

TURKEY'S REFUGEE POLICY UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE NEO-OTTOMANISM: A SOURCE OF SILENT CONFLICT?

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Abstarct

Along with Turkey's changing refugee policy from the Eurocentric, secular nation-state ideology to the Neo-Ottomanist one on the state level, there also exist main handicaps on both the macro and micro power level concerning the successful coordination of the refugee issue with full respect of the human rights. An apparent discrepancy is observed in Turkey's and many Western states literal migration procedures and practices that Turkey in practice did more than its primary obligations. Economic, cultural and political factors play a role in the relationship between Syrians and Turkish residents. Fragmentation within the Syrian community living in Turkey is also evident. On the other hand, different from the state policy, Turkish people implicitly show their reluctance towards this migration wave without creating a social turmoil. In this line, it is suggested here that Neo-Ottomanism, as a rising trend, helps a considerable majority of the society to take a moderate stance towards the immigration flux. Neo-Ottomanism wave influenced a significant portion of the community living in Turkey which reflected in their vernacular life. It has also been shown that Neo-Ottomanism plays a sedative role vis-a-vis potential conflicts with immigrants.

Keywords: Neo-Ottomanism, Migration, Human Rights, Syrians.

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Neo-Osmanlıcılığın Gölgesinde Türkiye'nin Sığınmacı Politikası: Sessiz Bir Çatışma Kaynağı Mı?

Öz

Türkiye'nin devlet düzeyinde Avrupa merkezli ve laik ulus-devlet ideolojisinden Neo-Osmanlıcığa evrilen göçmen politikasının yanında, bu politikanın başarılı bir biçimde ve insan haklarına tam anlamıyla saygılı olarak koordine edilmesinin önünde hem makro hem mikro güç düzeyinde birtakım ana engeller bulunmaktadır. Türkiye'nin ve birçok Batılı ülkenin yazılı göç prosedürleri ile pratikleri arasında açık bir orantısızlık bulunmaktadır ki Türkiye pratikte kendi yükümlülüklerinin üzerinde iş yapmıştır. Ekonomik, kültürel ve siyasi faktörler Suriyeliler ile Türkiyeliler arasındaki ilişkide rol oynamaktadır. Türkiye'de yaşayan Suriye toplumu içindeki bölünmeler de açıkça görülmektedir. Öte yandan, devlet politikasından farklı olarak, Türkler zımnî olarak bu göç dalgasına yönelik hoşnutsuzluklarını toplumsal bir kargaşa yaratmaksızın göstermektedir. Bu minvalde, yükselen bir trend olan Neo-Osmanlıcılığın göç konusunda toplumun ciddi bir bölümünün daha ılımlı bir tavır sergilemesine yardımcı olduğu öne sürülmektedir. Neo-Osmanlıcılık dalgasının, Türkiye'de yaşayan toplumun önemli bir bölümünü etkisi altına alarak, gündelik hayat pratiklerine yansıdığı görülmektedir. Bu durumun aynı zamanda göçmenlere karşı oluşabilecek potansiyel çatışmaların önünde yatıştırıcı bir unsur olarak rol oynadığı ortaya konmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Neo-Osmanlıcılık, Göç, İnsan Hakları, Suriyeliler.

Introduction

It has been eight years since the beginning of the resistance against the Assad regime on March 2011; a strength which has left many Syrians injured both physically and psychologically as well as many who have been displaced. Neighboring countries, especially Turkey, began hosting Syrian refugees as a primary response to the humanitarian call. Here, along with other possible explanations, I argue that this was the very result of a shift from Eurocentric policy to the Neo-Ottomanist one under the Justice and Development Party government. As was revealed by many authorities, Turkey has now

become the leading refugee-hosting country. In this paper, I would like to draw attention to the ambiguity of Turkey's Syrian refugee issue trapped between the micro and macro powers. I want to reveal the disproportionality of Turkey's refugee policy vis-à-vis that of the "human rights friendly" states as a source of macro-policy ambiguity. Meanwhile, I will address the specific conflict of power between Turkish residents and Syrians. That sort of power conflicts nevertheless is alleviated by the Neo-Ottomanist tendencies especially for the ones supporting the Justice and Development Party which hinder the inflame of the collision.

