

Survival Strategies of Young Syrian Refugees; Marginalization, Resistance and Resilience in Istanbul Streets

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Summary

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the experiences in Turkey of Syrians who are aged between 18-21 years old. The dissertation address in particular the intersections between the politically complex position of such refugees in Turkey today and the role that they also play as informal workers in a highly exploitative neoliberal economy. Through research with these young people I investigate combination of their capacity for resilience and resistance feeds into identity production processes and I argue that Syrian youth in Istanbul create an immense economic and social potential for themselves and their families. The majority of my material has been derived from ethnographic research conducted in Turkey and I combine this material with other relevant literature discussing child and adolescence labour, young immigrants and refugees and adolescences' resilience.

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Preface

In this ethnographic account of Syrian young people, my main motivation is my own experience as a their neighbour in Istanbul and as an anthropology student I witness that current attitude of Turkish state, because they fail to address the exclusion of adolescences from the production of value, paradoxically reinforces children's vulnerability to marginal exploitation by informal labour or begging. It is claimed that creating perfect refugee camps in distant towns outside of big cities and keeping people isolated and idle as subjects need constant psychological treatment, are the only proper response to the humanitarian crises. But in the streets of Istanbul, young people are constructing and deconstructing every definition of being a child, being a refugee or being on their own. I will devote my first part of this dissertation on works of other academics in field of childhood, migration and youth labour, in my second part I constitute my argument following the route through marginalization, resistance and resilience which is simultaneously and consequently experienced and reproduced by Syrian youth.

I would like to thank Prof. Magnus Marsden, Prof. Dorte Thorsen for their tremendous help throughout the research and the writing of this dissertation. And I wish to thank Huseyin and Samir Shefik for their support as translators and great friends during my fieldwork and all my informant I could mention their names here. I also owe my thanks to Harry Barnett and Clare Rogers for their administrative support and their kind words. My sincere thanks to all the people who helped me during my fieldwork, in particular, I want to express my gratitude to my parents and to UNDP Turkey Team.

Introduction

This paper's central argument is two-fold. First, irrespective of what adolescences do and what they think of what they do, modern society sets adolescence apart ideologically as a category of people excluded from the production of value. The dissociation of youth from the performance of valued work is considered a yardstick of modernity. Nieuwenhuys (1996) states that the problem with defining adolescences' roles in this way, however, is that it denies their agency in the creation and negotiation of value. Illuminating the complexity of the work patterns of adolescences in certain situations, we need to critically examine the relation between moral condemnation of youth labour on one hand and adolescences everyday work practice on the other. Syrian youth in Istanbul create an immense economic and social potential for themselves and their families through their labour, their easy access to workplace socializations and their ability to learn Turkish rapidly compared to their parents.

Second, the low valuation of youth's work translates not only in adolescences' vulnerability in their marginal livelihoods in streets but, more importantly, in their exclusion from remunerated employment. I argue that current attitude of Turkish state, because they fail to address the exclusion of adolescences from the production of value, paradoxically reinforces children's vulnerability to marginal exploitation by informal labour or begging. Turkish state claims that creating perfect refugee camps in distant towns outside of big cities and keeping people isolated and idle as subjects need constant psychological treatment, are the only proper response to the humanitarian crises. When I have examined recent interviews and reports (Bianet, 2013, Afad 2014) with different state officials, I witnessed their desperation and inability to understand reasons of Syrian refugees' constant refusals to stay in camps. But Syrian people define these camps as prisons and it is not very acceptable option to keep

them apart from the society, and more importantly even camps are modern and all their physical needs are provided, they cannot work and earn a decent living for their families or save for helping relatives stay in Syria in these isolated camps. (Dinçer, O. B., Federici, V., Ferris, E., Karaca, S., Kirişci, K., & Çarmıklı, E. Ö. (2013)).

The paper begins with a summary of the argument and the theory that undergirds it, followed by a review of the relevant literature and this paper's place within it. Following this introductory section are two substantive chapters. Chapter 1 examines methodological questions of researching adolescence and comparative analysis of my methods and data with other relevant ethnographies discussing anthropology of youth, child and adolescence labor, young immigrants and refugees, adolescences' resilience. In this chapter I will rely heavily on the work of other anthropologists, and I am incorporating their work and my primary research into the wider theoretical framework that shapes my argument. Building on Mayblin M., (2010), Aitken S., (2006), Burr R., (2002) and Thorsen, D., (2013), I note the appropriation of conducting valid ethnographic data on young people in survival struggles. In second part of the chapter it is discussed the exclusion of children and adolescences from the economical reproduction, though there is evidence that youth labour is a potential threat to adolescences' well-being, some forms of adolescences' work may function as a potential of enhancing social and economical resources associated with resilience, resulting in positive psychosocial development in extreme marginalization. Working young people can find through their working experiences positive sources of efficacy and cohesion, strong identity, positive relationships, and access to material and social capital. (Libório R.M.C. & Ungar M., (2009), Nieuwenhuys O., (1996), Woodhead M., (1999)) I will attempt to deconstruct narratives of young people and their parents to give tangible evidence about how they are strategically resisting against social exclusion and racial discrimination in highly biased society through their working experiences beside risks of harsh condition of exploitation and violence. The anthropological method will be utilized in this paper might illustrate that the work undertaken by these highly traumatized young people, have an important role to normalize themselves and their families.

