

**VICISSITUDES OF ISLAMIC
HUMANITARIANISM:
COMPASSION, CARE, AND IMMOBILIZATION**

By

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no material accepted for any other degrees in any other institution. The dissertation contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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İstanbul, 30 January 2022

Abstract

This thesis looks at intersections and conjunctions between the government of mobility and Islamic humanitarianism in Turkey. I argue that, although at times they operate not fully in tandem and at times in contradistinction to each other, both have immobilizing effects in refugee lives. In the face of increasing pressure on refugee movements, the attempts at decreasing the number of refugees who wanted to travel across nation-state borders are accompanied with other forms of immobilization which various sections of society (and not only the centralized nation-state) subscribed. I set out to discuss, in the broadest sense, how various modes of physical, social, economic, and political immobilization of refugees work. To that end, I propose to use *immobilization* as a lens through which to see how refugees' life experiences are conditioned through legal, spatial, economic, political, and social relations which hinge on techniques of immobilizing (and arguably, differently mobilizing).

I will zoom into a more localized form and limit my focus to Islamic humanitarianism in Denizli, a city at the southwest of Turkey, host to various refugee groups –predominantly Syrian, Afghan, and Iranian refugees and a considerably smaller population of Iraqi refugees. Throughout variously focused chapters I will demonstrate that Islamic humanitarianism is integral to the government of mobility and to the strategies of immobilization. These strategies include (but are by no means limited to) classification of refugees under ambiguous yet simultaneously individualizing and totalizing taxonomies; ideological political discourses; epistemic possibilities that act upon refugees without according to them a political position to express their claims and demands; and economic structures which narrow down migrants' and refugees' possibilities of reproduction and economic activity to precarious and informal jobs.

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Introduction

On the eve of the *Eid al-Adha* of 2018, I was traveling from Istanbul to my hometown. I went to one of the most crowded bus terminals in Istanbul to wait for my bus to depart. It was packed with people who were traveling for holiday from Istanbul to other cities of Turkey – this place was more like a hub from which people scattered across the country. While I was waiting for the printout of my ticket, an old woman and a young man approached the counter to book a ticket. The woman did not speak Turkish and the man next to her was translating her request to the employee of the bus company. Seeing that the woman did not speak Turkish, the first thing the bus company employee asked was her ID card. The ID card was presented, and the employee said, “Well, you are Syrian. I cannot give you a ticket unless I see your travel permit.” She didn’t have the travel permit, an authorization document issued by the provincial branches of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) for registered refugees¹ to travel from their city of registration to another city for a given period of time. It was not even clear that if her city of registration was Istanbul or that she would anyway need to travel to another city to have her travel permit issued. She nonetheless wanted to travel to another city and said that she wouldn’t be able to receive the permit since it was an official holiday, and all the offices would be closed for the rest of the week. It

¹ Throughout the thesis, I use the term “refugee” for all the people who have asylum claim (whether temporary protection, asylum seeker or undocumented people) in order to challenge the categories created by the universalized legal system, at the center of which lies the nation-state and state/nation/citizen nexus. In the places I needed to specify certain legal statuses, I refer to the Turkish asylum law and the Geneva Convention. Also, the universalized and individualizing distinctions between refugee vs. migrant, forced vs. voluntary, and political vs. economic amount the “violent abstractions” (Apostolova 2015) that obscure the reality which people assigned to such categories experience. Although I use the term “refugee” as, in a sense, to response to such taxonomies, I endeavor to give as nuanced an account as possible in order to show the commonalities experienced by refugees with other marginalized populations in the society and to unearth the differences and hierarchies between those who were ostensibly given “protected status” – which is, most of the time, a symbolic and abstract protection that does not provide a shield from discrimination, exploitation, or violence of various forms.

seemed impossible to convince the employee to sell her a bus ticket. He kept saying, “But the state will hold me accountable,” “I cannot risk myself and the company,” “I am told not to sell anyone a ticket without seeing the travel permit.” He seemed particularly worried about failing the duty of controlling the in-country mobility of refugees imposed on, if not outsourced to, him as it has been on many other people in the public transportation system. In the end, she and the man next to her had to leave the bus company’s office—possibly to try their chance with another bus company.

The employee of the bus company was referring to the DGMM (Directorate General of the Migration Management) circular which was published on 29 August 2015—in a way signaling the early measures against the “refugee crisis” of Europe that would reach its peak in early September 2015 (Cantat 2015; Bojadžijev and Mezzadra 2015; Rajaram 2015)—introducing “controls and limitations on the movement of Syrians within Turkey”.² Accordingly—and this was to be later strengthened by following DGMM circulars—temporary protection status holders³ were obligated to have travel authorization document to travel outside the city of registration and it is given by the governorate of the respective city for maximum 90 days, with a possibility of extension for another 15 days. Also, the governorate must be notified upon return, the failure of which can amount to suspension of the temporary protection status and thereby illegalization of the refugee. The circular was arguably implemented to halt the movement of Syrian refugees not only within the borders of Turkey but also towards the Western borders in a putative attempt to cross the border towards Greece.

² Asylum Information Database. “Freedom of Movement: Turkey”, n.d., Available at <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkey/freedom-movement-1>

³ Temporary Protection Status is granted to Syrian nationals as well as refugees and stateless people coming from Syria (Refugee Rights Turkey, 2017). It enables registered individuals to access basic rights and services such as healthcare, education and social assistance.

Around the same time as the circular, in 2015, the Turkish state had launched a project to construct an 826-km-long fence/wall at the Turkey-Syria border (which is in total 911-km long) as a part of the broader project of enhancing border security with advanced military technology.⁴ The wall and the circular seemed to be the part of a larger and elaborate plan for variously designed tools of geographical and physical control over refugee mobility and implied the end of the “open door policy”. Silently implemented, these immobilizing control measures enabled the government to continue its humanitarian discourses.⁵ With the implementation of the “open-door policy” between 2011-2015, the official state discourse became what I call “spectacle of welcoming” through which any issue about Syrian refugees was constricted into discourses of Islamic humanitarianism by the state. (This relation was later to be shortened to “Ansar-Muhajir”⁶ relation, the parable of the migration [*hijra*] of Prophet Mohammad and fellow Muslims from Mecca to Medina to flee [religious] persecution.) The spectacle, with its incontrovertibility and its capacity to conceal the violent or otherwise immobilizing forces behind it (De Genova 2013; Debord 2002 [1969]), made the language of humanitarianism and religious solidarity visible in the reception of (exclusively) Syrian refugees. Humanitarianism, in many ways, became entangled with other

⁴ “Turkey finishes construction of 764-km security Wall on Syria border” (9 June 2018). *Daily Sabah*. Available at <https://www.dailysabah.com/war-on-terror/2018/06/09/turkey-finishes-construction-of-764-km-security-wall-on-syria-border>

⁵ It must be noted, though, the humanitarian discourses used by the Turkish government became more entangled and multi-layered throughout. Humanitarianism, as a domestic and foreign practice and ideological stance, had been bifurcated: for the Syrian refugees within the country, humanitarian language continued under the religious and cultural modals of solidarity; for Syrian people in Syria (that is, people whose passage was blocked by the very wall that the Turkish government had been building), the humanitarianism merged with cross-border military involvement of the Turkish Armed Forces in Syria. On another note, even before the construction of the wall and enhancement of the border security, Syrian-Kurdish refugees crossing the border from Kurdish-majority towns in Syria were subjected to violent restrictions, even shootings at the borders. See, Hikmet Durgun (16 April 2015), “Sınırdaki Kürt Avı”. *Rudaw*. Available at <https://www.rudaw.net/turkish/kurdistan/16042015>

⁶ In the Islamic teachings (the Qur’an and the words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammad – the Sunna) “migration” occupies an important place as it is one of the constitutive moments of Islam as an institutionalized and expanding religion. In the parable called “Ansar and Muhajir”, Prophet Mohammad and his Muslim fellows flee Mecca where they face persecution and seek refuge in Medina, another city in today’s Saudi Arabia. In Medina, the Prophet signs a pact with the natives. “According to this pact, each ‘Ansar’ (literally means “the helpers” should take care of one ‘muhajir’ (literally means “the migrant”). This care included food, clothing, shelter and any other assistance needed until the ‘muhajir’ could look after himself [sic]” (Agha 2008:37). Narrated in Qur’an and other reliable Islamic resources, this pact becomes the backbone of migration in Islam and it regulates welcoming the refugees and refugee protection.

and contemporaneous immobilizing measures, in a sense, working not only as a shield (a stage, a spectacle to look at) for immobilizing measures but becoming one. This is the main point of departure of this thesis. I set out to discuss, in the broadest sense, various modes of immobilization of refugees in which humanitarianism was an important force. Throughout variously focused chapters I will demonstrate that Islamic humanitarianism is integral to the government of mobility and to the strategies of immobilization. Before moving on to the outline of the chapters, I will first give a brief account for the contemporary government of mobility in Turkey, which I argued above was partly instantiated by the circular dated 2015.

When the circular mentioned above was first introduced, it could be easily explained away neither by a humanitarian approach nor by the legal regulation for it was an outright restriction of the legally recognized in-country freedom of movement for at least a select group of temporary protection status holders. It became known only after the provincial law enforcement started intercepting a group of Syrian refugees seeking to travel outside the city of residence. I remember the day the said circular was first revealed upon an incident. When refugee rights lawyers and activists learnt about the interception of the Syrian refugees' travel by the law enforcement at the border of a Southeastern Anatolian city, everyone was caught by surprise as the circular had not been communicated with the direct addressee of the regulation, that is, the Syrian refugees. That night was full of long social media discussions: on Facebook groups founded for migrant solidarity, on Twitter, in mail groups of refugee studies researchers as well as activists and lawyers. Everyone was trying to find a contact in the DGMM to learn the details or to talk to someone who might know what was going on. The regulation was rather unexpected for everyone and hinting at more authoritarian measures that might be imposed on people who already had a precarious (perhaps even deportable, see De Genova 2002) legal position in Turkey.

The surprise factor about the circular catching everyone implied an asymmetry in Turkey's government of asylum: non-Syrian refugees⁷ were *already* subject to restrictions (Sarı 2020; Biner 2014; 2016). Once relocated in satellite cities, non-Syrian refugees had to “sign in regularly at the DGMM and could not leave their city without travel permits issued by the DGMM” (Sari and Dinçer 2017, 65). In a context where refugees are not confined in camps, control over refugee mobility through sign-ins and travel permits in satellite cities⁸ were working as a substitute of spatially bounded (urban) zones of refugee settlement, “blurring the boundary between the camp and the city” (Sari and Dinçer 2017, 65).

Syrian refugees on the other hand, until the circular, had a relatively freer right to mobility within the country since they were not assigned to any “satellite cities” but were rather encouraged to self-settle in their city of choice. The discrepancy in the rights granted to the Syrian and non-Syrian refugees was that night implicitly acknowledged by people who were involved in the asylum landscape of Turkey either as researchers and/or as activists and lawyers. The difference, however, was not only about the discrepancy of rights granted to differently categorized groups under the asylum legislation. Official Islamic humanitarian discourse, applying exclusively to Syrian refugees, implicitly meant a more favorable treatment of Syrian refugees, and this asymmetry lay at the heart of the contemporary mobility government of Turkey.

The restriction *equalized* Syrian refugees with other refugee groups *in being subject to more conspicuous immobilizing regulations*. It was, therefore, approached with justifiable suspicion: was it the end of the state-led humanitarian discourses; was it the beginning of

⁷ Refugees who were granted the status of International Protection Status Holder under the law called Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP).

⁸ UNHCR defines the satellite city as follows: “Upon the completion of registration of the applications, asylum-seekers are assigned to reside in certain cities (so called “satellite cities”) by the Ministry of Interior pending decisions on their applications and search for durable solutions.” See UNHCR (n.d.) “The Practice of ‘Satellite Cities’ in Turkey”. Available at <https://www.unhcr.org/50a607639.pdf>

anti-migration rhetoric that had been sweeping Europe, the US, and Australia; or was it a rather untransparent foreign policy leveraging against the EU? These questions are still very much up to discussion to this day. But one thing became clear: following the EU-Turkey readmission agreement signed in March 2016 (only a few months after the issuance of the Circular in late August), these restrictions became only stricter along with the militarization and strengthening of border infrastructure both at the Turkish-Syrian border and at the Turkish-EU border (the border with Greece and Bulgaria). Moreover, from then onwards, the official discourse of humanitarianism was more and more called in question and the spectacle of welcoming, that had been found laudable by the international community until 2015, became increasingly intertwined with other and more visible securitizing and immobilizing policies.

At the time of the bus station event I related above, that is three years after the enforcement of the circular and two years after the notorious EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement, intra-country travel restrictions expanded from law enforcement to much more quotidian configurations of the society: civilian employees of bus and airline companies were tasked with requesting travel documents of non-Turkish speaking, “refugee-looking” (can be as well read as racialized) passengers and blocking their travel if necessary. In other words, many civilian actors aligned with the law enforcement and the asylum bureaucracy in multiplying the borders across the country and within the cities (see Mezzadra and Neilson 2013).

Of course, this is not to suggest that new regulations and checks stopped the intercity movement of refugees. The movement within the country continued, only with the increasing risk of being illegalized, apprehended by law enforcement and possibly deported. However, refugees have devised manifold ways to challenge, bend, or overcome such strategies. They sometimes decide to remain within the confines of the bounded spaces assigned to them and

self-organize their solidarity while other times they choose to fall into illegality by moving to other cities where they can have further access to means of their social and material reproduction. Giving up on legal status and being illegalized can, sometimes, offer further possibilities of mobility for refugees. In other times, however, it causes them to face the further risk of immobilization or forced mobilization through means of detention or deportation. In the face of new regulations too autonomous mobilities (Nyers 2015; De Genova 2021; Bojadžijev and Karakayali 2010) continued, as the European “refugee crisis” that supposedly erupted in the last quarter of 2015 has unambiguously shown. State efforts rather fell short to stop the actual mobility of migrant and refugee populations first within and later across the borders of the country. In response, Turkey –in cooperation with many other international actors, most notably the European Union (EU)– developed and advanced other strategies in the process of rigidifying the control over mobility, and other actors became involved. Law and border enforcement turned out to be only *one among many* actors, and strategies not only proliferated but also became much more subtle. The increasing pressure on movement did not only point to the attempts at decreasing the number of refugees who wanted to travel from one city to another; it also pointed to an even more conspicuous deployment of a certain strategy to which various sections of society subscribed:

immobilization of refugees within the country, the city of their residence, and in their everyday life.

It is in this respect I focus on the Islamic humanitarianism and (local) actors carrying out Islamic humanitarian practices and discourses and the ways in which it has become an immobilizing force in the lives of refugees. I focus almost exclusively on Syrian refugees as they have been the primary *beneficiaries* of humanitarian practices and discourses. To that end, I propose to use *immobilization* as a lens through which to see how refugees’ life experiences are conditioned through Islamic humanitarian relations which were long

entangled with other legal, spatial, economic, political, and social relations. I argue that these modalities of relating to refugees hinge on techniques of immobilizing (and arguably, differently mobilizing). Accordingly, one of the central arguments of this thesis is that immobilization (as a relation but also as an authoritarian political strategy which is always in the making and which is always to be challenged) was both enabled and implemented by Islamic humanitarianism, and it lies at the heart of the government of mobility of Turkey. As such, strategies of immobilization penetrate well into the geographical and symbolic borders of the nation-state. And although refugees are at the forefront facing, being subjected to, and challenging and subverting these strategies, there are gradations of control and capture of mobility and variations of the actors that control mobility: mobility is not unconditionally free for citizens as much as it is unconditionally unfree for refugees.

In discussing Israel's attempt to control Palestinian lives and mobilities, Hagar Kotef (drawing on Jeff Halper) uses the metaphor of the Japanese game Go: "Instead of defeating as in chess", she says, "in Go, you win by immobilizing your opponent, by gaining control of key points of a matrix so that every time s/he moves s/he encounters an obstacle of some kind" (Kotef 2015, 89). Drawing on this metaphor, I argue that immobilization, in the context I discuss, is not about complete (physical) confinement and enclosure. Arguing so would have been too reductionist given that humanitarianism does work to assist people who have been dispossessed and displaced (and faced various forms of forced mobilization and immobilization). However, as I will unpack throughout the thesis, the way Islamic humanitarianism works cannot be explicated solely within the framework of good deeds and religious forms of solidarity. As a social relation unfolding not independently of the contemporary Turkish context, which has been becoming increasingly authoritarian and immobilizing in various respects, Islamic humanitarianism (and the "spectacle of welcoming" it produced and promoted) generated various forms of relations wrought out of differently

intersecting genealogies (the most obvious of which is the intersection of genealogies of government of mobility and the rise of Islamic humanitarianism in the last decades of Turkey). And, at a more abstract level, these relations unfold in a nation-state context where refugees have been historically marked as the other to be immediately controlled and immobilized—at times by way of and along with compassion and care. Therefore, I contend, *immobilization* as a lens offers a much more complicated and nuanced story of how Islamic humanitarianism works in Turkey rather than constricting the analytical lens to binaries between *humanitarian vs. anti-migrant* and *hospitality vs. hostility*. Going back to the *Go* metaphor by Hagar Kotef, immobilization is thus about devising various (social, economic, political, and physical) obstacles (advertently or inadvertently) designed to keep people *in place* assigned to them by the sovereign power as the guarantor of hierarchies (Nicutar 2021).

Here, I do not take sovereign power over immobilization as the property over which the territorialized nation-state keeps the monopolistic hold but as a relation —albeit asymmetric and unequal one— through which to “secure a hierarchy” of mobility within that particular territory. Hierarchy is —or, more precisely, is attempted to be— secured through “the power to refuse the status of autonomy to some entities” (Nicutar 2021, 96). As a relation, sovereignty over mobility is constantly established and reestablished, its boundaries are always under negotiation, its point of application is moving and mutable. It unfolds “in a dialectic (although often asymmetric) relation with the forms of lives and activities upon which it claims to reign” (Cantat 2016, 15).

Therefore, operationalization of sovereignty in the sense of capturing various fluxes and movements (Cantat 2015) is, although intricately linked, not limited to state organizations. This brings me to the second argument of the thesis. I argue that immobilization, as in creating obstacles to or appropriating resources needed for mobility and mobilization, works

in more capillary forms within the society. One can discern myriad actors differentially empowered and differentially effective in developing and implementing strategies of immobilization: international and transnational organizations, state, law enforcement, capital, and non-state actors such as NGOs, humanitarian organizations and networks. In Turkey's asylum regime too, a multi-actor and much fragmented one (Sarı and Dinçer 2017, also see Chapter 1), all of them have assumed various roles in the government of mobility.

I will however zoom into a more localized form and limit my focus to Islamic humanitarianism in Denizli, a city at the southwest of Turkey, host to various refugee groups –predominantly Syrian, Afghan, and Iranian refugees and a considerably smaller population of Iraqi refugees. Throughout variously focused chapters I will demonstrate that Islamic humanitarianism is integral to the government of mobility and to the strategies of immobilization. These strategies include (but are by no means limited to) classification of refugees under ambiguous yet simultaneously individualizing and totalizing taxonomies; ideological political discourses; epistemic possibilities that act upon refugees without according to them a political position to express their claims and demands; and economic structures which narrow down migrants' and refugees' possibilities of social reproduction and economic activity to precarious and informal jobs.

Three conceptual notes for the rest of the thesis

Before moving on to a more detailed discussion on immobilization and its relationship to humanitarianism and Islamic humanitarianism, I would like to bring in a conceptual note on how I use the term humanitarianism to guide the rest of the thesis. First one pertains to the definition, which I will later discuss further to unsettle it. Humanitarianism is broadly understood as “immediate relief of suffering” (Barnett and Weiss 2008). Accordingly, it entails a rapid response to human-made or natural disasters in a limited period of time.

However, in contemporary Turkey, protracted conditions of displacement and impoverishment and their Islamist problematizations ensued the transfer of care to Islamic aid communities which have had access to large enough resources to claim welfare provision role. This, in turn, granted Islamic humanitarianism a key position in the government of marginalized populations, and temporally and spatially extended the way humanitarianism is conceived and practiced. In this extended form, humanitarianism has created a traditionalized and cultural form of interaction between aid-givers and aid-recipients.

Humanitarian relations this thesis presents refers to a form of relation that is less caused by “emergencies” than structural inequalities, protracted displacement, and material forms of dispossession. In line with the critiques regarding the blurred boundaries between development assistance and humanitarian aid, humanitarian practices in Denizli stand at the intersection of long-term welfare assistance and relief of suffering meshed with imaginaries of emergency (displacement and dispossession) and ideological responses to structural inequalities.

Second note pertains to the actors of humanitarianism. A quick perusal of the literature on humanitarianism and displacement reveals that humanitarian actors are usually described as wealthy nation-states, international organizations such as UNHCR and IOM, or transnationally renown NGOs such as MSF (Doctors without Borders), Oxfam, CARE and the like. Scholars have identified grand scale humanitarian practices as a “massive scale of business hub” (De Lauri 2016) or a “powerful industry of aid” (Bornstein and Redfield 2011). However, in places such as Denizli which do not capture the humanitarian attention of the international community, humanitarian aid is undertaken by local NGOs, networks of pious local businesspeople who channel their charitable activities to specific urban spaces, regularly gathering neighborhood collectives, or Qur’an reading groups mostly organized by

pious women. This form of humanitarianism resonates with the “vernacular humanitarianism” conceptualization of Carna Brković (2017). “Vernacular humanitarianism” is grounded in local context and informed by local rules of morality and is “embedded into very particular local frameworks of morality and sociality” (Brković 2017). Based on a similar constellation of humanitarianism, this thesis focuses on local humanitarian actors operating within the socio-economic and political context of Denizli. These actors, besides local frameworks of morality and charity, derive their motivation, and organizational and operational understandings from their faith, Islam (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011).

That brings me to the third note: I use the term “Islamic” to characterize a group of humanitarian networks. However, as opposed to much discussed and even more contested contrast between Islam and West, or Islamic and Judeo-Christian tradition, or better yet, between Islam and secularism, I by no means intend to reproduce a binary construct. I situate it within a national and transnational context where religion has “made a comeback” as it were (Zaman 2016) and become more and more influential in the configuration of the social, the political, and, albeit less visibly, of the economic. Along with the reinsertion of God, family, and community to the center of the political, Islamic humanitarianism thrived both as a moral imperative to remedy social maladies and as a way of cultivating moral, pious, and disciplined selves to be mobilized in the face of such maladies.

When religion is taken as a “transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon” (Asad 1993, 28), this binarism that I mentioned above becomes susceptible to being reproduced and reinforced and, maybe more importantly, work as an essentializing force. Instead, following Talal Asad, I set out to examine how, throughout the history of modern Turkey, but more particularly during the rise of Islamism as an alternative focus of the political realm, religion has been located and relocated within different configurations of power, how it has held the power that

“problematize” and reproblematicize certain issues, and how it has been pushed aside. In a similar vein to Asad, Saba Mahmood (Mahmood 2005; 2016) shows, in discussing the so-called “Islamic revival” in Egypt, that Islamic knowledge is both a mode of conduct and a set of principles and, as such, has been rendered central to the conception of self and moral agency that seeks to transform the self and the surrounding sociality around the self. Both scholars therefore offer to approach religion as an anthropological category, rather than a transhistorical and transcultural category. In line, I find it important to leave room for interpretation of various beliefs by their own devotees based on their own temporalities, geographies, and understandings of religion rather than imposing unchanging, ahistorical religious identities (Asad 1993). On another note, going back to Asad once again, it is important that this conception of self and moral agency in Mahmood’s theory is not exempted from or immune to altering configurations of power and do not develop in a vacuum that is stripped of economic, political, and social contexts.

In and through boundary struggles and socio-political developments, Islamic humanitarianism in Turkey flourished concurrently to and in ideological conjunction with consecutive Islamist governments and found its conditions of possibility in a neoliberalizing context. It has gained significance in shaping the way to make sense of and engage with social and political issues. (I discuss the genealogy of Islamic humanitarianism in Chapter 2). It has acquired various forms such as “state humanitarianism” that is directed towards instituting religiously informed humanitarian aid both as a diplomatic tool and as a domestic welfare policy instrument; political party humanitarianism centered around and recruited political support for Islamist parties –most notably AKP and its predecessor Welfare Party–; transnational civil society working in the same field with and positing themselves as a competitor to other –supposedly Western– humanitarian organizations; and local and more

dispersed forms or organizing that mobilizes voluntarily to address problems they identified in their own localities.

Although all these forms are intrinsic to the contemporary molding of Islamic humanitarianism and they are closely interlinked with each other, I focus on the last one: localized forms of Islamic aid mobilization. This does not mean that this form of vernacular humanitarianism does not carry traces of broader national and international contexts. It shares ideological underpinnings with the abovementioned forms of Islamic humanitarianism that has been part and parcel of Islamist local (municipal), national and international politics (Batuman 2018; Alkan-Zeybek 2012; Alkan 2021). Also, vernacular Islamic humanitarianism carries transnational undertones in its efforts to help and be part of the Ummah – transnational imagined community of Muslims (Zaman 2016).

That said, at first glance, Islam, as it has been interpreted and lived, function in at least four different ways in the context I discuss in this thesis. It works to inculcate organized compassion for fellow Muslims facing dire conditions; it mobilizes a well-disciplined volunteer labor power to organize aid; it works as a community building process through collectivizing rituals between aid-givers and aid-receivers; and, finally, it works as an epistemic and moral matrix through which (Muslim) self and (non-Muslim) others are comprehended and separated from each other (especially in relation to aid-deservingness and inclusion into the moral community).

Immobilization and Humanitarianism

So far, I have suggested three interrelated aspects of (strategies of) immobilization embedded in the government of refugee mobility in Turkey. First, I stated that immobilizing strategies are not spatially confined to the nation-state borders. It is true that controlling the mobility of migrants and refugees is attributed, first and foremost, to nation-state borders, border

securities, and attempts at halting their border-crossings. However, as the circular I related at the start of this Introduction shows, struggle over controlling the mobility continues well into the “inside” of the nation-state territory. Indeed, it extends between nation-state borders to cities, neighborhoods, and to even households. Second, I contended that immobilization is not restricted to physical mobility. Although it is one of the most important aspects implied in the government of mobility, it is also broadly conditioned by and related to other forms of immobilization – social, political, and economic, each of which I will discuss shortly. Finally, I argued that the nation-state and its institutions are not the sole actors devising and deploying strategies of immobilization. These can very well be operationalized by local and civil actors. In his discussion on globalization and global value regimes, Don Kalb (2013, 14) states, “the actual pressures of global value regime on concrete labor are often delegated to local actors, relationships, and histories”. Drawing on this suggestion, I aim to show how the expansion of strategies of immobilization of refugees are effectively delegated to various actors who have convergent as well as divergent ideological and political stances towards asylum, humanitarianism, and nation-state politics. I will discuss but one actor, Islamic humanitarian actors in Denizli, and their relationship to other actors operating within the government of mobility.

While arguing these three points, the critique in my mind is that refugee scholarship on Turkey has a skewed focus on physical mobility and immobility, the conceptual substantiation of which lies in the difficult-to-navigate legal regulations as the main pillar of the asylum regime and government of mobility. Of course, especially recently, the attention on physical immobility is not without a reason for theoretical and contextual reasons. Theoretically, recent interventions in studies on mobility underlined how crucial it is to focus on “uneven distribution of mobilities” to grasp the ways in which global, neoliberal, and political regimes work (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Sheller 2016; Kalir 2013). They call

for a more comprehensive account of “mobility regime” that examines “new confinements and modes of exploitation” as well as an analysis of “government of mobilities” which is “fundamental to making of classes, racial, sexual, able-bodied, and gendered subjects through what moves (and resting places) are allowed or denied” (Sheller 2016; also see Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006). In other words, the mobility regime is inherently linked to and conditioned by “unequal distribution of power resources” (Harvey 2007, cited in Kalir 2013) in spatial, social and economic configurations entailing a more attentive analysis.

Contextually, on the other hand, Turkey’s migration policies changing at a stunning pace called for further academic and activist discussion not only to make sense of what is going on but also to devise ways to challenge, subvert and, if possible, reverse it. In the coming months and years after the 2015 Circular mentioned above, refugee mobility (and immobility) became one of the key issues in the political agenda. People who are implicated in the field of asylum –researchers, activists, lawyers, NGO employees, humanitarians, and on top of everyone else, refugees themselves– were taken aback with the government’s salvos of changing policies day in and day out. (I outline these policy changes in detail and locate them in the larger history of government of mobility in Turkey in Chapter 1)

There are however various forms of immobilizing strategies that have been at play for a considerably long time to keep refugees (and other *potentially* undesirably mobile populations) *in place* not only physically but also economically, socially, and politically. These strategies, I contend, make up a less visible but equally prominent aspect of government of mobility in Turkey and entail further attention. The most recent and visible one was the EU fund (3+3 billion Euros) given by the EU to Turkey as part of the Readmission Agreement was allocated between public institutions and (national and international) humanitarian organizations. NGOs and INGOs became thus an indispensable

part of the Readmission Agreement in implementing various means of immobilization. EU funding conditionalities, pressure to sustain themselves through predominantly short-term project funding, and Turkey's authoritarian measures that amounted to arbitrarily shut down or threaten to shut down civil society organizations⁹ pushed (I)NGOs to comply with the rules imposed both by the Turkish state's government of mobility and by the provisions of the EU-Turkey agreement.

There are on the other hand other humanitarian efforts¹⁰ organized mostly by local actors and Islamic NGOs who managed to mobilize organized compassion towards (almost exclusively) Syrian refugees (some exception may be Uyghur, Uzbek, and Palestinian refugees). Although these networks are not obliged to abide by the aid conditionalities of transnational agreements, they have developed and acted upon their own methods of registration, aid conditionalities, and relating to refugees in ways that are no less immobilizing.

It might sound odd, perhaps even questionable, to have this much focus on immobilization in a thesis on humanitarianism that, as far as refugees concerned, by definition assumes to help refugees during and after the border crossings and to build a new life in places of destination. It might then be somewhat controversial to claim that what is essentially a moral imperative to help is fundamentally restricting potentialities of refugees for not only physical movement but also for practices of labor, community building, and political mobilization in terms of imagining, acting upon and demanding an alternative way of being, living, co-existing, and

⁹ Following the 15 July 2016 coup d'état attempt, the government declared a state of emergency on 20 July 2016 that would last two years, until 19 July 2018. In the mean time, through executive decrees, the government effectively securitized the civil society scene and closed down 146 foundation (*vakıf*) and 1427 associations (*dernek*). Among them were Turkish branches of international humanitarian organizations such as Mercy Corps as well as local associations working with refugees such as *Gündem Çocuk Derneği* (Agenda: Child Association). See Akça, Algül, Dinçer, Keleşoğlu and Özden, 2018: 8.

¹⁰ Here, I exclude solidarity networks which are built for, with, and by refugee networks and which voice and act upon political discourses of equality, human rights, workers' rights, women and children rights, and freedom of movement (which includes freedom to not move). The way I see solidarity is about opening a space for not only making people decide and access their own means of reproduction but also opens a space for socio-political demands for people to utter, articulate and act upon their own needs (possibly much larger than "basic needs").

moving as well as creating alternative forms of solidarity. However, besides solidarity and inclusiveness that are included in the moral imperative to help, there are ideological (and faith-based) convictions, hierarchically determined and interpreted needs and neediness, asymmetric knowledge production practices, and exclusion. Humanitarianism is a complex system of situated relations. It is, moreover, a form of government which simultaneously encompasses the interplay of politics of solidarity and politics of inequality (Fassin 2012). Humanitarianism in this respect is both universal as it claims to embrace humanity as politics of solidarity and situated as it always takes place where the suffering happens and upon the bodies the suffering is inflicted. Hence it is grounded on the acknowledgement of inequality between the suffering and the helping (Fassin 2010), possibly in a temporally limited and spatially bounded relation.

