(p. 5) A socialization and interaction certainly exist yet the *real* conditions and nature of such an interaction are what matter most. This point brings me to Gülay Kılıçaslan's (2016) work, in which she examines the exclusion and inclusion dynamics of the refugees through their interactions and encounters with their Kurdish neighbours, who were internally displaced in the 1990s. The urban spaces she looks at, Kanarya and Bayramtepe, are among the above mentioned examples of "living together at micro level", which also bear the risk of the mentioned "urban segregation." Kılıçaslan (2016) interchangeably refers to them as "suburban neighbourhoods", "slum neighbourhoods", peripheral areas of Istanbul", and, last but not least, "predominantly Kurdish neighbourhoods." (pp. 78, 83, 79). All these references foregrounding different aspects of the quarters can be used for Demirkapı as well, which is located in the same socio-spatial urban area with the former neighbourhoods. The most common aspect of these neighbourhoods must be that they are urban spaces allowing a residence pattern that eases the livelihood and survival for the migrants mainly thanks to the social networks. Kılıçaslan draws attention to yet another seemingly paradoxical situation of being Syrian migrant in Istanbul, which is a basic yet a defining one for the lives of the Syrian refugees. It is the paradoxical state of living in the city while being denied due particularly to the precarious legal status:

> Although they are 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. (Kılıçaslan, 2016, pp. 83-84)

Kılıçaslan uses Lefebvre's "right to the city" to conceptualize this state of living in the city as migrants with indefinite legal status. She claims that this is where the mechanisms of inclusion come into being despite the exclusionary discourses and

practices that spring from the “liberal democratic model of citizenship” based on nation-state belonging. As she rightly believes that “everyday life is the core axis of the right to the city,” (p. 80) she attends to the everyday of the two Kurdish migrant groups – “Kurdish IDPs and Syrian Kurdish refugees”- and their interactions as neighbours.

Kılıçaslan (2016) mainly argues that the relations between the two Kurdish migrant groups have transformed in time from “solidarity-based ties toward increasingly exploitative economic relations.” (p. 79) The initial solidarity, she claims, was formed through shared experiences of forced displacement, shared identity and language. (p. 79) Although she mentions that the local and global economic transformations as well as social changes in the neighbourhood have “conditioned the relations of the Kurdish IDPs with the Syrian Kurdish refugees on the basis of market and economic needs,” (p. 94) she also says the tensions in the political sphere ultimately affects the relations in economic and social spheres, as well. (p. 94). Earlier, she touches upon what she means by political tensions. Mainly, it is the political orientation of the Syrian Kurdish refugees, she suggests, that does not fit to the Kurdish political movement, and this causes contestations in the spheres of urban space they share with the internally displaced Kurds. However, I suggest that one cannot make clear-cut distinctions for the political orientations of the Kurdish communities, neither for the Syrian Kurdish refugees nor for the first-comer migrant Kurds of Demirkapı. Here, what is more determinant than the political orientation is the fact that since 2015, “political violence and war became a significant part of the everyday lives of Kurds in Turkey again.” (Günay, 2019: p. 555) Throughout this thesis, I also elaborate on the transformations the relations of

the two groups have gone through. Yet, there are some other aspects that Kılıçaslan either does not open up more or does not mention.

Just as their legal statuses are different, and that certainly makes a significant difference in the ways of participating in the city life, the conditions of migrants are different as well. The relations of the Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey with the receiving society have been based on the exploitation of the newcomers since the very beginning. A strict line cannot be drawn, in that sense, between the Kurdish and non-Kurdish receiving society -not anymore, at least. There is not such a strong solidarity base that would be able to counter the systemic exploitation of the Syrian Kurdish refugees. The exploitation has been strengthened by the combination of the ambiguous legal status of the migrants, economic crisis, and neoliberal precarious work conditions that integrates the migrants as cheap labour to the informal markets. In time, the issues started to be thought, in public and academic spheres, more and more from an economic perspective, as it has become so apparent to ignore, due to the deteriorating economic conditions, increasing population of the migrants and indefinitely ongoing Syrian war, among other reasons. Yet, if not more, there is an equally important aspect to consider for a better understanding of the daily lives of the Syrian Kurdish refugees and their relations with the Kurds displaced from Turkey's Kurdsitan. The Kurdish political movement(s) and Kurdish question in the larger region, the way Turkey engages with it in Turkey and in Syria, the historical context of the Syrian Kurdish refugees that differs from their citizen Kurdish neighbours, and the ongoing civil war that exacerbates their displacement and obscures future plans for home... All these are significant dimensions and aspects that deeply affect the daily lives of the Syrian Kurdish refugees in the urban

neighbourhoods. They may even cause contestations between the two migrant groups.

To say it at once and straightforward, the Syrian Kurds are exhausted of politics. They are exhausted not just because they are displaced by a civil war but also because since the civil war had started, people in the Kurdish regions of Syria have been living under a delicate autonomous political system initiated by the Kurdish armed and political actors. Although some of them have not witnessed the physical disasters of the war, they had decided to leave their homes as, apart from the ISIS treat, the autonomous system in Kurdish regions, founded in the middle of an ongoing civil war and under the treat of the neighbour countries, cannot guarantee security, stability and convenient economic conditions –all being indispensable for a hopeful future. The Syrian Kurdish refugees have left their homes simply in search of a better and dignified life secured by just and democratic rules and regulations. Although they keep their hopes for their home regions, the hopes are also being exhausted. Are they living, in Turkey, in the favourite legal, economic and social conditions that they have been searching for? Obviously they are not. That is why to leave Turkey to Europe is always and still a better option although it means a further separation from the home and a dangerously long journey. Already subject to highly vulnerable and ambiguous legal status, the Syrian Kurdish refugees in Istanbul strive to build and lead normal and stable lives, for which they rightly see economic improvement and education opportunities as the key factors. Running one's own business, no matter how small it is, has been a favourite way to overcome the exploitative jobs easily available for them. That is may be why the most visible remarks of the presence of Syrian refugees in Istanbul are the small grocery shops and restaurants. What is more, the schools and streets, as the main interaction spaces

of children, seem to be the new spaces of contestations between the refuges and the receiving communities.

Syrian Kurdish refugees' search and efforts for simple normal lives –and hence a political disengagement- are usually considered by the citizen Kurds as conformism and weak patriotism. Here, it is indispensable to consider the political conditions in Turkey in general and vis-à-vis the Kurdish question particularly, which have been deteriorated in the last few years. Kılıçaslan's field research involves her visits to the neighbourhoods between 2012 and 2015, when Turkey has not made any incursion into Syria and a process of negotiation with the PKK was still going on. In the last half of 2015, closely affected by the Syrian war and political developments in the Syrian Kurdish region, the negotiations stopped and the armed conflict restarted in Turkey, as the excerpt given above from Eder and Özkul also summarizes. Such developments certainly had their affects in the predominantly Kurdish neighbourhoods of Istanbul, which used to be active with the youth protests and local branches of Kurdish political parties and cultural associations. Indeed, such organizations used to be the institutional basis of the initial solidarity between the 'local' and the newcomer Kurdish communities, as Kılıçaslan (2016) mentions as well:

> The *Mala Gel* were established within the local offices of the pro-Kurdish 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. (p. 86)

There has not been such a political atmosphere since 2016 that would offer such conditions at all. None of the participants I met in the field research mentioned HDP or Mala Gel. The only visible political activity I witnessed had been the graffiti on the walls calling for attention to the hunger strikes of the imprisoned Kurdish

politicians going on at the time I was in the neighbourhood. Turkey once again is going through a process defined by the armed conflict, violence, criminalization of the Kurdish and oppositional politics and by the rising authoritarian practices. Under normal conditions that have rarely been experienced in Turkey, one can anticipate that the Syrian Kurdish refugees could have even played a positive role, particularly in the sociocultural and linguistic spheres of Kurdish community in Turkey. Yet, under the current conditions, they even refrain from talking politics, as they know that the Kurdish identity itself is systematically being criminalized by the political violence and the war going on in Turkey. In a research that focuses on the narratives of counter-violence among IDP Kurdish working-class men in Istanbul, Günay (2019) also reaches to the conclusion that, as his interlocutors taught him, "time and change in historical context (…) shape what can be narrated, as well as the production, circulation, public lives, and effects of those narratives." (p. 563) The narratives I recount throughout the thesis are, similarly, the products of the context they are lived and told in. In this subsection, I have tried to give how the migratory context had taken its shape until the arrival of the Syrian asylum seekers and how it has changed after millions of the Syrian refugees started to reside in Turkey. Then, through a dialogue with Kılıçaslan's work, I have focused on the significance of the socio-political context that has been transformed by violence escalated inside, as well as outside, particularly in the north of Syria after Turkey started to be present on the ground since 2016.

Internal displacement in Turkey and Istanbul

All the non-Syrian Kurdish neighbours introduced in this thesis -predominantly from the rural region of Bitlîs province- are those who had been stripped of their villages in the early 1990s during the fierce years of the war between the PKK and the

Turkish army. All of whom I met in the neighbourhood, without exception, have been forced to accept to be “village guards”. When they refused, they had no other option but to join the working-class poor in the metropolitan cities in the west of Turkey, Istanbul being the leading one. Their villages are still zones of armed clashes at the time of this research. During the infamous 1990s, around four thousand villages and smaller rural settlements were evacuated. As for the people displaced and dispossessed, while the official statistics record 370.000 people, numbers given by the independent humanitarian organizations vary between one to four million displaced people. (Günay, 2019, p. 557) After a short armistice period that started in the Newroz of 2013, the heavy clashes resurrected between the state armed forces and the PKK in the summer of 2015, this time in the urban residential areas. The clashes had caused new waves of forced migration to the major urban centres within the Kurdish region, as well as to the metropolitan cities in the western part of the country, again predominantly to Istanbul.

Istanbul has always been a city of internal immigrants, including Kurdish citizens. Yet, the mass arrivals in the 1990s were results of a drastic displacement caused by war and from a certain part of the country, not by economic motivations from all over the country, as it used to be. What is more, unlike the migration waves before the 1990s, they were less circular and more permanent migrations in nature. Çağlar Keyder (2005) underlines the effects of this novel kind of migration in the neoliberal global transformation that Istanbul has been going through since the 1980s, as a result of which, the city, like “other globalizing third world cities (…) has lost its predominantly middle-class and relatively homogeneous character to one more commonly associated with extreme disparities of income, wealth and power.” (pp. 124-5) He also defines the residence patterns of the newcomers in the peripheral

neighbourhoods as the spatial urban organizations "for the perpetuation of a residence-based informal economy" where the social capital is the main source for the survival of the newcomer migrants. (p. 126) Such a pattern has remained as the way through which the new migrants –in this case, the Syrian refugees- find their way for livelihood and survival in Istanbul in the 2010s. Keyder is attentive to the ethnic dimension of the waves of migration to Istanbul in the 1990s. He specifies that the "migration driven by adverse political and economic conditions (…) implied a number of negative conditions." (p. 132) These are the conditions which my Bitlîsî interlocutors remember when they indicate how their early times in Istanbul resemble the arrival conditions of their Syrian Kurdish neighbours:

> (…) there is indeed a danger that these new immigrants have now calcified into a permanent underclass, moving back and forth between unemployment, self-employment and casual, informal work, always in need of outside assistance for survival. (…) The new immigrants are socially excluded: unlike the older immigrants who could assure socio-economic integration through the mobilization of network relations, they lack the material resources and the social capital necessary for any integration. They also often face the threat of political exclusion. For them, existence in the city is an enforced game of survival in a hostile environment. (Keyder, 2005, p. 132)

Anyone more or less familiar with the current conditions of Syrian migrants in Turkey may mistake the preceding remarks for the current circumstances of Syrian refugees. They are indeed analysis of the conditions the Kurdish IDPs had to face when they arrived in Istanbul in the 1990s. That confirms the observations of my Bitlîsî interlocutors that there has not been a considerable improvement for the Kurds and migrants in Turkey. Such adverse material and political conditions are favourite

for the formation of the closed, self-relied urban communities of "minorities" and refugees. This is also how the structural inequalities systematically create chains and hierarchies of poverty among the lower strata in the urban settings.

What follows are the core chapters. The second chapter deals with the discussions in the forced migration studies. I start with introducing theoretical and ethnographic voices critical to the humanitarianism approaches, from which I benefit largely. I give a detailed reading of critiques of humanitarian reason not to simply join the relatively safe and comfortable attempt of exposing the contradictions of humanitarianism. In doing so, I rather hope, first, to engage in a self-reflexive exercise to make sense of my work and research experiences in what one can take as the terrains of humanitarian action. Second, I believe it is indispensable to engage with the critiques of humanitarian reason if one is to advocate instead for the competence of ethnographic methods and the study of the everyday to disclose what humanitarian reason has made self-evident and taken for granted. Then I try to bring into conversation the conceptualizations I use in my arguments regarding the on-ground issues related to identifications and belongings on the one side and the socioeconomic conditions on the other side. I have designed the third chapter as the core chapter dealing with the field research. I introduce some individuals with whom I carried out in-depth interviews together with their detailed narratives of displacement from Efrîn of Aleppo to Bağcılar of Istanbul. The chapter is built on the portrayal of a park named Ceviz Bahçesi by examining how an Efrînî woman makes her exile bearable through this specific public space. The park also helps me to explain how the ways of cross-border displacement and dispossession –including mine- from different Kurdish cities intersect. In the fourth chapter I first portray the migratory texture of the neighbourhood. By further introducing the internally

displaced Bitlîsîs, I intend to open up what seems as overlapping displacements and to what extent, how and under what conditions the neighbourhood is a shared space of those displaced.

# CHAPTER 2

# CRITICAL APPROACHES TO HUMANITARIANISM AND THE QUESTION OF EVERYDAY

No doubt, my research and the thesis as its end product is destined to catch just one part and one side of an unfolding larger story. That is a massive story if we consider the huge population of its protagonists, who are the "uprooted" of the earth as Bauman names them in the foreword of his *Liquid Modernity* when pointing out to the unstoppable increase of refugees together with migrants, asylum seekers, exiles and like. (Bauman, 2000: pp. 1-15). This issue is usually defined and talked about as a crisis and as an emergency situation by the mainstream sources and actors like international humanitarian organizations, politicians and media outlets. Yet, the critical social scholars and the critical literature of refugees and humanitarianism claim and prove that it has been a considerable time by now that people on the move have become a norm, and that it is not a temporary state of crisis but rather a permanent element in the current global order. So, probing the migrant condition as it is experienced in this specific part of the world by a certain group of people, that is by the Syrian Kurdish migrants living in Istanbul, the most general and starting point of my study is to trace the resonances of that global 'issue' in – a relatively- local setting. In this chapter I try to make the connections between the local and global levels of forced human mobility through a discussion of the critiques of humanitarian discourse and the potency of the approaches that prioritise the study of the everyday life in the context of forced migration.

It is true that the rise of the population of people on the move deserves attention. Nonetheless, Gregory Feldman cautions us to be aware of a "worldwide obsession with migration:

> On a global scale, migrants do not reach extraordinarily large numbers, unlike workers, women, or postcolonial subjects. However, the "migrant" now dominates public debate more than any other categorical subject. This character usually appears as a stereotyped threat to national purity; as an economic resource that fills holes in the labor market; or as a victim of tragedy that must be saved and quickly returned home. Yet in insisting that the migrant is fundamentally different from the citizen (that is, that "they" are different from "us"), we obscure the shared conditions that undermine our political agency as well as theirs. (Feldman, 2015: p. 10).

This is not to undermine the migration, not at all forced migration I am examining in this thesis. That would mean to be in contradiction with my own efforts. However, it is refreshing to be aware of the stereotyping and unintended, obscuring results of 'joining' the mentioned obsession. Indeed, Feldman's suggestions in our context of urban migrant-hood makes sense, because of the firmer ground of "shared conditions" urban spaces offer. That is why, staying loyal to my vocation of prioritizing migrant points of view to the end, I eventually point to the need of joint political action by the migrants and citizens together. To indicate again, I have taken such a line of thinking rather to bring together Kurdish-ness and migrant-hood for the very practical reason of deconstructing the concept of citizenry.

Bauman's point is to counter the tendency of humanitarianism to approach forced migration and displaced people as emergency issues of crisis that require short-term and top-down intervention. As many examples from the critical literature on humanitarianism and professional aid work show, the assistance, protection or other solutions of humanitarian projects has taken shape according to a certain mind-set which, for example, usually assume passive innocent sufferers in need of emergent and temporary help. Similarly, the fact that the global humanitarian system

has been an administrative tool to manage displaced people according to the interests of international political system is another uncontested point. What is striking is to observe how such larger discourses can have an effect in the everyday texture of a neighbourhood settings. The initial welcome of the hosts to the "guests", for instance, is conditional in Turkey just as in humanitarian paradigm. this conditional hierarchy is formed as the one between the "savior" and the "victim". (Ticktin, 2016: p.260) As such, to start a discussion on the namings and categorizations I observed and listened in the neighbourhood would help me to bring together quite a number of scholarly discussions on humanitarian intervention, forced migration and every day interactions in the context of urban "refugee-ness".

One of the most common reactions from the interviews I had with the Syrian Kurdish residents, one that I can say was most typical and widespread among them, was underlining and complaining how they are being ignored and overlooked by the citizens. They would go on with explaining how they are being seen and called by their neighbours, bosses, landlords and children on the streets: "They do not value us as human beings.", "They do not respect our reason, our abilities, our educational backgrounds.", among other similar sentences. Yet, this is not all. It seems that some seemingly 'neutral' namings that has been known as technical/neutral terms in policy-driven studies and humanitarian discourse are not neutral for the Syrian migrants in Turkey. To the contrast, in the daily use, they have become useful words encompassing anti-migrant sentiments: "They call us Syrians.", "They see us as refugees (ar.: *lacı'*)". "We are still foreigner (tr.: *yabanci*) for them."[12] For anyone who has a little familiarity with humanitarianism would realize how these are usual namings in its discourses.

[12] The ones in brackets are words of interlocutors. Ar. is acronym for Arabic, tr. for Turkish.