In Chapter 2, I will analyze my ethnographic data under three subsections which is relevant to current situation I experienced during my fieldwork. Chapter will start with brief

background information about Syrian Civil War and international conventions about refugees and statistical data of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Then under Marginalization title I will continue with individual narratives and my overall observations about how young Syrian people are left in very vulnerable and vague positions deliberately by Turkish middlemen and Turkish government itself, structural and systematic marginalization is experienced as part of their everyday life. In continuing part Resistance I will try to explain reasons why young people militantly refusing camp life and through analyzing realities of camps and dangers of idleness. Adolescents and even children prefer their very poorly paid demanding jobs instead of schooling and playgrounds which camps offer them. Young Syrians resisting against both modern refugee status and strict western definition of youth; being protected, economically dependent and institutionalized. And in Resilience part I will attempt to tell the stories from everyday struggles of young boys and girls living and working in Istanbul streets. Witnessing their hardiness', their 'tactics of resilience I will discuss what moves these young people and I will establish my argument on how their resilience and powers as evaluating human beings confronting their environments move them to protect themselves and others they care for. (Mizen, P., & Oforu-Kusi, Y. (2013))

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Part 1: Methodology of Research with Adolescents and Young People

In their studies Hunleth (2011), James (2007), McNamee & Seymour (2012) denote that there are concerns with youth's voice derives from the idea that youth's views have not been heard in the past and young people should be given the right to express their views and having those views taken into account in matters concerning them (UNCRC, article 12). Giving adolescents a chance to speak for themselves, about their lives, priorities, etc. affords us a better understanding of their talent to live. (Mizen and Oforu-Kusi (2010), p.256) The idea that adolescents' voices are authentic and tell us 'the truth' about their

lives, views and feelings increasingly substituted by the view that voice and meaning are negotiated and constructed. Spyrou calls for researchers to “account for the complexity behind adolescences’ voices by exploring their messy, multi-layered and non-normative character” (Spyrou (2011), p.151)

As a reflexive researcher I must ask myself;

- What is my role in the process of representing adolescences’ voices through my work?
- How are adolescences’ voices constrained and shaped by factors such as my assumptions about them, our use of language, the institutional contexts in which I operate and the prevailing ideological and discursive climates?
- What are the epistemologies and power relations in data generation? And how do they affect the representation of youth?

In some point getting access to adolescences as research participants is possible by-passing adult gate keepers or peer groups to be allowed ‘free’ access. This might cause some ethical concerns but the context impacts on data production and for actualizing young people’s voices, i.e., to get them to freely and openly express themselves and creating rapport with the teenagers I have spent as much as time possible with them and I have slowly started interacting while observing them in the streets and shops they work. I relied on their oral consent at the beginning then at the stage of semi-structured interviews I explained my research and ask for written consent also. In other aspects also I have strictly followed ethical guidelines the Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth) I have fully informed every individual participant and respect their rights to withdraw from the research in any point.

Another important issue is confidentiality and anonymity of my participants, Ethical Guidelines state that informants and other research participants should have the right to remain anonymous and to have their rights to privacy and confidentiality respected. However, privacy and confidentiality present anthropologists with particularly difficult problems given the cultural and legal variations between societies. With Syrian community in Istanbul, I think I was familiar enough with cultural requirements to able to create a

rapport and protect their anonymity, beside that I never use their real names and well-known nicknames, take their own photographs or directly film them, I have tried to avoid recording voice and I do not keep voice records after I transcribe them, I have not shared their addresses or even temporary location they work or stay. I was planning to reach my informants through local organizations and with the assistance of my friends in Syrian community because I thought it might be more culturally appropriate to reach parents and children with help of the guarantor contact person who they have already known and trusted, instead of directly meeting them. I have conducted my research and made my interviews in neutral public settings like shops, cafes, parks, streets and gathering and meeting locations of neighbourhoods and charity offices.

The majority of my material have been derived from ethnographic research.

- Associated with a number of methods
- Participant observation
- Interviews – semi or unstructured
- Surveys to put research themes into perspective, e.g. demographics, output, etc.

Participant observation at the core, the choice of other methods depends on local conditions and the progress of the research project. I spent four full weeks with different adolescences working in streets, small shops and domestic environments and follow them during their daily routines before starting my semi-structured interviews with young people themselves, parents, employers and social workers dealing with refugee problems. I have tried to achieve immersion in Syrian community life makes my existence less intrusive, less of a stranger – builds friendships and trust by being there all the time. Because in this situation we cannot research and analyze adolescences' actions free from their communal ties. Syrian people generally live together as crowded families and kin-based networking is the base of community life (very similar to Kurdish community which I belong) (Charles, L., & Denman, K. (2013), Women, U. N. (2013)). With these crucial knowledge I take into account the hierarchies and protective reflexes but I hope being there and speaking the native language, Arabic vastly increased my chance of understanding young people's perception

and thus of giving depth to my analysis. Disadvantages of participant observation might be investment of a long time period, adolescences' resentment of being observed all the time, my presence may alters peoples behaviours and validity of my conclusion of my ethnographic account based may be a question for reader.

I have contacted with 3 main associations (Mazlumder, Göçmender and Balat Cemevi Centre of Balat Alevites) providing immediate help and advice to Syrian people in different neighborhoods of Istanbul, Umraniye, Balat and Esenler and besides my basic knowledge of Arabic and Kurdish, I am planning to get help from my native speaker friends during my interviews. Also I have been collecting newspaper interviews, articles and reports of international organizations (UNICEF, UNHCR, ILO) and national initiatives (AFAD, Bianet, IHH) to give an illuminating background information on current socio-political situation of Syrian communities in neighbouring countries and dynamic public representation of refugee identity in Turkey.