With the end of the Cold War, however, humanitarianism has mutated from the traditions of principled and limited life-saving efforts to a phase in which it can mean anything and everything – relief, human rights promotion, refugee protection, charity, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, development and even nation building (Piotukh 2013; Barnett and Weiss 2008). In the meantime, humanitarian discourses and practices are usually extended geographically and temporally –it, at least a part of it, returned “home” from remote geographies of disaster and emergency (Ticktin 2011). Notwithstanding the perpetuation of uneven (and post-colonial) distribution of disaster and emergency, protracted conditions of displacement¹¹ and dispossession have become more geographically scattered due to the co-

¹¹ Following Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar (2015) I offer to broaden the definition of ‘displacement as experienced by large numbers of people whether or not they have moved to another residence, city or country’ (Glick-Schiller and Çağlar 2015). In that respect ‘displacement includes not only mobilities including border-crossing migration but also the increasing precarity of those considered locals who experience various forms of dispossession under neoliberalization: unemployment, part-time employment (...) lower wage rates, forced relocation, loss of social status (...) and downward social mobility’ (Glick-Schiller and Çağlar 2015). Thus, it includes cultural dislocation, social disruption, material dispossession and political disenfranchisement (Hyndman 2000).

constitutive embeddedness and implicatedness of the so-called geographies of global South and global North. As a result and in response, humanitarianism acquired a central character and operated, in a more widespread and more conspicuous fashion, as a way of governing marginalized populations such as displaced peoples, urban poor, the sick, the elderly, the unemployed –in short, precarious lives (Agier 2010; Fassin 2012a).

The proliferation of populations to help (not only in remote geographies to direct compassion but also at “home”) is intimately related to shrinking provision of public services and mounting inequalities that characterize the neoliberal era. In this moment, I argue, humanitarianism has become a substitute for the provision of means of social reproduction. In her discussion on the “crisis of care”, Nancy Fraser (2017:25) states that in contemporary capitalism, organization of social reproduction is dualized: “commodified for those who can pay for it, privatized for those who cannot”. As a result, care work –the backbone of social reproduction not only in terms of the reproduction of capitalism itself but also for addressing material needs and developing meaningful relations– is externalized onto families and communities (Fraser 2017) among which are humanitarian organizations mobilized around a shared moral imperative and compassion for those who are displaced and dispossessed from their means of reproduction for a short period of time or permanently. In many parts of the world, including Turkey, many in refugee communities are part of this larger group. Humanitarianism, in this respect, is offered as one of the solutions to various overlapping “crises” –displacement, dispossession, care and many others– and in effect, transformed the way those issues are understood not as deeply and essentially political issues but as depoliticized “emergencies”.

There is, however, more to immobilizing strategies embedded in and deployed by humanitarianism than depoliticization, although it is undoubtedly a crucial aspect. I will lay

out two main mechanisms: First, postulated as a remedy for people who have been deprived of or dispossessed from their means of social reproduction, humanitarianism has acquired, quite literally speaking, a distributive capacity. Built on a moral imperative and based on voluntary activity, however, humanitarianism is much less subject to political contestation with regard to its distributive capacity. It keeps hold of considerable amount of resources collected through various fundraising mechanisms such as private donations, or grants by states or international organizations, and it has control over their distribution in accordance with their own method and understandings of needs assessment. It, then, becomes an authority for determining what legitimate needs are, who will be included in the category of people in need, how their needs will be addressed and allocated, and how to measure, as it were, the satisfaction of needs. However, this requires the translation of life experiences of aid-receivers (or aid-claimants) to administrable, measurable needs in a way to “individualize them as ‘cases’ and so militates them against collective identification. It imposes monological, administrative definitions of situation and need and so preempts dialogically achieved self-definition and self-determination” (Fraser 1987: 99-100).

Secondly, when I argued above that humanitarianism has been working almost as a substitute for means for social reproduction, I did not only mean social processes through which “food, clothing, and shelter are made available”. Social reproduction, taken in a more holistic manner, includes “activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships directly involved in maintaining life, on a daily basis and intergenerationally” (Brenner and Laslett, quoted in Bhattacharya 2017:6). It, then, goes beyond the subsistence activities, and becomes a “complex concatenation of social relations” (Bhattacharya 2017:8). Contemporary humanitarianism’s gradually increasing capacity to distribute such material means makes it implicated in this relational aspect of social reproduction and makes it a locus of power to shape “activities and attitudes, behaviors and emotions, and responsibilities and

relationships directly involved in maintaining life”. This being the case, moral imperative undergirding a specific form of present-day humanitarianism as well as its propositions of problematization and resolution of certain issues become situated in other, seemingly non-humanitarian, relations such as economic, political and social relations. Humanitarianism, in other words, conditions, a key set of social capacities which can be listed as, among others, “capacities available for birthing and raising children, caring for friends and family members, maintaining households and broader communities, and sustaining connections more generally” (Fraser 2017, 21).

How do different forms of immobilization work?

It is against this conceptual background that this thesis is shaped. To briefly summarize, throughout the thesis, I will look at three interlinked and co-existing forms of strategies of immobilization.

First, I look at the physical/spatial immobilization, that is, explicit and implicit ways of preventing physical mobility. Of course, this does not mean that refugee and migrant mobilities are stopped altogether. It rather means that some people, especially those who are marked by their “unwanted” and “undesirable” mobilities are rendered further subjected to various immobilization tactics and strategies as the mirror image of orderly mobilities that signify the “modern” forms of mobilities (Apostolova 2017). These strategies to physically immobilize “mobile” subjects are not peculiar to the present; they have developed as a response and reaction to “autonomous mobilities” within and at the borders of the territorialized sovereignty. In order to explicate how Turkey’s government of mobility has included, consolidated, and at times amended strategies of physical immobilization (as the co-constitutive nexus of mobilization, immobilization, forced mobilization which at times

conflated with forced settlement), I offer a genealogy and trace these techniques and strategies to the present-day politics of mobility.

Second, I look at political immobilization, that is, attempts at impeding refugees' ability to imagine, demand, and act upon alternative ways of living and moving as well as creating alternative forms of solidarity with other refugee or non-refugee groups. Political mobilization is not only about being able to speak but also being able to be heard (Asad 2003). It requires both, along with the resources that allow people to come together, being able to identify their demands and claims, to identify their commonalities and divergences. In its very literal sense, keeping people away from each other is a technology that keeps them away from the resources for mobilization. It is not simply about pitting them against each other in the sense that the European far-right movements pit migrants against impoverished workers of the West. This is also about reifying differences constructed along the axis of nation-state membership, ethnic origin, colonial histories as well as moral deservingness.

Finally, I look at economic immobilization, that is, curtailing and restricting refugees' access to means of reproduction socially and economically through various legal, political, ideological, and social strategies. Migrants, but more particularly refugees whose ways of return have been closed for various structural and subjective reasons, are readily dispossessed from their means of reproduction and, possibly, of production that they might once had. Curtailing the possibilities to rebuild means of reproduction and/or limiting their means to humanitarian aid simultaneously makes their subsumption into capitalist relations much easier since, "as Marx once said for the proletarians: [they are] 'free, unprotected, and rightless'" (De Genova 2010, 56). Economic immobilization, however, is not limited to the curtailment of means of reproduction of refugees. It includes devalorization of their labor power within capitalist value regimes through entrapment into cheap and unorganized

informal industrial or agricultural labor, or better yet, to permanent unemployment, and not allowing them to define and demand their own needs by imposing them predefined “basic” needs that must be unconditionally accepted. Throughout the thesis I trace how these forms of immobilization emerge in and put to work within Islamic humanitarian relations in Denizli.

This thesis is built upon a series of questions which attempt to delve into unlikely and contradictory coexistences. It takes its starting point from the question of how “spectacle of welcoming”, informed by the language of Islamic solidarity backed by the AKP government, can coexist with restrictive immobilizing responses to various forms of mobility. At the expense of presenting a somehow reductive picture, I think that political, scholarly, and quotidian discussions on refugees in Turkey have been constricted to two extreme opposites, both having blanket claims – although both are to differing extents apply. On the one hand, refugee reception is vehemently celebrated as the epitome of welcoming, as the apogee what a nation state can offer to refugee communities, which I have been calling “spectacle of welcoming”, informed by Islamic teachings of transnational solidarity and discourses of anti-Westernism. On the other hand, and to my mind more justifiably, refugee reception was tackled as a ferocious, arbitrary, intentionally ambiguous, and authoritarian system that does not grant rights and statuses to refugees while, at the same time, blocking their passage to Europe – in a sense, turning the entire country into a semi-open prison or camp for refugee communities.

Instead of arguing that the “spectacle of welcoming” is simply a rhetoric, masquerading solidarity while concealing the “actual” purposes that are “essentially” anti-migrant, racist, and inegalitarian, I set out to complicate the picture by taking seriously the premise that they co-exist. To that end, I delve into the ways which both are negotiated on the ground by

people who encounter with, cohabit common spaces and, to some extent, share everyday life with refugees. Although macro-level policies and discourses impact how more localized relations are lived, “actually existing relations” is not simply a repository of macro politics, nor is the locality a mere reflection, a scaled-down version of the nation-state scale.

The second question pertains to the workings of the “spectacle of welcoming” and discourses of Islamic humanitarianism. Once the idea behind the “spectacle of welcoming” is articulated as “solidarity among Muslims” –as it has been repeatedly done by the AKP government–, it does not only call for compassion for fellow Muslims but there emerges an abstract equality among Muslims by virtue of their shared religion, as dictated by that very shared religion (equality before Allah). The premise of abstract equality is rather effective in mobilizing compassion and in differentiating the Muslim self from the non-Muslim and/or the secular other (who can as well be a citizen of the Republic of Turkey). This is (again) an abstract difference that has proved effective in the culturalist discourses of the Islamist movement in Turkey. However, this abstract equality among Muslims is defied by the very nation-state formation which creates and entrenches differences between the citizen and the other, who are situated in an innately hierarchical ordering (Dzenovska 2013; L. Malkki 1994).

Considering that the Muslim humanitarians in Denizli did not seemingly have political positions that deny neither nation-statist hierarchies nor (*trans*national) Muslim solidarity, the question is then how Syrian refugees can be both an “insider” and an “outsider”, both a part of the culturalized “self” and the nationalized “other”. Based on this contradiction, I aim to unearth, and complicate, how Syrian refugees are perceived, represented, familiarized and defamiliarized in Islamic humanitarian relations in Denizli. And, of course, I aim to answer how and to what extent these relations act in tandem with or reproduce strategies of immobilization.

The final question, which is not unrelated to the first two, concerns humanitarianism which is premised on the idea of “humanity”, that supposedly universal and transgresses national boundaries. In the case of Islamic humanitarianism in Denizli, the idea of universal humanity existed, with a difference: it conflated with “geographies of persecution and suffering” that was seen to be predominantly “Muslim geographies” (under the oppression of Western powers or Westernized leaders). Then, the primary population to give a hand was the transnational community of Muslims – the Ummah. In any case, Syrian refugees could easily be a part of the Ummah: they were (Sunni) Muslim and they were persecuted by an (Westernizing/secularizing) oppressive leader; they were thus welcomed. Their inclusion by the Islamic humanitarian community had another consequence: it pointed out to the mobilization capacities and virtues of the humanitarians, proving their value as citizens and rendering them *deserving citizens* who have laid claim over the public and citizenship. Then, the question is how Islamic humanitarianism, premised on transnational commonality and solidarity of Muslims, can entrench a politics of citizenship that was gradually closed to many others during the increasing authoritarianization of Turkey under the AKP rule?

In other words, the question that runs through the entire thesis is how, under which conditions, and through which means *abstract* figures such as (transnational) fellow Muslim, the refugee, the citizen, and the humanitarian coexist with and get negotiated in historically, culturally, and politically *situated* relations?

Nicholas De Genova, Glenda Garelli, and Martina Tazzioli (2018:248) invite their addressees (I imagine it is not limited to migration and refugee scholarship) to take on a challenging task:

“Thus there is an urgent need to decouple the image of the refugee from the dominant ideological equation of refugee-ness with nonchoice and the governmental distribution of refugees as subjects who cannot but accept any and all obligatory

forms of relocation and conditions of hosting, converting their forced displacement with a subsequent condition of less violent but no less coercive emplacement and immobilization.”

I am, by all means, far from claiming that this thesis has fully assumed this challenging task, not to mention completing it. My best hope is that this thesis can contribute to the existing scholarly and activist discussions by looking at and making sense of how and through which means this image of the refugee in Turkey *becomes coupled with* physical, political, and economic immobilization.

Outline of the thesis

In order to give a more detailed account of these unlikely co-existences of seemingly contradictory opposites, I bring in an ethnographic account of a locality in which these relations transpired. Before that, I first look at the historical conditions of possibility of the growing Islamic humanitarian field in Turkey and within the government of mobility. Later, I zoom in to Denizli, to account for the localized histories and present-day conditions of Islamic humanitarianism. Next, I focus on different modalities of immobilization, although they all are rather interlinked and coexisting. Although I primarily focus on relations with Syrian refugees as they are the primary group of refugees to be included in Islamic humanitarianism at times I bring other marginalized groups including non-Syrian refugees into a comparative perspective to demonstrate the ideological and moral workings of Islamic humanitarianism.

The thesis starts with laying out the conditions of possibility of today’s government of mobility in Turkey, of which Islamic humanitarianism is an important part. Chapter 1 and 2, in this respect, set the scene to account for how immobilization and Islamic humanitarianism co-exist in Turkey’s modern-day government of mobility. Chapter 1 focuses on the legal and administrative production of the refugee figure. It zooms in to certain legal regulations,

institutions, and “political traditions” embedded in the government of mobility. It argues, first, that historically the government of mobility—as a central attribute of the nation-building process—stood at the intersection of forced displacement and forced settlement of certain populations differentially categorized under nationalized matrix of political power. I show that historically, Turkey’s government of mobility was to a considerable extent shaped by strategies to keep people *in their places* although at times this entailed their literal displacement. Even after the government of mobility was internationalized following the ratification of the 1951 Geneva Convention and much more so following the Europeanization of the asylum regime during the EU Accession Process throughout early 2000s and 2010s, these historical aspects continued to make their presence felt, both in legal regulations and in the ways by which refugees are perceived, represented, and related to.

Chapter 2 investigates another aspect of the mobility regime of Turkey: humanitarian production of the refugee. With the coming of Syrian refugees starting in 2011, legal and institutional regulations regarding mobility government were entangled with selective and Islamically informed humanitarianism, further revealing the uneven constitution of the mobility regime. That is to say, despite internationalized migration regime that conditions existing legal framework of asylum, humanitarian production of the refugee made the refugee figure known through their eligibility for and inclusion in Islamic humanitarianism.

However, I bring in humanitarian production of the refugee not only to demonstrate uneven and differential treatment of various refugee groups in Turkey. I also discuss it to show how, through inclusion in Islamic humanitarianism, Syrian refugees were situated in other marginalized groups of the society who have been governed through Islamic regime of charity for a long time. In order to demonstrate that, I gave a rather long account of how Islamism and Islamic regime of charity have come to assume a central position in the

political trajectory of the country, and how they have become loci of power in problematizing and offering solution to certain issues, most notably displacement and impoverishment.

Chapter 3, zooming into Denizli, maps out the spatial implications of Islamic humanitarian aid to refugees and other marginalized populations in the city. These spatial configurations are to a large extent related to the urban structuring of the city and political and social relations that are co-constitutive of urban restructuring. I discuss Denizli as a “charity society”, as a “refugee-hosting city”, and as “an abode of (benevolent) informalities”. This chapter, in a sense a transition from the national scale genealogy to localized relations, traces the urban, social and economic structuring of the city which enabled certain forms of labor relations to flourish concurrently with humanitarian relations. I show throughout the chapter that Islamic relations of aid have played a significant role in the spatial concentration of displacement and impoverishment in certain neighborhoods where the majority of aid relations and Islamic humanitarian socialities take place.

Chapter 4 takes its point of departure from the contradiction I outlined throughout, but more particularly, at the end of Chapter 2. This contradiction is analyzed as a constitutive aspect of Islamic humanitarianism in Denizli: the one between the abstract figure of displacement (i.e. the refugee) and the abstract figure of impoverishment (i.e. the aid-receiver). In order to include Syrian displacement in Islamic humanitarianism while excluding the displacement other refugee groups face, “the refugee” was drawn as an abstract moral/political figure which relives and reinvigorates Islamic narratives in efforts to challenge or rid of (religious) persecution. However, this abstraction -albeit amounting to politicization of the refugee figure and the humanitarians aiding them- immediately encounters with and is challenged by another abstract figure—the abstract figure of impoverishment: refugee as the aid recipient who experiences various forms of losses which make them incapacitated for political and moral positionings

which render humanitarian aid not only a tool for providing needs but also addressing moral defilements refugees might have been going through *only* by virtue of their refugee position. Then, Islamic humanitarian networks face two coexisting yet contradictory conceptions of refugeehood: refugee as a moral/political figure and refugee as a figure of humanitarian aid (a figure defined by its dependency and lack): moralized and demoralized, politicized and depoliticized at the same time.

Chapter 4 gives an ethnographic account of how Islamic humanitarian networks in Denizli worked and negotiated it. It discusses, facing this contradiction, how Islamic humanitarianism located Syrian refugees in local aid relations. I bring in two main mechanisms of postulating constitutive differences and they work in tandem, although sometimes in contradictory ways. The first one is situating loss (of state and national community) at the heart of producing knowledge of the refugee. The second one is almost Orientalizing culturalist discourses which postulate national differences between the Turkish and the Syrian communities.

Chapter 5 looks at how Islamic humanitarianism has assumed a significant place in labor relations in Denizli and how incorporation of refugees in the informal sector has been presented as part of humanitarian relations. I set out to discuss that Islamic humanitarianism in the city broadened its scope to include labor relations of the locality. Promotion of work, waged and unwaged, was not only made into a way of assisting refugees, but it also endorsed moral values attached to work and productivity.

Chapter 6, the final chapter, sets out to discuss the flipside of overlapping and intersectional immobilizations of refugees, migrants, and locals who receive humanitarian assistance: which subjectivities are mobilized as a result of and in the process of immobilization of refugees and migrants through relations of humanitarianism. I argue that Islamic humanitarianism, as a discourse and practice, has reinforced, if not constituted, another subjectivity: an active,

humanitarian citizen who aligns with the nation-state policies not by excluding migrants or upholding nationalist discourses, but by welcoming migrants and refugees in an attempt to subsume them under a nation-state centric ideological formation.

Methodology

The entire story of this thesis –its journey as it were since it travelled with me back and forth to many different ideational contexts and universes– has started in 2013 at a time when I honestly had no interest whatsoever in migration, humanitarianism, or Islamism. I was, however, a broke and precarious grad student in Ankara working at various projects. I was finding jobs in very random ways, through a friend or a friend of a friend who happened to know a project looking for junior researchers to do the field research. On one such occasion, I was invited by a friend to work on a project “about Syrian refugees”. It was as vaguely defined by my friend as “about Syrian refugees”. It was a new topic, no one really knew anything except that an increasingly violent war had erupted in Syria and many people were crossing the Turkish border to flee war. They were welcomed by the government, then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu were giving speeches about the Islamic duty that the Muslims of Turkey should shoulder for a short period of time as the Syrians would return to their country after the peace was secured in no time. In other words, the migration scene constricted in temporariness was spectacularized in a way to block alternative political debates. Syrian refugees were officially called “guests” underlining the temporariness of Syrians’ stay in the country and there was literally no legal framework to be used to offer another name for Syrian refugees, maybe except for “foreigner” which sounded even more alienating.

The research was about how the Turkish society perceived Syrians (two other unbelievably vague categorizations). In September 2013, I found myself thrown into a field that I had no

previous knowledge of. I became a part of a research team working in various cities, including cities bordering Syria and metropolises such as Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir. While I was familiarizing myself to the subject both in the field and through “desktop research”, I became more and more intrigued in the complicated and intricate politics behind the migration institutions and their relations with each other and the messiness of the legal framework (which was soon to be amended for a more comprehensive legislation). Nonetheless, it was still yet another paid job for me which I would probably forget after the project finished.

If I had to narrow it down to one origin story, I would say, an encounter stuck in my mind as a big question. Besides having interviews with refugee and local people, I was also tasked with interviewing NGOs working in the field of migration. In one such interview that I had with an Islamic humanitarian organization, the person I talked to told me many interesting things, particularly about their opposition to Western humanitarianism “that had been swarmed into the country”, and to the government policies for cooperating with the West. His steadfast anti-Westernism had reached to all other humanitarian organizations –Islamic or not– working to “help Syrians to stay in the country as the West wanted” instead of encouraging them to save their countries. Nonetheless, he still regarded his organization as a humanitarian one, which derived their humanitarian motivation from political convictions as it seems. This organization was taking his advice. A part of their aid activities was providing healthcare and to that end they had opened healthcare clinics at the border zones that were neither official nor unofficial –clinics were unregistered but the government back then was tolerating as long as these services took the burden off the public sector providing for refugees. What the person told me however was beyond the tolerated form of irregularity. He openly said that they were reserving their healthcare and aid services to warriors fighting in Syria and against the al Assad regime, and after a period of treatment and recovery, they were

sending the warriors back to Syria while at the same time taking upon the role for the care of their families.

I left the interview perplexed because what he had just told me was not what I expected to hear but even more than that, he was telling me an open violation of international law which was apparently not unknown to the state. His attitude in recounting these was confusingly undeterred and confident. When I reported what he told me, no one in the research team seemed particularly interested, not even surprised as though everyone already knew it. In the end, the interview was not even included in the research report and following publications, but confusion caused by it remained with me. Along with it came a growing interest in the field of migration and how Islamist discourses deployed by the government were going beyond the official rhetoric of welcoming but were actually conditioning responses to refugees. Therefore, the politics shaping such responses, to my mind, required further attention.

Two years later, when I started this research in 2015, I thought I was going to find a similarly radical attitude, but things had changed both in Turkey and in Syria. The possibility of toppling the al-Assad regime in the foreseeable future was much less likely; the war had already been internationalized and become a protracted conflict with no prospect of ending. Syrian refugees had already been situated in both the language and the practices of Islamic humanitarianism and –in many respects– had been situated along with other marginalized communities of Turkey. Also, in the meantime, the government of mobility had become more complicated and more nuanced thanks to new legal regulations and newly established institutions. 2015 was also marked by “refugee crisis” making Turkey and its borders the headline of international political agenda.

In 2017, when I could actually start the fieldwork, things had changed even more. Official humanitarian approach was being widely questioned, anti-migrant rhetoric had become more and more heard among pro-government and opposition circles, and on top of that the notorious EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement was signed in 2016, causing great anxiety and controversy. And, domestic politics had become all the more securitized due to the failed coup d'état attempt on 15 July 2016.

At times, I felt that it is impossible to navigate myself amid such drastic changes. At those times, I noticed that working on as politically ever-changing and chaotic a context as Turkey, one can find herself stuck in between looking for certain historical origins to trace a linear line of change or to discover a lineage and following the changes as though every single change has meant to deflect the policies into a totally new route. It was during these processes of thought that I decided to somehow reverse the gaze and –sometimes, challenging my own political positions– compelled myself to see Islamic humanitarianism not as a *problem* but as a *solution* to what has been postulated as problems in contemporary Turkey's government of mobility. If humanitarianism is about bringing compassion and care to the center of contemporary politics (Fassin 2012; Ticktin 2011), “especially when enacted under the threat of emergency or crisis, as solutions to problems of inequality, exploitation, and discrimination” (Ticktin 2011: 3), then which problems were to be delegated to the *care* of humanitarianism and which problems were to be excluded from it, and under what conditions entailed a further analysis. Islamic humanitarianism, then, was not only a solution to issues to be governed as problems; but also, it was an *ideologically thick yet still very much permeable* line drawing the boundary between variously designed solutions in contemporary Turkey. It was also effective in differentiating populations from each other, although at times it was difficult to tell the difference between the *problems* these differentiated populations faced, except for the *who* of the suffering. Islamic humanitarianism, then, was not only a solution to

what has been problematized, but it was a solution *to a select* group of problems faced by a *select* group of populations.

Some differentiations were rather manifest: for instance, between similar “problems” faced by the Kurdish Syrian refugees and the Sunni Arab Syrian refugees, one was militarized/securitized/intercepted at the borders and the other was humanitarianized respectively. Besides them, on the other hand, there were much more localized ways of workings of Islamic humanitarianism as a solution. It is these localized and provisional renditions which had seeped into the capillaries of the everyday drew me towards ethnographic research. Ethnographic research gains its peculiarity and significance through its ability to delve into the sites of meaning making by individuals and/or collectivities. By meaning making, it is meant the ways in which actors make sense of the context within which they inhabit, how and why they conduct in particular ways they do (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2015; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). As such, it drew to me look at *encounters* between what has been problematized and what has been offered as a solution as well as what has been neglected, overlooked, excluded perhaps not manifestly but by being left out of the boundaries of encounters.

In her book *Strange Encounters*, Sara Ahmed argues that “the stranger is an effect of processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities, including communities of living (dwelling and travel), as well as epistemic communities”. For her such processes should be understood as “encounters” in order to draw attention to the two aspects of relational processes that define one’s subjectification in a society: first, such processes are never fully determined; they are always open to surprises, contingencies and conflicts. Second, encounters are never isolated;

they encompass the multiplicity of subjectivities, histories, and spaces behind what makes encounters possible. In Sara Ahmed's (2000:8) terms:

Encounters are meetings, then, which are not simply in the present: *each encounter reopens past encounters*. Encounters involve, not only the surprise of being faced by an other who cannot be located in the present, they also involve conflict. The face-to-face meeting is *not* between two subjects who are equal and in harmony; the meeting is antagonistic. The coming together of others that allows the 'one' to exist takes place given that there is an asymmetry of power.

It is in this respect, I aimed at bringing in an ethnographic approach to humanitarian encounters not only between the giver and the receiver but also in many other relations where humanitarianism –ideologically, politically, socially, and economically– serves as a medium through which to make sense of these encounters. At some points, I had to make sense of *non-encounters*, meaning unseeing the suffering of people whose problems were not deemed compatible with the current problematizations. In other words, I worked to conduct my fieldwork to explicate –first to myself and to a broader academic audience, but more importantly so that we could bring the political back to the way we understand humanitarianism– how humanitarian encounters unfold at the point of their happening, with what past encounters intentionally or unintentionally brought into the present, and how these encounters open or close possibilities of transformation.

To this end, I have conducted a year-long fieldwork in Denizli, Turkey between January-December 2017. I have collected the field data through semi-structured interviews with the volunteers and workers of especially Islamic humanitarian networks. I have also conducted interviews with state actors in the migration management, municipalities and local partners of international organizations such as UNHCR and Mercy Corps. Besides interviews, I have attended the regular and one-time aid-giving events and I have had a chance to accompany humanitarian networks' house visits to the aid-receiving households to be able to observe the encounters on spot and in-time. Moreover, how these encounters are articulated and narrated

by primary actors of humanitarian networks provided me with the background of these relations I will try to map out.

I would like to mention a few notes pertaining to the scope of this research. Firstly, I conducted this research during the state of emergency in force between 20 July 2016 to 16 July 2018. The state of emergency was declared following the attempted coup d'état by a faith-based organization, the Gülen Movement, a previously well-known and reputable Islamic political organization also involved in charity. This being the case, all Islamic networks (civil society organizations, neighborhood associations, humanitarian NGOs, etc.) found themselves in a highly securitized environment.

Additionally, the government was pointing at the “Western powers” as accomplices and instigators of the attempted coup d'état (Sarı and Dinçer, 2017). In such a setting, I was approached quite warily. I was coming from a “European” university and asking questions about how organizations were establishing relations with refugees and what aid activities they envisioned. This, I realized, casted doubt on me and my research. A couple of times I was introduced as a “journalist” in meetings even though I had informed everyone more than once that I was doing my research on humanitarianism and these interviews and field visits were to be confidential and not public.

Moreover, the state of emergency and its political repercussions paved the way for further repressive measures and centralization of politics at the hands of the ruling party. Not only Islamic political and civil society networks were securitized. The government “also seems to use the emergency rule to also criminalize, silence, and eradicate other opponents, including pro-Kurdish, Alevi, LGBTI, feminist, and leftist politicians, academics, journalists, and activists” (Sarı and Dinçer, 2017). Any articulations of opposing ideas were readily featured as “elements of terrorist organizations”. Even people who were not content with certain

aspects of the country's migration regime did not wholeheartedly share those ideas with me. For that reason, it was important for me to supplement interviews with actual encounters between humanitarian network actors and refugees. This, I hope to have compensated, through actively participating in the house visits, one-time, or regular aid deliveries.

Along with these relatively macro-political reasons, another part of the story concerns my position. I was coming from a different social and political background – a “secular looking” young woman from a university in a European country which most approached suspiciously. Thus, the distance between myself and the actors in the field sometimes seemed unbridgeable to me, even in the moments I felt very much welcomed. By distance I mean not only the differentiations in our lifestyles, everyday relations, and practices, but also in terms of the political, moral, and ethical approaches as far as the migration regime is concerned. However, I was also aware that it is not only our perspectives regarding the migration regime that differentiated us. Borders drawn between me and the interviewees were reflections of the broader political entanglements which locate each of us at different corners of a bipolarized politics. Recent political debates in Turkey reduced political engagement to bipolarized and, so to speak, mutually exclusive boulevards: Muslim and secular, pious and non-believer, and so on. Sometimes, these poles did not allow me to ask the questions I had been struggling with. Similarly, the interviewees politely avoided some of my questions, laying claim to “mutual unintelligibility”. Although for most of the time I felt welcomed, what I came to realize at the end of the fieldwork was that borders as well as the potentialities of mutual intelligibility between researcher and interviewees are conditioned very much by the political, social, and economic dimensions that are far beyond the goodwill of either party.

Conducting ethnographic research brings along ethical considerations. During my fieldwork, besides interviews, I was not only made part of meetings where aid-receivers' conditions and

needs were discussed, I was also invited in the everyday as well as living spaces of so many people. Therefore, a further attention was warranted. In order to observe their anonymity, I identified not only the names of my interlocutors but also NGOs and humanitarian networks they worked.