Miriam Ticktin is well known for her rigorous critique of humanitarianism that discloses its multidimensional harms, both intended and unintended. She claims that "Humanitarianism provides little room to feel and recognize the value of particular lives (versus life in general), or to mourn particular deaths (versus suffering in general); and little impetus to animate political change". (Ticktin, 2016: p.256) She rightly believes that humanitarianism divides, categorizes and hierarchizes to manage, indeed to limit the numbers of people admitted into certain places. (Ticktin, 2016, p. 260). Thereby, the sizeable humanitarian discourse distorts the possibility of a ground of equal relations. It divides, for instance, refugees from "illegal economic migrants", the "guilty" from the "innocent" sufferer, leaving no room for an in-between possibility. (Ticktin, 2016, pp. 259-61). What is more, to gain access to some basic legal rights and welfare services, the innocent sufferer should strive hard to prove their victimhood and innocence. The same paradigm also deprives migrants from their past and future by its obsession with the present manifested in its principles of crisis and emergency. Just as it damages hopes for future, it does so to the practice of mourning for the past as well, by ignoring the "larger historical context". (Ticktin, 2016, pp. 262-63) Last but not least, she argues that the obsession of humanitarianism with emotions, particularly with compassion draws attention away from structural realities, and thus hindering the possibility of ethico-political responses. (Ticktin, 2016, pp.264-65) Nonetheless, she reserves the point that to critique humanitarian discourse and practice is not to "argue against a place for emotions" (Ticktin, 2016, p.268), neither to reject "the principles of justice that drive humanitarianism". (Ticktin, 2014: p. 277-78). As an ex- 'humanitarian worker', I have experienced the effects and indispensability of these two dimensions at first-hand.

Inspired by and in a dialogue with Didier Fassin, what Ticktin proposes as a middle ground is an anthropological engagement:

> (…) anthropologists have used their position of being "on the ground," while also having a (varying) measure of independence from the humanitarian process itself to trace the effects of good intentions. Fassin (2011a,b) describes this position through Plato's allegory of the cave, as on the threshold or border, attending ethnographically to people's own accounts of their lives while maintaining a distance from their interpretations to show hidden motivations or interests; this anthropological position is a difficult and fraught balance between being critical and yet accepting the principles of justice that drive humanitarianism. By situating themselves at this threshold, anthropologists have offered some of the most potent analyses of the often unintended or unexpected consequences of humanitarian interventions. (Ticktin, 2014: p. 277-78)

To speak for the scope of this research, I have to further delineate not only the consequences and ethical-political implications of humanitarian reason but also what it has made self-evident and taken for granted. Otherwise, all the dimensions, attempts and examinations I engage with here would bear the risk of appearing as repeating the clichés. The following keywords and concepts, for instance, would regain the meanings they deserve only after a well-established critique of humanitarianism: the subject with a narrative, voice and agency, resiliency, structural inequalities, social injustice, violence, domination, equal residency, rights…In short the lexicon distorted by humanitarian reason. In doing so, among others, I rely most on Didier Fassin's arguments.

Fassin points out to the aforementioned tension humanitarian reason bears, and which at first sight and on a personal level might seem to be experienced as an ethical or psychological issue. For him, this tension "is constitutive of all humanitarian government". It is the "tension between inequality and solidarity, between a relation of domination and a relation of assistance." (Fassin, 2012: p. 3) As such, the problem "is strictly sociological" because of "the very conditions of the social relation between the two parties (beneficiaries and aid workers), which,

whatever the goodwill of the agents, make compassion a moral sentiment with no possible reciprocity.", moral sentiments being "the articulation between reason and emotion." (Fassin, 2012, pp. 3-4). The shift from the attitude of "right of the receiver" to "the obligation of the giver" has concrete structural implications. The receiver is rather known to humanitarian reason by her biological life, "the life of the destitute and misfortunate in the name of which they are given aid", not by "biographical life" through which one gives meaning to her life independently. (Fassin, 2012, pp. 253-54)

This articulation also has a scientific literature since the 1990s, "a scientific literature of compassion— a body of writing relating to suffering, trauma, misfortune, poverty, and exclusion.". Fassin claims that the literature has contributed to replace inequality with exclusion, domination with misfortune, injustice with suffering and violence with trauma. Thereby a way of seeing the world is constituted self-evident, in which "social reality" is presented via "the language of compassion." (Fassin, 2012: pp. 5-7) The articulation of this scientific literature coincides with what he defines as "a changing moral geography" since 1989. It is marked by three major gradual developments: the rise of neoliberalism as "the only viable ideology" in economics; the principle of interventionism under the Western-USA supremacy; and the coalition and integration of nongovernmental organizations with states and other international organizations. (Fassin, 2012: pp. 14-15)

Seen through this humanitarian lens, many attitudes and actions would appear as just, right and good. Yet, there must always "be political and social implications of mobilizing "compassion rather than justice" and "representing war in the language of humanitarianism." (Fassin, 2012: p.8). To examine such implications from a "correct distance", for Fassin, is the task of social sciences. To comprehend humanitarian

reason as what it is, it needs to be considered with all its complexities and ambiguities. To do this, he proposes "a critical thinking located at the frontiers", as humanitarian reason is neither "the best of all possible governments" nor "an illusion that misleads us." (Fassin, 2012: p. 245-46) For him, it is ethnography that would provide the insight needed because there may be

> (…) no substitute for the participant observation and long-term presence that make it possible to reconstruct more precisely described scenes and more broadly situated contexts, thus avoiding simplification, locating narratives and arguments within their frame of utterance, and eventually grasping the issues within which they are contained and which they contribute to constituting. (Fassin, 2012: p.10)

My research certainly could not hold such a strong premise due to the time restriction within which it has been carried out. Yet, I strived to remain alert to simplifications and reductions. Albeit for a far shorter period than they usually require I had deployed ethnographic methods. I tried to compensate it through developing good rapports with the interlocutors. As a good news, we were ultimately not in a humanitarian setting in which they would have felt the need to demonstrate themselves as how "they think we would like them to be" (Fassin, 2012: p. 256), that is victims without a history and biography. Far from being a possible aid provider, for them I was a student, a researcher himself in need of their help to understand their lives in Istanbul.[13] That is maybe why the issues they mostly put forward were related to their exhaustion with being confined within the boundaries of victimhood and the temporality of being guest.

[13]Among many other insights, I owe to Efrînî neighbours to be able to better explain to my potential interlocutors why I was there and what my research was about. As the speakers of a language that 'lacks' a central standardization and being from distant regions of Kurdistan, a considerable part of our exchanges were automatically about local linguistic differences. For the word sociology, for instance, they were much more familiar, to Arabic "*'ulm içtima'î*" than Kurdish "*civaknasî*". They have provided me with many such nuances. Efrînî people usually see themselves as adaptable in a linguistic sense as they "can speak the Kurdish of everywhere" as one of them once said. That is true to a large extent. Yet, thanks to my work experience I could adapt myself to their local Kurdish. This had contributed a lot to the rapports between us.

What is more, I try to go beyond the pure "realm of concepts" by attending to the "day to day reality of life", to "irreducible empiricism" which Fassin explains as such:

> (…) things are somewhat more complicated, for behind ideas and ideologies there are people with their contradictions and doubts, who belong successively or simultaneously to different worlds, who support varying positions and take their place within different logics; there are also situations in which the interpretations are delicate and the issues uncertain, in which relations of power shift and are even sometimes reversed. Facing these actors and these facts, which resist all attempts at reduction, critique must precisely give an account of this irreducibility. (Fassin, 2012: p. 247)

Pure realm of concepts for me is similar to pure ideological attitudes that, for instance, make neighbours, bosses, colleagues or landlords of Syrian migrants in Turkey dare to ask them "Why did not you stay in Syria to fight for your land?" Things are much more complicated and "ordinary" people are aware of such complexities, even the ones asking such offensive questions. When it comes to the violent experiences of displacement and building lives anew in new locations, particularly in urban spaces where proximity is unavoidable, the situations and issues are more difficult to comprehend, hence interpretations on them delicate. My whole field research thus has been a journey through a widening irreducibility.

The story of lives introduced in this research are in a sense part of the history of dispossession of Kurdish people, a dispossession certainly including but also far more than and beyond material possessions. Although not declared in plain words, a central question of this research is "What is it to lose one's world?", borrowed form Veena Das, who in an anthropological endeavour engages with the question of how the extreme violence of some historical events has entered into "the recesses of ordinary" and what are its "tentacles into everyday life." (Das, 2006: p.1). The historical events she looks at are the Partition of India in 1947 and the assassination of the then prime minister Indira Gandhi in 1984, hence an intersection of the story

of nation state building and of violence on the individual level. Most of my Efrînî interlocutors situate themselves in an enduring line of some other violent historical events Kurds experienced in different times. Meta Cevrîye, a 55-year old Efrînî woman whom I introduce in the next chapter, is only one of those who see their displacement from their land as just another event like Helebçe and Kobanê. She even believes Efrînîs suffered less than the Kurds of Kobanê and Helebçe. I do not specifically look into "what happens to subject and world when the memory of such events is folded into ongoing relationships" as Veena Das does. Yet, I already approach the efforts of recovering, of rebuilding life in Demirkapı as historical events in terms Das uses to explain "the eventful." Displacement from and loss of Efrîn continuously shapes the everyday. Thus, what Veena Das (2006) suggests fits to our case as well: "Just as I think of the event as attached to the everyday, I think of the everyday itself as eventful." (p. 8)

In addition to this intimate relation of the everyday and the eventful, what has inspired my research most, among Veena Das' approaches, is her conceptualization on the everyday voice of those subjected to violence. The way she puts violence, that is the "sense of being violated" has been insightful for this research: "It is not only violence experienced on one's body in these cases but also the sense that one's access to context is lost that constitutes a sense of being violated." (Das, 2006: p. 9) What else can better fit to this situation of losing access to context and meaning than the experience of displacement and particularly the initial years in the exile? At these times, the ordinary grammar may fail to grasp the eventful. The words may lose their meanings. (Das, 2006, p.8) In such cases, as Fassin, inspired by Das, suggests, one should be able to hear the voice behind the frozen words. (Fassin, 2012, p. 256) While recounting young Efrînî woman Şemam's story of building her individual life

in Istanbul, I try to make the reader be able to hear her voice when she switches between the languages. While giving Meta Cevrîye's account of Ceviz Bahçesi, of her intimate relation with a public space, I again try to convey her voice. I also stayed attentive to the situations on which Efrînîs preferred to remain voiceless. For Meta Cevrîye, for instance, she did not talk about -may be- the most critical dimension of her life, that is her situation of lacking official documentation of the temporary protection that exacerbates the general migrant condition of uncertainty. If attended to and recounted rightly, the voice may compensate the grammar distorted by humanitarian reason.

In a very similar vein, another ethnographic work that attends to the vivid echoes of violent events of the past in the present life is Clara Han's *Life in Debt: Times of Care and Violence in Neoliberal Chile.* The event she takes central -in terms of Veena Das' argumentation- is the 1973 Chilean coup d'état. She defines the enduring past as "a past continuous inhabiting the present life" (Han, 2012: p. 4-6) Han examines the everyday and individual implications of the neoliberal top-down transformations that started with the military dictatorship in the local context of a poor urban neighbourhood in Santiago, named La Pincoya. These implications of "a past of state violence", she suggests, "are available to the present through the arrangements of the state and market today." (Han, 2012: p. 19). To trace the reflections of state and market violence, she attends to the aspirations and disappointments of the neighbours as well as their relations through which the aspirations and resentments are manifest. (Han, 2012: pp. 19-20)

I do not directly look at how the neoliberal market arrangements of Istanbul – that are novel for the migrants- and the memory of the civil war affect the daily life and relations. Yet, for me, Han's ethnographic insights into individual affects as well

as kin and neighbour relations have further clarified what Fassin described as "irreducible empiricism":

> Neighbourhood life does not fall along clear fracture lines of political affiliation. There are feelings of deep betrayal among those of the same political affiliation, and differences in political commitment within families. (…) In La Pincoya, people inhabit different relational modes simultaneously, so attending to others in daily life might not entail an all-or-nothing judgement. (Han, 2012: p. 20)

In Demirkapı, most of Efrînî people feel the bitterness of having left Efrîn. Most of them, including Weysî, have contradictory feelings and thoughts on the possibility of a return someday. While some of them, like young Xelat, blame the Kurdish forces for "failing to protect Efrîn", some consider their past and present Arab neighbours responsible for taking over their homes in Efrîn. Those who blame Turkish government, being aware of their "guest" status, would rarely state it straightforwardly. As for the relations with the "host" communities, the most aggressive statements on and about the treatment toward them would usually end up by saying "But we have good neighbours" or the latter would sometimes be a friend, a colleague, landlords… A landlord who is interested in Efrîn and asking about their previous lives, for instance, makes a considerable relieving effect on Efrînî neighbours. A friend from the workplace who helps with settling living arrangements is held dear to the degree that an Efrînî couple would name their new-born baby after this friend.

Critiques of humanitarian reason strongly argue for ethnographic studies that would attend to the everyday and the individual. Eric Tang's ethnographic work *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in The New York City Hyperghetto* is a specific example that realizes the theoretical critiques of humanitarian reason I have been describing thus far. His participant-observer study attends to an "official" case of displacement, that is the resettlement of Cambodian refugees to the USA between

1975 and 1994. It has been useful for me to better comprehend my professional experience in humanitarian processes of resettlement. As for the on-ground realities, Tang's arguments have resonances with Das' idea of "the continuity of the past" for the specific case of forced migration and specific individuals categorized as refugees. It unsettles the taken for granted idea that migration unfolds in a timeline marked by the statuses of migrant, permanent resident and citizen, respectively. (Tang, 2015: p. 4) As such, it "troubles political-juridical uses of the term "refugee" as well as the assumed inevitability of refugee crossing, transfiguration, and settlement." (Tang, 2015: p.5). While disclosing the never-found refuge, "unclosed sojourn" or "open interval", he also uncovers what rescue discourses mask, that is the "urban reality characterized by racialized geographic enclosure, displacement from formal labour markets, unrelenting poverty and the criminalization of daily life." (Tang, 2015: pp. 5-6) That does not necessarily mean his conceptualization of hyperghetto for its specific locality totally fits to our case in Istanbul. Still, it helps us to make sense of how refugee temporality as a "perpetual captivity" might be experienced in the precarious conditions of urban settings.

What is more, Tang's use of Loïc Wacquant's hyperghetto might shed some light on the social and economic conditions of urban spaces such as Bağcılar – beyond what is usually reduced to 'urban poverty'. While doing this, Tang makes a reservation that should be noted in our case as well:

> I use the term *hyperghetto* to identify the workings of the regime, not of those who are subjected to that regime's violences. I demonstrate that Cambodian refugees who are held captive in the hyperghetto engage in complex forms of survival and resistance that evince their centrality to (as opposed to their separation from) the main currents and contradictions of the state and its economies. (Tang, 2015: p. 12)

The present research focuses on the migration stories of individuals for similar reasons that prioritize the positionalities of migrant subjects. Yet, ultimately, urban

clusters –like Demirkapı- of dispossessed and displaced people from different parts of Kurdistan are not formed coincidentally. They are the articulation of a history of cultural and material dispossession carried out by nation states, as well as of a geographical borderization. Tang provides ethnographic testimonies to show of how hyperghetto is "slavery's afterlife" and how it "reveals the contours of unfinished colonialism." (Tang, 2015: p.15). The Kurdish migrants, whether internally displaced, long-settled residents or cross border migrants from Syria, are in a sense subjects of an unresolved age old problem that involves Kurds and all the neighbour peoples they live together with. As contemporary instances of such a history, urban districts like Bağcılar, for example, had long been sites of Kurdish youth demonstrations that usually involved violent interventions by the police. The Syrian Kurdish migrants had witnessed the last years of this political activities and insurgencies. Many of the Efrînî interlocutors has noted disapprovingly that until 2015, Demirkapı used to be one of such neighbourhoods where the youth would gather, start a fire and throw stones to the attacking police. As happened everywhere else in Turkey, "street politics" in Demirkapı is now neutralized. Yet the memories are vivid and the armed conflict is going on. While I was in the neighbourhood for the interviews, Efrînî children were playing on the streets, under the shadows of the walls that were filled with the graffiti calling attention to the ongoing hunger strikes

in the prisons initiated by then-imprisoned politician Leyla Güven (Figure 1).




Figure 1. Overlapping grafiti of a slogan referring to the hunger strikes (Long live freedom of prisoners) and improvised goal posts

On the other side, now with the population density of Syrian migrants, Bağcılar resembles to a hyperghetto maybe more than ever, hyperghetto in the sense that Tang defines in Wacquant's terms:

> (…) traditional ghetto has become (…) a space of "naked relegation." It is reserved for the isolation of and closure of the poorest urban residents who are no longer regarded as those to be recruited and disciplined into the lowest rungs of the workforce; rather they are seen as subjects to be warehoused. (Tang, 2015: p.10)

Here, it has to be noted that while Bağcılar and other similar poor urban districts, are *at once* "warehouses" for a considerable population of not-needed people *and* sources for the workforce needed for unskilled low-wage jobs. In the case of Demirkapı and Efrînî migrants, while the middle-aged men (like Apê Heme, introduced in the fourth chapter) constitute the former group, the children and youth are abundant sources for the latter, that is, for the exploitative labour market.