Turkey and Refugees: A shift from the nation-state to neo-Ottomanism

Not aloof from the very late Ottoman modernization, two principals were quite dominant in the formation of the Turkish Republic, them being nationalism and secularism¹. Holding these two principles as the central pillars, Turkish state aimed to create new and modern citizens who are predominantly secured from the influences of religion in both their private and public lives and a sort of WASP² Identity has been imposed with a highly Turkish nationalist overtone. This secularist and a nationalist incentive are not apart from the Turkish modernization which sought resemblance to the West, Europe in particular while detaching the links with other Muslim societies, especially the Middle East. That kind of state

¹ The characteristic of Turkish modernization is evaluated in this line by many scholars such as Kemal Karpat. *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays* (Vol. 81). (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Esra Özyürek. *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Jacob M. Landau. (Ed.). *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey*. (Leiden: Brill, 1984).

² Here, WASP corresponds to White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant that this analogy is used to refer modern Turkey's perception of ideal citizen as secular, Sunni, Muslim, Turk. For details, see Baskın Oran, *Türkiye'de Azınlıklar: Kavramlar, Teori, Lozan, İç Mevzuat, İctihat, Uygulama* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004).

imagination to create a new society failed in some respects since the Turkish society shelters a broad range of ethnic, religious and sectarian communities. Nevertheless, nationalization and secularization project has become constant in the Turkish state ideology until the 1980's despite minor fractions. Turkey's refugee regime, especially on the legal basis, is an outcome of the Turkish secular nation-state paradigm³ with extremely modernist discourse that defines modernity as an analogy to Westernization and Europeanization. Taking part in the Geneva Convention with particular geographical limitation is a subliminal outcome of that state ideology.

Turkey signed the Geneva Convention Relating the Status of Refugees in 1951 and approved it in 1961 under Law Number 359 and then, approved its 1967 additional protocol (annex) in 1968 which defines the refugee rights with a geographical restriction. As stated above, Turkey does not recognize people from outside Europe as refugees; only they have the right to apply for refugee status and wait for resettlement as required by the UNHCR. Turkey, in fact, provides just the right to reside temporarily in Turkey for the period when the cases UNHCR decide by their cases. As was evident in this limitation, meaning that only Europeans, namely the citizens of member states of the Council of Europe, could enjoy the refugee status in Turkey. In fact, the convention aims to achieve adequate protection for a refugee by providing personal security, the right to live and so on. UNHCR seeks permanent solutions such as giving refugees eventually with citizenship or helping them resettle into a third country or giving a chance for a voluntary return to his/her country of origin. Nevertheless, Turkey's geographical limitation

³For example, according to Settlement Law of 1934 (İskan Kanunu), the immigrants are defined as the ones who are *Türk* or coming from *Turkish* origin. For details, see Doğu Şimşek, "Türkiye'de Sığınmacı Olmak: Belirsizlikler İçinde Yaşamak," *Birikim* 320, (2005):17.

closed the doors for the first option which is the effective refugee protection regime.

For years, the international communities, UNHCR, domestic human rights organizations and EU have often criticized Turkey's refugee policy based on geographical limitation. According to the official records, Turkey had less than 100 refugees by 2011.⁴ Nevertheless, the stubbornness in numbers did not reflect the reality at all. Turkey used to host many refugees in the past before the Syrian regime was evoked. It is possible to give examples from the very early days of the Republic: Turkey gave refugee status to 800 people fleeing from the Nazi Germany⁵, Approximately 1,5 million Iranians also fled between 1980-1991 after the foundation of the new Iranian regime.⁶ Throughout the 1990s, approximately 20.000 Bosnians took temporary asylum, and in these years 17.000 Kosovars were also granted protection.⁷ Between the years 1988-1991, almost a half million of Iraqi Kurds sought asylum in Turkey, which forced Turkish authorities to introduce a more laborious procedure. Similarly, Afghans have been seeking shelter from Turkey since the Russian occupation of 1979. Similarly, significant influxes from Iraq never ended.

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⁴Bianet, "Turkey Sticks to 'Limited' Application of the Geneva Convention", last modified: 1 August 2011, <http://bianet.org/english/world/131856-turkey-sticks-to-limited-application-of-the-geneva-convention>

⁵ Dilek Latif, "Refugee Policy of the Turkish Republic," *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* 33/1 (2002): 6.

⁶ Latif, "Refugee Policy of the Turkish Republic", 7-8.

⁷ Kemal Kirişçi, "Turkish Asylum Policy And Human Rights", *Human Rights in Turkey*, ed. Zehra F. Kabasakal (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 173.

when the UNHCR decides their cases. As was evident in the 1994 primary flow, Turkey took certain precautions from time to time such as making it obligatory to apply officially within five days⁸ to hinder people's entrance to the borders.

In this regard, Turkey tried to solve the fundamental humanitarian needs of these people without provision of refugee status while providing them temporary protection. Thus, some of these people utilized Turkey as a transit country to move to other countries. It is necessary to note here that many of these refugees turned back to their countries of origin after the conflicts there ceased.