Chapter 1: Turkey's Government of Mobility and Legal and Administrative Production of the Refugee

“We opened our doors to our siblings who were fleeing from conflicts in Iraq and Syria and mobilized our means. We now host more than 1.5 million people in our country. Why? This is our understanding of humanity, conscience, and Islam. That's why we did it. We could not leave them to the danger of terrorist acts, bullets, bombs. We could not leave them to murderous Assad regime. If they emigrated to this country, we were obliged to be an Ensar¹². And we did it. And we still do [...] At present there are only 130,000 asylum seekers in Europe, and Europe complains about it. But only in Turkey, there are 1.5 million asylum seekers. This is our difference compared to the West (Erdoğan, 2014, quoted in Öztürk 2017 emphasis added)

The arrival of Syrian refugees in Turkey started in April 2011, following the earliest armed conflicts that would eventually escalate to a protracted civil war. In August 2011 the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Ahmet Davutoğlu, respectively, pointed to 100.000 refugees as the “psychological threshold”. They argued that the limit of Turkey’s hospitality could not exceed hosting 100.000 Syrians, and that if that number increased, the international community, particularly the UN, should consider creating a buffer zone at the border and provide shelter to refugees in the temporary accommodation centers within Syria.¹³ After a decade, according to the figures provided by DGMM, as of July 23, 2021, Turkey hosts 3.6 million Syrian refugees.¹⁴ The psychological threshold was surpassed a long time ago, indeed today Turkey is named by UNHCR as the country hosting the largest refugee population in the world. However, by the time, the official

¹² “Ensar” is the Turkish version of “Ansar” (host, in Arabic) but here Erdoğan refers to the “Ansar-Muhajir” parable that constituted the backbone of Islamic interpretation of forced migration. The parable will be discussed later more in detail.

¹³ Burcu Çalık (16 October 2012). “Mülteci sayısı psikolojik sınırı aştı”. *Sabah*. Available at <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2012/10/16/multeci-sayisi-psikolojik-siniri-asti>. Accessed on August 1, 2021.

¹⁴ Directorate General of Migration Management. Distribution of Syrians Under Temporary Protection by Year. Available at <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>. Accessed on July 28, 2021.

response by the Turkish government had taken a humanitarian turn shaped by open door policy (between 2011-2015) and the provision of protection, shelter, and social assistance to Syrian refugees.

For some time, roughly until 2015, this humanitarian approach and the open-door policy was found laudable by the international community, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the academic milieu in Turkey and beyond. In a global context where migrants and refugees have been equated with “intruders”, “terrorists”, or “enemies of Western civilization” by populist rhetoric (Johnson 2020), Turkey seemed to have developed an alternative, welcoming approach, albeit no less populist. While analyzing the reasons for this difference between Turkey and the (imagined geography of) the West, numerous migration scholars argue that Islamic populism (Hadiz 2016) that has been substantively on the rise in Turkey since the beginning of the AKP period (2002) has played an important role in differently locating (Syrian) refugees in the political discourse compared to Western countries (Yanaşmayan, Ustubici, and Kasli 2019; Kasli and Yanasmayan 2020; Kaya, Robert, and Tecmen 2020). To summarize, in the scholarship it is argued that populism in Turkey is radically distinct from the anti-immigration populism of the West. Turkey has flexibly defined “the people” in a way to selectively include Syrian (Sunni Muslim) refugees while excluding “the others” who are so-called Westernized Turkish citizens as well as ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities in Turkey although they hold Turkish citizenship. Therefore, it is argued, Islamic populist politics in Turkey was grounded not upon the nationalist and nativist logic which stigmatizes “the foreigner” as the intruder but assumed a “civilizationist” logic (Yanaşmayan et al. 2019) designating Turkey as the paternalist protector of the Ummah – transnational imagined community of Muslims. Hence, in academic debates, Turkey is located at the latter end of “two global trends: the rise of anti-immigrant populism in Western countries and Islamic populism in predominantly Muslim countries” (Yanaşmayan et al. 2019: 39).

However, anti-immigrant rhetoric and populism do exist and is gaining prevalence every year in Turkey. Main opposition parties and some media institutions with close ties to these opposition parties effectively fuel anti-Syrian rhetoric transmitting discriminatory messages to the audience sometimes through misinformation. For a very long time, for instance, one of the biggest challenges facing pro-migrant activist organizations, NGOs, human rights organizations, and human-rights based journalism has been to correct the widely believed misinformation that is also backed by the nationalist opposition parties.¹⁵ One such example is about the “unearned” and “undeserved” support Syrians are allegedly granted. The discourses such as “Syrians can go to universities without taking any exam”, “Syrians are given priority in the hospitals”, “Syrians are granted monthly payments (the figures always change but it is usually higher than the minimum wage for Turkish citizens)” fuel hostility that can easily take the form of physical violence and lynching.¹⁶ On social media, too “at the cusp of mundane and dramatic events”, anti-migrant discourses amounting to hate speech often go in circulation with hashtags #ülkemesuriyeliistemiyorum (I don’t want Syrians in my country) and #refugeesnotwelcome in the digital mediascape (Ozduzen, Korkut, and Ozduzen 2021). Transnationally familiar depiction of refugees as “criminals”, “uncivilized”, “aid-dependent groups” benefiting from Turkey’s resources, “illegal border transgressors” “cowards who did not fight for their countries and instead fled to Turkey” is shared by a considerably big population of the society (Aydınlı 2020).

Despite the prevalence, neither anti-migrant hate speech and racism nor misinformation are effectively addressed by the government. There are, to my mind, arguably two reasons behind

¹⁵ Mülteci-Der. (n.d.). “Suriyelilerle ilgili doğru bilinen yanlışlar”. Available at <https://multeciler.org.tr/suriyelilerle-ilgili-dogru-bilinen-yanlislar/>

¹⁶ Erkiş, Orhan. (December 29, 2021). “Mültecilere Nefret Söylemi Fiziksel Şiddete Dönüşüyor.” *Voice of America*. Available at <https://www.amerikaninsesi.com/a/multecilere-nefret-soylemi-fiziksel-siddete-donusuyor/6374392.html>; Günaydın, Abdülhakim (April 15, 2021). “Sığınmacılara yönelik ‘nefret söylemi’ sürüyor”. *Independent Türkçe*. Available at <https://www.indyrturk.com/node/345316/haber/siginmacilara-yonelik-nefret-soylemi-suriyor...-umhd-baskan-demir-artik-mazlum>

this indifference to easily inflammable social reaction. Firstly, in doing so, the government can keep the space for changing policies open for itself. That is, the ruling party's migration and asylum policies are not unconditionally supportive or human rights based; they are often fickle, oscillating between provision of protection and threats to send Syrians back to their countries, which I will discuss shortly. At times of policy change, anti-migrant rhetoric can be easily deployed as "the majority opinion", in a way to allow the government a flexible populism in between two ends of migration rhetoric. It also effectively disregards other solidarity groups by, for and with refugees. Secondly, coming predominantly from the opposition front, anti-Syrian discourses are effectively translated by the government into a criticism against itself and its policies. For instance, in a newspaper interview, the head of International Refugee Rights Association, an Islamic human rights NGO with close ties to both the government and other pro-government Islamic humanitarian networks, says "The main reason behind their racism is not Syrians; they want to criticize the current government instrumentalizing Syrians".¹⁷ This reinterpretation allows the government to reiterate its populist discourses against the opposition, depicting the opposition parties as against Turkey's growth and empowerment in the international realm as a benevolent country. As a result, the anti-immigrant rhetoric, although quite prevalent in media and political discourses including those of the ruling party (see Sunata and Yıldız 2018; Hrant Dink Vakfı 2019), is concealed behind the civilizationist populist discourses.

I argue that the analyses juxtaposing the anti-immigrant populism of the West and civilizationist Islamic populism of Turkey might create a false dichotomy between intimately related and interdependent geographies whose migration policies are defined in relation to each other. Especially after the notorious EU-Turkey Readmission agreement in 2016, this

¹⁷ Günaydın, Abdulhakim (April 15, 2021). "Sığınmacılara yönelik 'nefret söylemi' sürüyor". *Independent Türkçe*. Available at <https://www.indytrk.com/node/345316/haber/siginmacilara-yonelik-nefret-soylemi-suruyor...-umhd-baskani-demir-artik-mazlum>

interdependency became all the more evident. Maintaining and reproducing this dichotomy can also fail to make sense of policy changes of the Turkish state in migration management. It also poses the risk of reproducing dominant geographical distinctions within a rather Eurocentric framework.

Following the Readmission Agreement, Turkey's role in transnational migration management has been shaped by a double effort: keeping *outside* the refugees who are coming from the southern and eastern borders of the country and keeping *inside* the refugees who are mobilized towards the European borders of Turkey. This double effort mobilizes different institutions and discourses, and how each unfolds does not neatly fit into the conceptualization of "Islamic populism". The "keeping outside" efforts resorted to strengthening and militarizing border management and erecting walls at the Turkish-Syrian border. "Keeping inside" efforts were achieved not only through the militarized western border but also through public services provisions and humanitarian aid to a group of refugees selected based on certain criteria.

Although the terms of the Readmission Agreement required Turkey to keep refugees inside the country and halt their movement towards the western border of the country, populist discourses cherishing Turkey's moral primacy about refugee reception did not end. Approximately one year after the signing of the notorious EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement, on 2 March 2017, at the 4th International Symposium on Ombudsman Institutions held in Ankara, the main topic to be discussed was determined to be "Migration and Refugees". President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gave an opening speech in which he, as he usually does, juxtaposed Turkey's welcoming attitude towards refugees with the Western countries' anti-immigrant policies. Accusing the West of not taking its fair share of the burden and turning a blind eye to the persecution going on in the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia, Erdoğan continued:

"I have expressed this before; Turkey is a *belde-i emin* [a safe space]; a land of trust for the oppressed people (...) It is a 'country of those who wipe the tear without the eye knowing'. Our nation embraces everyone who comes to its door, regardless of

language, religion, and ethnicity, and saves a place for them at their table. We believe that the way to thrive is to make live, we believe in the blessing of giving and sharing.” (Erdoğan, 2 March 2017)

All these discourses were the markers of the humanitarian turn, which at a very early stage framed the way Syrian migration was to be governed. They were coupled with the existing legal framework which refuses granting refugee status to non-European refugees. Turkey, one of the very first signatory states of the 1951 Geneva Convention, applies “geographical reservation” and limits the granting of refugee status as put forward by the convention to people originating from Europe.¹⁸ Therefore, a vast population named under “non-European” are not eligible for refugee status in Turkey, instead they are granted various statuses (or no status at all), such as “conditional refugee”, “subsidiary protection”, and “temporary protection”.¹⁹ Each of these statuses accord differentiated rights and entitlements to people who hold them. Besides the legal status, however, humanitarian approach was afforded only to the Syrian refugee population, although only selectively. Moreover, it must be noted, the humanitarian approach, albeit seemingly based on Muslim solidarity, is not immune to the nation-state centrism dominating the contemporary world politics. It operates within the geographic and symbolic borders of the nation-state and is shaped accordingly.

Combined, lack of legal status and humanitarianism today seem to have marked the refugee regime of Turkey which faced the largest refugee population in the modern history of the country since 2011 to date. What went largely unseen at the time was the shift between discussions on the “psychological threshold” to “hosting the largest refugee population in the world”. This shift, which would later be followed by many other political and discursive changes vis-à-vis Syrian refugees, developed as a response to the refugee movement that exceeded the control of the Turkish state in terms of both intensity and volume. These policies,

¹⁸ Although it is an ambivalent concept politically and geographically, here in the Convention, “Europe” refers to the Council of Europe member states.

¹⁹ See Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (2013).

whether humanitarian or legal, are derived from a “reactive power” which “constantly attempts to seize already existing activities and flows” and “tries to appropriate” mobilities and accompanying social and political activities (Cantat 2016:15), including struggles for legal status, physical mobility, labor rights and subsistence.

By identifying Turkey’s state responses to Syrian refugees as “reactive”, I join a migration scholarship which argues that border control, immigration control and relevant policies are secondary to movement (*inter alia* Nyers 2015; Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2015; Cantat 2016; Mezzadra, 2011) and that they are shaped by attempts to halt, hinder, domesticate, or tame mobilities (De Genova, Garelli, and Tazzioli 2018). Critical of the “control bias” (Scheel 2013), which emphasizes the primacy of the state and the border control and the accompanying military, technological, and biopolitical means, this body of scholarly and activist work reverses the gaze (Mezzadra 2011) and emphasizes the secondary (reactionary) nature of the control and instead prioritizes and centralizes human mobility. As Peter Nyers puts, “border controls, immigration controls, security checks - these techniques of sovereignty come afterwards and are a response to movement” (Nyers 2015: 28). Reactive power of states and technologies of sovereignty work to halt, shape, channel, and constraint (cross border) movement in “an attempt to capture, immobilize and sanitize a set of human activities that exceed the ability of sovereign power to capture and internalize them” (Cantat 2016: 15). There is, then, always a tension between mobility and technologies of sovereignty which takes place through visible or invisible struggles. Migration and border policies, emergency responses to refugee arrivals, or humanitarian responses to those who have crossed the border are wrought out of these struggles. However, I would add, the statist efforts to capture, regulate, control, and internalize movement should not be limited to struggles at the nation-state borders. They, historically, geographically, and politically extend “deep into the putative ‘interior of the nation-state space” (De Genova 2015:3). Both nation-building processes and interlinked

developments of capitalism, which in many Western and non-Western contexts were shaped by struggles over intra-country movements, were intimately connected to the regulation of mobility. Therefore, I propose to expand it these struggles to “struggles over mobility” which include struggles over mobility, immobility, and settlement in, across, and at the borders.

These struggles, capable of destabilizing the territorialized sovereignty, however, are ingeniously obscured by the capture of movement into a presumably normalized order where the state is always already at the center and in control of the movements and its borders. The “control bias” attributing to the state the ability to have full control over the movement within the country and its borders is prevalent in migration scholarship on Turkey, as well. Current refugee situation in Turkey is almost exclusively explained by state-centered narratives framed around state’s capacity to open, close, re-open, or control its borders at will or by Turkey’s “unchanging”, “archaic”, “outmoded” or “long overdue” (Ihlamur-Öner 2013) migration regime built on the refusal to grant refugee status to those coming from non-European countries. Such explanations assume that once the legal system becomes fully congruent to the Geneva Convention, that is geographical reservation is lifted and rights accorded to refugee status are granted to everyone seeking asylum regardless of their country of origin, most problems refugees face in Turkey will be solved. The Geneva Convention, however, is an international legal document that is relevant only to the extent that state parties implement those clauses which are by and large predicated on universalized and individualized figure of refugee. On the other hand, variety of techniques of sovereignty that nation-states deploy to keep hold of the sovereign power to delineate who is entitled to legally recognized refugee status are largely hidden under the universalized discourses of legality. Therefore, it not only singles out the figure of the refugee as a universal legal figure, it also invisibilizes the nation-state politics under the name of legalization and formalization of people's experiences. Framing such a political and socio-economic phenomenon under the discourse of legality does not open a space

for relationalities within the societal system that go beyond the legally bounded relation between the state/nation/citizen nexus and its economic, political, social and affective relations to the refugees.

The legal system is of course crucial. Legal regulations are not simply overly-detailed, bureaucratized documents to struggle with or minor details that make the background of a context (Sari and Dinçer 2017). They condition the everyday relations and "constitute the very fabric of sovereignty – be it national, regional or transnational—and the human lives it claims to protect" (Sari and Dinçer 2017: 65). Indeed, Turkey implements quite a peculiar refugee regime with multiple legal regulations and multiple actors. It actively produces ambiguity, complexity and uncertainty as its *de facto* character of migration governance (Biehl 2009; 2015). The fact that Turkey's legal asylum regulations are based on ambiguity and uncertainty is attributed to multiplicity of statuses resulting from the lack of a single, fully recognized refugee status. Different statuses granted to different groups define their scope of mobility, rights, and everyday actions. They are also instrumental in knowledge production (Apostolova 2017). Figures such as conditional refugee and temporary protection status holder "represent categories of governance" and "allow state authorities, public discourses, and collective agents to relate to and govern migration in a specific way. (...) Hence figures do not represent social groups but instead conceptually reflect *relations* of migration" (Karakayalı and Rigo 2010, 129, emphasis original). The legal status, thus, does not define and determine one's experience as *refugees* but rather conditions one's experiences of exclusion/inclusion as well as mobility/immobilization (Biner and Soykan 2016).

Combined with selective humanitarianism, however, asylum regime in Turkey becomes more complex and layered, entailing a different gaze which decentralizes the primacy of state's attempts to control and shape people's mobilities and, instead, delves into how the state differently reacts to different movements at different historical periods. Even though legal

documents have a performative capacity -i.e., not only recognizing but also making one a refugee-, practices of inclusion and exclusion, humanitarian aid and recognizing one as a refugee vary by different contexts, not only due to states' claim to sovereignty to determine who the refugee is but also due to everyday encounters with the refugee figure conditioned by power relations and historical trajectories.

The problem with this overvaluing of the legal framework is that it fails to explain why Turkish state's response to Syrian migration was framed in humanitarian terms while many other contemporary waves of immigration (such as of Iranian refugees in the 1980s and Iraqi refugees in the 1990s) were neglected, securitized, or left to the discretion of international community. It also cannot answer seemingly radical changes in migration governance oscillating between welcoming on the one hand immobilizing refugee movements within the Turkish borders on the other; between offering humanitarian assistance and subjecting Syrian refugee populations to forced displacement by deportations or by the threat of "sending refugees to Europe".

The co-existence of these discourses is intrinsic to the contemporary Turkey's migration and asylum regime which is "a bundle of heterogeneous elements such as practices, discourses, institutionalizations" (Federico and Hess 2021, 6) and which adopts less structured, less formalized, and not-so-state-centric formations alongside other formalized and legal structures. The asylum regime is far from complete; it is always contested, always in the making. It also encompasses a range of actors that do not necessarily work in tandem or that are seemingly in contradistinction to each other such as border enforcement, law enforcement, bureaucracy, humanitarian organizations and non-governmental organizations. All these formations and structures constituting the asylum regime develop historically, but also "as a reactive governmental framework for containing, taming, and domesticating some of the excesses of cross-border mobility" (De Genova, Garelli, and Tazzioli 2018: 247). If the asylum regime "does not transform of its own accord, but rather obtains dynamics from the forms of migration

movement” (Bojadžijev and Karakayali 2010:3; Nyers 2015: 28) the way in which migration movement unfolds does not -actually cannot- lead to same technologies of sovereignty based on exclusion. The tension intrinsic to the encounter between the sovereign power and movements and activities exceeding it and resisting the capture by it (Cantat 2016), then, is a productive one involving “complex and ambiguous negotiations, contestations, and refusals” (Nyers 2015: 28).

I argue that Turkey’s humanitarian policy towards Syrian refugees (towards all refugee groups, for that matter) should be seen in this lens: as a reaction to the movement which the territorialized sovereignty cannot control but can internalize, domesticate and discipline using legal and humanitarian means. This does not mean humanitarianism is simply an instrument of the state to control and discipline refugees. It means that mobilization of discourses of humanitarianism as the official discourse vis-à-vis Syrian refugees (and only Syrian refugees as an abstract homogenized group), “state humanitarianism” if you will, led to “the humanitarian production of the refugee” (Rozakou 2012: 563) which, in effect, has become a crucial pillar of the current asylum regime and has mobilized a variety of formal and informal, governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions around it. Combined with the legal framework, selective and differential state humanitarianism has become a “technology of sovereignty” (Nyers 2015), as a “reactive power” (Cantat 2016) to control, govern, delineate, and immobilize refugee movements as well as subjectivities.

Before Turkey took the humanitarian turn, the first response by the state was to stop Syrian arrivals at its early stages. As the revolution in Syria started, Turkey made a call to the Syrian government to implement reforms demanded by the protestors. When these calls failed, Turkey decided to cut diplomatic ties with the Syrian regime. Later, international community such as the Arab League and the UN was urged to intervene in the political crisis. When international efforts fell short, Turkey decided to support the Syrian opposition, a support which would later

ignite many diplomatic and military tensions in Turkey's foreign policy. Finally, Turkey urged the international community to stop the refugee flows by creating a buffer zone or a no-fly zone to intervene in the political turmoil to Syria to prevent "refugee-producing conditions" and to reverse the refugee arrivals (Ihlamur-Öner 2013). Then Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu said in June 2011,

“Our wish and goal is to start the process that will prevent the continuation of such a wave of immigration as soon as possible. That is, the reforms come into play as soon as possible, the conditions that cause the security forces and the people to come face to face are eliminated, and the attitude towards the civilian population is more peaceful than security-oriented. If all these are met, the migration wave will decrease, and we will send back those who have come after hosting them.”²⁰

Later on, however, mobility of Syrian people fleeing war and other maladies exceeded the Turkish state's control over its borders, and other strategies to stop movement at or before arriving the border came to a dead end. By the time, Turkey had been fully involved in the Syrian civil war, politically, diplomatically, and militarily. Mobilization of discourses of Muslim solidarity, “open door” policy, and humanitarian assistance, the combination of which I call “spectacle of welcoming”, followed other attempts at capturing movement. Initially, Syrian refugees were named “guests” in a way to underline temporariness while spectacularizing hospitality of Turkey. As Katerina Rozakou (2012:563) puts in the Greek context, “reified and idealized definitions of hospitality reaffirm state sovereignty and echo an uncritical appeal to hospitality as an ethical imperative.” In Turkey as well, refugee reception, at the time, was stripped of international protection regimes of which Turkey is a party, of political discussions around Turkey's active involvement in the Syrian crisis, and a public-political discussion within the country as to rights and entitlements of Syrian refugees and instead culturalized as an ethical imperative. Also, Turkey's appeal to hospitality was translated

²⁰Şimşek, A. (June 15, 2011). “Türkiye: Suriyeli Sığınmacılara Kapımız Açık”. *Deutsche Welle*. <https://www.dw.com/tr/türkiye-suriyeli-sığınmacılara-kapımız-açık/a-15155526>

into an Islamic value that would be accorded to those who fit in the Islamist discourses' conception of the guest.

Besides what has been so far widely praised as hospitality, the term “guest” has a peculiar relation to foreignness: it simultaneously denotes those who are not-so-foreign so that they can be allowed in yet who are not members of the “household”, metonymically replacing the nation. The term guest refers to a degree of commonality and familiarity. This peculiar relationship between being familiar yet not so much is what enables material and discursive equilibrium between restrictive asylum regime and Islamic humanitarian discourse as far as Syrian refugees are concerned. They are a member of (Sunni) Muslim transnational community as well as historically part of the Ottoman Empire; hence, the familiarity. On the other hand, they are Syrians (Arabs), from a country whose differentiation from Turkey was drawn on cultural, imperial, and colonial histories of the respective nation-states; hence, the foreignness.

Nonetheless, temporariness alluded by the term is there, maybe more forcefully than anything else since “guest” is an ambivalent term without a set of clearly recognized legal rights and entitlements. Later, with the enactment of Temporary Protection Regulation in 2014, discourses on guesthood gradually faded away meanwhile temporariness was institutionalized (Mezzadra 2016) as a widely shared feature of migration and as a tool to govern refugees. Temporary Protection Regulation recognizes basic rights such as right to healthcare, education, long-term residence, and non-refoulement. However, it does not cancel out humanitarian discourses which operate parallel to the legal framework.

Therefore, the struggle over controlling movements and subjects that are deemed undesirably mobile continues *within* the nation state borders, with the deployment of various discourses ranging from humanitarianism to securitization, utilization of legal regulations for clustering people on the move under differentially empowered categories, and mobilization of a variety of actors from law enforcement to international NGOs, to small-scale local humanitarian

networks. In any case, the tension between the sovereign power to seize movement and mobilities resisting the seizure does not end at the borders; it is a broader struggle evolving around tactics and techniques of mobilization and immobilization of refugees -physically, politically, economically- such as naming refugees under various and mostly ambivalent categorizations, producing moral and religious discourses that cannot be translated into the political sphere, and rendering humanitarian assistance the part and parcel of refugee reception, which, due to its ethical appeal, cannot be easily criticized.

Historical backdrop of government of mobility in Turkey

In Turkey, the government of refugees and mobility in general has not always been structured by discursive and political adherence to humanitarianism. Indeed, as I mentioned above, even today humanitarian aid is not a generalized response to all refugee groups. Refugee groups are categorized differentially based on their legal status, but they are also subjected to differential inclusion and exclusion on the basis of their country of origin, their identification (as Muslim, LGBTQI+, Bahai, Christian, Shia, etc.), reason for seeking asylum, projected future plans (wanting to stay in Turkey, return to the country of origin, or head toward “the West”), and the like. Among Islamic humanitarian networks in Denizli, for instance, the differentiation was much less on the legal regulations. The Syrians are the main subject of aid for a simple reason: they were *the refugees* because they were the ones fleeing *religious* persecution and, hence, were included in the transnational Islamic solidarity. That is, other groups who settle in Denizli (Iranian Christian, Bahai, and LGBTQI+ refugees and Afghan refugees) were “ideological ones” who are attempting at escaping to Europe and who instrumentalize Turkey as the transit context. Although all come from Muslim-majority countries, the ideological refugees, quite similar to the debates regarding “bogus refugee” in the Western context, are excluded from the transnational Islamic solidarity. Moreover, the official discourse of humanitarianism seems to

apply only to Syrian refugees, mediating the understanding of refugeehood that is almost always *ought to* be addressed with relief and assistance. In a sense, it functions as “evidence” of recognition of Syrian displacement and dispossession (Feldman 2007), shaping in effect state and non-state responses, too.

Moreover, the government of refugees, migrants, and mobility has not always been mediated by international legal regulations. It is rather a recent development which started in 1951, with the ratification of the Geneva Convention but it acquired currency in the 1980s and 1990s when international migration and refugee movements became more and more on Turkey’s domestic and foreign policy agenda.

Priorly, internal and external migrations were governed as a domestic issue predicated upon assimilability of displaced populations into the nation or expulsion of unwanted populations from the nation. It was, again, shaped by the attempts at sovereign control over mobility (which encompasses forced mobility and forced settlement too, see Apostolova 2017) but more within the confines of nation-building. Kristen Biehl (2009) argues that since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the main motive behind the management of migration has been concerns over strengthening national identity and maintaining national unity. That is, decision over who will be allowed in the nation-state territories was not only about the so-called external reasons such as security and regional politics but also about the reconstruction of the citizenship regime based on the national identity. Accordingly, displaced groups that were allowed in and left out were defined by national politics and legal framework was less concerned with human rights and humanitarian assistance than with creating a homogenized and cohesive nation and re-establishing the order that had been disrupted after consecutive years of war between 1912-1923 (Erder 2018).

It is, of course, not surprising that certain populations were incorporated into or expelled from the nation-state territories as part and parcel of nation-building, and Turkey is no exception

here. As a continuous process, nation-building efforts created deep-rooted institutional, legal, and political heritages that are still at work albeit largely transformed. In the case of early Republican Turkey (and the late Ottoman period) many of these institutions were formed in an effort to shape, regulate, and tame mobilities that were rather difficult to control due to long-lasting wars, constantly changing borders, political instabilities, forced displacements and dispossessions in the country and in the region. Through nation-building efforts, some of these movements were assimilated into regulated and orderly mobilities or settlements, and reactionary responses to these mobilities were reincorporated in the historiography of nation-building. In a sense, the building of the nation, ideologically and historiographically, became the fulcrum of the state's sovereign power to regulate mobilities at the time. On the other hand, however, state's practice of sovereign power over mobility was not limited to reacting to incoming mobilities. It was also exercised by forcibly displacing variously settled populations as part of the "statecraft" (Soguk 1999) and forcibly settling formerly nomadic populations under nation-building processes. These two aspects went hand in hand, having enduring impacts on contemporary responses.

That said, it is important to locate contemporary responses to mobility in these deep-rooted institutions and ways of thinking about populations presumed to be "alien" to the nation while attending to the risks of creating a linear, continuous history offering all-encompassing "historicized" explanations for the government of mobility. Another risk, I imagine, would be to assume that the nation-building process is already over; complete and invariant. Instead, in this section, I will offer a brief genealogy of how the Turkish state responded (indeed reacted) to mobility and created forms of forced displacement and forced settlement. I will outline the ways in which government of mobility did or did not change during the nation-building process and beyond.

Nation, an imagined community, is presented to us in the form of a continuous narrative with a discernible, and indeed spectacular beginning. It appears as the fulfillment of national identity, as a manifestation of an “invariant substance” passing from one generation to the other (Balibar 1991). However, moments of making the nation are always multiple, cannot be tracked down to a single constitutive event such as a war, a civil war, or a revolution. Nation, quite the contrary, is formed and constantly reproduced “through a network of apparatuses and daily practices” which institute the individual “as *homo nationalis* from cradle to grave” (Balibar 1991: 93). Then the question pertaining to the nation-building is, for Balibar (1991: 93), “the question of knowing under what historical conditions it is possible to institute such a thing: by virtue of what internal and external relations of force and also by virtue of what symbolic forms invested in elementary material practices?”

Questioning the nation-building process while discussing responses to mobility might seem irrelevant. However, in the case of Turkey (and probably in many other nationalized cases), beginning from the late Ottoman period, responses to mobility are directly and intimately related to nation-building. So much so that Sema Erder (2018) argues that struggles to build the nation were shaped through the government of the mobility of forcibly displaced populations by (at times violently) implementing (forced) settlement schemes such as Muslim populations fleeing former Ottoman territories or non-Muslim neighbors such as the Russian Empire or by forcibly displacing the settled populations such as Armenians, Greeks, and to some extent the Kurdish. In doing so, the state devised specific laws and established institutions for governing mobility through which to create different categories ascribed to various displaced populations. The main objective was to ensure control over the demographic distribution of population having other ethnic, religious, linguistic allegiances and to maintain production/reproduction and security (Erder 2018).

Going back to Balibar's (1991) question concerning under what conditions it is possible to institute nation, it is difficult to reduce it to a singular formation or institution. Nonetheless, as far as the governing of mobility is concerned, Erder (2018) argues, "settlement" (*iskan*) stands out as the main institution through which to order movement. It aims at organizing and reorganizing the relationship between people and the space in using specifically tailored tools. Being a far-reaching, flexible, adaptable, and politically "convenient" authoritarian strategy for demographic control, it was -although not so smoothly- passed on to different eras from early Ottoman Empire until early Republican period (almost until the 1960s). In Turkey's legal system, the Settlement Law (last amended in 2006) is still operative; however, it is now used to regulate private property relations in areas which are to go under regeneration due to disaster risk, where large development investments are to be done such as dam or road construction, and where urban regeneration is underway (Erder 2018). It was, until the late 1990s, used for securitized purposes to displace Kurdish population from their places of habitation. The settlement regime (even when the Settlement Law was *de facto* nullified) is much more embedded and, in any case and at any period, inherently related to state's attempts to organize mobility through means and techniques of (forced) mobilization and immobilization.

The settlement regime goes back to the early years of the Ottoman Empire where it was used to mix populations in the newly conquered territories. In those years, the state resorted to settlement in order to populate those territories with Muslim groups (Islamization of certain regions) –in other words, de-homogenize the population–, to maintain security, and to invigorate the economy and secure agricultural production in regions where there was labor scarcity (Erder 2018). The settlement was conducted through means such as sending politically antagonistic persons or communities to exile; building new cities and towns, constructing roads and opening arable areas in those territories; and settling people from other parts of the empire in order to render populations governable. All these means involved forced displacement

particularly of rural populations who were otherwise not allowed to be mobile within the imperial territory. Ensuring immobility of the rural population was important to secure social stratification, to maintain agricultural production, to collect taxes, and for conscription and of the urban population to keep the control intact over the bureaucratic cadres, merchants, and artisans.

In early periods, settlement was loosely institutionalized and systematized, it was a locally implemented policy left to the discretion of the authorities in each locality. But it was widespread as a means to restructure imperial territories new and old. It was implemented congruently to the existing social stratification based on urban/rural division. During the settlement (forcibly or through incentives such as exemption from taxes and military conscription), urban/rural division was attended in order not to disrupt the social stratification and cause interruption in respective economic production. Settlement institution did preclude social mobility while forcing physical mobility; it however, created ethnically and religiously heterogeneous spaces through which to forestall political mobilizations based on homogeneous allegiances such as ethnicity, language and religion (Erder 2018; İçduygu et al. 2009).