In addition to Tang's *Unsettled*, I have another not less prominent handbook that has helped me to stay aware to the traps of humanitarianism and guided me to design my research as an everyday study: Catherine Besteman's *Making Refuge: Somali Bantu Refugees and Lewiston, Maine*.[14] After the war broke out in Somalia in the 1991, Somali Bantus fled to the refugee camps in Kenya where they lived for the period of a decade and a half before they were resettled in Lewiston of Maine in the USA. Besteman's work is a long-term multi-sited ethnographic study focusing on the collective and individual stories of the Somali Bantu refugees making their own refuge in Lewiston. She has some invaluable insights as a result of living with Somali Bantus as a participant observer in the last years before the Somali civil war erupted. Therefore, she knows what precisely the civil war -that "has topped everyone's list of humanitarian disasters"- has destroyed: "(…) closely knit communities, extended community networks, subsistence farming based on generations of deep environmental knowledge, and a social order based on family, faith and coresidence.", hence the following main questions:

> How do people whose entire way of life has been destroyed and who witnessed horrible abuses against loved ones construct a new future? How do people who have survived the ravages of war and displacement rebuild their lives in a new country when their world has totally changed?" (Besteman, 2016: pp. 4-5)

By attending to the lives of resettled refugees she shows how Somalia's civil war, just like all of other civil wars, is a global story. (Besteman, 2016: p. 55) As part of the same story, she devotes her anthropological study to "deconstruct humanitarian practice" and "reveal its basis as a technology of power wielded by powerful sovereign nation states against the mobile, reliant on inaccurate assumptions, images, and moral discourses." (Besteman, 2016: p.75)

[14] Among his many other timely contributions, I am particularly grateful to Saygun Gökarıksel, the advisor of this research, for informing me of the presence of *Making Refuge* and *Unsettled.*

She also deconstructs another well-established assumption that, albeit has a degree of uniqueness to American common sense, can be taken as a generalized issue:

> (…) a flat view of assimilation rests on two faulty assumptions. The first is that assimilation and integration are about wholeness and assimilating to some other, already existing culture. The second is that assimilation only works in one direction: the immigrant assimilates to the host society and not the other way around. (Besteman, 2016, 280)

In Turkey, it is early to speak confidently of a processes –good or bad- of integration or assimilation of the Syrian migrants, due mainly to the well-established belief that the Syrian "guests" will return back soon. Yet, it has been around eight-nine years many of the Syrian migrants are living in Turkey. Legal constraints and the lack of a positive and inclusive public debate on the presence of Syrian migrants jeopardize the humble processes of mutual transformation that have started at the local level in locations like Demirkapı. But what does the domestic context of refugee and migrant "management" look like in Turkey? How do the state and local/international civil society organizations engage in providing services and rights to the non-citizen groups? Where can Turkey be located in the international working of the regulation of mass mobility which is increasingly taking an involuntary nature across the world? Although it is not contestable that the individual agency is the major factor in the de facto participation of the non-citizens to the host societies, the effects of policies and governmental strategies are still determinant.

From the 1950s until 2013, there were not complicated laws and regulations with regard to migrants and refugees. The state used to keep a position of not engaging directly in the provision and supervision needed for the non-citizen groups. The migration affairs were conventionally in the responsibility of security organizations. Many Syrian refugees still call the migration offices as "emniyet"

(security) and "yabancı şube" (branch of foreigners), as they were initially "welcomed" by these offices. During the initial years of the Syrians in Turkey, partly due to the "absence" of the government in the field, the non-governmental local and international organizations proliferated in the engagement with the refugees, asylum seekers or "irregular" migrants. In the case of the Syrians, religious civil society organizations had been important actors in providing basic needs and some community networks. As for the Kurdish Syrian refugees, as the political atmosphere was also more or less favourable, solidarity based organizations and the municipalities under the rule of the Kurdish political movement in Turkey's Kurdistan had considerable efforts to fill the gap. After the July 2016 coup d'état attempt, during the state of exception, the institutional structure of civil society had been bulldozed. Since 2013, with the new laws and regulations, the government started to take the management to its own hands. The Syrian asylum seekers were taken under the status of "temporary protection". Now, the main actor is the civil state body of the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM), founded to take responsibility of migration affairs from the security branch. In the non-governmental field, the mainstream organizations have a domination. These are UNHCR as the international refugee organization and its domestic partner organization Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM-SGDD).

The context of Turkey is not easy to locate in the international schema of refugee management, or in the ways the states engage in the non-citizen governmentality. Kelsey P. Norman (2019), however, introduces a practical vocabulary and offers a theoretical attempt to better understand the situation of migration engagement in the countries like Turkey, which she defines as "transit-

turned-host" "semi-authoritarian" "non-democratic countries" hosting increasing population of migrants due mostly to their geographic locations. (pp. 46, 56) She introduces a third option beyond the traditional binary understandings that classify state policies of migration as either inclusive, accommodationist and liberal or, exclusionary, assimilationist and repressive. She brings in the concept of "indifference-as policy", that is when "the state chooses not to expend resources for engaging with migrants or refugee groups, necessitating that other actors – international organisations or domestic NGOs –step in to provide services." (pp. 42-43) That is how the state of affairs had been until the recent years. What seems to happen since around 2013 is an orientation toward more liberal policies of engagement with non-citizens residing in the country. However, there are major gaps between "policies as designed (outputs) and policies that actually impact the daily lives of individual migrants and refugees (outcomes)." (p. 54) Why these classifications are important? The latter is what defines the lives of migrant. *De jure* liberal policies regulating the lives of refugees and migrants, in countries like Turkey, are mostly driven not by the human rights principles but rather from the perceived "economic or foreign policy interests". (p. 56) The discrepancy here also discloses the international cooperation between the global South countries and transit-turned-host countries to restrict the movement of people and fortify the borders. Liberalising policies-on-paper of Turkey are rewarded by the EU with monetary aids, the most well-known one being the 2016 aid package of 6 billion Euros. (p. 54). However, not much of the "positive" policies are being applied to the benefit of the Syrian refugees in real life.

Throughout the thesis, we will see that the livelihood of Syrian migrants relies on the informal sectors in Turkey, which has become a systemic exploitation of

particularly the child and women labour. While Syrian refugees theoretically have access to formal employment, the working of the market creates an environment to the benefit of the employers. Instead of hiring Syrian workers with work permit, the employers, being aware of the fact that they would not face serious punitive sanctions, prefer to employ workers informally, thereby to get rid of the requirements of paying minimum wages and activating health insurances of the workers. This conditions rendering the refugees and migrants cheap labour source also withhold many children from education. The conditions under which the refugee children who can access to education services also remain free of supervision. The conventional mainstream civil society and international organizations operating in the migration field of Turkey prioritize to survive in the field as they conceive the "practical benefits" of working with the sole decision maker, that is the government, which is also the negotiator and receiver of the 6 million aid package. As such, non-governmental bodies lose or abandon their responsibility to follow through if the policies are applied to the benefit of the migrants.

Despite all the issues, Demirkapı is still a space where "mobility intersects with emplacement and migrants transform local places through their presence. Often (mis)characterized as sites of clashes and crashes, such intersections are more often sites of negotiation, learning, self-reflection, and social change." (Besteman, 2016: p. 289) It is relatively easy to make analyses about such local transformations through subjectivities. But how to consider the groups, belongings and cultural practices and values, which are indispensable in the formation of subjectivities and daily relations? Besteman's work has also been useful to contemplate on this issue for the local context of Demirkapı. She suggests that it is possible to mind the gap between "the popular and essentialized version" of culture and "the sedimentation of meaning and

practice that enables groups to recognize and cohere around collectively held values." (Besteman, 2016: p.289) To do so, one has to acknowledge that "difference is constantly emergent, constantly renegotiated, constantly revalued, but continues to contain groupness over time." (Besteman, 2016: pp. 289-90)

If the question of living together should be seriously posed, the point, as Besteman implies, is to create the conditions that would allow "the dialogues, debates and negotiations cohere around the question of the way life should be." (Besteman, 2016: p. 290) The civil society actors and institutions should raise and keep alive the demands for coresidence. The demands should first be wielded to the government authorities that keep the legal and social conditions of the Syrians flexible and vulnerable so that any time they would become the objects of a "war against irregular migration."[15] The latter is how governorate of Istanbul declares the rising policing measures that has taken a new momentum in July 2019 against those the official authorities define as "irregular", "illegal", and "non-registered migrants". The official terms that "regulate" the living and working conditions of the Syrian migrants have already been rendering the majority of them irregular or illegal. Not much surprisingly, the migrants are the ones who are the most aware of their precarious situation, of the risk of being deported anytime for any procedural reason. Many of the Efrînî migrants whom I met four months before "the struggle" was declared officially, had clearly stated the deep fear they have for the police, how their

15 As usually happens particularly with the issues related to the Syrian migrants, for a few weeks, the news on arrests and deportations were circulated as rumours and mostly through social media. The most consistent part of the government "policies" related to the Syrian migrants have been their lack of transparency, as usually criticized. On July 22, the Governorate of Istanbul felt the need to make a public statement that lists the principles through which the measures would be taken against the "irregular migration." August 20 had been given as a deadline for "the foreigners of Syrian origin under temporary protection who are not registered in Istanbul (registered in other provinces) to return to the cities of their registration.": İstanbul Valiliği,"Düzensiz Göçle Mücadele Basın Açıklaması" (2019): http://www.istanbul.gov.tr/duzensiz-gocle-mucadele-ile-ilgili-basin-aciklamasi.

"knees trembles when they see a police." Now faced with the declared policing measures, the Syrian migrants are further forced to live invisible lives, in the literal sense of the word, as they cannot leave their homes out of the fear of being arrested and deported from Istanbul, either to another city or to Syria. In such conditions, it is urgent more than ever to put forward the truth that the future of Syrians in Turkey is the future of Turkey.[16] Immediate measures for a bright future for every residents should be initiated and discussed publicly and seriously.

[16] Besteman (2016) argues that despite the fair share of Lewiston from xenophobes, there are non-migrant people who believe "the future of refugees in Lewiston is the future of Lewiston." (pp. 13, 31)

# CHAPTER 3

# FROM ÇİYAYÊ KURMÊNC[17] TO ISTANBUL:

# NARRATIVES OF DISPLACEMENT

> We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings. We left our relatives in the Polish ghettos and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps, and that means the rupture of our private lives.
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> *We Refugees*, Hannah Arendt (2007: 264-5)

Urbanization of refugees is a relatively recent reaction to the failures of international humanitarian refugee management. It is intimately tied with the global structural inequalities, defining characteristics of which are uninhabitable housing and exploitative, precarious working conditions the refugees –under increasingly ambiguous legal frameworks- are left, are forced to cope with in the asylum countries. As such, I have found it revealing to start with how, displaced from Efrîn of Aleppo, a middle-aged woman strives, not to adapt, not to integrate, not to settle but simply, beyond all these and other similar reductionist vocabulary of humanitarian aid and refugee studies, "to breathe" through a park. For sure, the park must be meaning more than how I observed it, specifically from the eyes of those displaced from Efrîn of Aleppo; whose displacement trajectory ended up -for now- in Demirkapı of Istanbul. With some cases now exceeding seven years of displacement and exile, the dispossessed Efrînî Kurds have been and are creating lives in the present time and space of Demirkapı, which itself as a neighbourhood, formed in

[17] Efrîn region is one of the three main Kurdish regions in Syria together with Kobanê and Jezîre. It is historically known as Kurd Dagh (Kurdish Mountain), a name from Ottoman times. Çiyayê Kurmênc is its literal Kurdish translation and how residents widely call it. Efrîn is the main town in the region which is composed of 360-366 villages.

1990s with the arrival of another "internally" displaced Kurdish community in Turkey. What follows is an attempt, mostly through narrative interviews, to follow the individual experiences and processes of displacement from Efrîn; how at the end of this trajectory of forced migration, a community is being created –or kept? - in Istanbul, in the specific locality of Demirkapı. My objective is to make an introduction to and to convey a better understanding of the scale of complex process of forced migration and individual resiliencies that follow it, through looking at individual experiences in the neighbourhood, memories of lost home, social networks, relationships and individual accounts of struggle, all revealed through narratives.

All the way to Bağcılar: Endurance of displacements

Born in the turmoil years of the early 1990s in Gever, or Yüksekova as its state-given name, I was raised listening to the stories of some "ancient times" of not a very distant past, when money was not the omnipotent means of exchange yet. A unit –a can or a bag- of wheat and also of walnuts were among the means of exchange. Considering the age of my grandparents, these years refers at least to the period that lasted until the end of 1980s, when the rural and tribal social systems were still dominant over the urban organization of life in this part of Kurdistan. We the children of the villages had been complicit in the insidious process that was overtaking the rural life. We used to wait impatiently for the arrival of *etars*, the peddlers travelling to the villages to sell the goods that were not easily reachable for the villagers. Plastic toys were our favourites, in exchange for which we had given many invaluable goods reminiscent of that "ancient times"; hand-made carpets, saddles of horses and black tents made of goat hairs being just some of them. Yet, the major rupture in this process, one that caused the evacuation of rural Kurdish

areas, is the war that peaked in 1990s, which started between the PKK and the state in 1984. Years later in March of 2019, in the middle of Istanbul, in a park named *Ceviz Bahçesi* (Walnut Garden) located in an inner-city neighbourhood called Demirkapı in Bağcılar, I came across some groups of elder Kurdish men of the generation of my grandparents, wearing their traditional caps and baggy trousers, and playing checkers and backgammon in the roofed picnic tables of the park. They were among those hundreds of thousands of people displaced, as a result of the war intensified between the state and the PKK in the early 1990s, from their homelands towards the regional urban centres first, and then to the western metropolises of Turkey. Before I arrived there, I had already known that Demirkapı is a residential cluster known for its population mostly from Bitlîs and its surrounding region but there was more.

In the park there were also some other groups of men of around the same age with the Bitlîsî men, yet sitting separately and speaking the same dialect of Kurmancî with some discernible local differences. They were elders of another displaced Kurdish community, this time from Efrîn or Kurd Dagh region which is located at the most northwest side of Aleppo, Syria. I was there to meet with my potential Efrînî informants for the fieldwork of the present study. Although it was thanks to the connections I made with the Bitlîsî residents, Apê[18] Abbas and his family specifically, that I could enter the neighbourhood, and although they had shared with me their invaluable thoughts and displacement narratives, I had tried, both in the fieldwork and throughout the study, not to take this specific community and their displacement to the centre. A considerable literature is already available on their displacement of 1990s as a result of the recent attention it has had from migration

[18] Throughout the text, I use the terms of kinship before some names –especially for the names of elderlies. I had used these terms in the interviews, as well, as it is a moral code of showing respect. Ap-ê means uncle, met-a means aunt, both paternal.

studies. For the present study, on the other hand, while I took their forced migration history as part of a larger history and memory of Kurdish displacement and oppression, and although their encounters in the neighbourhood with the Efrînî residents inform the study generously, the displacement of people from Efrîn and their settlement in Demirkapı is the actual focus of this study. That of Efrînîs is part of another more mass-scale and, this time, cross-border forced displacement wave, started around twenty years after their current Bitlîsî neighbour fellows were forcibly displaced in the 1990s.

Parks for those rendered invisible

As far as I had observed in my work experience -that lasted for one year and a half- as an interpreter in the refugee agency, when asked about discriminatory problems they face in Turkey, the Syrian Kurdish refugees –as I had worked only with Kurdish speakers- usually tended to refrain from disclosing much. In the rare instances when they did, the parks frequently appeared as the scenes where they face such problems as obviously parks are among the significant spaces of encounter with the locals together with schools and workplaces. In my very first night in Demirkapı, Apê Abbas' sons Yakub and Bekir, invited me to join them to a café they frequent. On our way back to their home, while we were passing by a park named Ceviz Bahçesi, their friend and neighbour Kamil, who did not have a welcoming tone for the Syrian residents during our tea-table talk in the café, pointed the park and complained how crowded it becomes during the day as one cannot find a place to sit because of "these Syrians". In the rest of the following month of my field research, Ceviz Bahçesi[19]

[19] Later on I came across another park named Fındık Bahçesi, in another neighbourhood of Bağcılar. In both parks stands a house built in unique styles. While the one in Ceviz Bahçesi is called Bitlis Evi (Bitlis House), the one in Fındık Bahçesi is named Karadeniz Evi (Black Sea House). When I checked the website of the municipality I found out that the parks are part of a municipal project called Nostalji

(Figure 2) had become the location I spent most of my time, from where I started my days in Demirkapı, and to where I returned after each interview both to contemplate on the interviews and to observe the daily flow of life.



Figure 2. An overview of Ceviz Bahçesi. Source: [http://www.bagcilar.bel.tr/icerik/539/8900/ceviz-bahcesi-ve-bitlis-evi.aspx]

The park actually is not a spacious one for such a crowded neighbourhood. During the daytime and if the weather is convenient, it is always busy. Together with the children playing in the playground, the men, usually middle aged and elder, playing checkers and backgammon in the roofed picnic tables, are the regulars of the park. There are also women usually in groups chatting while keeping an eye on their children around. In the weekends, and especially in Sundays when nobody is supposed to work, the small park becomes a picnic area for families. Besides the

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Bahçeleri (Gardens of Nostalgia). The project is composed of at least seven gardens. Kayısı Bahçesi and its Malatya House and Kestane Bahçesi with its Kastamonu House are the other combinations of the city of origin and trees known to be raised in these cities. The gardens seem to have been located according to the population composition of the neighbourhoods. It is a claim to be an environmentalist municipality embracing the widespread "mosaic society" discourse of Turkey, combining it with the ambiguous but useful notion of nostalgia. For how the municipality advertise the project, see http://www.bagcilar.bel.tr/files/hbulteni/hb2019/tesislerimiz_yatirimlarimiz/mobile/index.html#p=40. (accessed in 17.05.2019).

different accents of Kurmancî being heard in the park, it has also become possible for me after a few days to estimate who is from where, basically who is from Efrîn and who is from Bitlis -and its neighbour cities-, by their appearance. While Bitlîsî men usually wear caps that are used in the prayers, the women wear white head scarves, which is indeed common among middle aged and older Kurdish women in Turkey. Not surprisingly, the children speaking Kurdish among themselves and with their parents are Efrînî by and large. During Sundays, one would also see one or two groups of young Afghan men, usually sitting in a remote corner of the park.