Chapter 1 Part 2: The Literature on Resilience and Resistance

In this ethnographic account I aim to integrate the notion of resilience (Libório R.M.C. & Ungar M., (2009)) with the multiple and varied constructions of adolescences' economic-related activities that adolescences themselves report. The resilience constructed in different contexts is beginning to identify unique features such as resistance to cultural hegemony and acculturation among ethno-racial minorities like young Syrian refugees. People tend to return their social and economic routines immediately after traumatic loses and Syrian children losing their parents and taking the responsibility of their siblings in completely new and unfamiliar geographical settings (children in Istanbul mostly came from small villages or towns of northern Syria) are psychologically resilient and being economically active agents helps their identity development processes. (Quosh, C., Eloul, L., & Ajlani, R. (2013), Chrisman, A. K., & Dougherty, J. G. (2014), Özer, S., Şirin, S., & Oppedal, B. (2013))

Mizen, P., & Ofosu-Kusi, Y. (2013) quote from Nieuwenhuys (2005) that to the obligations possessed by working adolescences and how, in holding these responsibilities to others,

they actively participate in a “reciprocal exchange between generations”, sets of social rules and divisions of tasks that ensure that ever new generations of children are taken care of and acquire assets, resources, knowledge and relationships that will enable them to repay, as adults, their debt to older generations' (pp. 170, 175). In the attention she gives to working adolescences' sense of duty to family and kin, she also brings into clearer view their appreciation of the social relations within which they are embedded and, consequently, how decisions to work involve a conscious commitment to their families' well-being.

My focus on these adolescences' experiences working in the informal jobs in different poor neighbourhoods touching upon the terrible circumstances under which they live. It will be here looked at the young people's 'hardiness' their 'tactics of resilience' expressed not just in terms of the protection of self. I attempt to offer this account not as justification, as if a willingness to work in support of their families somehow makes street labour a more acceptable condition for them. But adolescences are not apart ideologically a category of people excluded from the production of value, teenagers just like the adults, for Marx, the labour is more or less identical with human creativity: it is the way human being exercises their imaginative power to create their worlds, their social ties as well as their physical environments. Graeber states that one says that in Mediterranean societies 'honour' is a key value or that, in America, 'freedom' is. Within capitalist societies, the word is normally invoked to refer to all those domains of human action that are not governed by the laws of the market: In other words 'values' begin precisely where economic 'value' ends. This would certainly imply that we are dealing with two different refractions of the same thing and therefore, that we would be justified in searching for their common basis. (Graeber, D. (2005)) Rather my aim here is avoiding simple conclusion and provide a multilayered analysis of these adolescences' agency. It is to recognize their 'talent for living' and to better know how, in confronting the routine extremities of poverty and racial discrimination, language barriers and social exclusion, what they may take from such situations.(Mizen, P., & Ofosu-Kusi, Y. (2013))

My purpose in this paper to take into account the unique condition of young Syrians with both their politically challenging refugee position and informal worker position in a highly exploitative neoliberal economy, through my research I attempted to investigate how these

processes of resilience and resistance feed into production of value. Abu-Lughod, L. (1990) argues that we should learn to read in various local and everyday resistances the existence of a range of specific strategies and structures of power. Attention to the forms of resistance in particular societies can help us become critical of partial or reductionist theories of power. Like young Syrians resisting against modern refugee status and strict western definition of youth (protected, economically dependent and institutionalized) Bedouin women in Abu-Lughods ethnographic account show how in the rich and sometimes contradictory details of resistance the complex workings of social power can be traced. (Swanson, G. C., & SIT, M. E. (2013)) These same contradictory details enable to trace how power relations are politically and historically transformed especially with the introduction of forms and techniques of power characteristic of modern states and capitalist economies. (Abu-Lughod, L. (1990) p.42)

Chapter 2

Background

Three years has passed as from the beginning of the conflicts which caused the death, injury and displacement of many people in Syria. After it is heard on 15 March 2011 that the young people who were arrested for their writings against the regime in Deraa city were tortured, protest were started for their release, and many people lost their lives as a result of the violent intervention of security forces in these protests.

As the conflict between the governmental forces and opponents became intensified and spread to the country, hundred thousands of Syrian became obliged to leave their country. Turkish government announced that it would apply “open door” policy in this period and opened its borders to Syrian asylum seekers. The spread of conflicts to the north of the country led to a rapid increase in the number of Syrian refugees coming to Turkey.

As from April 2011, Syrian asylum seekers who started to enter into Turkey were first placed to tent cities established in Yayladagi, Altinozu and Reyhanli districts of Hatay in June 2011 under the status of “temporary protection”. Turkish government defined Syrians not as refugees or asylum seekers but as “guests” due to the reservation it placed on the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (CRSR). It intended to prevent the “guests” from living outside the camp or pass to another country through Turkey and to place all the Syrian people coming to Turkey by passing the border to camps. (TBMM Report, (2012))

Turkey became a party to Geneva Convention relating to the Legal Status of Refugees and to the New York Protocol relating to the Legal Status of Refugees by placing reservations on them. The reservations are based on geographical grounds. With such reservations, Turkey provides the status of refugee to people from Europe but does not give the right to be a refugee to people coming from outside of the Europe. Turkey gives the asylum right to people coming from outside of the Europe until they pass to third countries. But Turkish legislation does not comply with the said convention and protocol.

The conventions which protect the rights of refugees are not limited to CRSR and New York Protocol. In the Convention on Economic and Cultural Rights (CECR), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), protected rights also apply to people who are not citizens and Turkey is a party to such conventions. Moreover, pursuant to Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution, in case of any discrepancy between the conventions and laws, conventions shall supersede. (Support to Life Report, (2013), p.6)

Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD) was identified as the institution responsible for coordination relating to the asylum seekers coming from Syria. Under the coordination of AFAD, the Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, National Education, Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Transportation and Finance, General Staff,

Governorship of Hatay, Presidency of Religious Affairs, Under Secretariat of Customs and Turkish Red Crescent carry out joint works.