The nature of the settlement institution changed when the empire territory was shrinking in the 19th century, during the late Ottoman era. At the time, the territory of the empire was not only shrinking, but the Ottoman state was facing large groups of forcibly displaced (mostly Muslim) people seeking refuge in the Ottoman territory after fleeing the former (lost) Ottoman territories or neighboring states that were expelling Muslim populations as a part of demographic homogenization schemes (Erder 2018). These different tides of migration into the Ottoman territory which was already shrinking compelled the state to change its settlement policies. These population movements exceeded state's control and compelled the state to devise a demographic policy to restore the already collapsing social order (Erder 2018). For Fuat Dündar (2006: 35), at that time, the Empire's policy priorities have shifted from "military and

economic consideration” to “concerns over population” in a way to “place demographic settlement at the heart of the policy”.

At the time, Sema Erder (2018) argues, the settlement policies shifted from “intermixing various ethnic and religious groups to govern” to “unmixing people to govern”. That is, newly arriving population in the remaining Ottoman territories where society was hitherto ethnically, religiously, and linguistically heterogeneous was segregated on the basis of Muslim/non-Muslim divide (Dündar 2014). Muslim groups, still ethnically heterogeneous, were dispersed to the country to fine-tune the ethnic and religious distribution in the country, to homogenize the population, and to prevent the mobilization of various groups. The newly arriving populations were also separated from each other on the basis of their relationship to former Ottoman territories. What was fundamentally aimed at was to mix the Turkish Muslim population with the non-Turkish Muslim population (Dündar 2006: 38) in order to internalize mobile populations and assimilate them into the existing social stratifications of the empire. While those who came from former Ottoman territories were named as “*muhacir*” (muhajirun in Arabic), those who fled non-Muslim neighboring states such as the Russian Tsardom were named *mülteci* (literally means refugee in Turkish) and they were hierarchically ordered in favor of *muhacirs* (Erder 2018; Fratantuono 2017). Those who were recognized within the settlement regime were given assistance, basically shelter and subsistence as well as land and livestock, under the condition that they would not leave where they were settled for a certain period of time between seven to ten years (Dündar 2008; Erdem 2017). They were also exempted from military conscription and taxes, although not permanently but until they are fully settled and incorporated into the host society. All these measures were to ensure that the settled groups would not move within the country borders and to promote their economic productivity.

While organizing legal and bureaucratic structures to address refugee populations, the institution of settlement was centralized in parallel to the modernization efforts to centralize the state and bureaucracy, and it became stricter in its implementation. This institutionalization, however, should not be overstated given the military, political and social turmoil that the empire was in at the time. Nonetheless, it can be read as a modernizing and bureaucratizing effort which could somehow become authoritative in managing migration. Institutionalization attempt by the state, in other words, was an attempt to place itself at the center of the newly emerging territory so that it could not only control mobility but to have the authoritative and monopolistic power to make sense of such social phenomena as mobility.²¹ This struggle, however, was not always successful. Fuat Dündar (2018: 165) describes the migration management at the time as “partly unsystematic, unstable, discontinuous, personal, exclusive, non-collective and insufficient” yet somehow capable of overcoming “issues related to immigration, and even succeed[ing] in building a new state integrating these newcomers.”

The settlement regime did not only regulate the population migrating to the Ottoman territories. Nor did it limit itself to ordering of the Muslim groups within the country’s borders. It was also used as an apparatus to suppress and expel non-Muslim populations, which took the most violent and radical form in the Armenian Genocide in 1915. With the Law of Displacement on 27 May 1915, which enabled the massive expulsion of Armenians from the Ottoman territories, the state consolidated authority over the settlement in absolute terms and vested the army with the power to implement state policies (Dündar 2014: 35). Besides Armenians, Greek and Bulgarian communities were suppressed, massively deported, or forced to leave the country in the same period. The result, at the time, was gradual production of ethnically heterogeneous and religiously homogeneous population. Part of the nation-building process which started in the late Ottoman period and lingered well into the early Republican era was attempts at

²¹ Prem Kumar Rajaram, January 2022, personal communication.

homogenizing various ethnic groups into Turkishness as much as expelling non-Muslim groups.

The settlement regime, institutionalized and centralized during the late Ottoman period, was adopted by the Republic in almost exactly the same way (Erder 2018). Nation-building endeavors of the early Republican period were very complicated and multilayered but were fundamentally marked by ethnic assimilation and religious homogenization and, in relation to that, the transfer of wealth from non-Muslim to favorable Muslim communities. As far as the former is concerned, it assumed a twofold operation: externally, settling those who immigrated into Turkey in various locations in the country and partly institutionally expelling non-Muslim groups; internally, exiling those who revolted against the newly founded republic and fixing the already settled populations to their assigned places, i.e. hindering their mobility. As for the latter, the settlement regime which had been operationalized to populate newly conquered areas with Muslim settlers at its heyday reversed the pattern during the decline of the empire: Muslim newcomers welcomed under the settlement schemes were settled in the properties vacated by the forcibly displaced non-Muslim populations. However, it must be noted, during the redistribution of land, previously existing social stratifications laid the foundations for the transfer of wealth. It was of utmost importance not to mix urban and rural populations and those who belonged to the higher strata of the previous communities such as military officers and local bureaucrats were treated more favorably. The government of physical and spatial mobility was, then, accompanied with the impediment of possibilities of social (upward or downward) mobility which, in the mindset of settlement regime, could lead to social unrest or disrupt the already largely dilapidated social order. Of course, what I am conveying here pertains more to the way of thinking within and through the settlement regime. In practice, the way in which mobility was controlled and people reacted to such governing attempts was much more complicated, contentious, messy, and at times violent. For instance, between 1924-1934,

official registry recorded more than twenty riots in the Southeast Anatolia, predominantly by the Kurdish tribes resisting resettlement. These riots were violently suppressed and the leaders were executed or exiled, leading to further forced exile of the Kurdish groups and their leaders and the further consolidation of the settlement regime with stricter legislative measures (İçduygu, Erder, and Gençkaya 2014).

In reordering the demographic composition of the country, the republic also adopted the distinction between “*muhacir*” and “*mülteci*” to denote those who were the primary demographic component of the nation due to their relationship to the former Ottoman territories and those who were deemed “non-hostile foreigners”, respectively. This divide was the main tool for discerning the Muslim population based on ethnicity. The strategy of ethnically categorizing the Muslim population based on their assimilability into Turkishness was later further institutionalized by the Settlement Law of 1934, which would become the main legal framework for governing international migration until 1994.

During the early Republican Period, the contours of which are drawn in the literature between 1923-1946 (the single party period), attempts at homogenization of the population continued. Islam, despite secularizing reforms, was recognized as a constitutive element of Turkishness. While discussing the Turkish modernization, secularism stands out as the most ambitious, most contentious, and most exclusionary aspect of modernization of the Republic of Turkey, suppressing the Muslim majority in favor of a Westernized public. In fact, by many, secularism is discussed as an attempt to erase religion from the public realm. Another group of scholars, on the other hand, argue that Islam, in its Sunni form, has always been at the heart of Turkish identity, and the Turkish nation was defined by its Muslimness. I think, endeavors to institute secularism and defining the nation on the basis of its religious allegiance are not mutually exclusive. Religion, which has defined individual identities, “souls”, and moral norms of the community for centuries, is constitutive in the making of the nation and nationalism (Balibar

1991). In Turkey too secularization policies did not take place in a vacuum but rather was deployed on the existing moral norms, some of which were derived from religion, and were translated into new configurations of the nation. Islam in Turkey, in this respect, was nationalized as a constitutive aspect of the nation while it helped the state sacralize itself as the authority over determining the contours of not only the sacred but also the social and the political. However, it must be noted, the extent of which element of this process will take precedence is the central hegemonic contestation predicated upon different political positions about secularism in Turkey. Therefore, even in the Republican period, “the nation-building process has fostered a kind of homogenization which, in practice, pointed to the demographic Islamization of the population” (İçduygu, Toktaş, and Soner 2008: 359).

There are two major developments in which the settlement regime was effectively put to work in a way to a large extent shape Turkey’s contemporary demographic composition: the Turkish-Greek population exchange and the Settlement Law. Both entwine the nation-building process with the definition of nationhood in a religious framework. The first one is Turkish-Greek Population Exchange (*mübadele*) which was also known to be the first major mass migration of the Republican era. It was conducted as a result of the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations (*Mübadele-i Ahali Mukavelenamesi*) between 1922-1924 (İçduygu et al. 2009) and monitored by international organizations (Erder 2018). The main aim was demographic homogenization of two newly founded nation-states –Turkey and Greece. Accordingly, “...The Greek Orthodox under Turkish state and the Muslims under Greek state were subjected to *compulsory* exchange ...” (İçduygu et al. 2009: 101). The two countries agreed exchange populations on the basis of religion: while Turkey sent Greek minority living in Anatolia for centuries to Greece, Greece sent the Muslim minority that had been settled by the Ottoman Empire following the military conquests to Turkey.

Attesting to the significance of the event, in 1923, the Republic established the Ministry of Population Exchange, Construction and Settlement (*Mübadele, İmar ve İskan Bakanlığı*). The ministry had a very short lifespan but was replaced with other institutions equipped with similar authorities. It nonetheless revealed the newly founded Turkish state's motivation to handle migration at the ministerial level (Dündar 2018). This extensive institutionalization had two reasons. First the population exchange involved a vast population: 1,200,000 Christian Greeks left, and 500,000 Turkish speaking Muslims arrived, entailing a massive bureaucratic and political organization. Secondly, and more importantly, the population that was forcibly displaced left vast amount of property that must be dealt delicately and the population that arrived was to be provided with subsistence and encouraged for participation in productive activities (Cagaptay 2006; Aktar 2000; Dündar 2018).

The population exchange was seen as an effective technology to enable the nation-states to substantially “get rid of” unfavorable ethnic and religious minorities in a “peaceful” way (Aktar 2000; Erder 2018). As peaceful as it might seem at the time, it was nonetheless an extensive and systematic forced displacement project which had far-reaching consequences for population control. The population exchange is by and large analyzed in terms of its contribution to “demographic homogenization,” and “nation-building” but the consequences were far wider. The experiences of the Turkish state between the 19th century and 1923 (the time period which helped normalize the emergency measures pleading to consecutive years of war and nation-building) contributed to the consolidation of state's “reactive power” to internalize, capture, channel population mobility using the techniques ranging from forced displacement to forced settlement.

The second major development in the settlement regime of Turkey in the early Republican era was the legislation of the Settlement Law of 1934. It is a highly controversial law given its vast scope and ambition to reshuffle the population. The Minister of Internal Affairs at the time

defined the law as a remedy to four main problems faced by the young Republic: “population, migration, nomadism, and land” (Erder 2018: 118). While codifying the law, the single party regime at the time articulated three aims: 1) to increase population by encouraging the immigration of populations loyal to Turkish culture; 2) to restructure the population in accordance with economic, national, and military needs; 3) to settle nomadic tribes.

The law was devised to construct a “homogeneous sense of national identity” (Kirişçi 2000) by changing the demographic structure of the country through forced displacements and settlements (Ülker 2008; Dündar 2014; Erder 2018). Kemal Kirişçi points to three main concerns behind the codification of the law: “concerns about the non-Turkish speaking minorities”, “large numbers of immigrants from the Balkans and the Caucasus who had been settled in Turkey by successive Ottoman governments and who could still not speak Turkish and hence had maintained their ethnic identities”, and “the settlement of nomadic tribes, both Kurdish and Turkish.” (Kirişçi 2000:4-5).

To that end, the law specified three groups and portioned the country into three zones: “those who speak Turkish and were of Turkish ethnicity”, “those who did not speak Turkish but were considered to be of Turkish culture”, and “those who neither spoke Turkish nor belonged to the Turkish culture”²² (Kirişçi 2000:5). Based on ethnic, linguistic, and racial categorizations, settlement zones were also defined:

“No.1 zones are the areas deemed to be where the Turkish cultured population is dense. No.2 zones are the areas separated for the migration and settlement of the population deemed to be assimilated into Turkish culture. No.3 zones are the areas where settlement and residence are prohibited owing to reasons related to health, economy, culture, politics, the military and security.” (The Settlement Law qtd in Yeğen 2004, 65).

²² “The second group included past immigrants from the Caucasus and the Balkans who were considered Turkish even if ethnically they might have been Albanian, Bosnian, Circassian, Pomak, Roma, Tatar, and so on. These did not or could not speak Turkish for a variety of reasons. The final group, on the other hand, included basically the non-Muslim minorities, Kurds and Arabs.” (Kirişçi 2000:5)

Accordingly, the law restricted movement between different zones, and obligated those who were settled in different zones to permanently stay their designated zones. It, however, largely failed even in the early years. The law regulated the settlement of immigrants and, although provisions pertaining to ethnically and racially segregated categorizations and zones were abrogated in 1947 (Dündar 2014) following the transition from single party to multi-party system, provisions regulating immigration and asylum remained in force until 1994, when the first legal regulation on asylum was codified.²³ Fuat Dündar (2018: 176) confers:

Having a pro-immigration policy Ankara encouraged immigration of the Balkan Turks and Muslims, who would easily and voluntarily be Turkified. Settlement Law of 1934 (...) determined the regions of settlement in accordance with the ethnic characters of migrants and local population. The Law distinguished the migrants in several categories, each had to be settled in previously determined regions. Those categories were named as “*Muhacir, mülteci, göçebe, gezginci çingene, naklolunanlar ve yerli*” (migrant, refugee, nomad, wandering gypsy, transfers and locals).

In defining who were to be allowed in Turkey as a migrant, the law expanded the category of Turkish culture to involve various Muslim groups from the Balkans and the Caucasus, while covertly excluding populations residing in the Middle East (Erder 2018). The list of the excluded was also codified, although ambiguously, naming the unfavorable groups to the new nation-state: “People who do not belong to the Turkish culture, anarchists, spies, nomadic Gypsies [*sic*], and those who were previously expelled from the country [the deported]” (Cagaptay 2006: 99). This article was amended as late as 2006, despite the fact that the way international migration was governed in the country had largely changed by then. The settlement regime underwrote internal and external division, inscribing the “internal enemy” and “external enemy” perception in the heart of the political sphere, which would resurface every time an emergency rule was to be fabricated and implemented (Erder 2018). The

²³ The regulation was titled “the 1994 Regulation on Procedures and Principles related to Mass Influx and Foreigners arriving in Turkey either as individuals or in Groups wishing to seek Asylum either from Turkey or requesting Residence Permits with the Intension of seeking Asylum from a Third Country”. For a more detailed analysis of the 1994 Regulation see (Soykan 2010; Biehl 2015)

distinction between the internal and external enemies grounded on two main responses: dissimilation and assimilation. While the external enemies (mostly refers to non-Muslim populations) were to be rendered “dissimilar” and to be alienated by policies including population exchanges, deportations and forcing to leave, the internal enemies (refers to the Muslim population that cannot be rendered “Turkish” as in the Settlement Law - that is, almost exclusively the Kurdish population but also the Kurdish and non-Kurdish nomadic tribes) was to be assimilated, be subjected to civilizing mission including forced settlement and forced displacement. The state, then, at the cusp of nation-building efforts, reactionarily instituted itself against the people whose (potential or actual) mobility or sedentarism was seen disobedient and threatening to homogenization. Through the institution of settlement, the state attempted at and institutionalized the regulation of mobility not only for the “external” migrants but also within the country; not only for the expulsion of non-Muslims but also the assimilation of the (non-Turkish) Muslim communities.

The external operation of the settlement regime, that is “cleansing” of population from the non-Muslim communities was a largely successful project which lingered well into the World War II period and the Cold War. Non-Muslim minorities who had stayed in Turkey (particularly in Istanbul) faced various legal and militarized attempts of Turkification, the most significant of which (Aktar 2000) were the Capital Tax Law (*Varlık Vergisi Kanunu*) and the 6-7 September Pogrom. Both of them were organized attacks to the non-Muslim communities of Turkey led the majority of these populations to leave the country and to Turkification of not only the society but also the capital and wealth.²⁴

On the other hand, the settlement regime operating internally had many problems in implementation and largely failed in its ambition to reshuffle the demographic composition of

²⁴ For further discussion on the Turkification efforts during the WWII and the Cold War, see Aktar 2000.

the country. It was responded with numerous insurgencies, especially by the Kurdish groups, and zoning of the country remained as an authoritarian utopia. However, it solidified an understanding of (domestic or international) mobility that must always be under the strict control of the state in order to maintain order in society. The state, in other words, located itself at the center of mobility and assumed monopoly over the regulation of not only actually existing but also “potential” mobilities that could pose threat to the hard-won national homogeneity. Even when it was assumed that the nation-building process was over, the centrality of the state as to police, regulate, and halt mobility remained as a constitutive mentality, and penetrated the internationalized regime of migration and asylum in Turkey, superseding the international human rights and asylum regime of which Turkey is a part.

In this section, I outlined how the control of mobility has been integral to the nation-building process which is always in the making. In doing so, I set out to anchor certain moments in the genealogy of the government of mobility which have -albeit transformed- ongoing effects on the mobility regime today. The institution of settlement, a centuries-old tradition that the Republic inherited from the Ottoman Empire, was central to the mobility regime as it was as broad in scope as to regulate both newcomers, already settled populations within the then-borders of the country, and those who were to be forcibly and not unfrequently violently displaced from the country, that is, worked internally and externally. In other words, the significance of the settlement lied in its flexibility to regulate and manage both forced displacement and forced settlement. These two components of the settlement became the backbone of the nation-building process for the religious homogenization and ethnic assimilation attempts. In this respect, it is striking to see that the failure of the Settlement Law to re-order demographic composition of the country was admitted as early as 1940s, but it remained in force to regulate international migration until 1994, long after the migration and asylum regime of Turkey was internationalized.

Internationalization of migration regime

The internationalization of Turkey's migration regime started after the World War II and the Settlement Law gradually lost significance in the control over internal mobility. However, the settlement regime which forged the statist mindset regarding mobility control remained for a very long time in conflict with the international law. Their contradistinction surfaced in various waves of migration: as late as the Bulgarian migration in 1989, the settlement regime seemed still powerful enough to shape state responses while the Iraqi migration that took place in the same period (in 1991) was delegated to the international community. The reason behind this conflict can be found in the nation-building efforts of Turkey that is homogenizing and Westernizing at the same time. The Turkish state, as I have shown above, have always favored ethnic groups "who can be assimilated into the Turkish culture" referring to people of Turkish origin, Sunni Muslim groups who used to be subjected to the Ottoman rule, and almost exclusively people from the Balkans and the Caucasus. In doing so, the regime implicitly refused to be associated with the people in the Middle East -albeit former Ottoman territory-, people who were constructed as "backwards and different" compared to the favorable subjects of Turkishness. The construction of difference is inherently related to Orientalist and Westernized constitution of the Turkish nation, which was underwriting the asylum/migration regime of Turkey and resurfaced after the 1980s in the government of international migration from Middle Eastern and African countries.

The 1950s marked an important turning point in Turkey's government of mobility, largely affected by the changes in international refugee protection regime. Turkey had located itself in the Western Bloc, and its geographical proximity to the Soviet Bloc countries attached Turkey a geopolitical significance in during the Cold War and afforded large scale political changes. In period a little less than a decade, Turkey received the Marshall Aid allowing it to increase investment in developmental projects; shifted from single-party to multi-party system in 1946;

signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949; signed the 1951 Geneva Convention in 1951 which originally stipulated temporal and geographical limitation, which would not disrupt Turkey's settlement regime under any circumstances (Erder 2018); and finally became a NATO member in 1952. The entire decade was marked by liberalization of the market economy and early efforts for capitalist integration. Turkey made wide-reaching reforms for country's integration into capitalist market economy, including in agricultural sector. Reforms in agriculture included agricultural mechanization which would eventually lead to production of surplus labor in rural areas and mobilization of a large rural population towards urban areas. As a result, the settlement regime, a much less discussed aspect of which is to "immobilize" the rural population to ensure the continuity of agricultural production, lost its power over the rural areas (Erder 2018).

Besides these drastic changes in domestic and international politics, the 1950s is characterized by large scale migratory movements from the Balkans, namely Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, and Romania. Muslim minorities, who had been settled in these countries during the Ottoman expansions, are argued to have fled the communist regime into Turkey. Offering a generous reception to Balkan migrants, especially to those ethnic Turks, could easily be translated into domestic and international political capital (Kirisci 1991), especially in the Cold War period during which Turkey aligned with the Western bloc. On the other hand, Sema Erder (2018) draws attention to a significant shift in the governance of migration at the time. For Erder, as opposed to late 19th and early 20th century responses, Balkan migrants (as they were largely referred to in the literature) were seen less as the constituent elements of the Turkish nation to be *naturally* integrated into the host society but as "migrant and refugees". They were welcomed; but this time not as "the kin persecuted by Christian states" but as "Turks abroad persecuted by communists" in line with Turkey's self-assigned location in the Western bloc (Erder 2018: 168-169).

Balkan migrants at the time, in fact during the long period of the Balkan Migration from 1950s to 1989, were nonetheless incorporated into the settlement regime and were not governed under the Geneva Convention. They were settled in designated provinces, provided with social assistance and flexible and low interest rate housing loan opportunities to rebuild their lives in Turkey, and were eventually naturalized into Turkish citizenship (Ozgur Baklacioglu 2017). In line with the previous practices, they were settled on the basis of rural/urban divide. Those who were settled in rural areas were given arable lands with loans and on the condition that they would not sell their lands; thus, they were indebted to the state in a way to halt their mobility within the country. Those who were settled in urban areas were also offered housing loans to settle in the outskirts of the cities (Erder 2018). Similar practices notwithstanding, the way the Balkan migration was shifted from nation-building efforts towards accepting a qualified labor power who could be employed both in agricultural and industrial sector.

The problem with these attempts of controlling mobility of newcomers was that the settlement regime had, by the 1960s, lost its power to fully implement desired policies and to be able to keep the rural population in the agricultural production. Alongside other populations living in rural areas, Balkan migrants also moved to cities where they had access to richer employment opportunities and could build their own communities in the newly established migrant neighborhoods. When it comes to the 1960s, the settlement legislation was no longer as far-reaching in terms of governing mobility. Its deployment was delimited to the displacement and settlement of people for large-scale development projects and security reasons. However, the settlement regime as the formal and informal practices of a heterogeneous group of actors, institutions, and networks as well as the mentality shaping the mobility governance did not fade away and continued to underwrite the responses to mobility, especially in terms of differentiated treatment of populations on the move.

The 1960s, in this respect, marked another important moment in the way mobility was governed and policies of forced displacement or forced settlement were replaced with “liberalization” of domestic and international mobility. On the one hand, internal migration was on the rise and rural populations were moving to urban areas. On the other hand, following the enactment of the 1961 Constitution, Turkey had removed many restrictions imposed on its citizens to cross international borders and signed international labor agreements with West European countries. Interestingly, however, this putative liberalization was as related to encouraging free and voluntary mobility as to the management of domestic surplus labor power. İçduygu et al. (2009) argue that the economic regression, combined with the internal migration increasing the urban population in the late 1950s resulted in high unemployment rates. The state came up with two solutions to solve this problem: first is to create employment opportunities within the country; the second is to “export” the surplus labor power through signing bilateral agreements with Western European countries. These bilateral guest labor agreements started in 1961 with the Turkey-West Germany Labor Recruitment Agreement and was followed by other Western countries (İcduygu 2012). As a result, labor export to other countries worked as “demographic solution” which was imagined to later benefit the country by providing remittances and producing qualified labor power who would return and help develop industrialization of the country (Abadan-Unat 2006). Labor mobility out of Turkey and refiguring Balkan migrants within a relatively more internationalized and capitalist framework broke the migration/nation-building nexus.

Following the labor migration, Turkey started to be seen as traditionally an “emigration” country (İçduygu and Kirişçi 2009) and constrained former tides of migration within the history of nation-building that was eventually completed (see İçduygu, Toktaş, and Soner 2008). This new temporal line was drawn between (forced) migration and settlement during the nation-building process and the migration and mobility in the internationalized regime. Therefore,

migration and asylum were conceptually and methodologically separated from each other. The former was qualified within the auspices of the nation-building and implied religious and cultural homogeneity (people of Turkish culture or people who are assimilable into Turkish culture, see the section above). The latter, on the other hand, included forced mobilities defined within the new internationalized regime of refugee protection grounded upon the state/nation/citizen nexus (Soguk 1999) and underlined culturalist (if not reified) differences between the newcomers (therewith legally called asylum seekers or foreigners) and the host society.

As a result of this epistemic and political shift, continuities in government of mobility and attempts at controlling movement within and beyond the nation-state borders have changed and the settlement regime was pushed aside as a legislation regulating land, development, and infrastructure. However, even in late 1980s and 1990s, Turkish state's responses to forced displacement as in the case of the last and largest wave of Bulgarian migration in 1989 and state's attempt at forcibly displacing people as in the case of violent and militarist operation of evacuating Kurdish villages in the 1990s were informed by the embedded yet evolving settlement regime and it was, in many cases, in direct conflict with the international refugee protection regime.

Following World War II, Turkey had become one of the original signatories of the 1951 Geneva Convention. However, once the Geneva Convention was annexed with its 1967 Protocol to remove the time and geographical limitation, Turkey upheld the geographical limitation to the Convention which allowed it to avoid extensive amendments in the existing asylum law based on the selective criteria. Geographical limitation purports to upholding the clause "events occurred in Europe". This, in turn, allows Turkey to keep asylum and refugee status applicants from non-European countries of origin in a limbo without a clearly recognized status. Reasons provided for Turkey's insistence on the geographical limitation are manifold. Officially stated

reasons usually underline the geographical proximity to the refugee-producing regions such as Middle East and Africa. In a 2008 report prepared by the Committee on Human Rights Inquiry of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on the “Problems Faced by Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Illegal Migrants in Turkey” geographical limitation was justified through a geographical binary between the West and the non-West by various actors in the asylum regime of Turkey (Committee on Human Rights Inquiry of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 2008). Turkey, in this binary, was once again attributed a position metaphorically called “bridge” between the East and the West –a metaphor which has been informing Turkey’s politics of geography and its relations to other imaginative geographies since early modernization efforts. For example, Melih Ulueren, Turkish ambassador and Deputy Manager for Directorate of Migration, Asylum, and Visa, states,

“due to Turkey’s geographical location, countries in the east are *instable and poor*; and countries in the West are *stable and rich*. This being the case, we do not want our country to be a center of attraction [for the citizens of poor countries]. If we allow Turkey to be center of attraction, this causes an incredible social and financial burden for Turkey”. (Committee on Human Rights Inquiry of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, 2008, p.77, emphasis added).

Geographical location of Turkey and the political situation at its east are still used as the main reason behind the refusal to recognize full status. However, the underlying reasons are nationalist concerns regarding, first, population engineering as to who will be included within the territory which was historically Turkified and Islamized, and second, Turkey's relation to the regions in the middle of which it is geographically located: Middle East and Europe.

Starting from the 1970s and 1980s, but especially following the end of the Cold War, both forms of mobility and sovereign responses to mobility have been multiplied and became all the more complex. Events such as the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution in 1979, political and social turmoil in the Middle Eastern countries such as Iran-Iraq war between 1980-1988 as well as erupting internal conflict against religious and ethnic minorities

(particularly in Iraq during the Saddam regime, see Daniş 2006; Daniş, Taraghi, and Pérouse 2009), and the collapse of Soviet regimes caused various population displacements and located Turkey geographically in close proximity to both these regions and to Europe. Hence, Turkey's location in the dominant geography of migration which is imagined to be progressing from “the East” to “the West” was redefined from a traditionally “emigration country” to “transit, emigration, and immigration country”. (İcduygu et al. 2009).

When Turkey started increasingly receiving forcibly displaced populations from countries at its *east*, the way in which the state responded to such groups also changed. At the time, there were two parallel and at times contradicting legal regulations fashioning the migration governance: on the one hand, the Geneva Convention was the most comprehensive international legal document to which Turkey has been a subject, on the other hand, the Settlement Law was the authoritative legal framework governing mobility. When populations that could neither be included in the scope of ever-developing nation-building project nor could be granted refugee status within the scope of the 1951 Geneva Convention, namely non-European populations that could not be assimilated into Turkish culture, started arriving, Turkey had to rely more and more on the support of international community and reconfigure its response in order to make sure that populations did not settle in Turkey and their stay was temporary.

For instance, following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, around 1.5 million Iranians arrived in Turkey (İhramur-Öner 2013). Their stay was allowed temporarily, only until they were resettled in the Northern American and Western European countries with the efforts of UNHCR and broader international community. The response to Iraqi Kurdish refugee flows in 1988 and 1991, Kurdish groups fleeing the Saddam regime, was shaped by the merging of nationalist concerns and securitization of refugee groups. In 1988,

“Turkey’s first response was to close the border, concerned that opening the borders would allow entry of the PKK [armed section of the Kurdish movement] militants into its territory. However, due to the rapidly growing influx of refugees, it bowed to domestic and international pressure and agreed to temporarily accept Kurdish refugees on humanitarian grounds without granting them refugee status” (Ihlamur-Öner 2013: 195).

In 1991, a much larger, around 500.000, Iraqi Kurdish refugee population arrived at Turkish borders, but were trapped in the Turkish-Iraqi mountain range for Turkey did not open the borders. In fact, security concerns over the reception of Kurdish refugees peaked and led Turkey to send security forces into “the Iraqi side of the border to keep the Kurdish refugees out of Turkish territory” (Ihlamur-Öner 2013:197). Finally, as a result of painstaking UN and international diplomacy, Turkish government at the time managed to convince the US “take the lead in creating safe zones and a no-fly zone at the Turkish border” to which refugees were relocated (Ihlamur-Öner 2013:198). This solution was also offered as a remedy during the early years of Syrian migration and is still pushed for by the government.²⁵

In the early 1990s, the coming of Iraqi Kurdish refugees fleeing the Saddam regime as well as the pressures from Europe compelled Turkey to adopt a national legislation of migration and asylum management. In the meantime, the number of refugees and migrants coming to Turkey either to seek asylum or to find a job in the informal market or refugees who want to transit from Turkey to the West was drastically increasing. All these, coupled with the "security concerns" of Turkey regarding the Iraqi border (Biner 2016) as well as political pressure from Europe on Turkey to "contain" the transit migrants and refugees, paved the way for the adoption of a relatively more comprehensive legislation on the topic.