*Ceviz Bahçesi*: A Corner where to take a breath

It was only during one of the last interviews that I approached most to what might the park mean for an Efrînî resident of Demirkapı. When I visited them for the first time a young Efrînî couple, Cennet and Weysî, had recently opened their own hair salon in one of the busiest inner streets of Demirkapı. Desperate of not being able to have any thorough interviews with Efrînî women at the end of almost one month, I decided to rely on this rapport –the best I have had in the neighbourhood. Up until then, most of Efrînîs I came to know were adult men. I was aware that it would not be appropriate to approach Efrînî women neither in the outer spaces like parks nor at the gates of their houses. Together with the couple, we thought that their salon –as somewhere to sit for interviews- might be a way to reach the Efrînî women. So, my third visit to the salon was to meet with a woman of Cennet and Weysî's acquaintance who accepted to talk to me. It was there that I met Meta Cevrîye, who would later disclose her displacement story in which she builds an intimate relation with Ceviz Bahçesi.

It has been six years since Meta Cevrîye, a 55-year-old mother of six children, left her house in Efrîn and came to Demirkapı. We met in 23rd of April, the national holiday in Turkey dedicated to and celebrated by children. After she mentioned her twelve-year old son, I asked if he attended celebrations today in his school. Then she revealed that he attends school just like a "*mêvan*" (guest), as he is not officially registered to school due to the lack of any identity documentation by Turkish authorities. Meta Cevriye, like many other Syrian parents, had stayed in Syria when the young children were leaving their country to Turkey in the early years of the civil war. As the war has escalated and the hopes of an end to the war were lost, most of those parents had joined their children, just as Meta Cevrîye did. The main problem of this specific group of migrants -latecomers- has since been the lack of biometric ID cards given by the Directorates of Migration Management under the regime of temporary protection regulation in Turkey. Stopping ID registries has in time become a way for the government to manage the increasing population of Syrian migrants, especially in the cities like Istanbul and Antakya (Hatay). The lack of documentation deprives the migrants of the limited public services that they might benefit from. What is worse, it might also lead to detention and deportation.[20] For this very specific reason, a considerable population of Syrians live "invisible lives" in Turkey, also a reason why I was not able to find many people to do interviews with, according to many Efrînîs.

"Misafir", which means 'guest' in Turkish, had for a long time been the most common so called welcoming denotation in the speeches of demagogues and in the mainstream media outlets to refer to Syrian refugees arriving in Turkey since the

[20] "Turkey stops registering Syrian asylum seekers: New arrivals deported, coerced back to Syria", via https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/16/turkey-stops-registering-syrian-asylum-seekers. Just three months after I met Meta Cevrîye, when I was about to finish the writing of the thesis, a "struggle against irregular migration" was declared in July by the ministry of interior and the governorate of Istanbul. See the footnote 14th in the previous chapter.

escalation of the Syrian Civil war. In Meta Cevrîye's words, however, it reveals the precariousness of her son's situation at school.[21] Though an overwhelming one, lacking identity papers is certainly just one of the hardships of Meta Cevrîye's protracted residence in Turkey. Feeling her uneasiness and remembering her saying earlier that she still has not gotten used to Turkey, I felt the need to ask her if it is not any better today now that it has been six years she is living in Turkey. That is when I received the best account of how a displaced Efrînî might be giving meaning to a space in Demirkapı, in our case to the park named Ceviz Bahçesi:

> For sure it is not like the first times. It was hard at the beginning, real hard. Exile (*xerîbî*)[22] is tough. There is nothing like xerîbî. If it would not have been a shame, I would have returned back right away. I could not bear it here. I used to sit in that park over there (Ceviz Bahçesi) every day from early mornings to late in the evenings. I could not stay at home. I could not bear indoors. It lasted as such for a year. In the park I could take a breath a bit. People were coming and going around. It was green. If I saw someone Syrian, ohh, my heart would beat fast. We used to sit together and have a chat so we could relax a little bit.
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> - And after a year? (I asked).
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> - I returned to Syria. For a visit. I could not bear. But I returned early. I stayed like only for two and a half or three months.

I have started with such a detailed portrayal of Ceviz Bahçesi not only to give a sense of how social environment of a public space in the neighbourhood looks like. More significantly, it is to show, through Meta Cevrîye's narrative, that how displacement may diffuse in time and space for those experiencing it. Borrowing a remark from Halilovich who, in his work on displacement of Bosnians (2013: 151), conveys from Malkki (1992: 38), I would say that Efrînîs, like many other people forced to displacement (e.g. Bosnians and Hutus, respective to the works of authors just

[21] As occasionally revealed throughout the present study, inconsistent, interrupted and fragmented education of the Syrian refugee children has been a matter the adults frequently touched upon to explain what they have gone through and how uncertain their *istiqbal*, their future is. Just concordant with the migration trajectory of Kurdish refugees from Syria, the education of the children has at times been in Arabic, for a time in Kurdish while in Efrîn, and now at the end it is in Turkish in Demirkapı.

[22] 'X' in Kurdish corresponds to the sound "kh" in English.

mentioned) are forming "multiplicity of attachments to places through living in, remembering and imagining them". Living through the ongoing process of displacement itself means new subjectivities, identifications or attachments in making. "Two months and a half or three months" of her stay when she visited Efrîn was not a long time as Meta Cevrîye speaks of it. Yet, it has been six years she is living in Demirkapı. A certain attachment to the present space is being made somehow or other as soon as the *xerîbî* starts.

Out of Efrîn for the first time

Unlike the overwhelming majority of the Efrînî migrants in Demirkapı –or elsewhere in Turkey, Meta Cevrîye had always lived in Efrîn before the displacement. She or her family had not had a migratory life linked to the urban centres of Syria, to Aleppo or Damascus and even to Lebanon as it is the case with the majority of the Syrian Kurds. I can say that, thus, hers is a stronger attachment to the homeland Efrîn, as she has always lived there –one can also add her age as a factor. Yet, it also seems that she has found a way of coping with her *xerîbî* by finding a corner from where she could take breathe more easily. As it is explained in the introduction, due to the geography and history of their region –a relatively stable history yet a physical distance from the larger Kurdish region-, Efrînî people have a sense of attachment to a great extent informed by their local homeland, or as they call it "memleket", "Efrîna me" (our Efrîn) or "gundê me" (our village). The namings have connotations to villages because the region, historically known as Kurd Dagh since the Ottoman times, is composed of 360-366 villages, Efrîn being just the name of the provincial centre. Not surprisingly, the experience of displacement and the ongoing gradual "loss" of homeland has further strengthened the above-mentioned attachment or

identification with the homeland. I say ‘gradual’, not only to underline the processual nature of displacement and indefinite temporality of refugee condition but also to note that for very real reasons and unfortunate events, the loss and displacement has become more concrete after the incursion of Turkey into Efrîn in January-March 2018. Since 2012 until Turkey started to take part in the on-ground-war in Syria, Efrînî exiles in Turkey used to “enjoy” visiting their home occasionally, mostly in religious holidays. Since the incursion of Turkey into Syria, to pass the border from Turkey, especially to Efrîn, is gravely dangerous if not totally impossible. This expectedly marks a turning point in the narratives of exiles I have met.

Our conversations with Meta Cevrîye and the others in the salon were not structured and “ideal” one to one exchanges. We were guests to our generous hosts Cennet and her husband Weysî in their salon. As such, it has become an unstructured focus group of which I had probably lost many invaluable details due to the unavoidable side conversations my informants had among each other. Yet, on the other hand, it has become just one of another moment when the serendipity of fieldwork opened new spaces of exploration. For the first time I had witnessed, in such a scale, how Efrînî migrants share their memories of and thoughts on their common or at least similar experiences of what they had gone through, specifically the feelings of loss of and longing for Efrîn. As another significant point that expectedly infiltrates into the conversations, I have to note that these experiences and memories of homeland and displacement are lived, carried and kept in a neighbourhood life, in a social environment *sealed* by the tightening economic conditions. The refugees, the most vulnerable and precarious subjects of all spheres of urban life are the ones affected most by the ongoing yet unnamed economic crisis in Turkey. Just in order to continue a living, a family or an individual is required to

pay the arbitrarily raising rents and increasing bills of basic amenities, which means a considerable time and energy spent in exploitive working conditions in the sectors of textile taking the lead and followed by construction.

Back to Ceviz Bahçesi and the first-comers

Before going on with the narratives, it might be more coherent to go back to the first day that took me to the street where the salon was located. I owe my acquaintance with Cennet and Weysî to an encounter happened, again, in Ceviz Bahçesi. It was on one of the early days of April when I arrived to Demirkapı and started, as usual, to wander in the small park. Not much later, the Efrînî accent of a group of four young men caught my attention. A few minutes later I found my courage to approach them. After a month in the fieldwork, I was now far more practical then the first times in introducing myself and the research I was doing. As it was 22-year-old Xelat among them who welcomed me, I went on asking questions to him. Both during my professional experience and the fieldwork, it had been rare to come across an Efrînî young man who, before being displaced from Syria, had not migrated to Aleppo for either work or education. Xelat was one of them. Only once he has been out of Efrîn and it was to come to Turkey. He remembers his year of arrival as 2011, which is possibly wrong as it is the immediate year the demonstrations started in Daraa city of Syria. Yet, obviously he came in the early years of the war. He fits to the age-gender group that constitutes the very first arrivals of the Syrian migrants, which are the young men. Both because of the war conditions that had specifically made them human source targets for all the warring sides in Syria and as well as for the socio-economic conditions that "privilege" them as the ones who could work and survive better once displaced, it had been the young men of the families, who had to leave

Syria first. Thereby they could also settle down the living conditions here so that the rest of their family members could join them in case if the hopes of a near end to the war are lost at home.

Xelat and his friends, working in the textile workshops, were enjoying their only day off of the week when I approached them. Just as it was for Meta Cevrîye, as an Efrînî who previously did not have an integrated life with Aleppo city centre, Xelat's early times in Turkey were the hardest. He, just like Meta Cevrîye, wanted to return back right away after he arrived, yet he had to earn money to send to his family left behind at home. Xelat joined his maternal uncle in his journey from Efrîn to Istanbul. For more than a year he stayed with his married sister with whose husband he had worked in the same textile workshop. While we met, he was living this time with his maternal aunt as his own family was still away. As Gmelsch et al. (2010) rightly summarizes, "Once in cities, migrants must find a place to live, get a job and develop a network of friends to satisfy their many needs." (p. 282).[23] This indeed is the route map, the credo so to speak, for the displaced who could not –just as the majority cannot- afford to access even to the very basic material conditions needed to start a new life in the new country. Xelat has relied in his kin network to make his way in the city. Such individual-scale coping strategies coming together in time become group-oriented. Fed by the common experiences of displacement from homeland Efrîn, and of exile in Demirkapı, they contribute to form cluster of communities in neighbourhoods like Demirkapı. In the urban conditions of a harshening neoliberal environment, social capital of networks that provide housing and employment to fellow neighbours explain the social and material texture of the neighbourhood to a significant extent. Yet, what is equally significant is that

[23] This point of struggle for livelihood is further developed in the subchapter "A Keyword: "Ma'işet" (Livelihood)" in the present chapter.

Demirkapı space becomes a place *lived in* for Efrînîs as they form their lives in it with their experiences, networks, memories and encounters at all sorts of borders they face in the urban setting.

Demirkapı: Home for now?

Xelat, seemingly at least, has a complicated relationship with Istanbul –he separates Demirkapı from Istanbul- and with his exile, which I believe would say many things about the perceptions and experiences of most of Efrînîs, which are seemingly contradictory, or at least ambiguous. Just like Meta Cevrîye, and many other Efrînîs indeed, he underlines that he did not get used to Turkey and Istanbul. He, on the other hand, also wants to make sure that I do not misunderstand him as if everything is going wrong and as if he does not like anything here:

> Everything is different here, nothing is like home (…) But I do not say that I do not like anything and anybody here. Turkey is fine. Yet I am not used to it here. Now if they say you have to return back to Efrîn, I will, immediately. But still there is no work there, it is the same as before.

I went on asking a broad question: If he knows Istanbul out of Demirkapı, if he likes getting around in the city:

> We do not get out of Demirkapı much. I do not like cities, I like villages. That is why I did not live in Aleppo. Even here, it has been two months and a half I am living in Güneşli neighbourhood which is just fifteen minutes away from here but I come to Demirkapı maybe ten times in a week in the evenings. If I improve my conditions I would return back to Demirkapı because we *cannot take our hands from*[24] Demirkapı.

One can imagine, at most, how dramatic a rupture it is in one's life, born and raised in a village, to be forced to leave it toward a metropolis like Istanbul. Yet the resilience of human capacity and solidarity, and moral and material support mechanisms and relations among family members, friends, fellow villagers, and even

[24] I translate it from the original Kurdish sentence word by word: "Destên me ji Demirkapiyê nabin." It has emotional connotations that stresses impossibility of individual courage to leave Demirkapı.

among countryman –Efrînîs- succeeds the reconstruction and endurance of lives in exile. The remarks Halilovich (2013) makes on the case of Bosnian exiles are helpful to comprehend the case of Efrînîs' displacement, exile, and attachment to Demirkapı:

> For many people who experienced forced displacement, the original place is not located in space anymore, but in time which has passed -in memories, narratives, and performative enactments of local identities. (…) thus, rootedness after displacement does not necessarily equal sedentarism; it is rather an emotional attachment that transcends geography…People in exile do not root in place but in each other. (p. 10)

When I was asking him questions, Xelat was surrounded by his friends. His friendship networks –add to them kinship and any sorts of social networks among Efrînîs of Demirkapı- is the main reason he visits Demirkapı "ten times a week". Bearing in mind that any attempts of definition and categorization here would be a reduction, I would still do so for the sake of a better understanding. It is probably not a de-territorialization in process but rather a re-territorialization happening in Demirkapı, under the omnipresent shadow of longing for homeland Efrîn and a strong belief of return to home in the future, shared by the fellow Efrînîs, and thereby creating new community ties.

"The youth does not care that much."

Xelat has become the first I interviewed among the youth of Efrînîs of Demirkapı. Until him, my map of acquaintance was limited with a certain group. It was composed of Efrînî owners of the small grocery shops; the fellow Efrînî neighbours spending their times in these shops by sitting and having chats with each other - almost like a daily habit; and the aforementioned elder male denizens of Ceviz Bahçesi. Here I find a point worth making to show how common sense understandings and perceptions in general and specifically of one generation toward another might be misleading. The above mentioned unemployed or self-employed

adult Efrînî men have usually tended to see and portray to me that their children and youth do not suffer as much as they do from the experience of displacement and the state of exile they are living in. They would explain it with the loose ties the youth have with all that is about homeland, most significant one being elder relatives left behind; the active participation of the youth and children in the excessive work life here; or simply with the gaiety of their age. What I observed with Xelat, on the contrary, was a relatively more 'vulnerable' ability of toleration that is exhausted; that has almost reached to its limit, which the same common sense reasoning by the Efrînî adults would paradoxically explain again by his young age. I implicitly asked Xelat if there might be any truth in how the elder generation tends to consider them as relatively "careless":

> I would say just one thing. I came to Turkey, my life got ruined. Not only my life, of these friends of mine as well, of him and the other and the other one…Our lives are ruined. I think of nothing about my future as it is gone. This thing of (coming to) Turkey had killed us. It just drives me crazy (thinking) how people could endure 'till now. Working this much and all the things they've gone through… It makes me crazy."[25]

Needless to say, apart from disclosing a misrepresentation by the adults, his remarks, more significantly, are adequately expressive of the perceptions and thoughts of the young Efrînîs who, lacking any future expectations, have to strive hard still for a basic livelihood in the oppressive material conditions of Istanbul. In the literature of the (forced) migration, this is a significant issue, usually considered as "generational differences." The experiences of the parents and the younger generations of migrants unavoidably become different, as a result of which the latter at some point object to "the contradiction between the ideologies of equal opportunity and the reality of discrimination and racism in their daily lives." (Castles, Haas & Miller: 2014: p.62)

[25] I add the words in brackets for clarification.

## The Square of Efrînîs

As I had usually done at the other interviews as a way of meeting new interlocutors, at the end of our conversation, I asked Xelat if he could help me to break the small social circle of Efrînîs I had been wandering in. Without thinking much, Xelat and his friends mentioned a coffee shop -kıraathane- "just over there", which would be an ideal location for me to wander around as there are so many shops of Efrînîs around it. Just in a minute of walking from the park, he took me to a spot in the middle of Demirkapı -like those small squares usually seen in the villages- where at least four streets meet. By that time, I was sure that there is nowhere left in Demirkapı that I have not been to as I was about to complete a month in the neighbourhood. Yet, it was in this square-like spot that I located Cennet and Weysî's salon to visit the following day. Apart from the salon, there was a restaurant, a barber, a patisserie and a grocery shop, all around the square and all owned by the Efrînî residents, as one could discern from the Efrîn-related names written on the storefronts. It was only in the following days that I could make sense of how such a physically small neighbourhood could shelter such socially rich streets. Obviously, Demirkapı, like many other neighbourhoods in Istanbul with the similar social texture, has a high absorbing capacity that allows more than two or three communities to knit within themselves and with each other, as further explained in the next chapter.

## A Keyword: "*Ma'işet*" (Livelihood)

It is now a prevailing argument that right beside the authoritarian rule of decades and its sectarian favouritism, even more significant in my opinion, was the economic hardships, harshened especially with the droughts since 2006, among the major

reasons that paved the way for the devastating civil war in Syria. It is certain that it again lies in the governance and policy making mechanisms to ease the effects of climate change on the citizens, yet still it is relevant and crucial to at least mention that larger, ecologic and economic side of the issue. To call attention to this issue would also serve to denaturalize the dichotomy made between "migrants and refugees", which legitimizes itself according to the economic and political motivations -respectively- behind migration, a point further discussed in the introduction chapter. Xelat never mentioned the war, for instance, as a reason of his flight or as a current obstacle for his return, but said *ma'işet,* one of the most frequently used words in the interviews, meaning livelihood in Arabic. The search for a better *ma'işet* has usually been foregrounded as the ultimate motivation of displacement by almost all migrants I came to know, even if they were aware that it has been the bloody civil war that have displaced them. Such multi-factor explanations the individuals bring to their experiences also proves the inadequacy of formulaic theorizations and namings in migration studies. Therefore, I would modify what Gmelsch et al. (2013) argues, as such: It is not "only*"* but *even* "in extreme cases of hardship such as famine and war" migration is *not* "motivated by a single factor." Yet, the following remark of the same argument goes without saying: "Migration must be viewed as a process in which individuals consciously change their own situation in search of a more rewarding life." (p. 281). For sure, his age is a significant reason for him not taking the war to the centre of his narrative. Because, it is highly possible that Xelat, then a 15-year-old boy, was not the one in the family who took the decision to leave the country. This is indeed a usual pattern, as Castles et al. (2014: 38) conveys from Stark (1978; 1991) that decisions of migration are not usually taken by "isolated individuals" but often by families and households.