According to AFAD and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are currently about 400,000 Syrian asylum seekers living in and outside the camps in Turkey. According to official figures published by AFAD on 22 February 2013, a total of 183,540 people live in 17 camps and accommodation centres in Hatay (5), Gaziantep (4), Kilis, Sanliurfa (3), Kahramanmaras, Osmaniye, Adiyaman and Adana. The number of sick and injured people receiving treatment in hospitals is 318 together with their hospital attendants. As seen from the data derived from these figures, about 200,000 Syrian asylum seekers live outside the camps. Although some of these people are registered, there are people passing from border gates without any registration. The fact that the borders between Turkey and Syria are not subject to checks creates a security problem for asylum seekers and leads to the lack of demographic and other information required at the stage of meeting basic needs of Syrians who refuge to Turkey. (AFAD Report, (2013))

About 70% of Syrian asylum seekers registered in Turkey live in camps and 30% of them live in cities. As the duration of the civil war and Syria's coming back to normal extends, the possibility of asylum seekers to go back to their country decreases. In this case, Syrians will constitute a serious and crowded refugee population (Diaspora) like Palestinian refugees.

Chapter 2 Part 1: Marginalization

It is known that there are 400,000 Syrian asylum seekers in Turkey and only 185,000 of them live in camps. It shows that more than 200,000 asylum seekers continue their lives in various cities. Some of the people living outside the camps are registered but most of them had entered in the country without any passport or no action had been taken on them in border gates. (AFAD Report, (2013))

The Syrian refugees, who could not enter in the camps due to negative impressions about camps or the camps are full, try to sustain their livelihoods with their own limited means

and humanitarian aids. According media representation, Syrian refugees in various cities and also in Istanbul try to sustain their lives outside the camps with their own means and humanitarian aids and their exact number is not known.

Mostly the children and women try to work and collect money on the streets in order to survive in their own of help their families. Some of Syrian adolescences work unregistered in the provinces they live in. On 30 January 2013, 2 young people who were Syrian lost their lives in the explosion in 4th Organized Industrial Zone in Gaziantep. It was not announced whether they had work permit. Adolescences who are employed without registration are obliged to work with low wages and under heavy work conditions.

In different part of Turkey Syrian youth depicted in very similar manner, news about the situation in other provinces with regard to Syrians living outside the camps are very typical. In one example, People who beg for money on the streets were expelled from the country after they were captured in Sanliurfa. The news was as follows: "The Municipal Police of Sanliurfa captured 750 Syrian beggars in one month and expelled them from the country. Syrian beggars who moved to Sanliurfa from their country where a civil war continues settle in the busiest streets of the city with their little children on their laps." (Support to Life Report, 2013) The press in Turkey, on the one hand covers the problems of the young refugees that live outside the camps and make news which lead to their marginalization. Such news, generally about the women and children asking for assistance on the streets, use names like beggars to describe the refugees.

Syrian refugees in Istanbul live in different regions of the city. The reported refugees mostly live in Fatih (Kucukpazar and Balat), Bahcelievler (Sirinevler), Basaksehir (Altinsehir, Bayramtepe and Sahintepe) and Gaziosmanpasa (Sultanciftligi). In small groups they also live in Esenyurt, Kucukcekmece and Umraniye. Although there are many Syrians living in almost every district in Istanbul, their economic status and living conditions are very different from each other.

Each family has generally at least six-seven children and most of the children are between 0-18 years old. Children spend all the day on the streets they live in and some of them beg for money in close places or work in small workshops. Older children and adolescences have full

time jobs and mostly are physical labourer because of language difference. Young people are able to speak English or Turkish can find jobs in main touristic areas as salesmen, shop attendants or translators and they earn comparatively high wages and have more mobility in different sectors.

Since the refugees I met have a crowded families (6-7 children), sometimes they are obliged to rent separate rooms but all children and adolescences in the family sleep in same room and have no privacy. The lack of language (Turkish) literacy is seen as a serious problem and it becomes very hard for them to work and communicate with the society when they do not know Turkish.

Since receiving a work permit is very burdensome (requires a long time, effort and money), refugees are unwilling to make an application for it at all. Also their lack of personal connection in government offices is an important obstacle because in Syria personal connections and patronage were key elements of their relations with Syrian government offices.

Some refugees work in textile workshops. For example, a father from Aleppo says: "My two young daughters were studying at the university in Syria, but they work 11-12 hours in a textile workshop for about two months. They had never worked in Syria, now they come to home with footsore. One of them earns 500 TL, the other earns 400 TL, and the third one just started." When I asked about wages, they say: "We have no chance to negotiate; we have to agree to what they give." They say that employers continue to use Syrian refugees as cheap labour force; for example, the Syrians who earn 850 TL monthly last year are paid 600 TL at most this year. It has been determined that many Syrians are obliged to work under such conditions. In Umraniye district each family we met has at least seven-eight children. Some young man and children sell water for earning money. Also there are children begging along the way.

I spent several nights with young women from Damascus, they were between 17-24 years old and married, their concerns are about relatives who have chronicle illnesses and pregnant women need hospital or doctor for inspection and controls. But they are very tired with ill-treatment in health centres. But during the interviews I became sure that the biggest

problem is about paying the rent. “We have difficulties in paying rents. We paid it this month, but now we think what we will do in the next month, where we will find the money” they say.

One of them says: “We can stand hungry, we can manage it but we stay out if we cannot pay our rent.” And she continues: “Those who want to help us, please do not give us money, only pay our rent, it is enough for us.”

A young girl from Aleppo said: “4 million people came to Syria during the 1st Gulf War. Our parents emptied our houses and did not take any rent from them. We even give them food.” And he continued as:

“There is no need to tell our situation here, thanks to God, we manage but we are sorry that Iraq doesn’t want to receive Syrians who want to refuge to Iraq.”