In the government of the Justice and Development Party since 2002, Turkish politics began to shift into a sort of neo-Ottomanism which is reflected in both domestic and foreign policies. The same attempts took place during the zal era⁹ Under the Motherland Party governments and in the quite short period of the Welfare Party government. This shift should not be understood as a claim to control the previously Ottoman territories or even as a claim to break the relations with the West at all. Instead, given certain fluctuations, it is a shift from the Eurocentric and withdrawn foreign policy into a more proactive approach seeking multiple co-operations.¹⁰ Throughout the process, relations with the non-western states, the Middle East, Africa and Asia were strengthened. It is possible to give

⁸ This was expanded to 10 days in 1998 due to the severe criticism of the EU as well as the international organizations.

⁹ For a detailed analysis of neo-Ottomanism during the zal times, see Malik Mufti, "Neo-Ottomanists and Neoconservatives: A Strange Alignment in the 1990s", *Insight Turkey* 18/1 (2016): 143-165.

¹⁰ What Burhanettin Duran describes this situation is an attempt to enhance the integration into the world rather than pursuing neo-Ottomanist incentives. For details, see Burhanettin Duran, *Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum AraŖtırmaları Vakfı*, "Yeni Osmanlıcılık DeĐil, Dnya İle Entegrasyon", accessed: 29 May 2016, <https://www.setav.org/yeni-osmanlilik-degil-dunya-ile-entegrasyon/>

a broad range of domestic examples from this paradigm shift as well: The state buildings, which previously utilized new, grey and angled architectural schema, began to be decorated with Ottoman motifs and more Oriental decorations. The conquest of Istanbul is now celebrated with great ceremonies whilst the previously strong emphases on nation-state's festivals have been weakened; Ottoman sorbet which is a mixture of some spices are served in official meetings as a rumination of "invention of tradition"¹¹As well to signify a continuity with the past.¹² Here, Ottoman identity, style, and tradition emerged as a new category of belongingness vis-à-vis the Kemalist secular identity, style, and tradition that the former one also accentuated in a broad range of conservative people.

Ottoman Houses (Osmanlı Ocakları) were established as civil society organizations, TV series with expensive budget on the Ottoman history such as *Muhteşem Yüzyıl* (The Magnificent Century) and *Diriliş* (Revival) started broadcasting, and as such, a sense of continuity with the Ottoman heritage has been popularized as opposed to Kemalist rejection of and blindness to the Ottoman past.¹³ The ex-prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu has emphasized that Turkey's humanitarian aid towards the Turks and Muslims abroad is a reflection of the Ottoman identity.¹⁴ Here, Davutoğlu refers to the Ottoman Empire's eagerness to take responsibility for humanitarian

¹¹ For details of the term "invention of tradition", see: Eric Hobsbawm - Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹² See for example Ak Parti Gençlik Kolları Başkanlığı, "Burdurlu AK Gençler İstanbul'un fethinin 563.yılında Osmanlı şerbeti dağıttı", last modified: 31 May 2016, <https://www.akparti.org.tr/genclikkollari/haberler/burdurlu-ak-gencler-istanbulun-fethinin-563.-yilinda-osmanli-serbeti-dagitt/84211>.

¹³ For a broader evaluation of the rise of Neo-Ottomanism in the domestic politics, see: Gülsen Kaya, Osmanbaşoğlu, "Ortadoğu'da Barışı Tesis Etmede Neo-Osmanlılık bir Seçenek Olabilir mi?", *Akademik Hassasiyetler*, 5/9 (2018): 1-15.

¹⁴ Ak Parti, "Osmanlı Torunu, Selçuklu Varisiyiz (We are the grandson of Ottoman, Successor of the Seljuks)", last modified: 3 June 2015, <http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/osmanli-torunu-selcuklu-varisiyiz/75629#1>.

needs which reflected the refugee policy of the Ottomans. Latif notes:

*It declared that migration into the Ottoman State was open to anyone who was willing to give his allegiance to the Sultan, to become his subject, and to respect the country's laws. It stipulated further that settlers would be protected against any infringement of their religious observances and would enjoy religious freedom like all other classes of the empire's subject.*¹⁵

Similarly, Ottoman Empire accepted refugee fluxes with tolerance throughout its history such as a broad range of ethnic and cultural compositions ranging from Spanish Jews to Crimean Tatars. In the course of the revitalization of that ideology, Turkey has been hosting approximately 3,5 million Syrian refugees,¹⁶ which is more than 4 percent of the population. What makes Turkey's attitude towards the Syrian flow is different from the previous streams stems from the paradigm shift. Previously, Turkey saw the issue as a new humanitarian responsibility for a temporary period. Nevertheless, this time Turkey tried to struggle with the problem in a neo-Ottomanist vision. Apart from sheltering and foods, the parliament passed many laws to enable the education of the Syrian children, to allow them access to health services, to provide them with ID's and working rights and so on. Nothing is perfect in such a significant flow for sure, but the incentives show that Turkey has accepted these people's long-term residence. A separate governmental branch in charge of the administration of immigration was established to deal with the problems of the immigrants.