The 1994 Law, which would finally replace the 1934 Settlement Law, "Regulations on the Procedures and the Principles related to Mass Influx and the Foreigners Arriving in Turkey or

²⁵ TRTHaber (25 September 2019). “Türkiye’nin Suriye’de Güvenli Bölge Planı Hazır”. Available at <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/turkiyenin-suriyede-guvenli-bolge-plani-hazir-432682.html>

Requesting Residence Permits with the Intention to Seek Asylum from a Third Country" passed to control the migration flows in and through the country. Its main objective was to implement international norms in governing migratory movements in Turkey (Üstübcü 2017). Although widely welcomed, this legislation created a system called "double track" or "dual procedure" in which every non-European refugee needs to apply to Turkish migration authorities (then the Governorate and the foreigners' police) and to the UNHCR (which had been the sole authority in evaluating asylum claims in Turkey) separately for two different statuses. That is, even though both institutions were bound by the same principle (i.e., the well-founded fear of persecution), Turkey does not recognize the asylum rights of the non-European refugees in Turkey. It recognizes only the asylum seeker or conditional refugee status that requires an uncertain waiting period in Turkey before a "durable" solution, most likely settlement in the third country or voluntary repatriation. Whereas the UNHCR, functioning as the institution managing the third country resettlements of the refugees, grants the refugee status (Soykan 2012). In the period until this gap between the Turkish migration authorities and the UNHCR on the status of the refugees is resolved (most probably with the resettlement of the refugee in a third country), refugees wait in the so-called "satellite cities" assigned by the UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior (Biner 2016; Sari and Dincer 2017). These cities are selected rather arbitrarily except for one criterion: they are usually the cities of inner Anatolia with little or no connection to the border regions (especially the Western border) and with little supportive networks (Biehl 2015). Refugees must wait in these towns, with extensive surveillance measures that are often immobilizing. Moreover, being cities with none or very little supportive mechanisms (such as international NGOs or employment options) for refugees, this policy plays out as a mechanism that forces refugees to "survive on their own" (Sari and Dincer 2017) or to leave them at the disposal of local dynamics, such as humanitarian organizations.

Between 1994 and 2013, Turkey's relation to the EU advanced and Turkey became an accession candidate in 2001. In accordance with the European Commission's Accession Partnership Program, Turkey was asked to make necessary legal and political changes to come to terms with the EU *acquis*. In accordance with the EU conditionalities, Turkey adopted National Program of Action for the Adoption of the EU *Acquis* in 2001 and National Action Plan for Asylum and Migration in 2005, which did not have immediate effects on the configuration of the refugee regime. The period between 1994-2013 was also the period of legal activism on the part of the civil society advocating for extending rights and protection for refugees (Üstübcü 2019). Rights violations were frequently raised and brought to the international agenda such as through lawsuits in the European Court of Human Rights. Activists and scholars linked problems in implementation to the lack of comprehensive legislation and arbitrary implementation by enforcers who were given a “wide discretionary power” (Üstübcü 2019: 7). All these developments led to an extended collaboration between the EU, UNHCR, IOM and Turkey to draft a comprehensive legal framework which would institutionalize migration management, recognize a clearly defined set of rights and entitlement to refugee populations, clearly define the duties and responsibilities of migration bureaucracy, and to harmonize Turkey's migration regime with that of the EU (Üstübcü 2017).

In April 2013, Turkey adopted a new law titled “the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) which was cherished as the most standardized and comprehensive asylum legislation of the country. The law adopts the principle of *non-refoulement*, grants basic rights such as right to healthcare and education to those who fall under this law (asylum seekers, in the legal-bureaucratic language). Although some novelties were attempted (Soykan 2012), geographical limitation to the 1951 Geneva Convention has not changed so far. One of these novelties was the attempt to civilianize and centralize migration bureaucracy by transferring the migration management from the police to the newly established Ministry of Interior

Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM). DGMM took over the role of the foreigners' police which had been responsible for registering the refugees in designated satellite cities and monitoring the activities of refugees such as sign-ins and travel permits (Sari and Dinçer 2017). All these legal changes instituted Turkey's asylum regime in which legislation, granting rights only partially and unevenly- works in tandem with alternative support mechanisms, namely the humanitarian regime. This bipartite constitution of the asylum regime leads to various power relations that locate different refugee groups hierarchically and that have serious impacts on refugees' everyday life.

LFIP is designed for determining individual asylum claims, thus, does not apply to Syrians, the largest refugee population in the country, slightly more than 3.7 million as of early November 2021. From April 2011, the onset of Syrians towards Turkish borders, until 2015, Turkey pursued an "open door policy". However, not until October 2014, did Turkey have a legislation to manage the coming of Syrians *en masse* but it rather clung to the idea of "guesthood" of Syrians and "hospitality" of the Turkish nation. In October 2014, the Regulation on Temporary Protection was finally adopted and later annexed to LFIP. With this regulation, "all Syrians who entered in Turkey before April 8, 2011" were declared "entitled to temporary protection" (Soykan 2017). It is designed to serve the management of the refugee populations referred as "a mass-influx population". The regulation stipulates refugees under temporary protection have a "right to legal stay, protection from refoulement (involuntary repatriation or forced pushback) and access to a set of basic rights and services, including free healthcare" (Asylum Information Database, no date). In January 2016, with another regulation, Syrian refugees were granted right to work, although under strict conditions. However, different from the refugees managed under the LFIP, Syrians are not assigned to the satellite cities; they can settle in whichever city they want, unless they prefer to live in the camps built in the cities at the Syria-Turkey border. However, "once they are registered in a province, their mobility within the country is also

subject like other asylum groups” (Üstüncü 2019: 11). Although temporary protection status given the Syrian refugees was seemingly more favorable compared to the other statuses defined by the law, it institutionalized temporality and “gave rise to an ambiguous legal category that can be terminated by at the discretion of policy makers” (Üstüncü 2019: 11).

The main aim of the new law was to standardize, centralize, and civilianize the management of mobility in Turkey. It, on the other hand, created a manifold of statuses and categories, each being attached differential rights and treatment. These categories are listed by Ayşen Üstüncü (2017:116) as follows:

“i) foreigners residing in Turkey with residence or work permit, ii) refugees coming from European countries [a *de facto* non-existent category], iii) Syrian nationals under Temporary Protection Regulation, iv) unaccompanied children, v) conditional refugees waiting to be resettled to a third country, vi) asylum applicants waiting refugee status determination procedure by DGMM and UNHCR, vii) asylum seekers who are not included in asylum and resettlement procedures [applicants of subsidiary protection] (especially Afghan refugees), viii) victims of human trafficking, ix) irregular migrants.”

All these various categorizations institutionalized segregation among refugee groups, justifying differentially recognized rights, differential treatment, and hierarchies of deservingness among refugee populations. Differential categorization, as I have shown above, is not unfamiliar to Turkey’s government of mobility, in fact, it was a common practice in the settlement regime for legitimizing differences and hierarchies in provision of social assistance, access to rights and services, and access to mobility within and outside the nation-state borders. What this law brought, on the other hand, goes beyond the differential treatment of variously categorized and differentially empowered refugee groups. It seems to have developed a novel solution to the conflict between the settlement regime that has defined government of mobility in the Turkish context nearly for centuries and the internationalized refugee protection regime: instead of distinguishing forcibly displaced groups on the basis of those who were to be governed under the settlement regime and those who were to be governed under the internationalized regime, it seems to have incorporated the settlement regime *within* the internationalized framework by

extending (forced) settlement and (forced) displacement practices to each and every refugee group. In merging these two conflicting ways of government, the Turkish state consolidated its reactive power to tame and domesticate cross-border and internal mobility of refugees. This development, of course, coincides with the changing transnational context in which mobilities were increasingly depicted as “threats and factors of instability” and coded as crisis since the 1990s (Céline Cantat, Thiollet, and Pécoud 2020:6). The 1990s, as I have shown above, also reconfigured Turkey’s location in the dominant geography of migration as a “transit” context where mobilities setting off to Europe must be intercepted, contained, and, if possible, reversed. This being the case, mobility government of Turkey which had historically always been characterized by authoritarian attempts of taming and domesticating movements received financial, legal, political, and logistical support from the EU to which Turkey was trying to be a member.

With LFIP Turkey further aligned its government of mobility with that of the EU and involved in attempts at EU’s border externalization policies. Border externalization refers to “a fundamental change in the scales and operations of border institutions” (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, and Pickles 2015:895). It is widely used to account for the strategies of the global North countries to geographical, scalar, and administrative displacement and relocation (but also multiplication) of borders and border managements to the countries of the global South. In Turkey, European externalization policies can be traced back to mid-1990s (as I have discussed above) and they gradually increased in the early 2000s with EU accession process. In fact, Cavidan Soykan (2019) shows, “Turkey had signed thirteen bilateral readmission agreements with third countries since 2011.” In the meantime, Turkey progressively aligned its migration management to that of the EU, of course, preserving certain aspects specific to Turkey, primarily the geographical reservation. The notorious EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement signed in March 2016 marks the peak of externalization scheme.

The Readmission Agreement came at a moment when the “migrant and refugee crisis” swept the way migration was understood, discussed, and addressed. The discourse of crisis gained a common ground with the four consecutive shipwrecks, which caused the lives of more than 1200 people in April 2015 (Céline Cantat 2015). In the following months, increasing death tolls in the Mediterranean became the center of attention in the European media and political discourse. On September 3, 2015, the capturing picture of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi’s body on the shores of Turkey was specified as the first event which was followed by the march of refugees from Budapest to Vienna -referred as “March of Hope”- marked the second moment which the “real crisis” began (Bojadžijev and Mezzadra 2015; Kallius, Monterescu, and Rajaram 2016). Immediately after, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced the unilateral suspension of Dublin II Regulation, which stipulates the “first-country-of-arrival” rule and opened the doors for refugee arrival in Germany. Although this first moment of opening was followed by “multiple closures” (Bojadžijev and Mezzadra, 2015) even of the Schengen Agreement that is the epitome of intra-EU freedom of mobility, Germany’s move was largely regarded as the announcement of the need for extraordinary measures both within the EU and the member and neighbor countries.

The extraordinary measures -some of them are still in place and many more is on the way- allowed political interventions including tightening the asylum laws in the European countries, re-implementing and even strengthening the border controls in the Schengen Zone, militarizing the external borders of the EU, erection of walls and razor-wired borders at the EU borders, and accelerating the readmission agreements with the neighboring countries such as Turkey, Libya, and Serbia as part of the “externalization of the border” scheme and, finally, the criminalization and appropriation of migrant solidarity. These measures had several political consequences not only for the people on the move but also for the EU and the nation-states involved in the process.

The Readmission Agreement signed with Turkey had three main components: first, “the return of all new irregular migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands as of 20 March 2016”; second, the declaration of the “intent to resettle one Syrian from Turkey to the EU for every Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek Islands”; and third, financial aid “to be channeled to Turkey to improve the living conditions of refugees” (Üstübcü 2019: 12). Thus, Turkey’s role in transnational migration management has been shaped by a double effort: keeping *outside* the refugees who are coming from the southern and eastern borders of the country and keeping *inside* the refugees who are mobilized towards the European borders of Turkey. The “keeping outside” efforts resorted to strengthening and militarizing border management and erecting walls at the Turkish-Syrian border which were to be followed by other walls in the Eastern-Southern border of Turkey. “Keeping inside” efforts were achieved not only through the militarized western border but also through public services provisions and humanitarian aid to a group of refugees selected based on certain criteria.

Besides the financial aid, Turkey was promised the continuation of visa liberalization negotiations for Turkish citizens. Although drafted in a very technical, indeed technocratic language, the Agreement had three main political consequences. First, it uncritically established the conception that the mobility of Turkish citizens within the EU can be negotiated at the expense of immobilization of millions of refugees wanting to settle in EU countries. Second, it normalized and consolidated humanitarian government of refugees under the sponsorship either of the Turkish state or of the groups of states organized under the EU umbrella. Finally, the Agreement seems to have consolidated a contradiction: on the one hand, the deal aimed at further internationalization of Turkey’s migration regime and its full alignment with the Europeanization scheme. On the other hand, it left the government of international mobility within the country to the full discretion of the Turkish state, somehow vesting the state with powers unchecked by the international refugee protection regime.

This last one showed that externalization policies do not unproblematically “move outwards from the European center, and then straightforwardly get implemented by the passive ‘others’” (Karadağ 2019:1). The position of “other” attributed by Europe is often challenged, strategically utilized, or at times reversed by the implementing partners. Although Turkey was given the name “gatekeeper” by critical voices against the EU-Turkey deal, it is only partially true because the Turkish state further implemented techniques of mobilization and immobilization to refugees who were supposed to be kept inside.

Three years after the Readmission Agreement, in August 2019, Turkey started deploying checkpoints in the neighborhoods largely populated by migrants and refugees primarily in Istanbul but also in other major cities. Patrols were checking the identity cards of “migrant-looking” people (read as racialized) and deporting them if they did not have “valid” ID cards. “Validity” here has a twofold meaning: first, refugees have to have registration in Turkey and have ID cards qualifying them for temporary or international protection. Second, they have to be in the city where they are registered. In the same period, workplaces (mainly small-scale industrial workshops) in which migrants and refugees are working informally were raided for the same purposes of deportation, or in other words, for purposes of “fighting irregular migration” and regularizing it. Syrian refugees faced massive deportations, were forced to sign “voluntary repatriation documents”, and were further immobilized socially, economically and spatially.

Finally, in July 2019, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu declared that “Turkey unilaterally suspended the readmission agreement due to the fact that the visa liberalization process for Turkish citizens had not been completed by the EU” (Soykan and Öztürk 2019). Although even after Çavuşoğlu’s declaration, deportations to Turkey as well as Turkey’s attempts to halt migratory movements headed towards Europe continued. On 27 February 2020, upon an attack to Turkish Armed Forces in Idlib, Syria which killed more than 30 Turkish

soldiers, the government -once again- unilaterally annulled the Turkish-EU Readmission Agreement and announced that Turkey would open the European borders to refugees. The next day, hundreds of refugees set off to the Greek border and attempted to continue their journey towards the EU. According to the Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu, 142,145 people crossed the Greek border. However, those who went to the land borders (approximately 5000 people) were stranded in the border zone and were exposed to violent treatment by the Greek Border Guard. More than 5000 refugees stayed in the border zone between 27 February and 27 March 2020. Following the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, Turkish guards opened the Turkish borders and reaccepted the refugees while declaring that when the pandemic is over, Turkey will open the European borders again. Once the borders were declared open, Turkey's law enforcement which had thus far worked hard to contain migratory movements within the country's borders started an organized effort to facilitate migrants' movements to Turkey. It seemed almost that the actors that had been the primary collaborators in the EU's border regime "were now actively dismantling it" (De Genova 2021).

So far, I have outlined the workings of Turkey's government of mobility, focusing on historical changes and continuities in it. In its current form, the entire mobility regime looks inconsistent, fragmented, arbitrary, almost fickle and messy, oscillating between two extremes from "spectacle of welcoming" to massive deportations and interventions that range between "make stay and let go." However, as I have set out to show, the mobility regime goes beyond juggling a variety of positions, actors, policies, and discourses. It is built on the historically distinct mechanisms of governing mobility that enable the state to assume flexible yet central positions based on ideological, political, and historical underpinnings. In this respect, ambiguity works yet another technique to conceal this widely differentiated and graded government. Responses varied depending on Turkey's domestic and foreign policies, changing ideological

constellations, and the place of the said migratory movement in Turkey's nation-state historiography.

Accordingly, each forcibly displaced population (internal or external) are assigned to different categories and governed based on their categorization. In the face of almost every tide of migration, the state had developed various responses designed to internalize or exclude the populations on the move. As I have shown throughout the chapter, there are manifold of categories -*muhacirs*, *mültecis*, *mübadils* (those who came after the Greek-Turkish population exchange), foreigners, Balkan migrants, migrants from former Soviet countries, Iraqi Kurdish refugees named *the Peshmerga* to deny them refugee status, asylum seekers, conditional refugees, *Syrian muhacirs*, irregular migrants, and many more.

Variations notwithstanding, the main pillar of the state's migration response remained to seize the mobility, internalize the populations on the move, and react in a way to regulate and order not only actually existing mobilities but also potential mobilizations, political, physical, or economic.

In other words, each of these categories produces knowledge about the displaced populations through which they come to be known. They become known by their difference from or resemblance to the host community - in a way to consolidate the constitutive yet graded differentiation between the "citizen" and "alien". These constitutive binaries are far away from designating a co-habitation between different (seemingly opposite) groups. They are suffused with and shaped by power relations, including the power to represent someone or something in a certain way, within a certain "regime of representation" (Hall 2020 [1990]). These are violently hierarchical and operationalize to reiterate this hierarchy through which one group comes to define the other (Hall 2020 [1990]). This binary reaches to such an extent that it does more than defining the other; it creates the other. The historical unfolding of Turkey's government of mobility is constructed upon producing certain groups and situating them in

certain regimes of representation which also have performative power (E. Isin 2018) in the sense that they “become embedded in human practices and provide ways of acting and being in the world” (Isin 2018:117).

This fragmented, if not messy, structure of legal regulations and migration bureaucracy -as I have hoped to lay out throughout the chapter- has also authorized other relations and ways of governing in the contemporary refugee regime which unfolded at the cusp of a social/political transformation in Turkey. It paved the way for humanitarian logic and institutions to grow and become an inseparable pillar of refugee regime. The asylum regime, in some respects, has shared the attempts of sovereign control over mobility with humanitarian institutions -state and non-state- that have much more intensively embedded in the everyday of refugees than bureaucratic and law enforcement institutions. These categories assigned to refugee groups did more than determining the legal status, they condition displaced populations’ everyday experiences, their relation to the broader mobility regime, access to provision of assistance, valorization of their labor power, and their relation to the host society. In this respect, production of the refugee always already goes beyond the legal production of legality/illegality (De Genova 2002) although the legal definition underwrites various ways to relate to refugee. In the next chapter, I will discuss the moral and humanitarian production of refugee in Turkey.

Chapter 2: Humanitarian Production of the Refugee

We are the grandchildren of a muhajirun generation, but at the same time we are the grandchildren of an ansar generation [. . .] my siblings in Reyhanlı should serve as ansar to the muhajirun who fled from the brutality of al-Assad. They should fulfil the same duty; they should also open their homes exactly like it happened at the time [of the Prophet]; and they should not see them [the refugees] as a criminal element against themselves. (Erdoğan 2013, qtd in Zaman 2016)

In the previous chapter, I showed that Turkey's refugee and migrant reception relies on a reactive state power aiming at governing mobility not only at the nation-state borders but also within the territory of the nation-state. By reactive state power, I mean that state response to mobility is always already grounded upon the attempts to seize already existing mobilities and accompanying social and political activities. In other words, state yields and consolidates its sovereign power by regulating actually existing mobilities and preventing the potential ones. To that end, government of mobility does not –and actually cannot– stop at the nation-state borders but has to seep into the heart of the so-called nationalized space. In order to further elaborate, I have discussed how two main mechanisms of Turkey's government of mobility, namely the settlement regime and internationalized refugee protection regime, have become interwoven - although not always smoothly.

In this chapter, I will look into a closely interlinked aspect of Turkey's mobility regime in its contemporary form, namely the humanitarian production of the refugee. I argued that the mobility regime is broader in scope in that it does not only assign legal categories that are in conformity with Turkey's peculiar combination of the settlement regime and the internationalized refugee regime. It further conditions everyday experiences of refugee communities in terms of opening or closing spaces for access to rights, service provisions, labor

market, moral communities, and humanitarian assistance. Legal categories have been entangled with a selective and Islamically informed humanitarian approach afforded officially to Syrian refugees who were deemed to be legitimate refugees (who flee *religious* persecution). Separating Syrian refugees from other refugee groups in the country and portraying them as the legitimate refugees instantiates how the moral and ideological situating of refugees have become entangled with the mobility regime that I laid out in the previous chapter.

This humanitarian approach, almost too readily demarcating between legitimate and illegitimate refugees, leads to “humanitarian production of the refugee” (Rozakou 2012). It is adopted by many actors including ministries, municipalities, humanitarian NGOs and neighborhood networks, so much so that the refugee figure came to be known almost through their eligibility to humanitarian assistance. The refugee, in other words, was associated with the deserving recipient of aid. It is in this sense that humanitarian production of the refugee is achieved and sustained. Selectively incorporated into the government of mobility, humanitarian production of the refugee -spectacularized through public speeches, media and social media, and the deployment “open door” policy”- successfully contains the reactive character of the regime while fulfilling a crucial role in the “production and management of alterity” (Rozakou 2012). Reactive power of the nation-state thus relies as much on humanitarianism as legal framework and border enforcement in Turkey. When Syrian refugees -culturally and religiously homogenized- came, they were, and I argue they had to be, incorporated in this new domestic and international framing that could facilitate both simultaneous production and management of alterity and govern and control Syrian mobility within and at the borders of the country. Combined, they made possible the humanitarian production of the refugee.

Humanitarian production of the refugee

That said, I argued that one technique behind the constitution of the regime of governing mobility is assigning various, vaguely defined yet strictly demarcated, legal categories to people who pass international borders. Most of the time, these categorizations work retroactively – *after the event* of crossing borders and after the populations crossing borders have been situated historically, culturally, and ideologically. The knowledge production practice of mobility government, then, first clusters people in line with their essentialized (national, religious, sectarian and ethnic) identifications, names them differently, and situates them to their relative places within the societal relations and hierarchies. The dissection, so to speak, based on national, religious, and sectarian identifications is intrinsically related to contemporary Turkey as an “imaginative geography and history” capable of creating and performing a sense of “distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away” (Said 2008: 361). The negotiation of distance and difference provide the discursive and ideological grounds for inclusion, exclusion, or differential inclusion. Legal categories and rights attached to displaced groups, to reiterate, are shaped within this negotiation of distance and difference. They were formed with oblique moral and political references (and sometimes explicit references, see the reasons for refusing to lift geographical reservation to the 1951 Geneva Convention in the previous chapter) to Turkey’s past, its nation-building process, its current imaginative position in the global affairs –whatever those references might be in a particular period of time. In the case of Syrian refugees, Turkey’s involvement in the political and military turmoil in Syria, its self-assigned position as the leader of the *Islamic world* (the historical existence of which is very much controversial), neo-Ottomanist foreign policy postulating protection of Syrian people “as an imperial responsibility”, and “cultural intimacy” (Kaya 2016) via (imaginative) shared history provided the discursive ground for the way Syrian refugees were to be approached. Besides legal production of the refugee (as an administrative

and legal category), the humanitarian production of the refugee took its current form amid these historiographic, discursive, and ideological configurations.

In fact, looking at the history of government of mobility, public assistance to newcomers during the nation-building process of the late Ottoman and early Republican period, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, was effectively utilized to settle displaced people, control their mobility, and to ensure their productive activities. At that time, newcomers were also made part of the welfare regime (in terms of regulating taxes and provision of housing and agricultural land) because their naturalization into Turkish citizenship was already in prospect. However, shift from welfare assistance to humanitarian approach has only recently happened in the 1990s. Also, mobilization of compassion depicting forcibly displaced populations as the Muslim and/or Turkish brethren (fleeing Christian persecution and/or communist persecution) in need of the protection of the Turkish state was frequently used to facilitate incorporation of newcomers into the host society as well as to promote local solidarity.²⁶ Even the Bulgarian-Turkish minority, who were swiftly naturalized into Turkish citizenship due to their connection to the Turkish culture and the Ottoman history (the segment of the nation who returned to the motherland), was reframed within this emergent language of compassion and were responded with limited aid not as public assistance but aid given due to humanitarian generosity of the state.

Besides the fact that welfarist integration of newcomers has almost totally faded away, the difference in the case of humanitarian response to Syrians is distinct for at least two reasons: first, they were not historically seen as part of the “Turkish nation” or “Turkish culture” so that

²⁶ One of the more recent examples of mobilization of this discourse was in 1989, when the Bulgarian Turkish minority fled the Zhivkov regime. The prime minister at the time Turgut Özal said, “all of the migrants [coming from Bulgaria] have rejoined the motherland and liberated” (Erder 2018: 181). Özal resorted to populist discourses by positing Turkey as the motherland of all Turks living in countries other than Turkey. In Turkey, this pro-migrant populism surely served to consolidate nationalism; however, it did not amount to addressing newcomers’ needs, and -as the academic research on the topic suggests- they were left to work in “short-term, precarious, low-paying jobs” and were provided with no further support other than they could mobilize with their relatives already living in Turkey (Erder 2018).

they could be incorporated into the nation-building process. Second, their prospect to citizenship was seen far-fetched, if not bitterly decried by the majority of the population, including the parliamentary opposition; hence, temporariness of their stay had to be emphasized time and again, by various discourses, practices and legal mechanisms. The humanitarian sentiments then had to be derived from somewhere else. Therefore, other narratives underlining the religious and imperial (Ottoman) history as well as reified cultural elements such as hospitality came to the foreground.

However, this still leaves the question as to why and through which means Syrian refugees were made part of the humanitarian regime of Turkey. The management of mobility in Turkey does not recognize refugee status for displaced Syrian population. Moreover, the existing legislation (Temporary Protection Regulation) offers neither a comprehensive set of rights to refugees nor a prospect for citizenship or being settled in a third country where refugees can be granted full legal status. Humanitarianism, both as a practice of giving assistance and as a set of discourses concealing the lack of rights, works to supplement the existing legal framework. This is, of course, only a partial explanation. It might as well be argued -albeit speculatively- that even if Syrian refugees had been given full legal status with rights and entitlements, they could still have been incorporated into the regime of Islamic charity for it has become a means of reproduction for millions of citizens of Turkey, working almost as a non-wage income (Kutlu 2015) for countless households.

Yet another, and related account raised the issue of religious backgrounds. In a context where the full refugee status is denied to the sheer majority of the refugee population, narratives about a shared religion were foregrounded to grasp how Syrian refugee movement was governed both for Syrians themselves and for the locals, both in the domestic and international realm. Still, the question of why and how *Syrian refugees* became a part of the select group to be incorporated in the Islamic regime of charity is interesting given that they are neither the first

nor the last (non-Turkish or assimilable) Muslim refugee groups seeking asylum in Turkey. Many refugees, including from Iraq, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, who identify themselves Muslims, had already been in Turkey since the 1990s, and their arrival in Turkey did not end, on the contrary, intensified after 2011. They were not, however, incorporated either into the official state humanitarianism or into the Islamic regime of charity, although they might be offered assistance by small scale neighborhood networks or by solidarity associations of respective national groups. The answer, then, cannot be found simply in shared religion, although the mobilization of religious sentiments and compassion was a crucial aspect.

Another explanation came from foreign policy analysis angle. Among others, Umut Korkut (2019), comparing Turkey's response to "refugee crises" in Syria and Myanmar, argued that what Turkey's response to both cases had in common was the changes in Turkey's foreign policy and geopolitical thought under AKP. Accordingly, Turkey has devised a "humanitarian diplomacy" which would enable the country to have influence over a wide geography, symbolizing Turkey's geopolitical power and conscience (Korkut 2019). As far as Syrian refugees are concerned, Korkut argues that this novel policy was operationalized with references to "Turkey's Ottoman past to qualify the current compassion for aggrieved nations" (Korkut 2019: 666), including Syrian refugees "with whom we share long history and often a common fate" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012, quoted in Korkut 2019: 667).

What all these explanations (offered both by the government and by scholars) have in common is that they point to larger and interwoven transformations, the former in the domestic politics and the latter in foreign policy. All speak to the rise of Islamism as the condition of possibility of these transformations. In the foreign policy front, the AKP, since it came to power, has made it a priority to shift foreign policy from a relatively neutral, isolated and Western-oriented traditional approach of the Republic to a "proactive" one (Davutoğlu 2001) in which geopolitical thought and humanitarianism go hand in hand (Korkut 2019). Accordingly, the

AKP formed new relationships with the neighboring countries, particularly with the countries in the Middle East around notions of historical connections and cultural links (Karakaya Polat 2018). This foreign policy “opening” to the Middle Eastern countries was harshly criticized by the opposition for shifting Turkey’s axis (imaginary location in the global politics) from the West (i.e. EU membership) to Islamism and neo-Ottomanism (Karakaya Polat 2018). The AKP rule effectively capitalized on these critiques and made the Middle East (as an imaginative geography both for the AKP and for the opposition, immediately associated with the non-Western and Islam), and particularly Syria after 2011, a showcase for the conflation of “geopolitical power and conscience” (Korkut 2019).

Domestically, resorting to religious and culturalist discourses, of course, is neither new nor surprising given that the AKP has long been a part of Turkey’s conservative and Islamist movements. In Turkey, religion and essentialized cultural notions have conspicuously stood out as a remedy to many issues, the most salient of which is the call for Islamic regime of charity and solidarity in the face of impoverishment and shrinking public services (Buğra 2012; 2008; Kutlu 2015; Koyuncu 2014). “We are members of a civilization that would ‘shame going to bed with full stomach if our neighbors are famished’” is the most pronounced hadith through which to mobilize palliative efforts of religious solidarity (Koyuncu 2014). The interpretation of the hadith can vary, capable of expanding and narrowing the ideas of civilization. For instance, in AKP’s discourses the neighbor can reach out all the way to Muslim people who are under persecution Myanmar (Korkut 2019) or suffering from poverty in Somalia; and hunger can be used as a metaphor for “suffering” in general. Syrian refugees were selectively included in the “neighbors”, and their suffering in the “hunger” mentioned in the hadith and were postulated as those whose hardships should be ameliorated through Islamic solidarity.

Given both the volume and intensity of the refugee arrivals, and the hardships they have faced in Turkey, the Syrian migration had to be dealt as a “social problem” (although never

unequivocally articulated as such, see Sert and Daniş 2021), the remedy to which was to be found within Turkey's specific and historical circumstances. Also, the conflict in Syria displaced millions of people and was depicted as a protracted and internationalized "crisis" capturing the attention of the international community. This, in effect, compelled the state to negotiate the arrival of refugees within Turkey's government of mobility without abandoning the internationalized, more precisely Europeanized, regime of refugee protection. Islamic regime of charity manifested as a remedy to forced displacement that went far beyond the state's ability to halt, simultaneously producing, managing, and governing Syrian mobility.

Problematics of the Humanitarian Production of the Refugee

Of course, the Islamic regime of charity in Turkey did not suddenly appear as a remedy to social issues, such as poverty, long-term care (elderly and childcare), orphaned households and children, and more currently, forced displacement, which the state (and public services) failed or is unwilling to address. It neither unfolded in a vacuum nor was it latent within the society, waiting to be resuscitated as an authentic cultural trait that was suppressed by the modernization and secularization processes, even though there is a great attempt to portray it that way. It was wrought out of a manifold of political struggles and local, national, and transnational transformations. In turn, it brought about many other transformations shaping the present. Incorporation of Syrian refugees into the Islamic regime of charity, then, cannot be attributed only or simply to cultural and civilizational traits. Regardless of efforts to present it as a result of transnational Muslim brotherhood, neighborhood, civilizational duty, humanitarian approach to refugees nonetheless took place and emerged within a nation-state context which, by definition, is territorially bounded and foreigner-averse (İkizoğlu Erensu and Kaşlı 2016) with no visible effort to undo the state-nation-citizen nexus (Soguk 1999). It has hence happened due to transformations in the way certain forms of migratory movements,

suffering, and state and collective obligations to address suffering are perceived and problematized within Turkey.

It is in this sense that I argue to locate the Islamic regime of charity and accompanying humanitarianism to Syrian refugees within a broader set of “problematizations” emerging with and shaped by two concurrent and connected developments: increasing neoliberalization of Turkey and the gradual rise of the Islamist movement and eventually the 20-year-long Islamist party rule since 2002. While the former licensed the capital, unleashed the market forces, assaulted organized labor, demonized the social state, and attacked equality (Brown 2019:2); the latter curiously conjoined it by enforcing traditional morality, featuring culturalist and religious forms of conduct, and promoting faith-based and communitarian solidarity through which to transform the ways in which societal issues were to be problematized, made sense of, and offered solutions.