Apart from his young age, the reason why Xelat foregrounds search for a better livelihood –instead of running away from war- can be understood with the relative stability of Kurdish regions, especially of Kurd Dagh that, unlike Kobanê and Jezîre, had not been among the main targets for Isis and other Islamist armed groups. Indeed, the Kurd Dagh region, or Çiyayê Kurmênc as Efrînîs call it more widely, had not became a conflict zone until the 2018 incursion. Yet, for this very reason, it was overwhelmed rather by the arrival of mass population of the IDPs, mostly from Aleppo since 2012. Hereby, to better comprehend displacement narratives, while going on with Cennet and Weysî's stories, I would also touch upon a point: how the pre-war life of Efrînîs was strongly integrated with Aleppo city centre in a regular migratory context, a context, unlike forced migration, might better fit into the formulas of 'sterile' literature foregrounding migrants' economic motivations in the studies of global migration trends.

Efrîn Episode in between Aleppo and Istanbul

Indeed, displacement stories of both Meta Cevrîye and Xelat are not necessarily generic ones for the mass displacement of Efrînîs. More typical might be that of Weysî and Cennet, who, originally from Efrîn, used to live in Aleppo until the clashes broke out in the city. So, for the majority of Efrînîs, living migrant lives in an urban centre is not a novel experience that started with the cross border displacement to Turkey. A considerable population of Efrînîs was living in Aleppo. Yet, it goes without saying that the migration episode of Efrînîs in Aleppo differs from that in Istanbul to a great extend as the former was almost solely motivated by search of better economic conditions. The majority of Efrînîs I met, both in my professional work as well as during the fieldwork of the present study, were either born in Aleppo

to parents who had migrated to Aleppo or they themselves were the ones who had migrated after getting married. As even for the families who had resisted the rural economic conditions forcing to Aleppo-ward migration, their children were migrant students chasing better education opportunities in the city.

Cennet and Weysî were among these Efrînî couples settled in Aleppo city centre after getting married. Back in Aleppo, Weysî had worked as a tailor for at least ten years while Cennet used to have a hairdressing salon. I visited the couple in Demirkapı, in their salon in the 5th of April, which turned out to be the sixth year anniversary of their arrival as Weysî shared his instant discovery with me when I asked the date they left Aleppo. The couple are in their thirties and parents to a 12-year-old son and a daughter not at the age of school yet. Cennet also has a young sister in the salon, who assists her in makeup and hairdressing. Weysî, on the other hand, does not have a specific role in the profession, yet, apart from managing financial and bureaucratic tasks of the women's business, his presence as a man expectedly eases the social acceptance of the working women in the neighbourhood. Weysî sits at the back of a 'boss' table in the main room from where one enters the shop. As a usual practice of women hairdressing salons in Turkey, their room of hairdressing, which is in a separate room in the back of the shop, is also not visible to outside. Yet, Cennet had fortunately joined to almost all of our conversations next to her husband, except the times she had visits from customers, which were not very frequent as I had preferred not to visit them in the weekends, the busiest working days of the salon.

Efrîn: Not a Corner in Paradise Always

Although Efrîn had enjoyed a relatively peaceful period as the clashes between the armed sides of the civil war had never arrived in Kurd Dagh region, it had been overwhelmed rather by not only the return of its urban emigrants but also by the arrival of hundreds of thousands of the IDPs from the war zone regions of Syria. The narratives of Efrînî migrants on their interval of stays in Efrîn are therefore full of economic hardships as well as domestic disputes. The latter one had been mentioned mostly by the women as they had to shelter in their parents in law's houses in Efrîn together with the families of other married sons. In the small village houses of elder parents, in some cases, would live three or four married sons –and sometimes daughters- who fled from their cities of residence due to the clashes. This at some point would be unbearable for the families residing at the same house and would force them to look for somewhere else. Therefore, although most of Efrînîs remember and portray their homeland like "a corner in the paradise", when asked more, they would also disclose the other side of Efrîn that had made them to leave.

Here, there is another significant yet less frequently mentioned fact that had made the conditions "unfavourable" in Efrîn: the de facto presence of Kurdish autonomous self-administration in Kurd Dagh region at that time. Specifically, indeed in line with self-defense principle, it had been the compulsory guarding duty that had directly affected the Efrînîs most. This side of the story had been the least mentioned one as they are well aware that it is a delicate matter to talk about in their situation of being refugee in Turkey. To an extent, their situation of living in Turkey constitutes a paradoxical state as it is a country involved in the civil war not much to their advantage. That is why most of Efrînîs I came to know refrained from talking much about anything they consider politics and from expressing their political

affiliations despite all that is still going on in Efrîn that further obscure their future plans. Yet, I can still say that even if they had felt comfortable in talking about "politics" more, they would not have shown a homogenous line of political thinking. What Clara Han says for the neighbourhood life of La Pincoya in Chile. (2012: 19-20) is true for the community life of Efrînîs as well: It does not necessarily "fall along clear fracture lines of political affiliation." because of all the above mentioned experiences and facts about the Efrîn of the times they left and more significantly because of what is going on in Efrîn since the operation of January-March 2018.

First arrivals to Demirkapı

Unlike many Efrînîs, who had for a time stayed in Efrîn before leaving Syria, Cennet and Weysî left Aleppo to come to Istanbul directly as Weysî's brother in law, already settled in Istanbul, had encouraged them to do so. They consider their own example of being encouraged by the relatives who came earlier as generic to how Demirkapı has in time became a cluster residence of Efrînî migrants. So challenging to the common-sense tendency that consider women as only being the passive victims of men's war, a significant explanation regarding the first arrivals to Demirkapı came from no one else but a woman, from Cennet. After saying that it was young men who came first, she went on explaining how and why it was "these young men":

> At the border, there are usually two smugglers working together, one in the Syrian, the other in the Turkish side. What I heard, the Syrian one would inform the one at this side that he has some young relatives who want to work in Turkey. The Turkish smuggler would respond that he has a relative in Istanbul who needs workers. That is how it started.

Cennet's account on the first arrivals has been the most realistic and detailed one I received. That explanation came up as the couple was talking about their first days in Demirkapı. Then they pointed at a house in the street as the first one they took shelter

in six years ago “this day”. Exhausted of the difficult journey that day, they got asleep once at home just to be awakened a few hours later by Demirkapı ‘local’ residents who, after hearing about and seeing the “misery” of the newcomers, knocked at their door to hand whatever they could brought as assistance. After describing this generous reception, Cennet and Weysî went on almost instinctively with explaining how and why their relations with the receiving community of Demirkapı has changed in time. As I explain in the next chapter, the residents I came to know from both the receiving and the Efrînî communities had pointed out to the same transformations of relations. They shared with me their own explanations, which more or less agree on the point that it has been so because time has proven that this stay is going to last longer than how both communities thought of it in the beginning. Weysî reflects on it as follows, “Just like them (Turkish citizens), we used to expect a soon return. ‘In 6 months, one year at most, we are going to return.’ I used to say to Cennet to console her. Now, it has been seven years.”[26]

A rupture that exacerbated the exile

Many Efrînî migrants I came to know had made it clear that they left their countries to return back once the conditions at home prove again to be favourable for living. This is also certainly one of the major reasons why they had chosen a neighbour country like Turkey- or Kurdistan Regional Government in some cases. I heard from almost all the Efrînîs I had interviewed (including Xelat, Weysî and Cennet) that during the few months just before Turkey started the Olive Branch Operation, the majority of Efrînîs were making their arrangements to return to Efrîn permanently. Especially those who used to live in Aleppo had a tendency to consider their life here

[26] I add the words in brackets for clarification.

in Istanbul as just another separation, this time across borders, from homeland Efrîn similar to that happened previously with Aleppo. Like Meta Cevrîye, most of Efrînî migrants used to visit Efrîn either in occasions of bairams if allowed or with the help of smugglers as it was not dangerous and therefore not very expensive. Nevertheless, the border regime has completely changed after the operation over Efrîn in the early 2018. Even if someone manage to arrange a smuggler to cross the border to Efrîn, the expenses are so high now that no one can cover. As such, the incursion of January-March 2018 is a rupture in the displacement trajectory of Efrînîs. It has deteriorated the dispersal of Efrînî people further, almost wherever they are living. Those who are in Istanbul has lost the possibility of visiting their home and relatives. Those who stayed in Efrîn had forcibly been displaced to Til Rif'at and Şehba, just outside Efrîn in the south. Many of those who were in Turkey waiting to return to their home lost their hopes for now and have therefore left Turkey for Europe, mostly through the dangerous sea journeys as the chances of official resettlement offered are too limited.

Elders Who Stayed Behind

For many reasons, those Efrînîs who had stayed in Syria were mostly the elder parents. Majority of them could not bear the emotional burden of leaving home. Some others could not take the dangerous journeys that require physical force. The few ones who had to leave were usually those who do not have more than one son. For such elder migrants, then, the most significant personal question becomes whether it would be possible to be buried back at home, as I was asked once in a resettlement interview by a woman in her 80s. For the remaining younger Efrînîs who live in Demirkapı, the period after operation therefore means a further separation from the parents who are still in Syria. Cennet has underlined a few times

that it has been six-seven years she has not seen her parents. For her and many others, like Xelat for instance, home means mother and father. Weysî believes that just like his 55-year-old mother who died while the incursion was going on, many elder Efrînîs has died out of *qahr*, the great sorrow of going through forced displacement over a night after such an age. So, during the interviews or informal focus groups, whenever the topic had been how Efrîn was beautiful, what had followed was, almost unavoidably, the rupture that has changed everything:

> Efrîn was so beautiful. The border was open at that time. You could even bring olives with you. I brought once. Olives of Tunisia ant Italy are famous in the world, for us Efrîn olives are number one. We used to raise them in our garden at home. All the meals were delicious thanks to olive oil. Now we are buying it from the grocery shops and markets. (Cennet intervene and adds" Blessings and abundances of Efrîn were so much.")[27]. Yeah, everything was abundant. But now that people left, working in the fields is difficult. Even mobility within villages is limited. It effects (olives) of course. (Cennet intervenes again, "Now my mom is stuck in Efrîn centre. She is not allowed to return to her village, located just 20 minutes away."). Yeah, that is chaos[28]. When there is chaos, everything is possible.

Yet, even in in such a context, one should not expect "clear lines of fractures", not only regarding politics –as for which Clara Han originally uses it- but also regarding the relations between individuals of the dispersed community and families. In my second visit to the salon, Weysî received a phone call while we were in the middle of a conversation. He did not bother to answer and put the phone away in a weary manner. He shouted to his wife who was busy in the back room: "My dad is going to call you too now. I am not here." I tried not to show my momentary confusion yet he wanted to explain that his father calls too many times every day. By that time, I had already had an insight about the strong connectedness of Efrînî exiles with home. In almost all interviews I had, I had been informed about how two pillars of this connectedness are smartphones that allow video calls and remittances to the

[27] "Xêrûbêrên Efrînê pir bûn." Cennet uses one single Kurdish word xêrûbêr, composed of xêr and bêr, which I translate as 'blessings and abundances' respectively.
[28] Weysî uses Arabic word 'fawdaa' for chaos.

relatives, usually through traditional ways of *hawala* (transaction). That short instance of phone call in the saloon challenged my well-informed and established idea that home is somewhere Efrînîs only long for. It seems that the displacement and exile has developed its own "normalities" that might perplex one at first glance.

Material conditions matter in the "last instance"

What is more to this point, despite some significant common grounds such as being displaced and living under an ambiguous legal regime –Temporary Protection Regulation-, material conditions of living in Istanbul are not same for all the migrants, sometimes even within the same neighbourhood. That, in return, effects thoughts and beliefs of migrants regarding their life in Turkey. Those of the small minority who have succeeded, like Cennet and Weysî, to found their own business, thereby get rid of being cheap labour in physically harming work conditions. On the other hand, there is a considerable population of those who do not even have the identity documentation guaranteeing temporary protection status, whence not available exacerbates living and working conditions as one cannot even benefit from the small amounts of financial assistance. Therefore, the current economic situation of families and individuals certainly effect their thoughts and perceptions on displacement, exile and home. Weysî and Cennet believe that their material conditions are better here -though such comparisons are made to the war-time Syria:

> We miss our village most, and indeed, the overall life that we were used to. Our circumstances might be better here. ("It is comfortable here." says Cennet.) It is. There is electricity and everything. As you might know, in Syria there is no electricity right now. Yet there are things the material conditions cannot heal. There is always something missing in here. (Pointing to his heart.). Especially when I first arrived in Turkey, due to the exhaustion of years of poverty, unemployment, insecurity, war and everything in Syria, I said 'Okay, I am not going to return to Syria anymore, no way'. You know, we are human beings. You cannot take yourself from saying such things.

> After a while, I realized it is not going to be that easy. Now when I come across it (Efrîn) on internet, my eyes fill with tears.

Exile, displacement, being away from home and not being able to return in a near future, no matter whether the home is perceived as a small village in Efrîn or a neighbourhood in Aleppo, or the overall previous way of life in Syria that is lost for now…All these as memories and embodied individual experiences sometimes create fragmented senses of belonging or contradictory feelings, that manifest themselves when Efrînî residents of Demirkapı say "One part of me is still in Efrîn." or "How can we return, we have nothing left in Syria.", and "How can we stay in Turkey, we had had a life in Syria.". I should note that, these are also their reactions to "Will you return to Syria?", one of the questions that is being directed to the Syrian refugees most frequently in the rising anti-migrant atmosphere in Turkey.

"I have to make something out of myself."

To further develop the point just made, that is the impact of the materiality of life built in exile over the subjective perceptions, here I pass to introduce one more Efrînî interlocutor who is not living in Demirkapı and whom I met not during the fieldwork but in an NGO as a fellow colleague. Thereby, I hope to moderate the domination of male interviewees as well as to take a step out of the borders of Demirkapı. Last but not least, I convey it as an exemplary narrative that discloses individual struggles, capacities and resiliencies of those whose lives are rendered invisible by the stubborn social policies and societal perceptions that insist in seeing them nothing more than "misafir".

Şemam is a 22-year-old woman living with her family in Bayramtepe neighbourhood of Başakşehir, which is not very far from Demirkapı and can be considered in the same urban area with Bağcılar –as it is also a peripheral low-

income neighbourhood. Her narrative bears some similarities to that of Xelat and Meta Cevriye and some stark differences in the meantime. In that sense, to convey her narrative, that of a young woman not living in Demirkapı would help for a better comprehension of the larger context of being an Efrînî refugee in Istanbul. Şemam is the youngest one of six children to a father who is a retired teacher of mathematics and a housewife mother. It has been seven years they left Aleppo, where they had been living all the time as a whole family as his father had been working there. She is a member to the few Efrînî families who had been able to afford by themselves the material necessities of building a new life as soon as they arrived in Turkey. Şemam's brother owns his own textile workshop. As such, hers is also one of the few Efrînî families that succeeded to found their own business in Turkey. As soon as the clashes broke out in 2012 in Aleppo, the rest of family travelled through the border gate to join Şemam's brother who came three months earlier. Şemam, unlike Xelat with whom she is at the same age, had never been separated from her family. That has shaped her whole trajectory of exile. With the support of her family she has succeeded to finish the last year of her high school here in Turkey. She went on with learning Turkish and English in private courses. Thanks to her fluency in Kurdish, Arabic, English and Turkish, she started to work, almost three years ago, as a part time interpreter/translator in two different leading international NGOs of migration while also studying food engineering at a private university in Istanbul. Although we did our interview in Kurdish, she also sometimes switched to Turkish but mostly to English, as she did in the following part:

> My situation is not the case for most of the Syrians, I know. Maybe because my family provided me opportunities, financially and emotionally. My father and my mother was always there to talk to. And as I said, they supported me financially. So, my high school was a private Arabic school. I went there, they paid money for that. My big brother paid for Turkish courses. For

> English courses I started to work in the (NGO)[29], so I paid half of it. But right now I finance myself.

The part above was toward the end of our interview, which was preceded by "Yes, we lost our home and life we built in Aleppo but at least we are alive and together." Before coming there, in the beginning when I asked about her initial times in Turkey, she laid a straightforward, year by year short narrative in Kurdish: "When I came to Turkey, first year 'depresyona girdim.' (In Turkish: 'I sank into depression'). The following year I completed the last year of high school. The third year I learnt Turkish and then English.". I went on asking more about the first year she herself identifies –in Turkish- with depression. Eventually, she had also disclosed the point how she came to decide to get over depression after a year:

> Me, I did not witness much in Syria. I mean I did now witness blood and things. But I was displaced from my city, left my friends. Most significant, I left my school. I do not know the language (here). You see people laughing and talking with each other and getting around all the time, everywhere. You do not know any of them. That is why I used to suffer from depression. But the major reason was school. I was fond of my studies. Then when I had to leave I was left with nothing. In times I was overwhelmed I used to talk to my mom, we used to go out together. The few friends I had in Turkey were not likeminded for me, though most of them were Kurds of here. They were working anyway. Many of them would say "You Syrians, you came here to destroy our country too." And things like this. Then in time you reach to a point and you say "I am going to stay here for quite a time with these people. I have to make something out of myself. What I am here?" I do not know how to say this, even in Arabic. Okay I switch to English. (She was speaking Kurdish up until here). You have to show them that you are a hard worker. So they can understand that you are a human being like a…you know, that you are not just a Syrian that fled from some war. You are also someone that is a hard-worker, that has an aim, has a goal in her life to achieve.