Turkey, a country usually criticized for its refugee regime for a

¹⁵ Latif, "Refugee Policy of the Turkish Republic", 4.

¹⁶ Number is retrieved from Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü (Directorate General of Migration Management) Website. For details, Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü, "Yıllara Göre Geçici Koruma Kapsamındaki Suriyeliler, accessed: 9 July 2018, http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713_icerik.

long time, has now become the most welcoming country following the Syrian crises, receiving by itself approximately 42 percent of the overall Syrian refugees. 90 percent of the Syrians in Turkey live outside the camps since they perceive the life in camps too dull and limited.¹⁷ Approximately 300 000 Syrian children were born in Turkey.¹⁸ What is ambiguous here is that Turkey is still criticized by the international community which is not able to share the burden at all. Western Europe by itself tried to continue with its deportation regime, and to the end of assuring its national security, these countries try to confine refugees in Turkey. Those who used to criticize Turkey for its geographical limitation towards the refugees now want to keep their doors closed to the Syrian refugees. In such a tragic humanitarian crisis, the “human rights friendly” states could not generously indicate their humanitarian priorities.

Micropower conflicts: Among Turkish citizens and Syrians

This macro-level ambiguity is not aloof from the micro level power conflicts. Although Turkish citizens living on the Syrian border have much in common with the Syrians such as language, traditions and sometimes common relatives,¹⁹ Turkey hosts approximately 3,5 million Syrians at the moment²⁰ and inevitably faces specific micro power conflicts which have both political, economic and cultural

¹⁷ Hürriyet, “7 Bin Suriyeliye Vatandaşlık Geliyor”, last modified: 8 July 2017, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/7-bin-suriyeliye-vatandaslik-geliyor-40514176>.

¹⁸ Anadolu Ajansı, “300 binden fazla Suriyeli bebek dünyaya geldi”, last modified: 17 March 2018, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/300-binden-fazla-suriyeli-bebek-dunyaya-geldi/1091916>.

¹⁹ Murat Erdoğan, “Türkiye’ye Kitlemel Göçlerde Son Dalga: Suriyeliler”, *Türkiye’nin Göç Tarihi: 14. Yüzyıldan 21. Yüzyıla Türkiye’ye Göçler*, edited by M.Murat Erdoğan and Ayhan Kaya (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015), 32

²⁰ According to the Directorate of Migration, the number of Syrians under temporary protection was dramatically increased between 2011 and 2018 and reached to 3 562 523 in 2018. For details, see: Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü, “Yıllara Göre Geçici Koruma Kapsamındaki Suriyeliler,”

origins. As for the political side of the issue, the Justice and Development Party (the Ak Party) governments, which bolstered the paradigm shift of the refugee regime from a Euro-centric and nation-state, perspective towards a neo-Ottomanist perspective has a great base as well as a considerable opposition in the society. In November 1st, 2015 general elections, the party gathered almost 50 percent of the votes among 16 political parties taking part in the polls. Although the Ak Party could not keep its previous success in the 2018 elections, it was continued to be the most influential party in the Parliament. Besides, the powerful leader of the party, President Tayyip Erdoğan gathered 52,59 percent of the votes in the first round.²¹ Erdoğan arose as one of the pivotal figures promoting Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey. In a harshly polarized political atmosphere of the country consisting of the pro and anti Erdoğanists, the popular base of the party and Erdoğan did not loudly criticize the government policy of receiving the Syrian refugees.

According to the statistics, Turkish people's acceptance towards these people rests on both the universal humanitarian incentives and their political stances. One of the parameters of the Turkish people's tolerance towards the Syrian refugees is without any doubt their political choices.²² According to statistics, those who vote for the Justice and Development Party were initially eager to support the Syrian refugee flow, new institutional and legal frameworks adapted to the needs of Syrians and the humanitarian aid. On the other hand, in an enormously polarized situation, those dislike the Ak Party indicate less welcoming attitudes towards Syrians. Nevertheless, the ones who share the same neighborhood with Syrians to a large extent consist of the Erdoğan's popular base whilst a considerable majority

²¹ Yüksek Seçim Kurulu (Higher Election Council), "Yüksek Seçim Kurulundan Duyuru", accessed: 9 July 2018
<http://ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/24Haziran2018/KesinSecimSonuclari/2018CB-416D.pdf>