Of course, Islamist politics and morality was not the only solution offered to what appeared to be “problematic” in Turkey; the violent suppression of labor, organized assault on labor unions, increasing securitization and criminalization of social movements (Akça, Bekmen, and Özden 2014) –the most prominent being the militarist response to the Kurdish movement–, increasingly authoritarian populism propagating nationalism as well as desecularization of the social and the political all accompanied neoliberalism in Turkey (Atalay 2018). In this drift towards “neoliberal authoritarianism” (as a wide spectrum of scholarship uses as a blanket term to define contemporary Turkey under the AKP rule), Islamist civil society and political parties assumed a role of rearticulating Islam as the unifying and stabilizing force in the society without unsettling soaring market integration (Koyuncu 2014). Postulating Islam as the long-lost social glue, the Islamist movement offered new interpretations of and solutions to existing and emergent social phenomena, in other words, came up with new problematizations which could both challenge established notions by Kemalism and secularism and offer new solutions

that appear to be emanating from suppressed cultural and religious values of the (always already Muslim) society.

In order to explicate what shape problematizations of social phenomena took under Islamism in Turkey, I find Foucault's analysis helpful. Foucault (Foucault 1997 [1984]:118) defines "problematization" as what lies at the root of the "transformations of difficulties and obstacles of a practice into a general problem for which one proposes diverse practical solutions." Problematization both as a methodological equipment and as a modality of inquiry (Koopman 2013) somewhat reverses the conventional order of inquiry. It does not manifest certain issues as "problems" to which solutions to be offered; instead, it first looks at diverse solutions and responses given to a social issue and how these solutions are made possible. Problematization, in this respect, traces the ways in which a group of obstacles and difficulties were developed into "problems" to which to produce a response. In other words, it is a double inquiry into "how the different solutions to a problem have been constructed; but also, how these solutions result from a specific form of problematization" (Foucault 1997[1984]: 119). It is in this respect I propose to employ Foucault's theory of problematization to delve into how the Islamist government in Turkey has postulated new solutions to what has been developed into "problems", most particularly, displacement and impoverishment.

As such, problematization of certain issues (in Foucault's theory it can be traced in, for instance, the birth of problematics of sexuality, madness, and delinquency) and response to them through practices and programmes of government (Rose and Miller 1992) is about unevenly situating groups of people in social hierarchies. It is, therefore, intimately related to value regimes in its two senses. First, in terms of valorization and devalorization of labor of those cast as "problematic" (or "normal" in the sense Foucault discusses) as the direct expression of the relations of capitalist production (N. Smith 2017). Second, in terms of

producing, appropriating, and distributing (social) values and “differential modes of inclusion and exclusion” (Rajaram 2018, 8).

I take both the Islamic charity regime and faith-based humanitarian approach to Syrian refugees in Turkey as *one of many contesting responses* -although the one that has managed to become hegemonic- to what have been postulated as problematics: impoverishment (taken here as dispossession from means of social reproduction) and forced displacement. It is way beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss how impoverishment and forced displacement came to be problematized in the making of contemporary capitalist relations and of the nation-state as the dominant form of polity of the world politics. Instead, I will offer a brief genealogy of how both are reinterpreted and became entangled in Turkey’s recent history and attempt to show that both are rooted in the double development marking Turkey’s present: neoliberalization and the rise of Islamism.

Before moving on to how humanitarian production of the refugee was enabled by the intersection of migration management, neoliberalism, and Islamism in Turkey, I will offer a genealogy of the location of religion in the history of contemporary Turkey. Next section aims at challenging the long-winded political and academic discussions leaning on the culturalized binary between Westernization/secularism and Islam as the genuine and original spirit of the Turkish nation. I instead outline the boundary struggles between the two and how they have been interlaced.

Boundary Struggles Between Secularism and Islam: A Brief Genealogy of Rising Islamism in Turkey

In his critical response to 20th century anthropologists who posit religion as a distinctive sphere of human practice and belief, Talal Asad (1993) argues that such an approach not only separates religion from politics but also invites us to separate it conceptually from the domain of power.

These accounts regard religion as stripped of politics and pushed into the private/personal sphere without any effect on the political sphere; hence, they fall short in addressing how religion transpires at the heart of the exercise of power. This approach also reveals an understanding of religion where it is decontextualized as a universal, “transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon” (Asad 1993: 28). He rather contends, we need to examine how, throughout history, religion has been located and relocated within different configurations of power, how it has held the power that created the condition of truth and whether and how it has been pushed aside. Analyzing the history of Christianity, Asad (1993) contends that, religion has enjoyed a certain political power to deploy disciplinary techniques and regulatory activities of social institutions as well as discourses that have rendered possible certain dispositions, practices, roles, and subjectivities while excluding, criminalizing, and denouncing others (Asad, 1993, p.35). In other words, it has been -and still is- capable of posing some issues as problematics and offering them solutions that could actually become rather hegemonic, or in Asad’s words, that are capable of creating the conditions of truth. In the middle of the ethical turn which brought religion to the forefront as a social value of American civil life, the Reagan administration, for instance, had “announced that religious organizations are more effective than state agencies and secular organizations in the provision of welfare” (Tuğal 2017a, 72) which began to be postulated less as a responsibility of the state than of (moral benevolent) communities. Asad suggests, then, instead of separating religion from politics as a fundamental feature of modern secular societies, we need to recognize the ways in which religion and politics interlace (possibly much more deeply than we think at first glance) and pay attention to how the boundary between the religious and the secular has been demarcated time and again throughout history.

For Ahmet Çiğdem (2021, 70), the interlacing of religion and politics, especially in Abrahamic religions, “is most blatantly manifested in mobilization of society or the body of believers

around mundane objectives” that are mediated by the language of religion. In Turkey too Islamic discourses were widely utilized and propagated in order to justify the Independence War (1919-1923, the war that culminated in the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, ironically the benchmark of which was to be an almost despotic secularism) “taking place against infidels” (Bora 1998a). Later, this religious justification was largely buried under efforts of building a secular nation. In the 1990s, at the pinnacle of struggle between Islamism and secularism as the two rival projects for hegemony to define society in Turkey, this narrative would be resurrected by the Islamist movement who advocated that the War of Independence was a victory thanks to religious unity and mobilization of the Turkish-Muslim society (Özyürek 2006). So much so that, the founding symbols of Turkey (including Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding leader) were to be translated into an Islamic language in an effort to provide a new historiography. It must be noted, though, the “Islamist nostalgia for the foundational years attempted to reconfigure the present rather than the past relations and structures of power” in the 1990s (Özyürek 2006, 154). The contestation over an alternative historiography also manifested another moment in the nation-building process through a boundary struggle between secularism and religion. History of modernization of Turkey (and previously the Ottoman state), maybe more than anything else, shows the line between religion and secularism is always open to contestation and has been redrawn many times, depending on political and economic conditions.

This boundary struggle, a fundamentally modern one, is rooted in the earliest modernization efforts of the 19th century in the Ottoman Empire. Previously, in the Ottoman state, the social stratification was built on the division between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, the former having the upper hand. Also, although Islamic sharia law was never fully or strictly applied (Gülalp 1995), Islam played the main justificatory principle of the empire which had kept the sacred post of the Caliphate since 1516. However, when, in the 18th and 19th centuries,

the nature of the Ottoman state's encounter with the West (the Christian Empires) shifted from a relationship between equal military and imperial powers to one of peripheralization of the Ottoman empire (Gülalp 1995), the Empire faced a crisis of legitimacy domestically and internationally (Deringil 2007; 2003). Modernization efforts started to take place at that very moment, as a defensive strategy to restore its power. Deringil (2007) argues that the solution found to this legitimacy crisis was not simply modernization but “a defensive modernization” that adopts the very ideological means of those who posed the threat. Accordingly, nation building efforts started to bring the empire's ethnically and religiously homogeneous components under the umbrella identity of Ottoman.

The emergence of Islamism as a modern ideology is coeval with modernization efforts in the Ottoman Empire. Tanıl Bora (1998a) argues, when the *Tanzimat* and *Islahat* Reform Eras (1839 and 1856 respectively) attempted to modernize the society introducing equal liberal citizenship into the political structure, the Muslim majority lost its privileges accorded to them within the Millet system,²⁷ instigating a discontent among the Muslim Ottoman intellectuals. The birth and growth of Islamism as a modern ideology in the Ottoman empire coincides with the age of nationalism. Reinterpreting nationalism as a Western concept, Islamist intellectuals argued that “the principal element in political identity to form the basis for establishing and regulating a society could only be Islam”. They hence embraced nationalism only insofar as it coalesced with Islam (Bora 1998). Paradoxically, modernization efforts started to create an umbrella identification for all the constituents, caused further and essentialized divergences through which nationality was aligned with religion.

Later, during especially the Second Constitutional Monarchy Era (*II. Meşrutiyet*, 1908-1920), when nationalism among religious and ethnic minorities in the empire was soaring, this

²⁷ Dividing society on the basis of religion, and hierarchizing religions according to Muslim and non-Muslim groups.

approach seeped into official nationalism of the government and was reflected in policies which attempted to find economic and non-economic ways to transfer wealth and property from non-Muslim to Muslim populations. For instance, Doğan Çetinkaya (2015), in his book *Osmanlı'yı Müslümanlaştırmak* (Islamizing the Ottoman Empire) shows how economic boycotts against non-Muslim populations (and their European allies) have become part of the building of nationalized economy during the Second Constitutional Monarchy (1908-1920). Appropriation of non-Muslim wealth and property through various means or compelling non-Muslim populations to leave their property behind so that they could be redistributed among the Muslim population continued as the backbone of redistributive activities of the Republic and combined with efforts to settle or displace various groups (see the previous chapter). This economic discrimination against non-Muslims continued in the 1930s and 1940s through heavy taxes and pogroms in which the plundering of non-Muslim wealth and property was covertly allowed by the government. The alignment of religion and nation within economic and political nationalization, hence, slowly penetrated the Republican period despite strong emphasis on secularism. Moreover, migratory waves and responses to them that I have outlined in the previous chapter solidified this alignment, making Muslims the primary constituent of the nation-building. By the time secularism became an official ideology, Islam had already been sitting at the heart of the nationalized population. During the nation-building, alienation of Islam from the public sphere went hand in hand with the expulsion of non-Muslim populations (and hence religious heterogeneity), undercutting secularism as a promise of the Republic of Turkey (Koyuncu 2014).

I mentioned above that during the War of Independence (1919-1923) the leadership and nationalist intellectuals effectively resorted to the Islamic language to garner popular support, framing the war of independence as “war against infidels” referring to victorious Western powers of the World War I and Greece. Ironically, though, the defeat of Western powers further

incited aspirations to Westernize, understood as the only way to make Turkey a member of “civilized contemporary humanity” (Bora 1998). As Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver (1885-1966), an intellectual and former Ministry of National Education in the early republican period, succinctly said “In the Turkish Revolution, maybe Europe was defeated, but Europeanism sure triumphed” (quoted in Bora 1998).

At the end of the Independence War, the new republic was founded, and new modernizing and Westernizing reforms started, which were marked by secularizing efforts that would later be the most controversial political topic of Turkey’s political history. Starting with the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, a series of reforms banished *medreses* (religious schools) and adopted the Law on Unification of Education in 1924; brought the enactment of a secular civil code (adapted from Switzerland) and penal code (adopted from Italy) in 1926; Latinized the Ottoman alphabet in 1928; and imposed clothing reform to modernize the traditional clothing of the population in 1934 (aiming at Westernizing the look of the population). Even more radically, in 1926 the constitutional provision of “Islam is the religion of the state” was lifted and finally in 1937, principle of laicism was amended to the Constitution.

These reforms, however, cannot be simply read as “mimicking Western modernization”. Intrinsic to them was the longing for restoring the past strength of the Ottoman Empire as a great power, or at least, to prove that the Turkish nation was as part of *contemporary civilization* as the Western powers. These aspirations led to endeavors to synthesize Western civilization with authentic national values and, in effect, to an ambivalent relationship with the West which is “either celebrated as a ‘model’ to be followed or exorcised as a threat to ‘indigenous’ values” (Ahiska 2003, 353). The solution was found within Turkish nationalism at the time: civilization and culture were superficially separated, and civilization was reduced to technology and material development (Bora 1998). This way, the Western civilization could be adopted

without necessarily abandoning what is indigenous - Turkish national culture in which Islam is an inseparable component.

These reforms sidelined the Islamic identity constitutive of the earlier nation-building efforts and expelled Islam from the public realm. In fact, the Republican cadres never totally banished religion, the struggle was more over the control of religion as a political force to galvanize opposition and who were to have the religious authority. At the time of nation-states, this boundary struggle between secularism and religion seems to take place most intensely in the nation-building process; in other words, in defining the content of the nation. Religion, in this respect, plays a paradoxical role: it both functions as a glue in the construction of the nation (and nationalism) and it keeps alive the threat against modernizing mission intrinsic to nation-building (Hobsbawn, cited in Bora 1998). For Turkey, at the time, the solution out of this paradox was found in the nationalization of the religious identity in a way to serve the needs of nation-building. That, Benedict Anderson (Anderson 2006[1983]) argues, does not mean an outright replacement of religion with nation. But it entailed reconfiguration of both religion and nation: it endeavored to sacralize the nation through inventions of transhistorical traditions, rituals and myths and located religion -at least in the case of Turkey in the early Republican period- as the reservoir through which national morals and conscience (as well as nationalized conduct and identity) are iterated and justified. Also, nationalization of religion served the centralization of the control over religion and religious interpretations, which, again in Turkey, made religion a main point of political contentions.

Reinterpreting Islam amid Secularization: Turkish Exceptionalism?

In the Muslim-majority societies, particularly the ones in the so-called Middle East and North Africa, it is argued that nation-building process was accompanied with a double anxiety: that of belatedness (to Western modernity) and that of the failure of religion to deliver a cohesive

community (Bora 1998). Interpreting nation-state (and nation as its imagined community) as mandatory for the survival of Muslim communities, Islamic societies found the solution in coalescing efforts of restoring Islam's authentic identity with building nation (Bora 1998). It is in this respect, Islam assumed the principal role of defining nations and nationalisms, particularly in Arabic societies. However, this coalescence served the justification of Islamism as a rival to nationalism, and in the 1980s, Islamism took precedence over nationalism in the configuration of Muslim societies.

This analysis seems to echo what Talal Asad (1993) criticizes as dominant approach in Western understanding of secularism. In this understanding, separation of religion from politics (and power) is attributed uniquely to the modern history of the West, fundamentally excluding mainly Islam but also other religions from secularization (and by proxy modernity) as a political-historical process. Therefore, it is claimed, Muslim traditions, by their essence, cannot keep religion apart from politics; in fact, their coupling is what fundamentally constitutes these societies. This is not an isolated take on Islam or Muslim societies, it is a rather dominant approach in studies of secularism, if not in social sciences in general. It is frequently used less as a social scientific depiction than a political justification for the fundamental and immutable difference between Islam and the West (see Huntington 1993; Gellner 1997). Ernest Gellner, an esteemed scholar of nationalism, also reiterated this tradition, but with an exception. "Theoretical consistency [of this approach] demands that Turkey must be seen as an exception among Muslim countries for having achieved secularization" (Gülalp 2002:22). In this respect, Gellner (1997, quoted in Gülalp 2002:22) argued, "Islam is unique among world religions, and Turkey is unique within the Muslim world".

However, Gellner's take on Turkey as "the exception within exception" actually works to vindicate the rule assuming immutable difference between Islam and the West. It accompanies the historical account of Turkish modernization that could only be achieved when it was

“imposed by the state from above, while people at the grassroots level were resisting” (Gülalp 2002: 22). However top-down it may be, the modernizing state was seen capable of undoing the resistance with further efforts for modernization, particularly urbanization and industrialization (Gülalp 2002), in other words, with further integration into capitalist modernity that is uncritically attributed to the West. When the Islamist movement gained political power and eventually won electoral victories (starting in the 1990s but more undeniably in 2002 with the AKP coming to power), the idea that capitalist modernity goes hand in hand with secularization was challenged by the Islamist movement itself, vehemently trying to prove that Islam is congruent to capitalism (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014; Taşkın 2019) both at the discursive level and at the policy level by neoliberal reforms.

This approach of Turkish exceptionalism (exception, only to the extent that it proves the rule) was embraced surprisingly by both Kemalist-secularists and conservative-Islamists. While Kemalists used it to prove their location within the league of “contemporary civilizations” (*muasır medeniyetler*) and legitimize top-down reforms, conservative-Islamist front adopted it to reiterate their claim that the (Muslim) society had always already resisted modernization. Both fronts, and their long-lasting struggles, led to an imagination of power struggle in the society around a topographic binary of “center-periphery” (Yılmaz 2017) to denote “cultural distance and power struggle between the [modernizing-secularizing] bureaucratic center and the Islamist periphery”. Center-periphery binary, besides being widely used by the conservative Islamic movement, also became the prevailing social scientific analysis in Turkish scholarship. It proved itself useful in shaping political imagination as unfolding in a single axis of modernization/secularization against genuine faith and beliefs of Muslim masses. So much so that the first years of AKP government, Zafer Yılmaz (Yılmaz 2018, 489–90) reports, “were celebrated as the final victory of the periphery over the center” in which Erdoğan and the AKP became “the representatives of Anatolia, the supposed home of authentic, humble and

uncorrupted Turkish-Muslim people who are dominated by secular and modernist (military-civil) elites”. This binarism prevalent in the history of Turkish modernization was effectively used to reclaim control over the location of religion in the composition of the society, hence, successfully politicized.

In Turkey too, as part of the centralization efforts, religious authority was recentered around the state by production of a new institution: Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) established in 1924 with the same law as the abolition of the Caliphate. The Diyanet was tasked with reinterpreting Islam in line with the new regime’s politics and garnering religious support for secularism (Bora 2017). There were two main missions. The first one was to reform and modernize Islam with methods inspired by the West, that is, to demonstrate that Islam is, by its nature, conducive to human progress and rationality, hence to modernity. The second one was to nationalize Islam by proving that it was conducive to Turkish nation and culture and that the compatibility between Islam and Turkishness was what supposedly made the Turks the leaders of Islam for centuries (Bora 2017). This double task actually shaped the future understanding of Islam in Turkey, even within the Islamist movement starting with the 1990s, although with alternate interpretations – the former, in trying to prove the congruence between Islam and capitalism; and the latter, in assuming a self-designated role of leadership in the Muslim world.

Orientalizing (Vernacular) Islam (and Muslims)

Although what I have discussed so far is to argue that Islam has always been embedded in the Turkish nation-building and secularizing processes, this does not mean that Muslim population (and more particularly Islamist cadres as well as those who had been socialized in religious orders, medreses, other religious socialities) was not alienated, otherized, and at times violently excluded. The new interpretation of Islam was strictly based on the centrality of the state in the politics of government of religion. Other non-state political claims over religion were

suppressed and discursively accused of and equalized with backwardness and Orient. In fact, the endeavors to reform and nationalize Islam were justified by a reasoning quite resembling to Orientalism: the fact that the Ottoman Empire lost its power and got peripheralized (in fact became a semi-colony) was imputed to an *Oriental* Islam equated with the Arab identity (Bora 1998; Koyuncu 2014) to such an extent that the Republican cadres strived to “cleanse” Turkish culture, language, and art of the Arabic influence (Koyuncu 2014).

Equating Arab populations with backwardness, however, cannot simply be attributed to Western influence of the Republican elite. It was embedded even in the earliest modernization efforts in the Ottoman Empire. In fact, during the *Tanzimat* Reform Edict (1839), intending to bring heterogeneous groups in the Ottoman Empire under the ideal of equal citizenship, the Empire announced another version of the edict, one that was “locally adopted” in the Arab provinces and excluded the Arab provinces from the principle of equality (Deringil 2007). The Ottomans’ approach to Arab provinces was not limited to excluding them from equality. When the 19th century nearly ended, the Ottomans, borrowing colonialism as a defensive strategy from its Western archenemies, “adopted a colonial stance toward the peoples of the periphery of their empire” (particularly the Arab populations) (Deringil 2003, 313).

“One half of this borrowed colonialism was based on tried and true practices of Islamic Ottoman empire building; the Caliphate, the Sharia’, Hanefi Islamic jurisprudence, guilds, and Turkish/Islamic law (*kanun/yasa*). The other half, or ‘new’ half, was a creature of the nineteenth-century positivist, Enlightenment-inspired centralizing reforms” (Deringil 2003, 316).

The Ottoman colonialism, for Deringil, was pragmatic and defensive yet it had further consequences. It somehow overrode the shared religion and created a “moral distance” between the ruling Ottoman elite (who were committed to the “civilizing mission” and “modernizing project”) and the population in the peripheralized geographies (Deringil 2003). This “moral distance” was further reinforced with nationalist myths narrating Arab nationalism of the late 19th and early 20th century as “treason during the World War I” (Koyuncu 2014: 41). As a result

of a crushing defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the World War I, the colonial ties with its “Orient” were terminated; however, Orientalism embedded in these colonial encounters continued their impacts well into the new Republic of Turkey.

It was widely discussed that Edward Said (1978), in his pioneering work *Orientalism*, omitted the cases of Turkey and its antecedent Ottoman Empire due to their particularly ambivalent position in the postcolonial history. “Said primarily locates the ‘Oriental’ other in the Arabic world (...) and his neglect of the Turkish case implies that Turkey stands in a very problematic relationship to the Arab World, the Ottoman Empire being the former colonial power there” (Ahıska 2003, 359). The Ottoman Empire disrupts the East-West binary and its direct correspondence with the colonized-colonizer, respectively. The case of the Ottoman Empire was described by Meltem Ahıska (2003, 360) as “the colonization of the colonizer”:

the major challenge to Ottoman rule came from the so- called West starting in the eighteenth century. The invasion of Western sciences, know-how, and artifacts, which contested Islamic and traditional ways of life and invoked the existence of a “lack,” was accompanied by actual Western enterprises that established and monopolized certain trades and industries. Thereafter Ottoman rule underwent a period of decline, which can be described as the colonization of the colonizer.

However, these are neither linear nor fully subsequent periods, but rather are inextricably interwoven in the history of the late Ottoman Empire and, albeit largely erased, in the history of modern Turkey. Instead of overlooking these seemingly ambivalent cases, Ussama Makdisi (2002, 768) seems to embrace the ambivalence and complicate East-West binary, claiming that “in an age of Western-dominated modernity, every nation creates its own Orient. The nineteenth century Ottoman Empire was no exception.” He, thus, comes up with a new term, “Ottoman Orientalism” (Makdisi 2002, 768) to explicate “how Ottomans represented their own Arab periphery as an integral part of their engagement with, explicit resistance to, but also implicit acceptance of, Western representations of the indolent Ottoman East.”

According to Makdisi, Ottoman Orientalism has two defining pillars: first, in an effort to respond to what they thought to be the misrepresentations of Islam, the Ottoman elite embraced Islam as the empire's distinctive features while the other modernization efforts unequivocally adhered to Westernization. Second, Ottoman Orientalism was inward-looking, in that it created the notion of progress and backwardness within the empire and represented "the backward subjects" similar to that of Western colonialism. Temporally differentiating various groups from each other on the idea of progress, the Ottoman Empire did constitute an Ottoman Turkish nation at the center of the empire that would become the leader and the modernizing force of other ethnic and national groups which were purportedly lagging behind in the Ottoman modernization. In both pillars, Islam played a significant role: in the former to underline the cultural difference from the West, in the latter, to signify the empire's commonality with the Muslim majority. However, Makdisi (2002, 779) continues, "this commonality implicitly and explicitly framed within a civilizational and temporal discourse that ultimately justified Ottoman Turkish rule over Muslim and non-Muslim subjects".

As discussed in the previous chapter, modernization efforts of the empire came as a defensive response to the peripheralization of the Ottoman Empire (Deringil 2007), and efforts to catch up with the Western other led to the creation of the Oriental other within the empire, reinforcing the moral and culturalized distance between the predominantly Arab population (that constituted the Ottoman Orient) and the Ottoman Turkish population that constituted the center. However, this defense strategy failed or fell short to reconsolidate the empire's power and the empire eventually collapsed following the World War I. The Republic of Turkey, founded in 1923, attempted to cast itself as a rupture from the Ottoman Empire and refused to address this complicated relationship with both its West and its East (Ahiska 2003). Owning Westernization as a model for modernization and discursively disowning to identify itself with the Islamic identity, the republic of Turkey continued its problematic relationship with the Arabic world,

but this time not as the imperial power claiming the rule the said geography but as a rival nation-state. The Kemalist elite's refusal to address these problems that the country inherited from the late Ottoman period made these complications invisible while contributing to the ambivalent attitude towards the Arab population beyond its borders.

I have heard so many times, when talking to Islamic humanitarians, how this moral distance between the Arabs and Turks (almost always Orientalist in its own peculiar way) was reiterated. This differentiation was present, although in less visible ways, among humanitarians who offered assistance to Syrian refugees. Sometimes, even the shared religious identity was used as a differentiating factor by utterances such as “their Islam, their way of praying is not like ours”. In fact, combined with the narrativization of Turkishness as the leader of the Muslim world, the moral distance appeared to have well exceeded the boundaries drawn by the Westernizing, secular elite and seeped into the language and identifications of the Islamist movement which successfully identified itself as the “voice of the voiceless Muslim masses” (Yılmaz 2017). To my mind, this conflict between religious proximity and moral distance became one of the ways in which actors within the Islamic charity regime encountered with the Syrian refugee population and tried to negotiate their decisions to give or not give aid.

Pushing the Boundaries of Modernization: Challenges to Kemalist Secularization Reforms

Republican project to nationalize and reform Islam, like other reforms, did not fully resonate in the society. In fact, to Kemalists' dismay, adherence to Islam and the Ottoman religious heritage provided those who were excluded from the Republican modernization with a resilient means of opposition. In the 1940s, following the death of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (the founding leader of the Republic) in 1938, it became even more visible that the Republic needed more legitimization which led the single-party regime to invest more systematically in religion: it

was raised both as a moral force and as a means to consolidate national homogeneity. New policies were formulated as a response to political opposition built around religion but failed to prevent religion from become the main field of political contentions.

Besides growing public appearance of religion, the 1940s and 1950s mark a radical transformation in Turkey's political and economic history. In the second half of the 1940s, Turkey transitioned to a multi-party system with the establishment of the Democrat Party (DP). Although the founders of the DP were part of the so-called Republican military and bureaucratic elite, DP built its political personality by claiming to be the genuine representative of religious-national identity (Bora 1998). This culturalist binarism between the Republican Westernizing elite vs. the Muslim traditional silent masses was successfully used, first by the DP, later by almost all the conservative-religious political parties. Moreover, although Turkey did not join the World War II, it deeply felt its consequences. Following the war, Turkey joined the Western bloc, making itself eligible for the Marshall aid between 1947-1958 against the Soviet threat. Wartime economic difficulties were thus largely solved, helping DP government present itself a successful political period both in terms of reinstating religion and tradition and boosting economic prosperity. Another important aspect of this period was the attempts of the DP government to implement numerous reforms to ensure Turkey's transition from statist/developmentalist economy into free market economy. In the period of 1940s and 1950s, conservative-Islamist thinking accomplished to insert itself into official ideology, consolidated its populist character, and took the early steps towards alignment with capitalism in Turkey.

In 1952, Turkey became a NATO member, sealing its place in the Western bloc. Marshall Aid, growing American hegemony in the capitalist bloc, and the DP government's pro-American foreign policy marked another shift in the hegemonic understanding of modernity in Turkey: the ideal image of Western modernity for the DP was no longer France as it had been among the Republican elite but the US, allowing both the state and the intellectuals to interpret

secularism more loosely and offer a liberal conservative ideology as an alternative to Jacobin Republicanism of the Kemalist period (Bora 2017; Koyuncu 2014). This conservative liberalism was most concretely manifested in DP's advocacy for freedom of religion and conscience. However, Tanıl Bora (2017) argues, this was pretty much the limit of DP's political liberalism which was otherwise rather an authoritarian political party. Promotion of freedom of religion was useful in constituting and reinforcing the culturalist binarism between the Muslim people and the secularizing elite, it also worked to invent a narrow and majoritarian conception relying on to electoral victories as the "necessary and sufficient condition of democracy" (Bora 2017: 538). The dominant aspect of the DP's liberal conservatism was its strong advocacy of economic liberalization. It championed private enterprise and free market against Republican statist policies, in fact, prioritized economic prosperity over cultural reforms in Turkey's path to modernization (Bora 2017). Given the dominance of post-war welfare state, economic liberalization remained limited to be later completed in the 1980s, following the 1980 coup d'état.

Along with limited democracy and conservative-liberal populism of the time came anti-communism as almost the official domestic and foreign policy of Turkey. It was capable of bringing Kemalists cadres under the same roof with conservative, Islamist and nationalist groups. Although long-term political and ideological rivals, they conjoined to contain the communist threat the representatives of which were presented as socialist/leftist youth movement and working-class movements. Socialist project was seen as a threat to the hard-won national unity that cannot be jeopardized with class conflicts (Taşkın 2019). Therefore, two aspects that had been long used for ensuring societal homogeneity were foregrounded even further, paving the way for nationalism and Islam to become inseparable elements of the hegemonic project. Islamism, at the time, was not an independent political movement and was politically active only within the conservative-nationalist milieu, gradually yet effectively

increasing the presence of Islamism within it. Otherwise, it chose to organize as an intellectual movement of authors, poets, historians assembling under various journals (Taşkın 2019).

The political arena at the time was open solely to different nationalisms posited as the legitimate (anti-communist) ground for politics; nonetheless, emergent nationalisms (embedded within conservative populist movements, including the DP) were still seen as a threat to the foundations of the Republic. On 27 May 1960, the military announced a coup d'état which marked the first of many to follow. The military takeover, on the one hand, violently suppressed political groups that it perceived as a threat to the Republic, and particularly to secularism (sentenced four political leaders of the DP to capital punishment and executed three of them). On the other hand, it redrafted the Constitution in an effort to restore secularism. Curiously, it would come to be known as the most liberal constitution of the Republic of Turkey by the Kemalist and non-Kemalist secularist groups in that it paved the way for unionization, increasing youth and labor movements, and civil society organizations, without of course abandoning anti-communism. Still, secularist restoration of the military government was seen by the Islamist and conservative milieu as a dictatorial intervention to a flourishing democracy and further reinforced the binary between the military/bureaucratic elite stymieing the growth of the popular will. In the right-wing political parties claiming the political legacy of the DP, both the 1960 coup d'état and the secularist restoration were criticized. Aligning with the Islamist movement, these political parties integrated religion, nation, and state as the sacred values that were not recognized or valued by the political movements (socialist-communist movements and Kemalism) influenced by the foreign powers.

Islamist movement became all the more visible in the 1970s when it organized under a political party independent of conservative-nationalist right-wing parties. The movement organized under the name of “National Outlook Movement” (*Milli Görüş Hareketi*). In 1970, first the

National Order Party (MNP - *Milli Nizam Partisi*) was established. It was closed in 1971 by the Constitutional Court (a product of the 1960 coup) and replaced by National Salvation Party (MSP - *Milli Selamet Partisi*) that was established in 1972 by the same cadre and remained active until it was closed in the 1980 coup d'état. In 1973, MSP gained an important electoral victory and became part of the coalition government. The main point of contention for the National Outlook Movement was the impassioned defense of Anatolian petit bourgeoisie against the big "Istanbul" bourgeoisie favored and protected by the Republican establishment and subsequent governments. The movement assumed the spokesperson role of the marginalized and alienated Muslim masses and strived to translate economic concerns of the Anatolian bourgeoisie into a culturalist conflict.