What she enthusiastically explains -in the language learning of which she considered a way of "making something out of herself"- is that she is not about her mere biological presence but she has a biographical life she gives shape and meaning to. The switches Şemam made between languages themselves are revealing. She used to suffer from depression in the first year when she was not speaking Turkish yet. That

[29] The name is omitted for purpose of confidentiality.

is why she smoothly infiltrates a Turkish sentence ("Depresyona girdim.") in her narrative she was giving in Kurdish until then. She has seen learning English as a way of "making something" out of herself, therefore switches to English at the moment of explaining it. She stopped to answer her sister calling her on the phone. After the phone call she wanted me to remind her where we left. I summarized, in Kurdish, how at some point she decided that she has "to prove"[30] herself to go on. She caught the word "to prove" and said "That is the word I was looking for." Not later on but at the very moment of listening to Şemam, what she said especially on "making something out of yourself" reminded me what I have read from another refugee, from Hannah Arendt:

> Before this war broke out we were even more sensitive about being called refugees. We did our best to prove to other people that we were just ordinary immigrants. (…) Yes, we were "immigrants" or "newcomers" who had left our country because, one fine day, it no longer suited us to stay, or for purely economic reasons. We wanted to rebuild our lives, that was all. In order to rebuild one's life one has to be strong and an optimist. So we are very optimistic. (2007: p. 264).

Şivan Perwer: a ghostly voice of all time

During my childhood that had passed in 1990s in Gever, not all the stories I had heard from the adults of the family had been pleasant and nostalgic ones. The stories of how people had to bury the cassettes of Kurdish singers have in time become the most well-known and representative ones to explain how hard those times were. Those of Şivan Perwer were the most popular cassettes people had to hide to avoid getting into trouble with the military and security forces. To hear the name Şivan Perwer years later in a different context from Şemam, unavoidably made me think of some links between the 'infamous' years of 1990s and the current displacement of

[30] Kr.: "îspat kirin".

Efrînîs. Our conversation reached to that point from a relatively unrelated topic. I asked about her friendships in Turkey:

> I used to have many Turkish friends. They were nice as far as they did not talk about the war. Yet, after Turkey entered Efrîn and we got a bit upset, these friends started saying things like "Turkey has to do this. It is Turkey's mission. It has to do this, do that…So they *Suriyeli olarak kabul ettiler bizi ama Kürd olarak kabul etmediler.*[31](…) You cannot have an argument with them as well. "No, it is this, it is that… and over." The only truth is what they have in mind and what they say. They even, for instance, got upset when my sister used to listen to Şivan Perwer in her workplace. They used to say "What is this you are listening.". They were so upset with my sister listening to Şivan Perwer. But they would not say anything when the music was in Arabic.

Considering its symbolic value in the near history of Kurdish struggle, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that listening to Şivan Perwer is a practice like that Besteman was mentioning: one "that enables groups to recognize and cohere around collectively held values." So, the scene Şemam describes is an instance when "difference is constantly emergent, constantly renegotiated, constantly revalued, but continues to contain groupness over time." (Besteman, 2016: pp. 289-90). Indeed, apart from the deep rooted marginalization of Kurds, this is also just another moment when the much functional and practical naming "Suriyeli" is put to work. According to the boundaries that the migrants are put into as misafirs, "Suriyeli" should also not enjoy much visibly here at the house of her host.

"Garden of Olives"?

Let alone being a means of exchange anymore, walnuts –and many other vital but abundant local subsistence products that once used to sustain village life- had become exotic for us to eat during my childhood, as the villages of our parents and grandparents were already evacuated and made inhabitable. Similar to what walnuts

[31] Tr.:" They have acknowledged us as Syrians but not as Kurds." She unexpectedly yet smoothly switched speaking from Kurdish to Turkish for the second time with this sentence. The first one was "Depresyona girdim.".

were for us or for Bitlîsîs once upon a time, olives have been ,and are still, a life-shaping subsistence farm product for Efrînîs.[32] In the hands of the municipality of Bağcılar, walnuts had become a name to be given to one of its Nostalgia Gardens project, to appeal its Bitlîsî residents.[33] Whether or not the municipality would in the future think about "pleasing" its considerable Efrînî community by naming one of the parks as "Olive Garden" depends may be upon whether their homeland would someday again provide Efrînîs with its favourable living conditions for a willing return. The Efrînîs I talked to sometimes showed complicated thoughts about their stay in Demirkapı and about future plans regarding homeland. The perceptions are rightly complicated, as the ambiguity of their future is so concrete on a daily basis in the social, economic and legal conditions of being –indeed of impossibility of being- a refugee in Turkey. Nonetheless, almost all of whom I met wholeheartedly believe that they would one day return to "their Efrîn".

[32] According to a recent report, Efrîn district alone in the region approximately contains 18 millions of olive trees. The report also contains some invaluable on-ground insights on what has changed with and what is going on in North of Syria since the incursion of Turkey. Available at https://www.paxforpeace.nl/publications/all-publications/socioeconomic-impact-of-displacement-waves-in-northern-syria.

[33] Right here, to remember the significance state mechanisms give to namings and to draw attention to another ironic naming act, see how a street in İstanbul is named "Olive Branch" after the operation of the incursion into Efrîn: "Zeytin Dalı Caddesi",İBB: https://www.ibb.istanbul/News/Detail/34555. In the larger context of state violence, naming is an ageless strategy, the most well-known example being the futile yet stubborn erasure of age-old name 'Dersim' and its replacement with Tunceli.

# CHAPTER 4:

# OVERLAPPING DISPLACEMENTS:

# "ISTANBUL IS NOT OURS, BUT NOT THEIRS AS EITHER"

According to the statistics of UNHCR, the population of Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey is more than three million and a half as of May 2019.[34] This is according to the official statistics which is limited only to the registry of those defined and registered by DGMM[35] as "Syrian foreigners under the temporary protection".[36] Yet, it is known that a considerable population of the asylum seekers are not registered since, in the last few years, the Turkish authorities has started to limit the registrations.[37] These figures are not for anything than to give a rough sense to the readers about the overall population of the Syrian asylum seekers. The present study narrows the scale down rather to the individual and community lives of the displaced Kurds from Syria within the limits of a neighbourhood to do justice to such delicate experiences as forced displacement and exile, at least on its own part and as far as would be possible within the limits of a graduate research. To speak in quantitative terms for the last time, Istanbul, not much surprisingly, is now the leading city in Turkey for "sheltering" the Syrian migrants, whose population in the city is around to reach one million. From my professional work experience in a humanitarian refugee organization, I was already aware that the Syrian Kurds are settled in certain neighbourhoods in certain districts such as Esenyurt, Arnavutköy, Başakşehir and Bağcılar. Yet, Demirkapı of Bağcılar specifically, came to the fore for the present

[34]UNHCR. https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria
[35] Acronym for Directorate General of Migration Management, or Göç İdaresi as widely known in Turkish, whose countrywide organization is only as old as the Syrian civil war and the following mass arrival of the Syrian refugees.
[36] "Geçici Koruma Altına Alınan Suriyeli Yabancılar" in Turkish, as referred in the migration report of 2016 by Migration Management:
http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/2016_yiik_goc_raporu_haziran.pdf
[37] https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/07/16/turkey-stops-registering-syrian-asylum-seekers

study when a friend of mine from an IDP-focused NGO based in Istanbul informed and advised me about Demirkapı and its migratory social fabric.

The 'protracted' exile of the Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey has long been made an unending temporariness. It is made so by the practical and discursive approaches initiated by government policies and embraced by the large portions of the 'receiving society.' These approaches are encapsulated by the namings "*Suriyeli*", "*yabancı*", "*mülteci*", "*misafir*". Or in other words, these are the powerful discursive representations of tacit enclosure and practices of rendering invisible the lives of Syrian refugees who have been residing in Turkey, mostly in urban spaces, more than four years even in the shortest cases. That is what I imply by saying "protracted". These namings mask the resilience and livelihood struggles of Syrian refugees in urban environments. What these namings do not even bother to mask is that even if it has been eight years "the guests" still have to return to where they came from. Although these are more than enough to problematize and examine the issues, Demirkapı has its own specificities that extends the limits of the study further. The neighbourhood is home to a large population of internally displaced Kurds of Turkey since the early 90s. Yet, neither IDPs nor today's Efrînî refugees of the neighbourhood are mere subjects of humanitarian crisis and management. They are indeed part of a living collective memory of an enduring oppression and dispossession -in the lightest terms- over Kurds under whatever nation state they have been living. As argued in details in the introductory chapter, they are members first and foremost to one of those communities Mbembe (2017) refers to in his *Critique of Black Reason* as "whose share of humanity was stolen at a given moment in history". (p. 183). I suggest to see Demirkapı as a spatial embodiment, as an urban extension of that violence and dispossession over a certain people. If by chance not

‘neutralized’ by other means on the original lands they are living, these people are left to face displacement which inevitably leads to urban poverty. In urban spaces like Demirkapı, overt state violence -albeit preserving its right to return anytime- leaves its place to structural (legal, economic, social and cultural) inequalities. What follows are the encounters, practices and thoughts of those people who, although aware of larger systemic and indiscriminating displacement and dispossession, strive to endure the daily struggle of livelihood in urban conditions.

Urban spaces of “taking turn in poverty”

Settlement patterns of the migrants in Istanbul follow one that is generalized within the larger migration studies which do not underestimate the socioeconomic inequalities and their segregator-y manifestations. The pattern is that certain disempowered groups of people live in certain areas of cities. In accordance with this pattern, beside the aforementioned districts that “attract” Syrian migrants in the European side of Istanbul, one can also name Sultanbeyli in the Asian side, among the urban districts which have in time become clusters of urban poverty. History of the formation of such districts dates back to the beginning of internal rural-urban migration in 1950s according to the periodization by İçduygu and Aksel who define the years between 1950s and 1980s with “migration boom and rapid urbanization” in Turkey. (Castles et al, 2015:119). For a better comprehension, Bağcılar of today and thus, Demirkapı should be contextualized in the history of migration dynamics of Turkey that have created such “peripheral squatter settlements” (Castles et al: 123-4) in the major urban centres. One of the best known ethnographic studies on such clusters of urban poverty is that of Işık and Pınarcıoğlu on Sultanbeyli (2001). In a similar trajectory to that of Sultanbeyli, I would say that the social and economic

development in Demirkapı as well has followed a pattern of "taking turns in poverty"[38]. The first settlements in Demirkapı were by Anatolian migrants –especially from the Black Sea region- in 1950s before the internally displaced Kurdish migrants settled in the neighbourhood, starting in the late 1980s but mostly in the 1990s, the decade when the "low intensity war" –as 'security experts' call it- has reached its peak. The Syrian civil war has further contributed to the migratory texture of Demirkapı. The last large migrant population in this chain thus is of Syrian Kurds, mostly from Efrîn region,[39] who started "to take the turn of poverty" in Demirkapı since as early as 2012. Yet, as one would come across in many districts similar to Bağcılar, in Demirkapı as well there are Afghan and Pakistani migrants, albeit in less numbers, located at the lowest level of "the turn", and benefiting from the "generous" yet extremely precarious housing and employment "opportunities" of the neighbourhood.

I say "lowest" because they constitute the migrant populations that has come to be named as non-Syrians in legal definitions –particularly in categorizations by the UNHCR- increasingly in the recent years with the Syrian civil war and the following "refugee crisis". That is not to provocatively say some migrants suffer while some others enjoy, with sharp boundaries in between. More broadly, it is rather related to the determinations of international refugee management that privileges the interests of the developed countries. As such, Syrian refugee crisis becomes the most urgent one among others for the European states. It is also eventually related to the uncertain legal regulations on migrants in Turkey. As Mine Eder and Derya Özkul rightly suggests, "(…) though much more work needs to be done on this issue—the

[38] Here I borrow how İçduygu and Aksel translate the pattern of "nöbetleşe yoksulluk" from Işık and Pınarcıoğlu. (2015: 124).

[39] Initially, I was yet to know that the Syrian Kurdish residents of Demirkapı were overwhelmingly from Efrîn region. Like much of the content in the present work, it has manifested itself during the fieldwork.

“relative privilege” of Syrian refugees in terms of legal and welfare entitlements has already started to create tensions among the various migrant groups.” (Mine Eder & Derya Özkul, 2016: p. 6). One should also add the presence of a population of Syrian Arabs in Demirkapı, albeit again in less numbers, as they also have “their own clusters” like Demirkapı in some other parts of Istanbul. Regarding the current population state of the neighbourhood and the scale of its transformation, İlhan (a resident originally from Bitlîs, introduced in the coming parts) made the most striking and summarizing remark: “If a few years ago one had said that one day you will hear people speaking Urdu or Arabic in Demirkapı, no way would I have believed.”

Demirkapı is the most densely populated neighbourhood of Bağcılar. Once getting off the subway or bus, the first thing one would realize is the high buildings surrounding the subway and bus stations, some completed and some others still under construction as one would come across frequently anywhere in Istanbul. Just after ten minutes of walk through random streets into the inner parts of the neighbourhood, one leaves the ‘new face’ of Bağcılar and starts to sense the nostalgic neighbourhood feeling, so to speak, usually characterized by medium-height, five and six-storey old fashioned buildings; children playing in the narrow streets; and newly washed clothes left to dry on the balconies (Figure 3). I have

started my fieldwork towards the middle of March 2019 under the shadow of upcoming municipal elections of 31st March. On the neighbourhood level, it was not surprising to observe that the elections were felt as a race among the mukhtar candidates. The walls and shop windows were filled with the banners and posters of the candidates. I owe to these banners my very first impression on the composition of the neighbourhood. In these posters, the portrait of candidate stays in the middle and the portraits of his associates (aza) surround him. The captions under each portrait do not mention anything than their cities of origin, neither occupation nor age but city names like Bitlis, Van, Adıyaman and also Tokat, Sivas and Erzurum in some others.



Figure 3. Medium-height, five and six-storey old fashioned buildings; children playing in the narrow streets

In all over Istanbul, and specifically in the neighbourhoods like Demirkapı located at the "periphery" of the city, no one would be surprised to see such population compositions, if aware of the migration history mentioned above.

The ties with the cities of origin, whether effective or not, can also be traced through city associations (hemşehri dernekleri) located in every corner in Istanbul. Such social institutions and networks based on solidarity among those from the same cities –sometimes from the same village- create micro-clusters of *hemşehri* within neighbourhoods which themselves constitute clusters in the larger urban scene. Such clusters most of the time are so closed that false self-perceptions emerge relating to community, and solidarity among its members. Regarding this point, in my very first day in the neighbourhood, I received a very revealing comment by a Bitlîsî resident while we were talking about the upcoming local elections.

> I had learned many new things about Demirkapı while conducting my undergraduate research project.[40] It is not like how we want to think of it. After each local election, we would blame each other like "We Kurds are traitor to each other, how we could not elect our own mukhtar!". No man, our population is lower than that of Turks in this neighbourhood. This is a big neighbourhood. (Güney, in his 20s, from Bitlîs).

This time, they said, they managed to consolidate a unity. The results however had disappointed them once again as the mukhtar of the previous term succeeded to keep his post for another term. This is a point that deserves further explanation. The neighbourhood is certainly not a homogenous one in terms of its population, which now also includes a considerable portion of migrants, mostly but not exclusively from Efrîn. It is not a Bitlîsî neighbourhood per se as well as it is not a neighbourhood of Efrînîs, or of any other community originally from another city of Turkey. Yet, I came across many neighbours from communities of both Efrîn and

[40] Güney kindly accepted to share with me his graduation project in sociology. For reasons of confidentiality however, I would not disclose its original title and details that might reveal Güney's identity.

Bitlîs, who takes Demirkapı as “a small Efrîn” or “a small Bitlîs”. Indeed, that is how the neighbourhood is, on the other hand. In a few parallel streets is clustered the residents originally from Bitlîs. An observation from outside would identify the population concentration by the local names given to bakeries, grocery shops and small business places such as textile sweatshops, coiffeurs, simple electronic shops and like. The same settlement pattern is relevant for the Efrînîs, as well.

A small Bitlîs

The cluster or the network through which I made my first rapport happened to be that of residents originally from Bitlîs, as I made my entry into the neighbourhood with the help of a Bitlîsî family. My fieldwork journey, therefore, in the initial phase is incidentally informed by the displacement and emplacement narratives of a Bitlîsî family, and more significantly, by their perceptions on their “newcomer” fellows from Syria. Thus, I start with a detailed account of my initial conversations with a Bitlîsî family, which have provided me with invaluable insights that, possibly, I would not have been able to gain in some other arranged formal focus groups. Their welcome was so warm that I could not reject their insistence to stay for the dinner and night. After I accepted to stay and explained my research, Yakup and Omer, Apê Abbas’ sons, asked me to join them for a tea at their youngest uncle İlhan’s, who happened to be a postgraduate sociology student and was living just a floor downstairs. A few minutes after we arrived, Apê Abbas’ nephew Güney – abovementioned-, who was also graduated from sociology in a university in Istanbul, joined our gathering. What is more, as I mentioned earlier, not long later I learned that Güney did his undergraduate project on the displacement of his own community and on how Demirkapı has taken its shape with migrations waves up to the arrival of

Syrian migrants. In short, only in a few hours after I arrived in the neighbourhood, I found myself as a guest to a Bitlîsî family, drinking tea while discussing my research and fieldwork with the youth of the family, two of whom happened to have a background of the discipline of sociology. In the following accounts, the reader would be able to trace the effects of this incidental "sociological aura" in our conversations which were flourished further upon their extra interest in my research, as might be expected.

"The Syrian Kurds remind us our initial times in Istanbul."