²² Erdoğan, "Türkiye'ye Kitlesele Göçlerde Son Dalga", 330.

of the opponents generally live in more isolated places. For instance, in Ankara, the neighborhoods such as Altındağ and Keçiören are the main places that Syrians have place to live that the former 63 per cent, the latter 55,5 per cent voted for the Ak Party in 1 November elections whilst Çankaya region, one of the most isolated neighborhoods in Ankara voted just 22 per cent of the votes for the Ak Party. The same is true for many places. Similarly, on 24 June 2018 elections, the President Tayyip Erdoğan gathered 58,8 percent of the votes in Keçiören and 65,8 percent in Altındağ.

Furthermore, if we consider the election results of the first ten cities hosting the highest number of Syrians according to Directorate of Migration,²³ it is seen that Erdoğan and Ak Party could not win in İzmir per se. In other words, all of the remaining cities as is seen on the table below continued to support Erdoğan and the Ak Party. What seems interesting here is that Kilis, as a small city in the Southeastern region of Turkey, hosts Syrians whose number exceeded the population of Turkish citizens residing in Kilis. That city also continued to support the Justice and Development Party and President Tayyip Erdoğan with clear-cut scores of 50,8 and 70 percents.

²³Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü, "Yıllara Göre Geçici Koruma Kapsamındaki Suriyeliler".

²³ Yüksek Seçim Kurulu (Higher Election Council), "Yüksek Seçim Kurulundan Duyuru".

Table 1: Election results of the most Syrian hosted cities

CITY	Number of Syrians	Presidential Elections of 2018 (The highest score in the city)	Parliamentary Elections (The highest score in the city)
İstanbul	563 133	Erdoğan, 50 %	Ak Party, 42,7 %
İzmir	137 624	İnce, 54 %	CHP, 41,3 %
Bursa	150 063	Erdoğan, 55,5 %	Ak Party, 46,1%
Adana	214 672	Erdoğan, 44,1 %	Ak Party, 34,6
Konya	97 018	Erdoğan, 74,2 %	Ak Party, 59,4 %
Gaziantep	387 118	Erdoğan, 63,9 %	Ak Party, 51,4
Şanlıurfa	473 952	Erdoğan, 64,7 %	Ak Party, 52,6 %
Mersin	209 150	Erdoğan, 37,9 % ²⁴	Ak Party, 28,6 percent
Hatay	443 477	Erdoğan, 48,5 %	Ak Party, 36,2 %
Kilis	131 302	Erdoğan, 70 %	Ak Part, 50,8 %

Source: The table created upon the data retrieved from: Yüksek Seçim Kurulu (Higher Election Council), "Sandık Sonuçları Paylaşım Sistemi", accessed: 9 July 2018, <https://sonuc.ysk.gov.tr/module/GirisEkranı.jsfhttp://ysk.gov.tr/doc/dosyalar/docs/24Haziran2018/KesinSecimSonuclari/2018CB-416D.pdf> and Göç İdaresi Genel Müdürlüğü (Directorate General of Migration Management Website), accessed: 9 July 2018, http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/gecici-koruma_363_378_4713_icerik.

Ironically, Syrians have become the rivals of those people working in the agriculture, manufacturing and service sector. For instance, at the beginning of the migration flow, an observer reports that in the Çukurova region, unregistered Turkish workers were daily paid for about 10 dollars in the previous years in cotton harvesting. However, Syrians began to do the same job for less than 4 dollars a day, which leads to both exploitation of their labor as well as the emergence of a brutal competition between the Turkish workers and Syrians. In spite of the efforts to hinder these kinds of abuses, a bill providing the right to work for the Syrians was implemented to limit these kinds of illegal situations in the working life. Even Syrians after six months of applying for international

²⁴ Ahmet İçduygu and Eleni Diker. "Labor market integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey: From refugees to settlers", *The Journal of Migration Studies* 3/1 (2017): 12-35.

protection status can apply for work permit, İçduygu and Diker show low number of work permits. On the other hand, as Bahçekapılı and Çetin observed, the unemployment rate of Turkish citizens increased throughout this migration flux.²⁵

Moreover, since a vast majority of Syrians live outside the camps, demand for the housing has increased incredibly in the neighborhoods where refugees have welcomed Syrians. This in turn automatically caused a rise in the rents.²⁶ Furthermore, the government enabled Syrians to get free health services (except for particular operations like organ plantation) no matter what they have a valid passport, ID card or any official document. This led to a certain discomfort among the locals in the integration process of the refugees since the Turkish citizens visiting the same hospitals complain about the situation a lot.²⁷ Sometimes the issues bearing greater competition have the potential to provoke Turkish residents. For example, the Syrians follow different procedures in the university entrance process²⁸ which became another conflictual issue since in Turkey university entrance is a big deal. Even the ruling party before the 2019 local elections needed to declare that these Syrian students also have to take an exam to enter a university in Turkey²⁹.