Another component of the National Outlook was fierce anti-Westernism which equated the West with "crusade mentality" seeking to destroy Islam and Muslim nations, and the Westernizing elite of Turkey with mimicry. For the National Outlook, the national could only be Islamic, and those who argue otherwise were Western pawns who turned their back on their roots (Bora 2017). It was the first political party to voice such blunt anti-Western sentiments. So much so that, it fiercely opposed to Turkey's accession to European Economic Community (which would later become the European Union), claiming that "it is a Masonic-Zionist hoax seeking to colonize Turkey by blocking national investments" (Erbakan, quoted in Bora 2017: 471). These discursive practices, however, proved successful in reformulating the political conflict in "national/mimicry" axis and harnessed confidence among the Muslim population (Bora 2017). In fact, they were supported by a wide spectrum of people ranging from the Anatolian bourgeoisie to impoverished classes. What the National Outlook economically offered was national industrial development which would go hand in hand with cultivating Muslim, patriotic youth who were tasked with maintaining "moral (economic) development" of Turkey. After the 12 September 1980 coup d'état, as any other political party, MSP was also

shut down and the MSP leadership was imprisoned on the grounds to reinstate national unity and order which was, according to the military junta, violently disrupted by ideological clashes.

Turkey post-1980: Intersections of Religion and Economic Liberalization

The repercussions of the military junta (1980-1983) were intensely felt in all walks of life, but two interwoven consequences are still discussed to have shaped the present (Akça, Bekmen, and Özden 2014). The first one was in the transformation of national economy in a way to conclude intermittent liberalization of the country between 1950-1980 (Tugal 2009; Tuğal 2017b; 2017a). The coup was, first and foremost, a response to the structural crisis, an overlap of economic crisis and crisis of hegemony, of the 1970s that erupted in line with the global crisis of accumulation. “After 1977, all fractions of the bourgeoisie agreed to contextualize the crisis in terms of class struggle, specifically complaining about high wage levels, trade union rights, collective bargaining and the other rights of the working class” (Bekmen 2014:14). In response to heightened class struggle, in 1980, the government adopted an economic policy infamously known as 24 January Decisions. They were policies promoted by the World Bank and the IMF aiming stability measures and structural adjustment (Bekmen 2014). The fragmented political arena at the time did not afford any political party with sufficient power to implement these policies. Therefore, the military intervened, with the mission of disciplining labor, suppressing leftist movements, and creating an enabling political environment for implementing neoliberal program and solidifying the power of bourgeoisie. Disciplinary measures amounted to repression of almost all political opposition, banning of labor unions, and criminalization of social movements in a very short interval, to the extent of “shock doctrine” in Naomi Klein’s (2007) terms:

Under military regime more than 650,000 people were detained; police files were opened on about 1,680,000 people; there were 210,000 political trials, in which 7,000

people faced the death penalty; 50 of 517 death penalties were executed; 300 people died in prisons for allegedly unspecified reasons; 171 people died from torture; 1,680,000 people were classified in police files, 388,000 people were deprived of their right to a passport; 30,000 people were fired from the civil service; 14,000 people lost their citizenship; 39 tones of published material were destroyed; and 23,677 associations were closed down (Bekmen 2014, 16).

The second effect was the rearrangement of the political arena in a way to sweep class conflicts and restore (already crumbling and to a very large extent artificial) homogeneity of the nation.

If one aspect of political rearrangement was to discipline labor power, the second one was yet another endeavor to define the nation and embark on another nation-building project. The main political legacy of the 1980 coup d'état was the official recognition of the "Turkish-Islamic synthesis" ideology which had been brewing for a very long time. This ideology was neither novel nor unimplemented at the time of the coup d'état. In fact, even in the early years of the Republic, there were intellectual and theological endeavors to apprehend Islam as the most compatible religion to Turkishness and the Turkish nation as the leader and protector of Islam. The main conflict was over to get a grip of the extent to which these two phenomena constitute one another. With the advent of anti-communism, first in the 1940s but more steadfastly in the 1960s and 1970s, the official ideology started relying more and more on religion as the socially uniting phenomenon and to manufacture consent among the working classes. Nevertheless, religion worked less as a unifying force than as a divisive mechanism. While nationalist, conservative and Islamist movements conjoined the state efforts to manufacture consent via upholding religion, the class movements, labor unions, leftist youth movements and non-Muslim, non-Sunni populations were increasingly ostracized and exorcised.

The 1980 coup d'état, encouraged by the ruling classes and conservative movements, presented the class struggles as the main divisive force that is also a threat to the survival of the state and a challenge to the security of life and property (Bekmen 2014). In place of class-based divisions, the junta authoritatively coerced a very specific interpretation of Sunni Islam (which

is, paradoxically, the religion of only a part of the population consisting also of Alevis and non-Muslims) as the integrating force. The difference of the 1980 coup d'état compared to previous ones in 1960 and 1971 was that the military regime, for the first time, explicitly articulated Islam as the constitutive aspect of the nation-building and amended the constitution as well as implemented policies accordingly. This was, arguably, a reaction both to heightened leftist and working-class movements and to increasingly radicalizing Islamism (Tuğal 2017). It was aiming at sweeping the leftist movements while coopting the Islamist one into the statist ideology. The advantage of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis as an official ideology was that it was offering a flexible amalgamation of nationalism and religion in a way to reach out to almost all right-wing parties and constituencies at the time and realign them with the statist ideology. The main advantage, however, lay in the ideological roots of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis which demand unquestioned obedience and loyalty to the disciplining state from all political fronts, hoping to contain “extremist ideologies”, including communism and Islamism (Bora 2017). Efforts to contain *all forms of* extremism notwithstanding, the 1980 coup d'état achieved only the violent suppression of the left, while -seemingly unintentionally- creating an environment for the Islamist movement to burgeon.

Although initiated by the military regime, both economic neoliberalization and the Turkish-Islamic synthesis were socialized by the civil government under the leadership of Turgut Özal (Prime Minister between 1983-1989; President between 1989-1993). He was heralding the new “new-right” hegemony: he was the ministry of economy of the military regime and an ardent advocate of technocratic government and liberal economy with close relationships with employers' associations secular and right-wing; he was even more ardently anti-communist; and he was also known with his ideological proximity to the National Outlook movement and personal proximity to religious orders (Doğan and Durak 2014; Bekmen 2014). Alev Özkazanç (2007; 1996) argues, Özal's hegemonic project was the combination of three main pillars:

neoliberalism, conservatism, and authoritarianism. Getting strength from the post-coup political environment vacated of working-class movement and other (or social democratic and right-wing statist) opposition, the Özal government could bypass both the parliamentary and the street-level opposition while implementing neoliberalizing reforms. It promoted, and to a very large extent accomplished, transition from import substitution industrialization to an export-oriented accumulation strategy, aiming at reducing labor costs as well as disciplining labor class economically and politically (Bekmen 2014). A more drastic change occurred in the economic field when the government decided to fully open the markets to foreign capital investments in 1989 (Özden 2014). After that, the growth of Turkish economy made almost fully dependent on the foreign capital inflows, making economy more vulnerable to global financial crises and stimulating a vicious circle of economic crises. In fact, in less than seven years, Turkey went through four consecutive economic crises in 1994, 1998, 2000, and 2001 (Özden 2014).

Moreover, in an attempt to establish the market rule, the Özal government used the populist means to attack the developmentalist state economy, accusing it of preventing large masses from accessing material gains. In fact, the Islamist criticism of the MSP regarding the unfavorable treatment of the Anatolian bourgeoisie and large Muslim masses resurfaced as a policy during the neoliberalization efforts, once again as the deployment of cultural binarism between the secular establishment and the authentic, Muslim society. In an absence of any other counter-hegemonic project, or even popular opposition, the “new-right” hegemony was able to “manufacture consent on the part of the masses”, promising that “they could enjoy material gains while preserving their identity” (Taşkın 2019, 54), meaning without abandoning their Muslim and Sunni identities. Political allegiances, hence, were forged in non-class forms (Özden 2014). It was not only heralding the possibility of upward mobility for those who had

been excluded from capitalist relations; it was hinting at the integration of religion and market, which would later be refined and become the main hegemonic project of the AKP government. This integration played a decisive role in the transformation of the welfare regime. The Özal government criticized, even mocked, developmentalist statism as “archaic” and inefficient (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014), creating the conditions of possibility to dismantle and decentralize welfare state and welfare provisions. While the state was recentralizing in an authoritarian fashion, the welfare was decentralized and delegated to non-state actors. The importance of religion, family, and nation was emphasized while “calling for personal responsibility and self-help to keep under control socio-economic insecurity aggravated by the expansion of market relations” (Özden 2014:157). Before moving on to how Islamism was shaped post-1980 coup, I will give a brief explanation of the previous welfare regime and how it transformed.

Neoliberalization and Welfare Regime: Bringing Religion and Charity Back in Welfare Provision

Post-1980 period changed the welfare regime by policies of deregulation and privatization but also reinforced many aspects of the previous welfare regime by boosting informal labor and informal subsistence provision relations based on family and unpaid labor of women, regulating responses to poverty with reference religion as the main pillar of the social solidarity. Solution proposed to impoverishment, at the time, became community, religion, and family. This was a transnational phenomenon (Brown 2019:11) which characterized the contemporary politics with conservative references to community, religion and family as the principal means of welfare (see *inter alia*, Clarke 2004; Brown 2019; Tuğal 2017; Berlant 1997). Discussing how Frederik Hayek (1998) envisaged neoliberalism, Wendy Brown (2019, 11) states, “neoliberal reason (...) casts markets and morals as singular forms of human needs provision”. In order to justify withdrawal of the state from welfare provision, Hayek postulated the two as

each other's condition of possibility, arguing "a free market economy requires the moral basis provided by traditional values and institutions" (Ayşe Bugra 2007, 47). For Hayek, Ayşe Buğra (2007, 47) eloquently states, "an unqualified individualism where the importance of the latter [morals] is undermined would be incompatible with neoliberalism because it would necessitate an ever-increasing dose of state intervention to ensure social cohesion".

Nonetheless, it would be reductionist to simply assert that the state fully withdrew from the welfare provisions as a result of neoliberal restructuring, unleashing markets and morals to substitute the state-led welfare provision. In fact, the Turkish state gradually expanded government-funded social assistance provisions while encouraging private assistance initiatives (Zencirci 2014). It attributed new meanings both to state-sponsored social assistance and to private benevolence on the basis of religion, charity, and community. What accompanied the social assistance provision was the cutting of already limited welfare benefits for the formal labor (Buğra and Keyder 2006). Granting limited benefits to people in the formal employment and relying on informal employment as well as informal relations were already existent in the earlier periods of the Republic. Over the years, these relations were deepened along with capitalist market integration and, in fact, reinforced by government policies.

In the early Republican period, welfare benefits were given only to government employees and excluded a vast majority of the population such as self-employed, people working in the agricultural sector, a very large stratum of workers, and the unemployed (Özden 2014). At the time, the political authority assumed very limited responsibility in the realm of social assistance or regulating poverty. Instead, the single party regime devised two solutions: first, they attempted at keeping poverty confined to the countryside without social provision measures (Buğra 2007). This containment policy was coupled with aims to control rural to urban mobility to make sure rural poverty did not spread to urban areas. This policy was supported by tax exemption for peasantry with the aim of "sustaining small peasant agriculture, preventing a

rapid dissolution of the agrarian structure and kept rural-urban migration under control” (Bugra and Candas 2011, 519). These measures later formed the basis for the continuation of informal and family- or community-based welfare support mechanisms for following years, implying that rural-urban migrants in the post-war process of urbanization “could count on these [informal] relationships as family support mechanisms that combined different livelihoods” (Özden 2014, 161). Second and regarding urban poverty, voluntary initiatives and wealthy citizens were encouraged, provided that they were under strict state control (Buğra 2007). Philanthropic institutions of the Ottoman period (mainly waqfs/foundations) were reproduced but realigned along the lines of not religion but nationalism and modernization (Göçmen 2014).

In the multi-party period starting at the end of World War II, social benefit coverage was expanded for formal sector workers. At the same time, incentives for industrialization and urbanization as well as changing agricultural policies in the rural area (starting of mechanization and commercialization of agriculture) caused a great wave of rural to urban migration the majority of whom found employed in the informal sector. Instead of creating effective welfare benefit instruments to cover majority of the population, an “informal pact” between state and society emerged (Buğra 2007), tolerating and reinforcing informal and flexible networks to regulate urban poverty. One particularly important component of the informal pact was the construction of informal housing settlements by the urban newcomers who were provided informal access to public lands (Ayşe Bugra and Candas 2011). Formation of inner cities was gradually authorized through land reforms. In the following years, this informal housing system played significant roles in terms of concealing the lack of formal welfare coverage: it provided the urban poor with housing and reinforced informal relations both with the state and among themselves on the one hand, it produced low-cost industrial labor with no social insurance and allowed the state to regulate urban poverty, on the other. These areas mostly rendered invisible by the state politics actually became fields of political

contestation: in the 1960s and 1970s, a very strong working-class movement thrived in inner cities, leading to criminalization and securitization of informal settlements. Conversely, post-1980 and particularly in the 1990s following the heightened urban poverty and violent suppression of the class struggle, these areas turned into urban spaces where Islamic charitable relations flourished and the Islamist movement mobilized its social constituency. Even long after formalization of informal settlements, in formerly informal neighborhoods in Denizli, where the industrial working class as well as migrants and refugees settle, Islamic charitable activities are vibrant (I will discuss spatial relations in another chapter).

Post-1980 welfare regime was built on these structures where, for a great majority of the impoverished population, subsistence was provided via informal urban-rural as well as non-market solidarity networks and dependent on informal labor, family support, and unpaid labor of women. The transformation in the neoliberal period, hence, was less related to changing these subsistence mechanisms than intensifying them coupled with resuscitated religious motivations in welfare provision. The intensification of these mechanisms came with a demographic change, too. Further marketization of agriculture led to dissolution of agrarian structures, weakened informal safety networks in the rural areas (and by proxy in the urban areas relying on unsevered rural ties) ensured by cutting state subsidies and removing tax exemptions to the agricultural sector (Özden 2014). This, in turn, came with a large scale of rural-to-urban displacement, drawing economically insecure rural population to city centers. Also, securitization and militarization of Kurdish question in Kurdish-majority provinces amounted to armed conflict started in the mid-1980s and widespread forced displacement of the Kurdish population that would continue throughout 1990s. Combined with deregulation of economy and cutbacks on labor rights, the country faced the “the rise of new forms of poverty” (Buğra and Keyder 2006) that could neither be contained in the rural periphery nor addressed through welfare benefit reforms.

Neoliberalizing State as a Benevolent Actor

In this period, in the midst of social policy cutbacks and increasing poverty, the state assumed a new role which had previously widely delegated to private beneficence (although under strict state control). State's response to rising impoverishment was to engage in social assistance through the establishment of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation (SYDV) in 1986. It was "rooted in the tendency to regard poverty as a *problem* that could *be best dealt with* through the country's traditional ethos of charity involving (...) state-society cooperation without proper delineation of private and public funds used to assist the needy" (Buğra 2007, 46, emphasis added). The name of the institution was, in this respect, is carefully chosen. First, the name was suggestive of the hope to mobilize private donations; however, the model did not work and public resources constituted the main funding (Buğra 2007). Second, although odd, it was not coincidental that a state institution was named "foundation" which is, historically speaking, known to a non-state organization. It was named to be evocative of traditional and religious charity; in fact, in order to justify the establishment of a social assistance institution, the Özal government argued that "the fund would be the manifestation of the culture of foundation [*vakıf kültürü*] of the Turkish-Islamic civilization" (Koyuncu 2014, 238).

This logic inserting private charity mentality into public provision was resonant in public employers in Denizli in 2017, 30 years after the establishment of the foundation. Municipality employees (including the deputy mayor) and employees of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation (affiliated to and operating as a government office under the Ministry of Family and Social Services) were referring to their jobs (which literally was distribution of social assistance collected by public resources and donations) as "gaining *sevap* (good deeds)" which would evidence and strengthen their position as devout Muslims both for themselves and vis-à-vis aid recipients. It had seemed to me that the distribution of social assistance was almost separated from its public welfare character as much as the social problems were severed from

their political and socio-economic contexts and were naturalized. What was more to notice was how these public officers recounted their jobs not as duties defined by a public office and from which they earned wage, but as voluntary work that they had willfully and graciously chosen to help people in need. In their narratives, they had separated social assistance from its links to public and reformulated it as a *private, volitional* activity depending on the goodwill of the giver, be it the state, the municipality, the donor, or the employees executing the distribution.

In the same period, that is in the late 1980s, the welfare regime gained a more humanitarian, Islamic, and communitarian character in conformity with the rise of Islamism as a rival for hegemony project in Turkey. More humanitarian, because the public character of social assistance defined within the scope of the welfare regime was largely attributed to private benevolence. More Islamic, because private benevolence was ascribed to the religious verdicts. More communitarian, because problems emerging from the shrinking public services due to neoliberalization (unemployment, increasing informal sector employment, impoverishment, lack of long-term care and social reproduction schemes for employed or unemployed populations) were reframed so as to be remedied within the community, with the help of fellow community members (the do-gooder citizens of the city or the neighborhood).

Although it instigated a longwinded change in the way of seeing provision of public services, state-sponsored social assistance remained limited during the 1980s and 1990s. The desire to “keep social assistance outside the realm of social rights defined in the context of the formal redistributive system” (Buğra 2007: 46) was more dominant, and it was animated by an even more prevalent idea that “the provision of public assistance would create dependency and encourage laziness” (Buğra 2007: 46). Instead, private benevolence and communitarian solidarity were encouraged to which the public services to be delegated. The rediscovery of communitarian solidarity was conducive not only to neoliberal restructuring that dismantled the public provision of services but also to the culturalist binary that have prevailed in Turkey’s

political history. In this way, those who were excluded and (economically, culturally and politically) ostracized by the secularist establishment were motivated to set up their own moral communities of solidarity. Islamist movement could successfully capitalize on this new communitarian logic in a way to surpass class, gender, and ethnic/racial disparities in the formation of new hegemony in the 2000s.

State engagement with social assistance as a novel instrument in welfare regime and the revival and/or promotion of traditional mechanisms of religion, family and community however fell short of responding to larger impoverishment that came with free market impoverishment. Consecutive economic crises throughout the 1990s called for more macroeconomic structural reforms to be implemented under IMF and World Bank watch. As a result, “labor markets became the main absorber of the shocks of these crises”, leading to suppression of wage incomes, large-scale lay-offs in the private sector throughout the 1990s, and “intensification of marginalized labor through various tactics such as outsourcing, job flexibility, and deregulation of labor relations” (Özden 2014: 163). All these crises accompanied instability in electoral politics. Between 1991 and 2001, nine coalition governments were formed, none of them lasted longer than two years (Özden 2014: 164). Political and economic fragility reached its peak in 2001, when Turkey faced the most grievous economic crisis of its modern history. “Kemal Derviş, a top-level World Bank figure, created the blueprint for deregulation and privatization (i.e., neoliberalization) measures that gripped Turkey for the coming decade. The Turkish state has restructured welfare to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable (rather than organized labor and civil servants), such as the disabled” (Tuğal 2017b: 436). Cumulative effect of structural crises created a social and political vacuum in social assistance and welfare provision schemes and paved the way for (actually actively encouraged) civil society mobilization. The result was the earlier steps towards what would eventually become “a neoliberal welfare governance based on government-charity partnerships” (Tuğal 2017a, 436). This vacuum

opened a relatively large space for Islamic charitable organizations supported by the newly rising bourgeoisie, dubbed as “Islamic bourgeoisie” (Göçmen 2014; Tuğal 2017a). In this period, Islamist movement itself underwent a political transformation. In the next section, I will outline how the decades long Islamist movement organized itself in the post-1980 period. I will specifically focus on how, in instituting a new hegemonic project, the Islamist movement combined humanitarianism and neoliberalism, while effectively capitalizing on the changing economic and political scene.

Islamist Movement in the post-1980 period

In the post-1980 period, as mentioned above, alternative projects to define the components of the society were violently suppressed first by the military and later by the civil regime backed by the military. Drawing strength from the concurrent retreat of the left globally, in Turkey the leftist movement which had been very powerful during the 1960s and 70s was framed as an “archaic”, unvenerable relics of the past (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014). Instead, both the 1982 Constitution (drafted by the military) and the new “new-right hegemony” made the market as the only viable option for development and competition in the international arena. The problem, however, was that while the ideal of equality was pushed aside as outdated by the new government, inequalities emanating from neoliberalizing Turkish economy became more and more conspicuous (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014).

Against this background, the Islamist National Outlook Movement, which founded another party called the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi* RP) in 1983, had to revise its political and economic agenda. To offer a viable political alternative, it had to operate within the confines of the official market-friendly ideology yet be able to respond to evident inequalities emanating from the very market economy. To that end, the RP remanufactured its political identity as the protector both of the impoverished masses pushed to the peripheries of capitalism, and of small

capital owners with entrepreneurial aspirations, and of the Anatolian bourgeoisie that felt casted out of the capitalist competition during the Republican period. Both groups were represented as those who were marginalized by the sociocultural and economic trajectory of the country, especially the small entrepreneurs and the Anatolian bourgeoisie were the backbone of this re-presentation, because, the RP argued, their entrepreneurialism was against monopolistic tendencies of the Republican capitalist class and yet they were not valued because of their cultural identities (Bora 1997).

Islamist ideology of the RP, to secularist bewilderment at the time, served as the main unifying component of this unlikely coalition and allowed the RP to adjust itself in line with political economic changes of the post-1980 environment (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014). In doing so, the RP actually redefined the way Islam was configured so that it could transcend the ethical field and come to shape the socio-economic institutions and economic, social, and cultural interactions at once. This transformation once would have been considered beyond the pale even for the Islamist movement which had constrained its conspicuous politics to the reconditioning of the ethical within the right-wing conservative parties. Yet it somehow became mainstream in Turkey. So much so that an Islamist conception, which went beyond the ethical and aspired to regulate the political and the social, could become a rival hegemonic project. This project was named “Just Order” (*Adil Düzen*), appealing both to working classes and to the newly rising bourgeoisie in the 1990s.

Just Order presented Islam as the social glue that would unite the society without integration with the global economy (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014). Two main discursive mechanisms played a particularly decisive role in Just Order ideology: the first one worked to blur the boundary between economy and religion, using religion as an asset “to foster a sense of solidarity among those segments of national and international business communities that stand to gain from enhanced cooperation” (Buğra 1998: 536). The second one pertained to the replacement of the

ideal of equality with the ideal of “justice”. “The term ‘justice’ successfully obscured questions about unequal class relations and highlighted the rights defined by the mutual trust, loyalty, and solidarity that hold together the community of believers in a civilization that values justice over power” (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014: 97). Combined, these two intimately related discursive mechanisms successfully instituted a new moral economy. In practice, it also proved effective: the former, in the organization of new bourgeoisie under the name of “Islamic bourgeoisie” (the term Islam here referred less to the cultural identity than the business model which was rather capitalist) and the latter in the mobilization and unification of the hitherto pluralist Islamic charity field under the roof of the RP (Tuğal 2017).

With the establishment of “Just Order” conception as the new hegemonic project in Islamism, both (wealth inequality) poverty and political disenfranchisement were hence differently problematized, and new solutions were offered. These two social issues, deep-rooted in Turkey’s history, was translated into culturalist binaries between Westernized elite and the Muslim majority. Solution to both was found within the confines of Islamism. While the latter was addressed by mobilization of Islamic charity, the former was projected on to the new political economy, export-oriented accumulation strategy, which offered advantages to the Islamic bourgeoisie. This new problematization and their solutions were to be sustained, and in fact made more mainstream during the AKP era. The RP’s new hegemonic project starting with the foundation of the party in 1983 was crowned with two consecutive electoral victories: in the 1994 local elections and 1995 general elections, the RP gained an unprecedented victory winning by 19% and 21.5%, respectively. Part of the victory was attributed to the disciplined voluntary power of RP activists who mobilized Islamic charity and solidarity for the urban poor with the financial support by the newly rising Islamic bourgeoisie as the main donor. The Islamic charitable field, therefore, contributed to the formation of cross-class/gender/ethnicity coalition which was to form part of the constituency of the 20-year-long AKP government.

After a set of decisions -a memorandum- taken by the National Security Council on 28 February 1997, the political rise of the RP was forestalled by yet another military intervention, which later entered the literature as the “post-modern coup d’état”. This set of authoritarian decisions were justified under the name of “struggle against reactionary forces” referring to the Islamist government at the time and conjuring up the constitutive division between Islamists and secularists. The 1997 military memorandum did not dissolve the parliament or suspend the constitutional order (as it was the case in other coups). The government was forced to resign, and a new government implicitly approved by the military was formed. In January 1998, the RP was shut down by the Constitutional Court and its leaders were banned from politics. This closure gave way to a split in the Islamist movement, leading to two new parties claiming the same legacy (Tuğal 2017a) : Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*) and Justice and Development Party (AKP - *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), which would come to power in 2002 to date. Besides the very short lifespan of the military intervention, it somehow reflected how consolidated the political power of the military in that it did not even have to suspend the democratic order by taking up arms, yet still managed to overthrow the government without even, borrowing from a deep-seated idiom in Turkish, “leaving their barracks”. Despite seemingly short-lived disruption in the democratic order, the memorandum had enduring impacts on the country’s political trajectory persistent to this day.

The AKP Era: Growing field of Islamic humanitarianism, national and international

The political victory of AKP in 2002 came after the 2001 economic crisis and the dissolution of all other political alternatives, including that of the right-wing and social democrat parties which had formed numerous unsuccessful coalition governments throughout the 1990s. The 2001, the most grave economic crisis in the modern history of the country, aggressively intensified the impoverishment, “the new forms of poverty” (Buğra and Keyder 2006) that was

underway for decades. In response, the the AKP, on the one hand, implemented the IMF package prescribed to Turkey after 2001 for deepening the market integration. On the other, it further centralized the location of religion as a response to societal issues that appeared as problems with the help of state and non-state actors. In doing so, it managed to assemble a large coalition of Islamist civil society, marginalized (Muslim) populations in the inner cities, and the newly growing “Islamic bourgeoisie”. They were, in an abstract fashion, equalized in them being the castaways of the Republic due to their adherence to Islam, and respective (and often unmatching) problems they faced could uniformly and consistently be solved within the ideological frame of Islamism.

“As early as 2002, the AKP incorporated neoliberal benevolent ethics into its official program. The party committed itself to investing in human capital, fostering self-reliance among society’s members, and empowering the poor at the economic level (in individualized fashion)” (Tuğal 2017b; 2017a). Disciplined, active and committed civil society activism cultivated and strengthened during the RP era proved useful in increasing the influence of Islam, Islamic forms of interpreting societal issues (problematizations), and religious solidarity in the public. Government-civil society partnerships were promoted and frequently practiced not only for aid delivery but also for creating social and political networks and moral communities.

AKP, pledging to fight the anti-Islamic (which, by proxy, alluded to anti-majority/elite) forces, primarily the military and the secularist elite, managed to make its neoliberal policies more acceptable even for those Islamic aid associations that were previously anti-neoliberal (Tuğal 2017a). Another consequence was that Islamic charitable organizations entering the field post 2002 uncritically embraced the neoliberal organization model. The neoliberal model was not only related to the public service provision role undertaken by the Islamic charity in place of the state. They have managed to set the ground for conjoining Islam to neoliberalism by creating subject positions where the ethical subject of neoliberalism is endowed with Islamic

morality (Atasoy 2009, 111). That is to say, Islamic moral principles such as obligation to help the disadvantaged and other acts of piety including providing religious education to youth to develop disciplined, responsible individuals conjoined with neoliberal principles such as self-realization and individual self-growth (Atasoy 2009, 120).

While, in Turkey's domestic politics, Islam and neoliberalism grew hand in hand and almost came to define each other, another shift began in the foreign policy. Turkey was "opening" itself to its East, trying to develop better trade and diplomatic relations with its immediate neighbors and, more broadly, in the region. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey had first undertaken a self-designated duty to be a model, an ally, and an economic partner of the newly independent Turkic Republics in the Central Asia in the 1990s. This earlier shift was justified based on shared history and ethnicity, although the hierarchy was clear: Turkey was to be the "elder brother" (*ağabey*) of new ethnic Turk nation-states (Bora 2017). If this new "opening" was partly due to Turkey's international aspirations to cultivate more influence in the international arena, it was also partly due to brewing export-oriented economy. Turkic Republics which were to be integrated in the capitalist system, and Turkey's new bourgeoisie (Anatolian bourgeoisie backed first by the Özal government, later by the Islamist governments under the name of "Islamic bourgeoisie" or "Anatolian Tigers" referring to the Asian Tigers as the growing non-Western economic models) wanted to have a share in the new geographies of global capitalism. It became clear in the 1990s that the Turkic Republics were not interested in an "elder brother", but trade relations between the two regions boosted, contributing to the enrichment of the Anatolian bourgeoisie and the construction of a new foreign policy that could melt aspirations for capitalist expansion with ethnic/religious discourses – combined, it resurrected the imperial fantasy rooted in the Ottoman past.

1990s, this new foreign policy found a fertile ground because the immediate surrounding of Turkey, particularly the Balkans, Middle East and the Caucasus, was both under economic

reconstruction and in political turmoil. Particularly the war during the dissolution of former Yugoslavia was effectively used to establish a new foreign policy discourse, particularly by the Islamist milieu. First, the war was happening in the middle of Europe but there was no or very little effort on the part of the developed European countries to stop the war. Incisively articulated notwithstanding, this critique to Western European states was translated to a civilizational clash in which Muslim nations are represented oppressed and persecuted under the West's watch. In response, it was offered, Muslim nations should form a coalition through which to compete with the "Christian West" economically and politically. Second, these international developments laid the ground for the expansion of Islamic charity mentality beyond the nation-state borders. Turkish-Islamist milieu was quickly mobilized to collect aid for Bosnian Muslims both within Turkey and among the Turkish migrant communities in Europe. Charitable mobilization was coupled with political mobilization where Islamist activism gained a ground to engage advocacy for Muslims worldwide. Hence, in the 1990s, Islamism in Turkey ideologically and politically managed to transcend nation-state boundaries and inserted "Ummah" (transnational imagined community of Muslims) into domestic politics. In doing so, Islamists in Turkey established and effectively capitalized on an immediate connection between the Muslim communities persecuted worldwide and the Muslim communities persecuted in Turkey. They appealed to an emotional identification with "oppressed Muslim groups" all around the world, but particularly in the immediate neighbors. This in turn helped the Islamist politics "nationalize" the problems faced by other Muslim nations and laid the foundation for its populist discourses: while "oppressed Muslim nations" were identified with the Islamist in Turkey, secularist elite was likened to the oppressor Western (read Christian) powers. In the coming decades, emotional identification and narrative of victimhood (Yılmaz 2018; 2017) would often be used in the case of Bosnia, Azerbaijan, Palestine, and finally, Syria. However, this identification, which could mobilize economic

cooperation and humanitarian aid to other Muslim countries, was and still is conditioned on Turkey's (imagined) leadership among the Muslim nations. In fact, Islamist pundits, in their commentaries, books, and speeches, effortfully underline these claims for leadership and protectorate (Bora 2017).