After I explained why I was there and what my research is about, both İlhan and Güney reassured me that Demirkapı is the right place to carry out a research with Kurds from Syria, specifically because, just as they did roughly 25 years ago, the Syrian Kurds have also "chosen" Demirkapı to settle in. They have made, thus, many comparisons regarding the Syrian Kurds in such a retrospective line of thinking. More or less, they believe, the situation of newcomer Kurds from Syria is just the same as theirs was when they first settled in Demirkapı approximately 25 years ago. Yet, they immediately bring up a significant difference: The newcomer fellows, they claim, enjoy a significant advantage, that is the presence of a common language. As the Bitlîsîs still remember, the language barrier had been the biggest hardship they struggled with for the initial years of their exile that started 25-30 years ago in Demirkapı. What follows is some further accounts of how their new neighbours remind two Bitlîsî young man of their early times in Demirkapı:

> The Kurds from Syria are going through the same processes we had gone through some twenty years ago. We were discussing it with Güney the other day: The way they manage their grocery shops, for instance, with no signboards, smoking cigarette and chatting inside all the time, not-yet-institutionalized, face-to-face relations of business... You would see such shops in each corner. That's exactly how we were

> twenty years ago. (…) We have in time reached to better standards and got institutionalized somehow. Now the Syrians have started to take the same process. I say 'Syrians' but it is complicated with the Kurds[41]. (…) (İlhan, in his early 30s, Bitlîsî resident).

Mother tongue: a home in exile

As for the harsh language barrier the Bitlîsîs had faced, it is certain that it had isolated the community for quite some years, and paved the way for the creation of a self-reliant community of Kurdish speakers. To Ilhan's remarks Güney contributed as follows:

> While conducting my research project, I had an opportunity to think about my own past in Demirkapı. I had not known one Turkish word when I started primary school. All the neighbours on our street were either my family members or fellows from our village, or from neighbour villages of Tatvan-Bitlîs. So there was, and still is a population density of Bitlîsîs in these three-five streets around, usually shaped by family ties. So, I thought, one was able to sort everything out with Kurdish in a certain environment, as it is still the case. So, what else a Syrian Kurd would want if Kurdish is everywhere, in your workplace, in the streets. Look, back then, we had to listen to music in no other language than Turkish in textile workshops. Now they (the Syrian Kurds) listen to music in their own language. The language factor might seem insignificant but it is not. This is the deep of comfort for them.

Indeed, while we were talking about all these, İlhan's mother, in her late eighties, was listening to us silently but enthusiastically. At one point I felt the need to apologize from her as I could not know if she was able to follow our conversations that were mostly in Turkish. Despite all the years she has passed in Demirkapı, the mother does not speak Turkish, as İlhan later gave her case to exemplify the language matter. That reminded me the situation of her fellow elder Efrînî Kurds, mostly women, that I came to know during the interviews in my professional work, who does not speak Arabic despite living for decades in the big cities of Syria,

[41] I leave İlhan's last sentence here to go on with later, to open up the discussion of identifications and encounters between Kurds from Efrîn and from Bitlîs.

mostly in Aleppo, and in some cases in Damascus. In the previous chapter, a detailed account is given of how the first arrivals of Efrînîs have happened to be in Demirkapı. Although it was mostly due to the networks of smugglers on the both sides of the border, the major reason Demirkapı has developed and stayed as an Efrînî enclave, so to speak, has been the population of "internally" displaced Kurds already settled in Demirkapı and the Kurdish they speak.

Here, to return back later, I switch to some remarks from an interview with an Efrînî elder man I met in the small park of the neighbourhood called Ceviz Bahçesi[42], in order to better comprehend the matter of common language and to make an introduction to the encounters of –as well as boundaries between- the two displaced Kurdish "communities" of Demirkapı. It was my third day in the neighbourhood. As usual, elder Efrînî and Bitlîsî men were playing chess and checkers –in separate groups- in the picnic tables of the park Ceviz Bahçesi. I came across an Efrînî resident I met the day before in a grocery shop. As he was already aware of why I was there, he wanted to introduce me to an Efrînî, whom he thought would be the most informing one. Apê Heme, 52-year-old, had left Syria six years ago and is living in Demirkapı since then. Unlike many Efrînîs who were previously settled in Aleppo city centre, Apê Heme had been earning his livelihood in Damascus since he got married until the war broke out. After he was displaced from Damascus, he could not afford to stay long in his hometown Efrîn, which had already been overpopulated by the IDPs from the war torn cities. I asked him why nowhere else but in Demirkapı they had settled:

> As you know, since before, wherever they are, Kurds, our people live together. One finds his comfort among his own people. Back then in Efrîn, the names of Demirkapı, Fatih neighbourhood and Bağcılar were already known among people as many Efrînîs were already here and were visiting

[42] For a detailed account of Ceviz Bahçesi please see the third chapter "From Çiyayê Kurmênc to Demirkapı: Narratives of Displacement".

> back Syria occasionally. And we know, the oppression of enemies over Kurds is the same everywhere. Being aware of this, and hearing that there are Kurds living in Bağcılar, Demirkapı, Fatih Mahallesi…We thought it would be much less difficult if we go there. So, despite all the hardships here, you know that in case if you need something, if you ask something, they would at least respond in your language. That is enough for you to feel at ease, even if they might not be nice people all the time.

However, it had not taken a long time to start to feel that the language matter is just the bottom level, just a facet of a much complicated, multi-layered social texture of the locality of Demirkapı. In what remains, I try to examine and comprehend this locality through the confrontations and boundaries manifested in the daily life of the neighbourhood.

It is now a truism that the age-long systemic assimilation over Kurds –to which forced displacement have always been serving as a main instrument- has reached a considerable success in Turkey. Therefore, the general situation of Kurds in Turkey, and specifically in Istanbul –including the decreasing use of Kurdish among them not only in public but also in private spheres- might has been "disappointing" for Kurds from Syria, at least for those who, like Apê Heme, the Damascene Efrînî, has a relatively stronger sense of ethnic belonging. Although I use it, the word "disappointing" would not be a justice to the perceptions and thoughts of the Syrian Kurds on their fellow neighbours and on their encounters with them. Those of Syrian Kurds are indeed more contemplated-on perceptions as far as I have found out in the fieldwork.

"Kurds of here, Kurds of there"

These perceptions and thoughts are most of the time sophisticated and multifaceted for some reasons that can be considered in two dimensions. The first is about the general situation of being "refugee" in Turkey. Obviously, uncertain legal

frameworks that shape the lives of displaced migrants and the hierarchical relation vis-à-vis the receiving communities that position the former to a vulnerable place influence the perceptions. Most of the Efrînî migrants I came to know have refrained from making one-sided arguments, particularly when talking about their relations with the receiving communities. More significant and influential, in my opinion, is the second dimension, that is the historical and social background of being a 'minority' across the long border, in another nation state regime, i.e. being Kurd in Syria. While the Bitlîsîs have generally acknowledged their lack of a considerable knowledge on the Syrian Kurds, and more particularly, on Efrîn and its people, the former, obviously, have a better knowledge on the latter, thanks to not only the last seven-eight years they have been living in Turkey but also to the conditions specific to the Kurdish-ness that has been lived within the nation-state borders of Syria, and thus, that has been informed by different state-society relations. In short, the delicate position of being –indeed the difficulty of being- refugee in Turkey plays a role for Efrînî migrants to have -or show- relatively multisided, well-thought and open ideas and perceptions especially about the relations with the receiving society-s. More significant than this point is the general situation of being migrant in a country, or relatedly, the diversity -of all sorts- to which migrant people contribute to develop in the receiving societies. Castles et al. clarifies this line of thinking as follows:

> It has always been part of the migrant condition to develop multiple identities, which are linked to the cultures both of the country of origin and of the destination. Such personal identities possess complex new transcultural elements, manifest in growing transnationalism and expanding diasporic populations around the world. (…) Immigrants are not unique in this; multiple identities are becoming a widespread characteristic of contemporary societies. But it is above all migrants who are compelled by their situation to have multilayered sociocultural identities, which are constantly in a state of transition and renegotiation. Moreover, migrants frequently develop a consciousness of their transcultural position, which is reflected not only in their artistic and cultural work, but also in social and political action. Despite current conflicts about the effects of ethnic diversity on national cultures and

> identity, immigration does offer perspectives for change. New principles of identity may emerge, which may be neither exclusionary nor discriminatory, and may provide the basis for better intergroup cooperation. (2014: 330)

As for the last wishful sentences, although the situation in Demirkapı is yet to manifest itself so that one can make a certain foreseeing, I believe there are some evidences to be optimistic about the development of a ground of living together in Demirkapı in the future. Yet, here as a side-note –but as an essential one, one has to remember that, this is first and foremost dependent to the government policies, public discourses and general attitude towards and about the Syrian refugees. As to pass to the evidences for optimism, the presence of Efrînî migrants and the reality of their "migrant condition", as Castles et al. rightly name, has already been influencing, changing and shaping the sociocultural and economic spheres of Demirkapı.

In what remains, by referring to the interviews with the Efrînîs, I will mostly try to examine perceptions and practices related to this ongoing transformation in the neighbourhood. An appropriate and useful way, I believe, is to focus on the interactions and encounters of the receiving and newcomer communities, as well as to focus on the situations when such interactions and encounters do not happen. Thereby, one would be able to see how, as Castles et al. put it, "multilayered sociocultural identities" are "constantly in a state of transition and renegotiation", in other words, a constant state of encountering and negotiating sociocultural and economic borders that manifest themselves in the daily life. One of the coming subchapters, which takes its name "You cannot blame" from the words of the Efrînîs, is allocated to this specific issue. A prominent proportion of what Efrînî residents have shared with me in the interviews are thoughts and perceptions out of the comparisons they make between Syria and Turkey; between "Kurds of here and

Kurds of Syria" (or specifically "Kurds of Efrîn"); between Turks and Arabs, and such like. To scrutinize these dichotomies and categorizations that seem to be ethno-nationalist does not mean to favour a "methodological nationalism". (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002: 301-334). It is rather to do justice to what the Efrînî residents themselves –as the subjects who have gone through forced displacement and has been living in exile in Demirkapı- have foregrounded in our conversations during the fieldwork. Therefore, in what follows, I mostly rely on the accounts of the Efrînîs from the interviews in order to better understand their life –in their own words, namings and categorizations, as well as with their practical and discursive priorities- in Demirkapı in as much dimensions as possible.

Those who are 'unable to be exploited'

In light of what I have hitherto laid down about the context of the neighbourhood, that is how it is one of the many peripheral urban spaces formed as a result of the internal migration and forced displacement, it is right to suggest that Demirkapı conforms to the global pattern of being one of these urban spaces where the newcomers -whether migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, or "guests"- are put to a position of competing with the poor, the low-income, the marginalized, -in short domestic foreigners- over sharing the "limited sources" made available to them. That is why the neighbourhood constitutes a case for this study; not simply because it is an urban area of confrontation for the two displaced Kurdish communities –although that has been a significant dimension for the study- but also because this confrontation is being experienced by individuals in such a locality that speaks to the larger structures and processes that constantly disempower the multitude. I use multitude here to overcome the categorizing and dividing, and thus confusing,

vocabulary of the policy and governance-based approaches. To refresh and clarify the argumentation, I make reference to Achille Mbembe (2017), who says "If yesterday's drama of the subject was exploitation by capital, the tragedy of multitude today is that they are unable to be exploited at all." (p. 3). He situates the multitude in his theorization of "The Becoming Black of the World" to point to the flexibility racism has obtained (on religious and cultural terms) to make a room for anyone who is not wanted. Certainly, the foreigners are the leading figure of not-wanted, no matter how they are being called in different contexts. In Turkey, recently they are being called "Syrian guests". What Mbembe says for the contemporary abandonment by capitalism happens in Demirkapı as well. Some remarks by Apê Heme, the Damascene Efrînî, resonates powerfully with his argument. While we were discussing about their relations with the receiving society and state in general and the 'local' Kurdish community of the neighbourhood specifically, at one point he said:

> We did not and we do not want anything from the people of Turkey. We are human beings, we are strong. We do not want to be a burden to anyone. We can work and earn our lives. If they just employ us. But they did not even do that.

There are thousands of migrants in Turkey like Apê Heme who cannot even be exploited. For the ones at his age the situation is even further exacerbated. The middle aged Syrian migrants are usually rejected employment, even if they are skilled –Apê Heme was a mechanic in Damascus. For employers, it is far more profitable to employ their children instead, whom they can manipulate with less trouble and far lower wages. Not surprisingly, the other most exploited group is young migrant women. The precarious working conditions are to a large extent result of the government policies that, by restricting obtaining work permits, constrain the Syrian migrants to work in flexible and informal conditions, to accept to work indeed no matter how and what the conditions are. As such, they have to accept to work for low wages to sustain a livelihood in the urban conditions (Figure 4). As a result, for




Figure 4. A job posting of a textile sweatshop from Demirkapı specifying the positions and their daily payments

the majority of the receiving society they become the easy suspects, "the thieves" of the limited jobs available in the low-skilled labour market. What follows employment is the housing market, as another significant sphere of artificial competition. The mere presence of migrants is widely conceived as responsible of the constantly increasing housing rents. These are the main contours of economic tensions between the longer-established neighbours and the Syrian migrants.

Here, it is convenient to point out to another related significant issue. I have suggested that there is a considerable migrant population that cannot even find a place in the exploitative labour market. Those who join to the labour market, on the other hand, are not joining in a framework in their favour. What Sinem Kavak (2016) rightly defines as "adverse terms" are pre-given when they join to the precarious labour market:

> (…) the workers are not excluded from the labour market but rather incorporated into it through adverse terms that stem from already existing vulnerabilities. (…) These vulnerabilities, which stem from their socio-legal status and livelihood pressures, push them to the bottom of the labour market. (pp. 34, 57).

What is more, those who find a job are obviously not employed according to their skills. Deniz Şenol Sert (2016) describes this as "de-qualification", and observes that it is a significant yet an understudied issue in the migration studies. It is significant because it exacerbates the precarity of migrant workers as it becomes an "institutionalized discrimination" (p. 97) if we consider in the context of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey.

"No matter what, you are still a Syrian"

Most of my interlocutors, both migrants and citizens, agree that the nature of relations between them have changed over the years. While the fieldwork was

continuing, I have gradually reached to the result that Demirkapı has been a destination from the very beginning for many Efrînîs when they decided to take on the journey. Like Apê Heme, many of them most probably soothed themselves with the expectation that not only they are going to live somewhere they would not suffer much from a language barrier, but also the basic struggles of housing and employment at the destination would be less painful thanks to the possible solidarity of the co-ethnics. This has indeed proven itself in the lived reality but only to reach spatial and temporal limits soon, the limits that the naming of "guest" –or hospitality in general- encapsulates. Partly in accordance with or as a result of the state discourse at that time, the Syrian migrants were initially welcomed by the large segments of people in Turkey. They were welcomed as guests who would return as soon as the violence from which they fled ends. That is how more or less the arrival and settlement of Syrian asylum seekers has been perceived in the mainstream of Turkey. As for the situation in the specific context of Demirkapı, in addition to the mainstream welcome across the country, the fact of being Kurdish –and all that it implies historically and politically- had been a significant determinant in the initial gesture of reception. As I left his remark above, Ilhan, sociology student originally from Bitlîs, said "(…) I say 'Syrians' but it is complicated with the Kurds." The complexity is a grounded and rightly-put one, on the sides of, maybe, both the Kurds from Syria and Kurds from Turkey. Yet, it can be clarified to an extent again and still with some other remarks by Ilhan and Güney from our discussion. "The Kurds, they do not consider themselves as Syrians" says Ilhan, and Güney agrees. Then he goes on "Yet, no matter how much one is a Kurd, he is still a Syrian."[43] He was powerfully pointing to the fact that even if they wish, in the eyes of the citizens, they

[43] Translation may not make the original sense, here is the sentence in the original language: "İstediği kadar Kürt olsun, yine de Suriyelidir."

cannot “get rid of” being Syrian, the latter now being a stigma, a naming synonymous with all the negative meanings attributed, in the recent sociolinguistic realm of Turkish, to the words *refugee*, *foreigner*, *migrant* and like.

I suggested that the complexity is grounded on both sides, that is, it is complicated for both the migrant Kurds and the receiving Kurds as such namings and categories are given meaning and are contextualized as much by the history they encapsulate as by their contemporary use. The context of their current use -that is the reality they point to- and the realms of meaning they imply is significant. To keep the details of the ethnic identification short –as they already diffuse to the whole of the thesis and are too messy to deal with here- I again trust Mbembe’s (2017) remarks he makes for the outcasts of society to clarify and contextualize the condition(s) of being Kurd under failed nation-state projects:

> In fact, for those who have been subjected to colonial domination, or for those whose share of humanity was stolen at a given moment in history, the recovery of that share often happens in part through the proclamation of difference. (p. 183)

Kurds in Turkey, Iran, Syria and in Iraq until recently, have been those “whose share of humanity was stolen”. That, I believe, is what is rather in-common among Kurds more than any other narrow and essentialist criteria of ethnicity. Mbembe’s actual argument also indeed sheds light on the issue of difference, that is why the Kurds, like other fellow oppressed peoples tend to highlight the difference. Yet, as Mbembe implies (2017), the process is circular: “Often, the desire for difference emerges precisely where people experience intense exclusion. In these conditions the proclamation of difference is an inverted expression of the desire for recognition and inclusion.” (p. 183). That is how also I understand the process in the specificity of Demirkapı. Proclamation of difference works in Demirkapı in a concentrated, in a miniature way. Apê Heme meant the same when he said “Wherever they are, Kurds

live together." Yet, the harsh neoliberal conditions in urban areas of our time, which are experienced more painfully by the migrants, are not to be undermined. Here is when it gets complicated in Demirkapı. Needless to say, identifications are not only determined by ethnicity and cultural values. Whether on the individual or collective level, ways of life and experience are contradictory, multilayered and varied, maybe even more for the bilingual peoples like Kurds. The heterogeneity of life and experience that shapes the phenomenon of identification has been relevant for Efrînîs in Syria as much as it is now in Istanbul. So, the difference is further concretized even within the smaller groups, as in the case of being Efrînî, being Syrian Kurdish or being Bîtlîsî or Kurd of Turkey and such like. That is why it is not surprising when, for Efrînîs living in Demirkapı, the difference being proclaimed becomes "being from Efrîn."