Regarding the cultural aspect of the issue, ostensibly Turkey and Syria seem to have quite common cultural practices, which in practice do not exist. According to the statistics, Turkish people reject

²⁵ Cengiz Bahçekapılı and Buket Çetin. "The impacts of forced migration on regional economies: The case of Syrian refugees in Turkey", *International Business Research* 8/9, (2015): 1-15.

²⁶ Erdoğan, Türkiye'ye Kitlemel Göçlerde Son Dalga", 331.

²⁷ Erdoğan, Türkiye'ye Kitlemel Göçlerde Son Dalga", 324.

²⁸ Erdoğan, Türkiye'ye Kitlemel Göçlerde Son Dalga", 331.

²⁹ In order to see the details, the pamphlet that the Justice and Development Party published is available at Ak Party official website:

<https://www.akparti.org.tr/media/275667/suriyeliler-kirimli-brosur-a4.pdf>

that they have specific common cultural points.³⁰ Language is a severe handicap for Syrians to integrate into the public life in Turkey. In a survey, more than two third of Syrians reported that they prefer to socialize with Syrians rather than Turkish citizens.³¹ In the early years of the flux, an absolute deficiency on the education campaign was observed. Nevertheless, today, official branches of the state, voluntary organizations and projects carried by UNHCR began to give free Turkish courses to the Syrians. To involve Syrian women in the social life, in some cases, free babysitting and child caring services are provided for these women's dependants along with the language education for the women themselves. Nevertheless, the scope of these services is far from being enough.

Cultural differences in women's gender roles have also become a considerable source of conflict in that Syrians hold a more self-caring and attractive women role which has potential to discomfort Turkish women whose femininity is not that much apparent in general. In that regard, many Turkish women fear to lose their husbands, which according to statistics is not much a real threat.³² A human rights activist states that many Turkish women, who previously provided voluntary aid for Syrians in their neighborhoods, gave up helping Syrians after noticing the cultural differences between the Syrians and themselves in the perception of the role of women in the family. Moreover, Turkish civic law prohibits polygamy, and early age marriages are different from the regulation in Syria which enables Syrian women to accept being the second wife of a Turkish man. That also negatively influences the peace and solidarity among Syrian and Turkish women, but it did not lead to an open turmoil in the society. Besides, the Syrian women' gender role

³⁰ See Erdoğan, Türkiye'ye Kitlesele Göçlerde Son Dalga”.

³¹ Ertuğrul Karakaya. “Türkiye'de Suriyeli Göçmen Tüketici Davranışlarının İncelenmesine Yönelik Bir Araştırma.” Bülent Ecevit Üniversitesi Uluslararası Yönetim, İktisat ve İşletme Kongresi, Zonguldak, (2017).

³²See Erdoğan, Türkiye'ye Kitlesele Göçlerde Son Dalga”.

might have been evolved throughout time.³³

In such a broad range of conflicts that may have the potential to disturb Turkish citizens commonly living with the Syrians and sharing the same social benefits do not reach far beyond the Turkish citizens' political preferences. As the table above suggests that, in spite of the abovementioned disputes, a considerable number of Turkish citizens, that this paper suggests as a reflection of their Neo-Ottomanist political positioning, continued to vote for the Ak Party and Erdoğan. Further, they do not amplify the conflict of interests and try to embrace Syrians manifesting under the name of the recovery of Ottoman tolerance towards the difference.

However, that hospitality does not reach a collective national identity for long-term projections. For example, one of the things that disturb Syrians is the concept of "guest" (misafir) that was utilized by the Turkish people in order to describe their status as short-term residents. Juliette Tolay argues that the perception of "guest" comes along with an understanding of the issue as a charity rather than a legal right in Turkish society.³⁴ All in all, the conflict between the Turkish citizens and Syrians are growing from day to day on political, economic and cultural grounds. Ironically, those who politically oppose Syrians have fewer sharing points with these people in daily life while people living in the same neighborhoods with Syrians have more economic and cultural conflicts. However, the ones who have Neo-Ottomanist political sentiments have more

³³ Yumna Asaf. "Syrian women and the refugee crisis: surviving the conflict, building peace, and taking new gender roles." *Social Sciences* 6/3, (2017): 110; doi:10.3390/socsci6030110

³⁴ For details see, Juliette Tolay, "Türkiye'de Mültecilere Yönelik Söylemler ve Söylemlerin Politikalara Etkisi" (Discourses towards the Refugees in Turkey and the Influences of these Discourses on Policies), *İltica, Uluslararası Göç ve Vatansızlık: Kuram, Gözlem ve Politika*, eds. Özlem Çelebi, Saime Özçürümez, and Şirin Türkay (Ankara: UNHCR, 2015): 204.

room to develop empathy towards Syrians. Along with the ruling party's position, they tend to recognize Syrians with solidarist tenet after a fashion.