Accommodation conditions of all young people are very bad in terms of sanitation and physical environment. Mostly, many people live in only one room. The squatter houses and hotel rooms they stayed in are humid and do not have ventilation, lightening and heating facilities. They are obliged to pay higher rents for the places they accommodate although such places are in a bad condition.

Adolescences and especially the children get sick frequently due to the accommodation conditions, undernourishment and lack of preventive health care services. Accommodation conditions are convenient for epidemic diseases.

Children cannot receive any education service and psycho-social support service that may rehabilitate the trauma they experienced. Young people, particularly the children, are devoid of sufficient nutrition facilities.

There is not much alternatives for younger children to earn money, they are physically weak and cannot cope with long working hours. They try to collect money on the streets in order to be able to pay the rent of the house or hotel room they live in. These children are unprotected against any exploitation risk.

Older ones who are obliged to work in daily jobs without any registration are paid very low wages. They sometimes cannot receive their wages and they do not know where to apply in such cases. Adolescents who are employed without registration are subject to a serious labour exploitation.

Although they live under very hard conditions, young people we met thank to Turkey for opening its doors. I asked different people “if they came across any negative attitude from their neighbours until today for being Syrian”, and they generally answered as “No, we did not”. But finding an apartment, even a small room is very difficult for them because of regulations which do not allow non-Turkish people to make tenancy agreements and force them to pay Turkish middlemen who often take advantage of their vulnerable situations. They have to pay very high commissions and they cannot do much about arbitrary behaviours of landlords or middlemen.

Turkish government creates black holes in the streets of big cities for Syrians and uses ambiguity and arbitrariness as an established mechanism to exhaust and coerce them to camps. Despite of high hygienic, organized, institutionalized and disciplined nature of camps, living in Istanbul means vulnerability, insecurity, harsh exploitation and constant struggle for food, medical aid and shelter. In a Foucauldian perspective, marginalization becomes the first step of social control and exercise of power and authority on this very vulnerable group. But in next part I will try to explain their highly resistant response, their demand of being a functioning part of society and try to investigate how these processes of resilience and resistance feed into production of value.

Chapter 2 Part 2: Resistance

Coming to Istanbul is long journey for young Syrians, first comers left their homes 2 years ago and their first stops were generally Beirut, Gaziantep or several other cities and most of them did not have contacts in Istanbul. Followers then had simpler routes directly to

Istanbul to meet their relatives. No information or guidance was provided to them on any issue while they were entering in Turkey from the border. Sometimes even their passports and identity cards were not checked.

When, I started my fieldwork I contacted with Istanbul municipality and their departments working with Syrian refugees and I asked them about camps in Istanbul. There are one major refugee camp near Pendik (small town outside of main city) and my contacts cannot share any information about number of Syrian refugees staying or camp conditions but they stated that as a result of the long meeting it was decided to allocate the area, which had been used as a youth camp for a long time, temporarily to Syrians who were out in the last winter.

Government official *Ahmet Bey* I interviewed insistently emphasized that they understand these young people who left their country for saving their lives when the war began and Syrians want to go back as soon as possible but there is the fact that the war had continued for a time longer than anyone could anticipate, Turkish state was as unprepared for this situation as Syrian people themselves. *Ahmet Bey* claimed that most of the young people who had money when they first arrived in Turkey but now they had no money anymore and creating scenes because of they are refusing going back and staying in camps at the same time. When I asked him why these people choose to beg on the streets instead of living in places where they could easily accommodate, find food and clothes, he points to the fact that some of them considered begging as a job. *Ahmet Bey* continued as follows: "We still have an idle capacity of 30-40,000 people at the border. The people for whom we allocated places here are those who did not want to live at the border, and who rejected to go there. Even though all of their needs are met by our government, they do not want to live in camps. All of their needs like food-beverage, sanitation and education are met periodically. However, some of them get bored of the routine life in camps and therefore do not want to stay there. They hope to work outside the camps and they want to invest in their future. And since they ran away from harder conditions, they work for lower wages and thus find jobs easily in Turkey. 5-6 children from a family work and try to make a capital, they force their under age children to work in textile shops. They are not good decent people. My

impression has hitherto been like this. Otherwise, why a person rejects a life presented to him readily and comes to here for begging or working like slaves?"

Ahmet Bey was very critical about parents who let their children work in factories or textile shops but he did not accept begging and illegal street vending as only left option. He claimed that "begging is not a thing that everyone can do, I think that the people who beg for money do not do this since they really need it, and they do this since they consider begging as a job. They consider begging as an occupation and it is clear that they try to pile on the agony of the situation. But it should be remembered that these people do not represent all Syrian people."

Ebubekir, who is executive member in the board of directors of a charity foundation which help Syrian people, supports the statements of *Ahmet Bey*. He said that Syrian people themselves also suffer from beggars, he continues: "There is no reason obliging these people to beg. They find the money required to come to Istanbul from the border. Since they choose Istanbul instead of camps, I think they should have information or confidence. They say that they are victims but when we say "let's put you in a proper camp, give you health care, send the children to school", they reject this. We have seen many instances like this. It would not be right to blame the government due to these people. These people ran away even from Red Crescent camp in Pendik."

Ebubekir notes that those young people are begging as an occupation; "Go to Syria, then you may find out that the same person begging there too. They earn good money; they don't want to give it up. They find it hard to obey the rules of society."

I asked *Ebubekir* how one could distinguish between beggars and children who stay in parks since they can't afford a place, and he answered precisely; "If someone stays in street and s/he begs, s/he must be a beggar..."