Guests are becoming visible

The relations between the neighbours has changed in time as I mentioned above. From the first arrivals of Syrian Kurds to Demirkapı until the attacks to the autonomous Kurdish regions, first by Islamist groups and then by ISIS, started to be repulsed in the late 2014 and early 2015, the Syrian Kurds have relatively received an "extra" welcome by their Kurdish neighbours, mostly as efforts of solidarity. Since then the reality started to take another direction, as far as I have been informed mostly by Bitlîsî neighbours. Güney has put it most straightforward:

> As also the war was more intense in the beginning in Rojava, their Kurdish identity was at the forefront. As soon as 'to be from here' (*buralılık*) and employment has developed, they kind of become from Turkey. Their visibility has increased. Relations have become more and more face-to-face and the possibility that they are going to stay here has taken more ground.

These remarks have been informing for me to comprehend how in Demirkapı, identity and solidarity constructed around it are contextual and situated. On the other hand, what is more striking and maybe unfortunate is that the points Güney lists are all about migrants breaking the boundaries they are enclosed in by conjoined discourses and practices of mainstream society and state policies; they are becoming what they are in reality: equal stakeholders and neighbours in social life, non-dependent subjects with agency over their own lives. Yes, as displaced and dispossessed, they are victims of a systemic violence resulting from the geopolitical wars between the states and armed groups. Yet, just like each and every human being, they are individuals with dignity and capacity. That is indeed the first and foremost reality that has to be internalized publicly in Turkey if there is a chance of living together with *misafir*s, foreigners, refugees, Syrians and Kurds.

Ilhan and Güney, partly relying on their sociological formation, diagnosed "the approach of yesterday's refugees –that of the Bitlîsîs- as arrogant ("*üsttenci*") who "kind of consider themselves as host". Yet, I came across another more intuitive remark later on by another Bitlîsî. Once waiting for my turn in a barbershop run by a group of young Efrînîs, upon witnessing his warm manner with the barbers, I had mistaken a middle aged costumer as from Efrîn. After I shared with him my mistake and why I was in Demirkapı, I had a chance for approximately ten minutes to listen to his thoughts on the displacement of his newcomer neighbours. His last sentence was of a new perspective for me then: "You see, my hair turned grey here in Istanbul. But Istanbul is not ours. Istanbul is not theirs as well." he said, showing the young Efrînîs with a gesture of head. These words were distilling from his vivid memory of his own displacement from a village in Tatwan of Bitlîs. As such, he had situated himself in-common with the Efrînîs. He was around the same age with Apê

Heme, the Damascene Efrînî, who were saying that "(…) the oppression of enemies over Kurds is the same everywhere.". Overall, I came across not few people both from Efrîn and Bitlîs having a similar line of thinking. The feeling of sharing the same oppressed and denied identity is effective. Yet, it is also from the same ground that many Efrînîs show disapproving or uneasy thoughts on their relations with the "local" Kurds.

You cannot blame people

These are partly due to the different state and society -or sociopolitical- conditions Kurds have been living under in Syria and Turkey. Many Efrînî residents are well aware of these differences as they are now the first hand witnesses right in the flow of the daily life in Turkey. Making comparisons with their own community, what they find as the most visible differences of Kurds in Istanbul are the results of different assimilation policies in the two nation states. Apê Heme did the most explanatory comparisons, most probably because of his personal profile: A middle aged Syrian Kurd who have been living in Demirkapı for the last 6 years. Who, before displacement, used to live in Damascus but had always kept his ties close with his village in Efrîn. He has assured me about this intimate tie. As he has worked as a mechanic for long years, at one point when our discussion was about the longing for home, he used a related, powerful metaphor: "When we used to go to our villages for visits from Damascus, our batteries were recharged.". From such a context, here are the comparisons he made:

> Socially ('*içtimaîyen'*) we and Arabs, we are not mixed. The state was cruel and the Arab people were negative. ('*ters*'). That is why in the middle of them we could stay as we are. Our Kurdish-ness was left to us. You could not find one hundred women across all of Efrîn married to Arab men. Here in Turkey it is totally different. But you cannot blame Kurdish people. The state

> has been far more cruel here. Turkish people, on the other side, are not negative, they are accepting.

Then he went on with a story he listened from one of his Bitlîsî neighbours, who have been beaten by the gendarmeries when he was eight years old, for not speaking Turkish: "They are intimidated, you cannot blame them.", he concluded. He also reminded me of the geographical differences. The Kurdish areas in Syria are not very far from the big cities of immigration, allowing for weekly visits even by those permanently settled in the metropolises. He was aware, on the other hand, of the young generations of the internally displaced Kurds in Istanbul, who have not yet seen the villages their parents were forcibly displaced from.

The deteriorating conditions of an already delicate economy influence the relations between the migrants and their neighbours in Demirkapı to a great extent. One of the most recurring theme of the complaints of Efrînî residents have sprung from the working environments. Work places are the main spaces of encounters between migrants and local residents. The leading sector is textile business, as the other giant one, the construction business has been losing ground in the recent few years. As previously mentioned, Kurdish Syrian migrants mostly seek employment in workshops run by Kurdish employers, to overcome language barrier but also because of the close relations between smugglers and employment that has settled the first arrivals, as previously explained. Hereon, I will rely on Nejat's remarks, another Efrînî man, in his late forties, whom I made rapport with at a grocery shop the day before he introduced me to Apê Heme. He never wanted to sit for a full interview but had stayed right beside other interlocutors more than once. The workplaces bring together Syrian Kurds with Kurds of Turkey –both employers and colleagues- from many origin cities like Diyarbekir and Van, Adıyaman and Siirt to mention just a few that I heard from Nejat. As the reader would remember, the young

Efrînî man named Xelat was saying "It just drives me crazy (thinking) how people could endure still. Working this much and all the things they've gone through… It makes me crazy." This, indeed has been the most recurrent concern of Efrînîs I met. They complain about the long working hours, harsh conditions and low wages. While doing this, they again make comparisons to their livelihood practices back in Syria. With no exception, all of the Syrian Kurds I met both in Demirkapı and while working previously in the organization, had explained how it was more dignified to work in Syria despite all. One single breadwinner –mostly father- could sustain the livelihood of a crowded family. I did not come across a coherent comparative research dealing with the economies of the countries but all the testimonies from my fieldwork point to a reality that Syria has been 'lacking' the strict and dominant neoliberal economic principles that rule the economic affairs in contemporary Turkey. Also, it is known that the Syrian economy has been a state-dominated one.

As a result, socioeconomic precariousness isolates lives of Syrian asylum seekers in a cage of work and home. While employers make profit from this, the government earn more time to endure the political "stability" by keeping lives of millions of Syrian people invisible as long as it goes. In attempts of revealing my research and asking for their participation, the first reaction I have usually taken from Efrînî residents has been "What can we talk about, our life is just about home and work. That is how things are for us in Turkey." Although there are also some other motivations behind such reactions –most significantly, they are more than aware of the docility expected from them-, they often reflect the reality. The relations with receiving societies are usually thought about and negotiated through the encounters experienced in workplaces. At an early stage of my interview with Apê Heme, Nejat intervened:

> Wherever we work, they always ask 'When will you return?' What is the matter here? Their wages will double. The problem is economic; it is about the wages. That is why our presence bother them. I once replied to the question, I said 'Do we eat what is in your plate? Is not all that is on earth and under earth enough for you?' We suffered so much and I wish to write a book about all that I have seen here if I return to Syria someday.

The tensions over scarce employment opportunities are combined with the xenophobic attitudes which has been fed by the rising stigmatization of "being Syrian" (tr.: '*Suriyeli*') as well as by the racism against Arabs, that has a historical background. A significant side-note to make is that when it comes to the discussion of "being Syrian" Efrînî interviewees usually do not divide the receiving society as Kurds and Turks. Nejat is well aware of what is implied by Suriyeli:

> They look down on our reason. You are just Suriyeli, no matter how much you are educated, or how a good person you are. You do not have any value as a Suriyeli. You are a refugee (ar.: '*laci'*), you are a foreigner (tr.: '*yabanci'*), and if one hundred years pass you will still remain as such. Many of them think we are from another planet (ar.: '*kawkab'*). They ask such absurd questions as if we were living in the caves. They do not know that Aleppo was not a city lower than Istanbul.

Then, as usual with many other interlocutors, he lowers his tone:

> Yet, there are so many nice people. How the world would go on without them? We have good neighbours. After all, that is how we are portrayed and inscribed into people's minds. I know wherever there were starving people in the world, they used to be shown as Arabs in Turkish TVs since the 80s. It is the same at schools as well. Even their imams think Turks are superior. But there is no blame here to put on the people.

It is right that the "conditional hospitality" that determines the lives of Efrînî residents plays a crucial role in them showing "balanced" thoughts on their relations with their citizen neighbours. But still, despite the legal ignorance and abandonment by state discourse and practices conjoined by the rising public hostility, Syrians have been living as neighbours of citizens now for almost eight years in some cases. That is a certain proof of an insist, on the parts of Syrian migrants, on a life to be lived together.

In this chapter, I first portray the recent history of Demirkapı marked by migrations. It is right to suggest that Demirkapı conforms to the global pattern of being one of these urban spaces where the newcomers -whether migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, or "guests"- are put to a position of competing with the established poor, the low-income, the marginalized, -in short the non-foreign, inner outcasts or domestic foreigners- over sharing the "limited sources" made available to them. Then, relying on my conversations mostly with the earlier migrants from Bitlîs, I open up the details of how Demirkapı is a neighbourhood of "overlapping displacements" of Kurds from different regions divided by nation state borders. As to what extent it is a "shared space", I rely on the remarks by Efrînî residents on their encounters with the receiving society to show the grounds of tensions, power geometries, legal and socioeconomic inequalities as well as the enduring possibility of a life together. I tried to conform to complexity of the findings from the fieldwork. That is why I examine the encounters of Efrînîs with the longer-established residents in the neighbourhood. It is observed that the naming *Suriyeli* has the discursive potential to cover all the inner dynamics of relations between communities, due to the stigmatizing connotations it has been filled with in the recent years against the refugees. When I use the adjective "protracted" for the exile of Efrînîs, I do not mean any negative connotations. To the contrary, I want to point out to the harm the still widespread perception that "the Syrian migrants are temporary guests" do to its addressees. However, as Efrînîs have reassured repeatedly, the blame is not to be put to people. The time has long ago arrived for the responsible policy actors to abolish all the isolating regulations that limit the access of Syrian residents to basic rights and thereby to improve the ground for equal residency.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION

If we agree that "displacement and emplacement are historical products." (Malkki, 1995, p. 516), the history that has caused the specific case of the displacement of the Syrian Efrînî Kurds, as yet another displacement episode of Kurds, is a history of territorial sovereign nation states. Since their establishment, the presence of Kurds has been considered as a threat to the sovereignty of the Turkish and Syrian nation states whose citizenship frameworks are based on nativist principles. The post-French mandate history of Syria had been marked by anti-Kurdish state policies which in 1962 had reached to the point of the termination of the citizenship rights of 120.000 Kurds living in the Jezîre region, on the pretext that their residency in the country since 1945 was not proved. (Altuğ, 2011, p.237). As for Turkey's Kurdistan, it is a history of steady violence and dispossession of Kurds since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, that has endured to today's counter-insurgency war with the PKK. Lacking any official recognition yet constituted by a collective remembering of state atrocities and an ever-present struggle, an unofficial history survives of oppression, displacement, dispossession and injustice. Accompanying the violences by the states has been the unequal and adverse conditions of capitalism taking over the community lives of Kurds built over centuries without a complete integration to the central state authorities and capitalist markets -in the ways as it is being experienced today. As a result, the more circular-in-nature and, to an extent, voluntary migrations of Kurds to the big cities in Syria and in Turkey have increasingly become permanent displacements in each disruptive violence processes. The Syrian civil war has left no such cities in the country for a context of internal

displacement. Istanbul has been the “top destination” for the internally displaced people from Turkey’s Kurdistan since the 1990s. Since the Syria civil war, it has also become the city where the highest population of the Syrian refugees in Turkey reside, among whom the Syrian Kurds constitute a considerable part. The international system of the political organization that renders Kurds as “the biggest stateless nation in the world”, by a cooperation with the current neoliberal capitalism, makes Istanbul “the biggest city of Kurds in the world”, thereby combining two popular saying among and about the Kurds.

What I have tried throughout the research is, in part, to offer a framework of the geography of Kurdistan connected by the dispossession stories of individuals first and foremost from Çiyayê Kurmênc/Efrîn region, then from Bitlîs region and to a less extent from Gever through my own reflexive account. The dispossession in question is of individual and community lives whose processes of integration to the global capitalist market are shocked at different times by extreme instances of violence, at the one end of which always stays a sovereign nation state “imposing national sovereignty and extracting labor power.” (Feldman, 2015, p.12) The non-material and material reality of the dispossession in this research is the processes of displacement and emplacement as being experienced by individuals on the level of the everyday. A peripheral neighborhood of Istanbul named Demirkapı -with its small park Ceviz Bahçesi- is the urban spatial framework of these processes and thus of this research. At this point, Meta Cevrîye’s narrative of her personal displacement and how she made her first year in exile sufferable by spending time in Ceviz Bahçesi is the most emblematic narrative of displacement and exile of Efrînî Kurds in Istanbul. Meta Cevrîye telling her story of sitting in the park every day “from early mornings to late in the evenings” with an enthusiasm for seeing her Efrînî fellows

who have been displaced and found themselves in extraordinarily new conditions acknowledges Susan Sontag's (2007) following remarks: "Time exists in order that everything doesn't happen all at once … and space exists so that it doesn't all happen to you." (p. 214) The fact that Sontag speaks for the context of storytelling in literature does not make her remarks irrelevant for our case. Quite the contrary, Meta Cevrîye's narration –and of all the other interlocutors whose voices are conveyed throughout- is in a sense an attempt of reclaiming and reconstituting the sense of time and space that had been severely disrupted by violence and displacement, as well as by the experience of exile lived on a daily basis.

There are more reasons why the research has foregrounded the study of the everyday and individual narratives of displacement. "Just as power secretes knowledge; the national order of things secretes displacement, as well as prescribed correctives for displacement. Thus, the international refugee regime, (…) is inseparable from this wider national order of things, this wider grammar." (Mallki, 1995, p. 516). As such, the study of the displacement is also subject to the same "national order of things." Yet, as explained above, in the case of the displacement of Kurds who are excluded in both subtle and explicit ways from the national order, the case of displacement itself provides a ground for "a denaturalizing, questioning stance toward the national order". (p. 517) However, the displaced Kurds still remain, in theory and practice, within the category of refugee who, by being named as such, "find themselves quite quickly rising to a floating world either beyond or above politics, and beyond or above history -a world in which they are simply 'victims.'" (p. 518) In such conditions, the individual experiences of the everyday and the ways they are narrated and recounted have the capacity to take back the historical and political grounds of which the Kurdish refugees are being stripped of

as ‘victim refugee Kurds’. To narrate a story of displacement and exile –no matter if it is filled with instances of resilience or of suffering- is also, in a sense, to reclaim the “normality” of life which has been confined -by the sovereign nation states, by the mechanisms of the refugee regime and also by the working of global economy- either to the dullness of victimhood or to the exceptionality of being refugee. We have seen such a reclaiming in Şemam’s story that echoes Hannah Arendt’s (2007) remarks on what one loses with displacement and how it is indeed normal to strive to take them back, that is “the familiarity of daily life”, “the confidence that we are of some use in this world”, “the naturalness of reactions, simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings” and “private lives”. (pp. 264-5)

Demirkapı is located in a national context in which migration policies and legal frameworks are highly restrictive and uniquely ambiguous –indeed reviving and extending borders in-to the urban spaces. For a long time since the influx of the Syrian refugees, the legal uncertainty had been articulated by a strong public discourse enclosing the large population of Syrian migrants to the indefinite and implicative position of “guest”. Humanitarian aid and approaches of NGOs, on the other hand, far from going beyond government policies, tacitly contribute to the short term governance of ‘dependent war victims under temporary protection.’ The humanitarian refugee organizations in Turkey have increasingly become complicit in restrictive legal mechanisms, due particularly to the measures taken by the European Union, which are basically monetary funds promised to Turkey in return of keeping the “irregular migrants” heading to Europe where they are. NGOs’ source of the money certainly determines their engagement with refugee and migrant groups. In the local level, the Turkish authorities have increasingly been focusing on monopolizing the field of refugee management. In the summer of 2019, while the

present research is being written, at a time when Turkey is counted as "the country hosting the largest population of refugees in the world", a new governmental practice, and thus a public discourse, was being pushed forward in Istanbul under the name of "war on irregular migration". The new policing practices aim to deport the migrants who do not fulfil the procedural requirements of holding a temporary protection ID and also to relocate those who do not reside in the city their ID is registered to –the requirements that had been kept loose and flexible until recently. The "war on something" phrase immediately reminds one the firmly established paradigm of "the war on terror" in the context of Turkey and Turkey's Kurdistan. That is not by a coincidence. As the international entanglement of Kurds in Syria increase, the security-centered practices in Turkey and the well-established counterterrorism paradigm expands its borders and front zones.

Yet, narratives and stories should be able "to reduce the spread and simultaneity of everything to something linear, a path." (Sontag, 2007, p.226) It is despite all they face the Syrian Kurdish migrants hold on to an "after", a tomorrow, to an end to their story. Left to cope with all these and equally harsh neoliberal conditions of urban livelihood, Syrian Kurds residing in Demirkapı still create their own ways of integration to the flow of urban life. The study focused on the experiences and perspectives of migrants as active agents of the ongoing local transformation and dynamic process of emplacement. It has observed that, even though in a micro level, the presence of migrants in the neighbourhood has the potential, in the long run, for a social change toward an equal residency. However, as we witness today, the current situation in Turkey is far from promising a future to live in together. The question then arises of how the conditions can be secured to allow the refugees, the individuals and the civil society to intervene together in the

local and international policies and strategies determining their lives. For the protracted exile of the Syrian refugees in Turkey to take a direction toward becoming voluntary, regardless of the fate of the situation in Syria, the restrictive and indefinite government policies and paternalistic and short term humanitarian approaches has to be abandoned. The inspiration is already there on the local level, in the individual and collective efforts of integration on the part of the refugees, should the responsible actors intend to take it.

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