In such a broad scope of conflicts on the micro level, the political positioning also pursued to help to shape the perception of Syrian flux to Turkey. The Neo-Ottomanism as a way of construction of the national identity found a way to spread in the eve of the 2018 elections. Before the elections, during the 2017 referendum process, the Nationalist Action Party, who sometimes prefer to define itself as "as Turcic as the Mount Tengri, as Muslim as the Mount Hira" (*Tanrı Dağı kadar Türk, Hira Dağı kadar Müslüman*) began to show its generous support towards the ruling Ak Party and Erdoğan. This turned into an official collaboration in the elections under the name of the *Cumhur* (Public) Coalition, while integrating the conservative nationalist Great Union Party (Büyük Birlik Partisi) as the trio of the coalition. In such an overtly conservative nationalist manner, the neo-Ottomanism continued to define an upper identity with a reciprocal influence of macro and micro politics. The ones who supported Erdoğan and the so-called *Cumhur* Coalition do not indicate an open and rigid opposition towards the government's Syrian policy due to the influence of their political positioning and neo-Ottomanist incentives.

On the other hand, it is also necessary to note here that İstanbul Bilgi University carried out a research on the investigation of the polarization in Turkey in 2017. In that research, it was founded that the ubiquitous point of the Ak Party supporters and the opposition party supporters consist of their motivation towards the Syrians' status in Turkey as well as Turkish citizens' will and motivation for

Syrians' going back to their homeland.³⁵ However, the percentage of the Ak Party supporters towards Syrians' leave of Turkey is still relatively low.³⁶ The cities continue to vote to a large extent for Erdoğan are sharing many social, political and cultural domains with Syrians. Though they are not overtly happy with this flux, keeping silence about this reluctance is probably strengthened by their neo-Ottomanist positioning. Active polarization and politicization of the Turkish case may lead to people's decision-making process which I think neo-Ottomanism play a cemented role for Erdoğan's popular base.

Micro-power conflicts: Among Syrians

On the other hand, Syrians are divided within themselves politically, economically and ethnically. As a result of the open door policy, Turkey tried to help all the asylum seekers from different political affiliations, sects, religious backgrounds, and ethnicities. It is possible to meet Syrians who fled from the Assad regime, people displaced by the ISIS, and Kurdish people, Ezidis, Sunni Arabs, Turkomans, Nusayris (Alevi) and so on. Although the camps are open to everyone, it is possible to observe a particular group's domination in the camps. Since people are not forced to remain in the camps, they can quickly move to other places where they feel more comfortable. For instance, Alevi Syrians prefer to settle down in the areas where mayors are tolerant towards Alevi. ³⁷ Christians in

³⁵ İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Göç Araştırmaları Merkezi, "Türkiye'de Kutuplaşmanın Boyutları", accessed: 30 June 2018, <https://goc.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2018/02/05/bilgi-goc-merkezi-kutuplasmanin-boyutlari-2017-sunum.pdf>.

³⁶ In that study, given the statement that "after the Syrian war will end, all Syrians should be sent back to their homeland" and 83,2 % of the Ak Party supporters said "yes" to that statement vis-a-vis 92,8 % of the CHP's. For details, please visit İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Göç Araştırmaları Merkezi, "Türkiye'de Kutuplaşmanın Boyutları."

³⁷ Kirişçi, "Turkish Asylum Policy And Human Rights", 39.

Mardin also welcome Syrian Christians through their associations.³⁸ Religious organizations care for both Turkomans and Sunni Arabs. So, even though asylum seeker camps are open to everyone, based on the refugees' demands and given that they feel discriminated, the government and related civil societies try to create convenient places for them.

One of the primary sources of the fragmentation that I observed throughout this research is the purpose of their asylum seeking. As part of this research, I talked to 47 Syrian refugees from different economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Even the number is quite limited; I observed that there exists sincere respect for the ones who have political reasons to seek asylum. Sometimes, these people do not refer to themselves in the official documents as "political refugees," but the neighbors know that they are politically affiliated. These people in no small extent display moderate opposition towards the Assad regime, and they demand political freedom, security and a more democratic framework. They generally obtained higher education, they can speak English, and they sincerely want to return to Syria. These people have somehow leadership position among other Syrians.