Ebubekir thinks that the opinion of Turkish people against Syrians is changing due to these constant begging, asking and demanding position of them. His analysis and examples are very striking: "One who applies to associations and asks for help is considered as a victim. If that person keeps on asking for help even though the request for help is met, that one must be a beggar. A person might be aggrieved; s/he might become obliged to stay in parks

temporarily. Camps might be full at that time but those people are trying to find jobs or rooms to stay, and they are using their own children. As a Syrian, this situation disturbs me very much. Those beggars do not represent Syrian people in any way. They change the point of view of Turkish people towards us. Before the war, the attitude of Turks against Syrians was much more different. Especially in border regions, they were much warmer. Attitudes have changed a lot due to the increase in Syrian population, and such opportunist people.”

Syrian social workers are very concerned with working children since they affect the image of Syrian people negatively. Turkish shopkeepers and their Turkish neighbours ask the government for taking measures against these young people in the streets, and Istanbul Municipality and local organizations point out the empty camps. But when I talked with young Syrians experienced camp life, they have very different stories about camps.

Camps around borders were their first experience, some interviewees said that they had stayed in camps in Turkey and few interviewees said that they had stayed in a camp in Iraq. All young boys interviewed told me that they did not want to live in camps based on different reasons. These reasons include the physical conditions of camps and political considerations about camps. Firstly their Desire to find a job and work: they believe that they are more free and better off if they work in big cities rather than live in camps. Camps means idleness and becoming useless for other family members waiting urgent help in Syria. Secondly Physical conditions and security was challenging: In some camps, people from different parts of Syria have to stay in the same tent or container and young people are forced to monitor and report each others to camp authorities for 7/24. Also camps close to the border bear security risks from outside and are located in regions close to the conflict areas. Thirdly Isolation and restrictions on the freedom of movement: The entrances to and exits from the camps are tracked; the communication between those who take shelter in the camps and outside is under supervision and the camps are closed to international civil society organizations or CSOs from Turkey.

Also risk of discrimination based on ethnical or religious identity is very high: Refugees with different ethnical or religious identities (Christians, Alawites, Kurds, Romans, Circassians,

etc) do not enter the camps with the fear of being discriminated as the camps are under the control of the people with Arab/Sunni background. Sexual discrimination and violence are significant problem: The fact that the camps are open to the risk for young boys and girls of being sexually harassed, assaulted, exposed to violence and raped, deter especially alone female refugees with children from living in the camps.

Also most of young people had involved in civil war in Syria and their parents are concerned that their children will be pressured and influenced by the political groups in the camps and will be forced to take a political side. (Support to Life Report, (2013))

The refugees who live outside the camps cannot benefit from the health care, food, education and accommodation facilities provided to “guest” Syrians living in camps. Thus, this situation creates discrimination among the Syrians who came to Turkey. Syrian people like *Ebubekir* who were given important position by government or local authorities are constantly refusing to see real concerns of young people and repeating grand narrative of Turkish state and media based on one typical good and one typical bad Syrian refugee. Because under this high asymmetric power dynamics resisting against the authorities who want to address your basic human needs in the exchange of your freedom and dignity, is very romantic. Resisting here for these young people means being outside open to all possible dangers of being targeted ethnic minority or working for 14-15 hours every day, exploitation, inequality or begging, asking for help again and again in same streets but it is also inescapable. According to Abu-Lughod there might be a tendency to romanticize resistance, to read all forms of resistance as signs of the ineffectiveness of systems of power and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated. But Abu-Lughod’s resistance is something more like as she borrowed from Foucault “where there is power, there is resistance”. She believes that certainly Foucault is using this hyperbole to force us to question our understanding of power as always and essentially repressive. When we start de-romanticizing the discourse of 20th century, Foucault shows that he is interested in how power is something that works not just negatively, by denying, restricting, prohibiting, or repressing, but also positively, by producing forms of pleasure, systems of knowledge, goods, and discourses. Abu-Lughod quotes from him and explains how he adds what some have viewed as a pessimistic point about resistance by completing the sentence just as

follows: "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Abu-Lughod, (1990), p.42 from Foucault, (1978), p.95-96). This gives us the intuitively sensible "where there is resistance, there is power," which is both less problematic and potentially more fruitful for ethnographic analysis because it enables us to move away from abstract theories of power toward methodological strategies for the study of power in particular situations. As Foucault (Abu-Lughod, (1990), p.42 from Foucault, (1982), p.209, (211)) puts it when he himself advocates this inversion, we can then use resistance "as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their points of application and the methods used." We could continue to look for and consider nontrivial all sorts of resistance, but instead of taking these as signs of human freedom we will use them strategically to tell us more about forms of power and how people are caught up in them. (Abu-Lughod, (1990), p.42)

Chapter 2 Part 3: Resilience

Samir, 16 years old, who I have encountered at the entrance of the Aksaray subway, sells tissue papers for 1 lira each. He said that his father looked after his sisters and brothers at home, and his mother was in hospital and then we went to his house. I learned that they hired a house with furniture on a street a few blocks away from the subway. Its rental fee is 100 liras a day. Apart from *Samir*, his brother also sells tissue papers. "We earn money for our rent together with my brother" he says. The situation of the house which was hired for 100 liras a day is very bad. There is no carpet on the floor and the situation of the little children running on this floor is very bad. They wait for their mother to come back after being cured. *Samir* starts to sell tissue papers at noon and continue until it gets dark. He does not complain about working, his only fear is the municipal police.

I saw a young girl who begs with her little baby for subsistence by sitting ahead of the same subway. *Aysa* asks for a place for begging by talking to hawkers and starts to beg with a plastic plate, her baby always crying. She is 21 years old and her husband was killed in the

war while she was pregnant and she stays in a hotel room in Eminönü by paying 25 TL a day for about 1 year. She says that she could not find any job other than begging when they came to Istanbul together with her cousin, there is nobody to look after her baby and that she barely finds money for the hotel. When I asked her why she did not go to camps, *Aysa* who looked like used to negative reactions, did not answer my question.

A group of beggar boys I encountered on Vatan street works as a team. The children are cousins and they had come from Gaziantep; they say that they sell paper tissues first, and after all tissues are sold, they start to beg. All of them know Turkish. They told me that they lived in Sulukule together with a few families. They also have one more common point: even they can speak Turkish; none of them goes to school. These boys, who live in very bad neighbourhoods, beg for money and who cannot go to the school, return their homes when it gets dark but they are very close friends and taking care of each other. An older boy who sells tissue papers or begs and claims that they are victims of Syrian war and Turkey is equally responsible of this mess. Boys are way more open to discuss politics compared to girls.

I'm at the park near Bayrampaşa coach station in Esenler. There are groups of three to five young boys around the fire made inside tin boxes and tents set up beside the wall of the a mosque.

People are cooking for dinner over the wood fire in front of some tents. There are cloths laid on green bushes in front of tents for drying or perhaps for airing out. And also, voices of children fill the park. Children do not come to this park for playing. This park is their home. I talked to one of the families gathering near the fire. They were at the corner of the park. They did not have a tent yet at the moment.

They just arrived from Aleppo where the war had become increasingly violent. In Turkey, they arrived in Kilis first, and then came to Istanbul. I asked them why they did not stay in camps. Their answer was short: "We cannot enter to camps." Then I asked them what they would do in Istanbul. And they replied: "We will live." In the meantime, he hushed a child who was playing with a toy gun which was making a lot of noise.

People, who thought that I went there for bringing help, started to gather around us. Children need clothes, all the families need food and a place to stay. “Do not come here, you people write that we are thieves. What good you have made to us!” says a young woman in an angry tone. A 12 years old girl, whom I saw while begging between cars on Esenler Avenue, was also there.

The residents of the neighbourhood are reacting to the situation as well. A man who told that he had been living in Esenler for 40 years said: “Toilets of the mosque are closed at night. What will these people do? They have needs. This place stinks now.”

Then I asked him what should be done. And he said: “The government will come here, take them, look after them and feed them.” Then he pointed a certain point with his hand in the midst of darkness and said “Look, both the district governorship and the municipality are here”. This is not the case only for this small park in Esenler. Furthermore, Syrian refugees inhabit not only the parks, but also a piece of green area they manage to find. One month ago, there were 4 Syrian families living in the small area beside bus stops. The family who live beside a tree with three children on the way to Esenler was very friendly. They were from Homs and. The mother was just 24 years old holding a baby who was not even one year old and there was a 2-year old little girl sitting right beside the mother. Their only possession was a small blanket and they gave me a space to sit on it. The father said that he had applied to Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality which was at a walking distance for help but could not receive any answer yet.

There are also young people who are relatively luckier than the Syrian refugees living in parks. They manage to find a house by receiving support from charity organizations or sometimes by finding a job by themselves. Ethnic and religious orientations are important for entering a network, in that way; young boys make friends and spread the important information through groups. For example Alawites open their own praying houses (Djemevi) and find small jobs to Syrians who cannot stay in camps because of their identities. Some of young boys and children without families took shelter in Gaziosmanpasa Djemevi and some of them were put in houses thanks to the subsidies collected. In our meeting, *Muharrem Bey*, director of an important Alawites Cultural Association, sometime people were coming

in huge groups and children could not find their parents, that they had to put tens of people in a house and provided these people with food relief. Djemevi also lodges a big group in itself. A storehouse near the Djemevi was turned into a “house” and given to three Syrian women who ran from Aleppo with lots of children with them. They do not complain about living in such a place which was turned into a house with a carpet laid on concrete floor, a sofa bed, a few mattresses and a kitchen setup at the corner. Like many other Syrian refugees, children wanted to find a job and work in Istanbul.

Those who find a job as well as a house are probably “the luckiest ones” Even though they do not have any social security, it is important for them to have a monthly income. Another young man who hosted me in a humid basement was one of them. He came to Turkey with his cousins and did not want to talk much about his days in Syria like the other refugees; he said that he was happy to find a job in a subcontractor firm working for the municipality. When I asked him what his job was, his answer was “anything”. “I carry stones, I pave, and I blend mortar.” But his hands are in very bad shape with old open scars. He cannot afford stitches for his wounds in a private clinic, also he said his instructors never let Syrian workers to go medical centre. Medical centre is for Turkish workers.

When I asked him if he received any help or information from the government, his answer was “No” like many others. And like the others, he said that his only will is to work and sustain his family left in a border city.

When I was on streets to observe the living conditions of young Syrian in Istanbul, I met very different group around the neighbourhood I live in; they had Kurdish origins. They stay in hotels (places which are also called as “bedsitter”) or in parks, they try to sustain with reliefs from Kurdish community; the fact that there is no regular support but at least that they do know where to apply for support and they have an language advantage with their ethnic community. There are big Kurdish neighbourhoods in Istanbul, they can find rooms and daily jobs but of course, the future is unclear.

One of four young men sitting under a tree with children on his laps said:

“I was a tailor in Aleppo. The war was very intense. We lost everything. We first arrived in Urfa, then came to Istanbul with the hope of “finding a job”. We are on the streets for seven

days. We want to find a job. Of course we want to go back to Syria but there is war. We know no one here.”

They have passports but they could not receive any support from an association or a government entity. One of them told that his wife brought their child to a hospital and that no fee was taken from them in hospitals if they had passports. They know that Syrian Kurds are living in hotels a few blocks away but they say that “there is no money to pay even though there are rooms to live”. In the meantime, the people around brought food for children and I heard they said that “It is very shameful to be in need of help”.