Most of the Syrians in Turkey immigrated due to security reasons or displacement. They moved to the places in Turkey where their relatives or neighbors from Syria had settled. They try to keep good relations with Turkish neighbors while refraining from illegal actions. Three different people -I interviewed said that in their culture, a guest should obey the rules of the host. With that in mind, they usually indicate their thanks to the Turkish state and say that they show a considerable effort to stay within the legal order of Turkey.

³⁸ Kirişçi, "Turkish Asylum Policy And Human Rights", 39.

Nevertheless, these two groups exclude the ones who came to Turkey mainly for "economic" reasons, namely the penholder Syrians since they are thought to damage the image of the rest of the Syrians. During this research, I talked five different penholders. They said that they did not have a stable and settled life in Syria, too. They were usually emigrating from one city to another but they generally inhabited around Halep. After the plunder of Halep, the Syrian government settled them in different villages, but they could not survive there either. They moved to Turkey basically for economic reasons since the instability in the country influenced their living conditions adversely. They generally like Esad and support his regime. One of the women that I talked to, Lemye, is illiterate, never went to school and married at the age of 13. She does not even have an identity card, civil marriage record or any other official document. She complains that other Syrians exclude them and they could not live in the camps for the same reason. As Skvoretz and Willer delineate, exclusion becomes a source of power.³⁹ In such networks. By excluding these penholders, the rest of the Syrians could have a chance to represent themselves as "true refugees" or "true asylum seekers."

On the other hand, the excluded ones experience the real tragedy and human rights deficits along with sure abuse of their situation. For instance, while other refugees pay 350-400 liras for their moderate houses, which is in no small extent funded by the charity organizations, those people living under awful housing conditions, in abandoned houses appear in the picture, and the unofficial owners of those abandoned houses demand 500 liras for such dwellings. They do not have heating facilities, hot water or regular housewares. Even the settled down Syrians have a chance to access the education, health services, and some other state benefits,

³⁹ John Skvoretz - David Willer, "Exclusion and Power: A Test of Four Theories of Power in Exchange Networks", *American Sociological Review* 58/6 (1993): 802.

these "unofficial bodies" who do not even have an ID card are all deprived of those benefits. Thus, their integration into the society is quite limited. As the illiterate ones, their Turkish language skills are relatively underdeveloped vis-à-vis the rest of the Syrians. As far as I observed, this group is the other of the other; the rest of the Syrians exclude them to strengthen their social position because they feel embarrassed about the Syrians' penholder image.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Turkey as the outlier of the Geneva Convention is often criticized by the international communities for keeping the geographical limitation for the determination of the refugee status. This limitation is a reflection of Turkey's Euro-centric nationalist perspective which has been altered in the last decade and evolved into a neo-Ottomanist way of thinking. In this regard, Turkey accepted approximately 2,5 million Syrians and tried to struggle with that colossal flow. What is ambiguous here is that the "human rights friendly" states and especially the ones in Western Europe seek to strengthen their securities with less emphasis on human rights as a macro-power ambiguity. On the other hand, Turkish citizens and Syrians have emerging political, economic and cultural conflicts that might probably endure for a long time. Nevertheless, the coalition between the conservative nationalist block in Turkey under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party paved the way for the spread of neo-Ottomanist identity on the public level as well. This sentiment created certain belongingness from Ottoman heritage which requires keeping solidarity towards the asylum seekers. This neo-Ottomanist trend helped to mitigate the silent tension for the ones sharing that identity.

On the other side, Syrians within themselves are wholly segregated. Their ethnic, religious or sectarian conflict for the nonce is not a source of great chaos since the spatial dissociation of the

Syrians. In other words, particular groups prefer to not encounter with each other. Finally, the penholders experience the most significant tragedy; they are isolated and excluded by the rest of the Syrians. All in all, current multilayered problems require serious burden sharing regarding the Syrian refugees that Turkey by itself may not continue to cope with. Apart from its social and economic side, the rising trend of Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey helped to appease the potential conflicts and the supporters of Erdoğan, who commonly share the common places with Syrians refrain from loud criticism of the asylum seeker problem in Turkey. Nevertheless, the neo-Ottomanism on the societal level is fostered by the popular culture without carrying a longstanding internalization and intellectual framework. If the grounds of neo-Ottomanism cannot be filled by sophisticated means, the ongoing conditions may not proceed or may worsen in the near future. Thus, the macro and micro level conflicts make Syrian refugees hang by a hair in Turkey.

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