They said that their wives are around and I saw women asking for help with hesitation from people around. I walk with the women I came across on the next street. One of them told that she came from Homs without her husband and five children six months before. They live in a room and when I asked them how they sustain their lives she said:

“If we receive support it’s good but if there isn’t, there is nothing to do. My husband was a cardiac patient, he cannot make it here. Since our identity cards are in Syria, the hospital asks for money and we don’t have any. Children sell water in the streets but they cannot make money. I’m going to beg for money.”

Syria has the same meaning as war for them, she told that she lost one of her relatives and said “there is war there, we cannot go back.” We then went to see people who stay in hotels or rental rooms. Many Syrians stay in buildings on the same street. Young men and children are in front of the doors. I cannot enter into the hotel they stayed since the owner of the hotel did not allow. Women did not talk, and the men I talked did not want us to see the place they live in, I did not insist they were very ashamed that they could offer me a proper beverage or somewhere to sit; I was their guest now so we talked to them in front of the door.

Three young men had come from border five days ago. Each family stays in one room. There are people living in one room with seven people, and they say “we manage on” when we asked about the conditions. They said that, a governmental officer had come a few days ago, listed their names and provided them with food and clothes. They said that he was a governmental officer but they did not know which institution he was coming from.

One young boy came to Diyarbakir with his family from North West region of Aleppo eight months ago. He was a driver in Diyarbakir but then he came to Istanbul with his wife and their newborn baby a week ago since the business was slack there. He said that he wanted to be a taxi driver, but continued as: "I may return to Syria and fight there. They are in war now. My cousin and my uncle died as martyrs. If America intervenes in, it will make me return there. I can leave the children with my mother and father living in Diyarbakir."

The number of children is striking. The old ones protect the little children while cars are passing from the street. One of the children we saw on the street, a twelve year old boy says "Syria is ruined". He tells that he was at 7th grade, but a bomb was thrown beside his school. His grandmother and aunt came to Istanbul, his father is still in Syria, and he doesn't want to go back. He says that he ask for job during the day, he has lots of friend living different streets around. As Thorsen points out theorising within anthropology and sociology stresses that social categories such as 'children', 'adolescents' and 'youth' are historically and culturally constructed. The meaning of, and belonging to, any social category becomes a matter of negotiation – between individuals and at a more abstract level. At the individual level, a key point is that evaluations of who is included in a category and what it means are not necessarily identical. During my fieldwork I experienced ambiguity of roles and social categories in every individual, in some cases I mentioned, 16-18 years old women and men as called young people in my notes, already have 2 or 3 children, According to Thorsen Although individual preferences and capabilities may drive negotiations, they are obviously embedded in wider social and cultural practices. It is therefore imperative to scrutinise critically how young people's identities are shaped by others' perceptions of them; their resistance to or acknowledgement of such perceptions; and the concrete constraints they experience due to marginalisation and exclusion (Thorsen (2007), p.16 from Werbner (2002), de Boeck and Honwana (2005)). People tend to return their social and economic routines immediately after traumatic losses and Syrian children losing their parents and taking the responsibility of their siblings in completely new and unfamiliar geographical settings _children in Istanbul mostly came from small villages or towns of northern Syria_ are psychologically resilient and being economically active agents helps their identity development processes.

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the experiences in Turkey of Syrians who are aged between 18-21 years old. The dissertation will address in particular the intersections between the politically complex position of such refugees in Turkey today and the role that they also play as informal workers in a highly exploitative neoliberal economy. Through research with these young people I will investigate combination of their capacity for resilience and resistance feeds into identity production processes.

The majority of my material has been derived from ethnographic research conducted in Turkey. In particular I employed methods of participant observation, and semi/unstructured interviews. Participant observation lies at the core of the research. I used interview methods depending on local conditions and the progress of my research. For example, if I was able to secure access to government officials dealing with policy concerning the refugees I used structured interviews. I spent four full weeks with different young people working in streets, small shops and domestic environments of Istanbul. I tracked their activities during the course of their daily routines. Having carried out this research, I commenced my semi-structured interviews with young people. I also interviewed their parents, and employers as well as the social workers that are employed in Turkey to deal with refugees. I tried to achieve immersion in Syrian community life in Istanbul.

And I combined individual narratives with my overall observations about how young Syrian people are left in very vulnerable and vague positions deliberately by both Turkish middlemen and Turkish government itself and forced to accept staying in camps instead of demanding decently paid jobs, health care, housing which they can freely live with their own relatives. I witness that current attitude of Turkish state, because they fail to address the exclusion of adolescences from the production of value, paradoxically reinforces children's vulnerability to marginal exploitation by informal labour or begging. It is claimed that creating perfect refugee camps in distant towns outside of big cities and keeping people isolated and idle as subjects need constant psychological treatment, are the only proper

response to the humanitarian crises. But in the streets of Istanbul, young people are constructing and deconstructing every definition of being a child, being a refugee or being on their own. I constitute my argument following the route through marginalization, resistance and resilience which is simultaneously and consequently experienced and reproduced by Syrian youth.

Marginalization becomes the first step of social control and exercise of power and authority on this very vulnerable group. Resistance is the counter action to marginalization and as Abu-Lughods states if we can de-romanticize notion of resistance, it become less problematic and potentially more fruitful for ethnographic analysis because it enables us to move away from abstract theories of power toward methodological strategies for the study of power in this particular situations. My aim here is avoiding simple conclusion and provide a multilayered analysis of these adolescences' agency. Resilience is to recognize their 'talent for living' and to better know how, in confronting the routine extremities of poverty and racial discrimination, language barriers and social exclusion, what these young people may take from such situations.(Abu-Lughod, (1990), p.42)

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