It is in this respect, forced migration and issues regarding seeking asylum were shaped in the Islamist politics. Forced displacement was problematized in particularly -and almost exclusively- regard to displacement of Muslim populations who were subjected to persecution. Persecution was reinterpreted and narrowed down as *religious* persecution by either the Western/Christian powers as in the case of Bosnia or the Westernized or anti-Muslim political leaders as in the case of Syria and the Rohingya refugees in Myanmar. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the flexible and fragmented mobility regime was conducive to such interpretation, and Islamic humanitarianism operating nationally and internationally could easily be casted as a moral and political solution to the forced displacement of the Muslim populations. Both the identification with religiously persecuted Muslim peoples of the world and the self-assigned protector role of Turkey enabled the Islamist politics to inculcate and mobilize of humanitarian sentiments for the “oppressed nations” (*mazlum milletler*).

Humanitarian production of the refugee within Islamic charity regime

So far, I have discussed the longwinded history of how and through which political struggles Islamism has gained a hegemonic position in Turkey. I argued that despite the debates portraying a dichotomy between Westernized elite of the Republic and the genuine Muslim majority, I have shown that, first, Sunni Muslim religion has always been an indispensable part of Turkey's political power and, second, that the main struggle has been a boundary struggle over the extent to which religion (Sunni Islam) will be a determining factor in political and social issues. Following the 1980 coup d'état, religion was effectively integrated into the

political and ideological constellation of the country which was accompanied with economic neoliberalization. This way, Islamism which had rather remained marginal to the centrist politics was incorporated with the political-economic system and, in fact, has become both the advocate of neoliberalization and the remedy to inequalities, impoverishment, displacement and dispossession neoliberalism generated. That is, an important political success of Islamism in Turkey, whether actually elected for office or not, was to cast new problematizations relegated to culturalized disenfranchisement of the Muslim people (nationally and internationally) and new solutions to these new problematizations by gathering a cross-class/gender/ethnicity coalition under the same umbrella the contours of which were drawn by the Islamist ideology.

My main aim was to locate the current responses to Syrian refugees in the broader political history of Turkey. When Syrian cross-border mobility into Turkey started in 2011 and gradually increased in the coming years, Turkey was under neoliberal and Islamist reconstruction. The volume and intensity of forced migration was beyond the state's ability to stop at the borders; hence, the response (indeed, reaction) to the Syrian refugees had to be found within the nation-state borders. The legal and institutional regulations and their fragmented structure could be combined with the Islamic regime of charity, well-developed as both state and non-state practice and discourse, and it provided the ground for the solution to be offered to this emergent and urgent "problem". In other words, when Syrian refugees -culturally and religiously homogenized- came, they were, and I argue, had to be incorporated in this new domestic and international framing.

However, the integration of Syrian refugees in the regime of Islamic charity was more complicated: they were not part of the nation, i.e. the citizen body imagined and desired by the Islamist government, nor were they fully a part of the foreign policy event happening beyond the nation-state borders and allowing for affective intimacy and emotional identification from

afar. They were portrayed as Muslim brethren under religious persecution; however, their direct incorporation into the Islamic humanitarian regime of charity needed to be further qualified politically and ideologically.

Ahmet Çiğdem (2001/2021) argues that the main tension of Islamist ideology in Turkey lies in the negotiation of citizenship and the Ummah. While the political trajectory of the country propelled a more nationalist Islamist politics, ummah still remains an important justificatory component of contemporary Islamism. With the coming of Syrian refugees, Islamist milieu in Turkey, once again, faced this tension. On the one hand, Syrian refugees needed to be integrated in the charity regime, as part of the Ummah and as demanded by the changing foreign policy. There were other reasons too behind this necessity: Islamic regime of charity has been working as an important substitute for welfare benefits for so long for the general population of Turkey and refugees' socio-economic needs, it appeared, could be addressed within this system. Also, combined with neoliberalism, it created an uneven and asymmetric interdependence (Tuğal 2017a) between the aid-givers and aid-receivers, which, in the case of Syrian refugees, could be translated into politics of immobilization. On the other hand, Syrian refugees were *different* from the Turkish nation, they had never been integrated into nation-building process; hence, there needed an alternative solution to mobilize sentiments for Syrian refugees within the citizen body.

Political Imperative for Compassion: Politicizing the Refugee and Humanitarianism

An uneasy solution to this tension was found in reinterpretation of forced migration that would go beyond and at times contradict with the legal framework. The reinterpretation was enabled by the religious narratives. In a sense, forced migration was Islamized, and hence paved the way for humanitarian production of the refugee.

In many of the anthropological studies on humanitarianism and forced migration, humanitarian production of refugee is usually discussed in opposition to “political production of refugee” (*inter alia* see Rozakou 2012; 2017; Ticktin 2011; Rajaram 2002; Hyndman 2000). This tension between the two is attributed to humanitarianism as a depoliticizing force and its workings to render refugees as “speechless emissaries” of universal persecution (L. H. Malkki 1996). Indeed, humanitarianism places at the center of politics a moral imperative (to relieve the suffering) and injunction for compassion, which is itself anti-politics (M. I. Ticktin 2011). “The politics of compassion that humanitarianism exemplifies fosters the protection of suffering bodies and biological life. Humanitarianism thus produces ‘a limited version of what it means to be human’” (Rozakou 2012, 564). In doing so, while mobilizing compassion, it also mobilizes ideas regarding the “humanity” of refugees, that is universal yet incomplete at the same time. It is universal, because it speaks to an abstract ideal of human, as understood in the post-Enlightenment thinking. It is, however, simultaneously incomplete because it is reduced to its basic needs - mostly defined in terms of preservation of physical existence. Hence, refugee figures are constricted in their bodies, with no political agency attached to them. In other words, while mobilizing a set of actors (experts, NGOs, volunteers, state institutions, and international organizations) for an anti-politics, humanitarianism politically immobilizes refugee populations.

I agree with all these accounts, in terms of representation of the refugee figure as a depoliticized, silent and docile figure. However, what I would like to show is that in the case of Turkey’s response to Syrian refugees, humanitarian production of the refugee was achieved through politicizing the refugee representation. Reinterpreting the forced migration with reference to Islamic narratives caused the production of an abstract figure that is politicized and, for this reason, that is ought to be integrated in faith-based humanitarian relations, which have been embedded in the political trajectory of last decades of the country. For the reasons I

outlined in previous pages, compassion mobilized for Syrian refugees is translated into a political issue in which both the spectators and sufferers appear as political figures. Lauren Berlant (2004) argues that compassion “implies a social relation between spectators and sufferers, with the emphasis on the spectator’s experience of feeling compassion”. It, then, instantaneously postulates a distance between the spectator and the sufferer, which translates itself into a social relation. I think of this distance in the case of Turkey -and probably anywhere else- is that it is politically determined and that at its center which lies not only the moral but also the political imperative for compassion because the suffering itself is politicized.

This politicization of the refugee representation was embedded in the Islamic narrative of *ansar* and *muhajirun*, widely referred both by the state officials (see the Erdoğan quote at the beginning) and by humanitarians. It goes hand in hand with a series of abstractions: it abstracts the meaning and ramifications of forced migration in the present; it abstracts the refugee into a figure that is simultaneously politicized and humanitarianized; and finally, it abstracts the religion (or culture, or civilization for that matter) as an atemporal and immutable set of commands. Arif Dirlik (1997, 46) states, “abstractions are ideological, not only because they represent ‘strategies of containment’ in the definition of meaning, but because these strategies play a crucial role in the struggle for hegemony by suppressing alternative meanings that challenge hegemony.” It is in this sense crucial to examine how the refugee was constituted as an abstract category in and through the religious narrative. In what follows, I will give a brief account of place of asylum in Islamic history and tradition.

Tahir Zaman (2016:1), in his book on Islamic traditions of asylum, argues that "movement is a recurrent theme in Islam". Giving examples from various Islamic practices he continues arguing that movement is an indispensable part of the belief and a turning point both in the history of Islam and in Prophet Mohammad's life:

One only has to think of the prayer itself and how the devotee moves throughout it. First, she is standing, then bowing, then prostrating, and then seated. *Zakāt* or the giving of alms commands that wealth be distributed and circulated from the wealthy to the poor. Movement is apparent once again in the tracking of the lunar cycle to mark the beginning and the end of the month of Ramadan and other auspicious occasions in the Muslim calendar. The pilgrimage to Makkah calls on adherents from around the world to make the journey—for some an arduous one, for others less so. Arriving in Makkah, the first port of call for pilgrims is the *Ka'bah*, which they circle seven times. Then there is the *hijra* or the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions from Makkah to Madina, the memory of which Muslim refugees remind themselves of to come to terms with their own displacement. The Prophet too was a forced migrant (Zaman 2016, 1)

Keeping the (non-linear) movement has, it is argued, become the main tenets of Islam. So much so that, Islamic calendar starts with not with the Prophet Mohammad's birth or with the first revelation of Qur'an to the Prophet, but with the *hijra*, migration of the Prophet and his companions from Makkah, where they were under religious persecution, to Madina in 622 A.D. (Zaman 2016; Manuty 2008).

This historical moment of migrating and fleeing the religious persecution has further implications in the Islamic teaching, both for the *muhajir* and for the host community, regulating both the understanding of forced migration and the protection offered to them (Elmadmad 2008; Manuty 2008). Drawing on Prophet's biography, Muslim communities regarded fleeing persecution and moving to places where they will find (religious) freedom and well-being as an *obligation*.

Similarly, Islamic teachings (the Qur'an and the words and deeds of the Prophet Mohammad – the *sunna*) regulate welcoming the refugees and refugee protection. This regulation was concretized with a pact agreed between the Prophet and the *Ansar* (the helpers), the locals of Medina. “According to this pact, each ‘Ansar’ should take care of one ‘muhajir’. This care included food, clothing, shelter and any other assistance needed until the ‘muhajir’ could look after himself [*sic*]” (Agha 2008:37). As a result, the inhabitants of the city of Medina, promised the hospitality and fair treatment to the *muhajirun* (translates as the migrants, sin. *muhajir*)

(‘Abd Al-Rahim 2008; Elmadmad 2008; Agha 2008). Moreover, they treated the *muhajirun* with neighborliness, as brothers and sisters. Muddathir ‘Abd al-Rahim (2008) argues that this encounter between the Ansar and the *Muhajirun*, and their neighborliness, marked one of the most important moments of the Islamic history: this encounter informed the teachings of Islam “characterized by remarkable compassion and practical concern for the interest and welfare of the refugees irrespective of difference in race, faith, culture, or social status”. Hence, this encounter in Medina marked the creation of the *Ummah* – the transnational community of Muslims sharing faith and destiny by virtue of commitment to Islam.

This history is ingrained into the present-day narratives of the asylum system, refugeehood and the refugee protection. Studies on Afghan *muhajirun* fleeing the Soviet invasion between 1979-1989 exemplify the significance of this narrative. Shahrani (Shahrani 1995) shows that at the time, UNHCR and other international organizations, actively present and operating in the camps in Pakistan, used the legal term refugee while the Afghan community, displaced by the Soviet invasion, actively rejected this term and called themselves *muhajirun*.

The reasons behind the objection to the term “refugee” were rather political. First one, Shahrani (1995) argues, is the self-perception of the Afghani *muhajirun* as political figures fleeing “the Soviet-sponsored communist coup on 27 April 1978, the Russian invasion that followed in 1979, and the decade-long occupation of Afghanistan”. Therefore, they were not simply “victims” of persecution but rather they deemed their migration to Pakistan and Iran as political acts of resisting the “communist invasion”. Although largely framed under the anti-communist propaganda of the Cold War politics, the act of asylum-seeking of the Afghan *muhajirun* pointed out one important aspect: seeking refuge is a political act, not only because it retrospectively refers back to the political and/or politicized conflicts and problems in the country of origin but also because it is a way of standing up against the persecution. Afghan *muhajirun* rejected the distinction between fleeing the persecution and obligation to resist it

(Shahrani, 1995). Self-politicization by Afghan *muhajirun*, however, could not be fully processed by the internationalized refugee regime, which, as a result, came up with a new concept: refugee warriors. Political character of the Afghan *muhajirun* as well as their insistence on further politicization of their acts in exile blurred the boundaries between the refugee and the citizen, between the legitimate subjects of the political and the “speechless” victims of persecution respectively, under the state-nation-citizen hierarchy (Nyers 2005).

Second reason was the religious references that are embedded in the self-conceptualization of the Afghan *muhajirun*. As the narrative goes, Prophet Mohammad was a refugee and was politically empowered to negotiate his and his companions place in the new context. Therefore, following the Prophet’s path in the face of persecution provides an alternative referential system for the Muslim refugees to conceptualize their act of asylum-seeking (Zaman, 2016). This system (alternative to the internationalized and inter-governmentalized refugee regime) helped Afghan *muhajirun* to frame themselves as “honorable exiles” or “rightful refugees”. They interpreted that the reason behind their persecution was their religious devotion to Islam, which the communist Soviet Union and its local accomplices want to destroy completely. Therefore, the devotion to Islam became the main anchor of their self-conceptualization and identity formation. Although this is rather a simplistic picture of a much larger discussion regarding the Afghan *muhajirun*, especially following the end of the Cold War, this set an important example of how Islamic teachings provide an alternative referential system as to who (self-)qualifies as a refugee but also how “persecution”, which is individualized in the internationalized refugee protection system, is reinterpreted in religious terms.

In Turkey, references to the Prophet’s biography swept the way the AKP government and its supporters shaped the way Syrian refugees are understood and their plight is addressed. Although there were no explicit references to the Afghan *muhajirun* of the 1979-1980 period, the way in which persecution was understood resembled one another. It was strictly

reinterpreted under religious terms: while for the Afghans, the oppressor was the communist threat and the Soviet invasion, for the Syrian refugees (as it was interpreted by the government) it was the Assad government, a member of the Shia sect and a secularizing leader. But in both cases, the reason for the brutality and oppression was attributed to the religion of the oppressed.

Despite the similarities, it must be noted that in the case of Turkey, the naming of refugees “muhacir” (*muhajirun* in Turkish) did emanate not from the self-conceptualization of the “politicized” refugee community (even so, it was not made visible or heard) but from the government of the host country. This difference is important in two respects: it allows for the politicization of the refugee figure, an abstraction (in Dirlik’s terms) and a representation, yet it does not amount to politicization of individual refugees. In fact, it works to the contrary: insofar as the representation is politicized, the political agency of refugees (I mean political acts by refugees undoing the representation) becomes more easily denied. Also, this naming works to mobilize another politicized figure, that of the humanitarians, which is also an abstraction (as in *Ansar* in the parable above) who unconditionally help the refugee regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, and language. Therefore, both Syrian refugees and Islamic humanitarian groups are located in a regime of representation in which both groups are politicized in their own abstract ways. This regime of representation is empowered by the culturalist binaries that have come to shape the ideological and political trajectory of the Islamist movement in Turkey among others. It is then strictly historical yet postulated in an atemporal manner - limiting the conflict into a religious narrative from centuries ago. The problem with this regime of representation lies not only in the problems inherent in abstraction that Arif Dirlik (1996) discusses. It serves to conceal the hierarchies intrinsic to humanitarian (and imaginary) differences reiterated in the *actual* encounters between humanitarians and Syrian refugees. In the following chapters, I will discuss how this gap between the regime of representation that politicizes figures of the refugee and the humanitarian and the encounters

between those two are negotiated in Denizli. Before moving on to chapters on encounters between the Islamic humanitarians and Syrian refugees (also other aid-receivers), I will give a detailed account of Denizli as a “charity society”, as a “refugee-hosting city”, and as “an abode of (benevolent) informalities”. I will outline not only the urban structuring of the city but also how Islamic humanitarianism has become central to the urban relations.

Chapter 3: “What are you doing in Denizli?”: Navigating the Field Site as a “Charity Society”, as a “Refugee Hosting City”, and as a “Home to Benevolent Informalities”

When I first moved in to Denizli, a city that members of my extended family also live and that I had been visiting since my early childhood, neighbors and acquaintances who knew me through familial or neighborhood connections wanted to know what I was doing in Denizli. They knew that I grew up in Izmir, a metropole and the third biggest city of Turkey, and went to study in even a bigger one – Ankara, the capital and the second biggest city. Later, I moved to “Europe” to continue my studies and regardless of how big or small the city I was living in, it was in Europe, thus, like in the imaginary of many people in Turkey including members of my family, it had to be a metropole, incomparable to their city. My decision, however temporary, to live in Denizli, a small city with nothing interesting for “a person like me” going on, struck them with curiosity – hence the question, what I was doing there. When I replied, “I am here for research purposes” the curiosity grew because in the city they had been living for all this time, they had not observed anything particularly interesting, anything worth researching. Then, I must certainly have had something to do with the university in the city, which was not the case.

When people heard that I was researching on charity and humanitarian work, the inquiry about my presence there quickly turned into appreciation. It was one thing that everyone I talked to –humanitarians, public officers, politicians, municipality workers, neighbors, the grocery store in the neighborhood, and extended family members– did unanimously agree on: Denizli was certainly a city full of charitable acts and events going on in their every day, in the most mundane moments, so much so that they would only realize when they talked to me. Once a family member said, “You walk on that street down the road [referring to one of the most

central and busy streets of the city] hungry, your stomach will be full with all the gifts by the time you arrive at the city center.” And she was right. Especially at noon on Fridays (the holy day of Islam), there would be small boxes or tables on the shopfronts which one could find with a variety of food –chocolate, fruit juice, bakery products, sometimes a full meal– offered as the weekly charity of the shop owners. The amount and the variety of what was given would change depending on the wealth of the shop owner, size of the shop, and the religious significance of the particular day. At the end of the street about a 20-minute walk, there was a big mosque after which the main square of the city center was named. The mosque had a small green garden where people socialize or sit on the benches under plane trees while waiting for prayer times. If the small gifts all the way down were not enough, there would certainly be a bigger charitable event, most often giving away food, in that garden on Fridays and other religious days, most visibly during Ramadan.

Besides these weekly or otherwise periodical events, people would collect donations for people in their neighborhoods, arrange aid giving to elderly people or people with disabilities. Aid-giving for children was also very important. Almost every family that could afford to would cover the school expenses of at least one child of an impoverished family. House gatherings, Qur’an reading groups, faith-based socializations such as fast-breaking and collective Friday prayers could swiftly turn into an occasion for planning aid giving for someone who was in need, and the needs were rather diverse: it could be covering treatment expenses of a sick person, it could be covering wedding expenses of a young couple who could not afford it, school expenses of children, furnishing a house, providing winter fuel allowance, and providing other forms of in-kind aid. In almost every store, there was a see-through coin bank by the cashier with a hadith on it: “*Sadaka* (voluntary almsgiving) keeps the trouble away”, located to remind people to sympathize with and give alms to others while shopping for themselves. It

was truly impressive to witness such a vibrant scene of charity-giving as there was a never-ending cycle of traditionally and religiously motivated giving in the city's everyday life.

So, the people proudly telling me that Denizli was a city of charity were right. Almost everyone would know a local philanthropist, usually a pious and wealthy public figure, whose stories of benevolence would spread. Even the then rector of the local university and his wife -later I came to learn that both had close ties with the faith-based humanitarian networks and the AKP- were well-known local philanthropists who did not want people to know about their benevolent activities although it was an “open secret” stories about which were widely shared. “Thank God”, Sümeyye, a young NGO volunteer who was also a sociology student at the city university, told me, “Our city is both rich and generous. No one sleeps hungry in this city. We haven't lost the sentiments of neighborliness, charity in our city.” It was intriguing to hear these words from a university student in her early twenties; these words sounded to me as though uttered by a person who had had a longer experience in the field and been knowing the city for a long time to compare which tradition had survived and which had been lost throughout time. With these words, however, she was not only conveying the commonsense wisdom that, I suspect, was communicated to her by elder humanitarians. Her words were a way of embracing the city, being a native in Denizli. Partaking in, engaging with, or being the donor or intermediary of, or simply witnessing charitable deeds were a way of showing one's belongingness in the city's charitable ecosystem. They were not only about benevolent deeds, they were also about performances of reputation, respect, social status, and being acknowledged in the city's public realm.

The city had constructed itself as “a charity society” and had created a lore of charity, and I was very excited, thinking that I was at the right place. However, despite all these stories whispered in almost every ear, organized charitable efforts were much less known. Very few people could actually put me in contact with others in humanitarian networks. Charity and

benevolence, for many in Denizli, was an individual effort as commanded by the local traditions and religion. Everyone was somehow involved in it, in their own capacity, as it had always been that way. People to whom I talked in my first days in Denizli did not think about more organized and formal charitable efforts, and they reckoned much less the need for anything like that as the informal networks of charity were smoothly functioning.

As my conversations with neighbors and acquaintances about the charity tradition in the city continued, I was asking about charitable organizations assisting refugees, and to my surprise, it was hardly heard of although everyone was aware of and talking about the diverse refugee populations in Denizli. My neighbors, a Pentecostal Christian Iranian refugee family of three who had come to Denizli three years before I did and were waiting for resettlement to the US for around six months, also did not know about charitable organizations assisting refugees. They had not received any assistance except from the UNHCR's implementing partner NGO and rarely from their parish that they were going for Sunday services. There were possible explanations why an Iranian refugee family were not getting any assistance. First of all, there was an unsubstantiated yet widely shared belief that the Iranian community in Denizli was well-off because they, unlike Syrians, were not fleeing a war or a disaster and were able to save money before seeking refuge. My neighbors were, however, not well-off; the father was working at the industrial site as a car mechanic and the mother was changing part-time jobs at various textile workshops to work when their 8-year-old daughter was at school. They were getting paid much less than the minimum wage and most of the time the payment was delayed. They told me once that until now they were putting up with the conditions in Turkey because they knew they would be moving to the US but earlier that year in 2017, the Trump administration had passed the so-called "Muslim Ban" and their resettlement plans had been indefinitely postponed. Under these conditions, they were stressed that their financial situation would be even harder to bear with, at least at the time, no prospect of having better conditions.

Knowing how they were living and listening to the stories they told about others in the Christian Iranian community in Denizli, it was hard for me to find it credible that the absence of assistance in a city with as dynamic a charitable field as Denizli was due to the absence of need. The second explanation, although it was hardly ever openly accepted that some people were excluded from aid provision which was based on need and was only implied as a passing comment, was that Iranians in Denizli were either Christian, Bahá'í, or LGBTQI+ refugees who were settled in Denizli as a satellite city until their resettlement to a third country, most probably to North America.

That Islamic humanitarian networks were excluding Iranian refugees and later I came to learn that Afghans too was fairly plausible and, to a considerable extent, true. For Iranian refugees, identifications assigned to them somehow laid the reasons for their exclusion from Islamic aid relations. For Afghan refugees, on the other hand, the Muslim identity was indisputable –as they were known, if anything else, by their religious identity. Their exclusion, therefore, cannot be based on faith-based differentiations. One explanation was offered from a professor of Pamukkale University (the university in Denizli) who was really helpful to me for navigating other aspects of the urban life in Denizli. For her, it could be argued that the reason why Afghan refugees flee their country was not simply explained by “religious persecution” because the Taliban did not particularly fit into Islamic humanitarians’ understanding of persecutor. Another explanation came from a humanitarian volunteer who argued that the Afghan community was very isolated, and they did not have any interest in being part of the society; they were neither having social relationships nor learning Turkish to initiate a form of relation. Yet another explanation came from Adem. For him, both Iranian and Afghan refugees were “ideological refugees” who were attempting at escaping to the West instrumentalizing Turkey as a steppingstone or a waiting room. He implicitly blamed them for wanting to settle in Europe or the US which are marked by not only further economic opportunities but also by a specific

lifestyle, an ideology that is reprimanded by Islamic ideology. Such a desire to go to West is not read through demand for better living conditions or more generous means of one's reproduction, but through an ideological fix which valorizes Western lifestyle.

But there was another reason that was often given to me when I asked people in the Islamic humanitarian networks why they were not providing aid to Iranian refugees. They were telling me that they did not know or encounter any Iranian refugees, which was, for humanitarians, an already good enough a reason to assume that the Iranian refugees were not in need of support. Later a friend in Iranian networks explained, the Iranian community that was already marked as “undesired aliens” for being non-Muslim, ethnically non-Turkish, or LGBTQI+ was settling in relatively better-off neighborhoods or neighborhoods where predominantly university students and faculty lived. Those places may be expensive, but the chances of facing discrimination for identification were much lower for Iranian refugees. They were, in a sense, separating themselves from districts that were known to be “religious” and “conservative” although those districts could offer more affordable rents and living expenses. Humanitarians telling me that they did not encounter Iranian refugees was indicating possibly that they or aid-recipients they worked with were not sharing any physical space with Iranian refugees. But it further indicated an important aspect of how Islamic humanitarian networks operated in Denizli. Aid was spatially concentrated in certain places which were seemingly in need of aid the most; but this spatial concentration, in turn, was enabling reconfiguration of these spaces and reshaping how they were made sense of in the public and humanitarian imagination in Denizli.

An overview of the urban structure

Denizli, located in the southwest of Turkey, a medium-sized city with a population of one million, is one of the most industrialized cities of Turkey. It is famous for its textile production,

in fact, in the 1990s, during the wave of booming urban economic growth through transnational branding, it was called the “textile capital of Europe”. In Turkey, Denizli was also counted among the “Anatolian Tigers” -named after the Asian Tigers- to underline city’s successful economic growth in the neoliberal era. While some scholars attributed this success to the booming industrial state subsidies, some others underlined the role of the “entrepreneurial spirit” that only blossomed after the 1980s. Textile is the primary sector along with chemicals, marble, mechanics, agricultural machinery, plastic industry, steel and iron, food, glass and metal industries (Keçeli 2012). After the 1980s, the city went through a boom in industrial development (Şenses 2016; Türkün-Erendil 2000; Özügurlu 2008; Bedirhanoglu and Yalman 2009). This boom took not only the advantage of deregulation of labor by neoliberal macro-economic policies, but also the historical labor organization of the city which has enabled low unionization of labor, flexible labor market, strict control over labor processes, and informal labor and low wages (Ünlütürk-Ulutaş and Kamber 2016; Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2015; Karadeniz and Durusoy Öztepe 2018). Economic developments have also shaped the face of urbanization of Denizli.

In the last 40 years, growing industrial capital has become the primary determinant of transformation of the city center: the city was re-built around the new industrial areas installed around the main roads to the big cities. It also encouraged establishment of squatter areas as residential areas for the newly growing working class. Denizli continued attracting labor migration both from rural areas and neighboring cities. With the growing working-class population that came to the city center, new working-class neighborhoods were also built in close vicinity to the newly built factories. To date, these neighborhoods are still known to be impoverished and deprived neighborhoods with unhealthy housing conditions and poor infrastructure.

Moreover, the city since the late 1990s, has become a conservative stronghold manifested by consecutive local and general electoral victories of Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party which has been in power since 2002). Local government has been under the rule of AKP since 2004. Denizli, as an urban context, exemplifies what has been widely analyzed as merging of Political Islam with neoliberalism in Turkey or, as Mona Atia (2012) puts it in Egyptian context, to ‘pious neoliberalism’.

In the 1990s, Denizli received internal migration from neighboring cities as well as from Southeastern cities of Turkey as a result of ongoing forced displacement and internal conflict. These migrants were quickly absorbed by the industrial production. Also, internal migrants who work in precarious conditions for low wages increased squatting areas in the city center. Multiple forms of displacement and dispossession coupled with precarious working conditions, sweeping the large part of industrial organization, led to wide income gaps and social aid has become an integral part of their lives for most of the residents. All these developments marked the character of urbanization of the city as well as shaped the humanitarian and charitable efforts. In the 1990s, newly flourishing Islamic charity networks directed their efforts to certain districts which not only host impoverished and precarized urban labor but also which can be and have been blended in the Islamization of everyday life through humanitarian encounters.

In early 2010s, Denizli started hosting Afghan and Iranian refugees as a satellite city. After 2013, Syrian refugees also started to settle in the city for rich employment opportunities in the textile sector which is also notorious of informal employment which refugees are compelled to due to lack of work permits. Refugees also started to settle in the inner-city neighborhoods and were also quickly incorporated in the informal labor market in the textile sector.

Spatial Concentration of Displacement and Dispossession

That impoverished populations usually inhabit or are driven to inhabit in certain districts of urban contexts is hardly novel. Spaces are constructed in accordance with different rationalities and implement different techniques for distribution of bodies in and through various spaces as a sovereign technique to order and regulate people and their movement (Foucault 1979; Kotef 2015). Spatial concentration of marginalized populations as well as their (at times coercive) dispersal is integral to the construction and government of space. For the government of refugee subjectivities, too, spatial regulations are of significance. For a very long time, and arguably to date, “camp” has been configured as the most convenient spatial settings for refugees who are seen as uprooted, out of place people. UNHCR, for instance, did not recognize “urban refugees” as a separate category.²⁸ Even when it eventually did, it continued to add a caveat that delivery of humanitarian aid and basic services such as healthcare and education as well as prevention of human rights violations against refugees are more challenging in the urban context. Spatial confinement of refugees was somewhat justified by efficiency of aid distribution and protection in enclosed spaces.

In contrast to general association of camp setting with the refugee populations, in Turkey, official encampment is hardly a part of refugee management. There are refugee camps for Syrian refugees in the border cities established in 2011, in the wake of first refugee arrivals. Even then camps were not the compulsory form of refugee settlements and Syrian refugees were encouraged to self-settle in cities. Today, according to figures provided by the Directorate

²⁸ Not until 1996 did UNHCR recognize refugees who lived in non-camp settings as the refugee regime was based on encampment of refugees in rural areas (Marfleet 2007). When, in 1996 UNHCR issued its first policy document on “urban refugees” recognizing the rising phenomenon of refugees settling in cities instead of refugee camps, it promoted the camp model as the ideal refugee protection model (Biehl 2019; 2014). However, most refugee camps are marked by “immobilization, the waiting and the constriction of daily life into a restricted space with multiple constraints, [...] remote and isolated” (Agier 2010, 36). Facing harsh critiques for endorsing encampment, they updated their take on “urban refugees” with a 2009 policy document which emphasized community-based approaches for the self-reliance of refugee communities (Biehl 2019).

General of Migration Management, only 1.5% of Syrian refugees live in refugee camps while the rest prefer to live in urban and semi-urban environments.²⁹ In urban contexts, refugees predominantly choose to live in inner cities sharing space with other impoverished groups. Therefore, even in the absence of encampment as the primary strategy of spatial confinement of global asylum regime, spatial concentration of refugees is likely to happen, alongside other marginalized communities of a given context. Considering all this, the idea that aid is channeled to certain places inhabited by refugees who are deemed most vulnerable and impoverished is not unexpected.

There is, however, more to spatial concentration of aid activities than simply providing “efficient” protection to the organically and spontaneously assembling vulnerable groups. Advancing aid efficiency or spontaneous spatial proximity of populations in need of aid as the reasons behind spatial constriction of aid-recipient groups render those spaces empty and devoid of power relations (Lyytinen 2013). However, as Doreen Massey (1994) aptly puts, spaces are constructed from numerous social relationships which are embedded in and co-constitutive of power relations. Humanitarianism too is integral to power relations that construct and shape spaces it acts in and through. In Denizli, places where organized aid relations take place are built in the intersection of various power laden and interlinked relations, the most notable of which are informality, labor precarity, vulnerability, and humanitarianism. In this chapter, I will map out the spatial implications of Islamic humanitarian aid to refugees and other marginalized populations in the city. These spatial configurations are to a large extent related to the urban structuring of the city and political and social relations that are co-constitutive of urban restructuring. Although I pointed above that spatiality of aid and modes

²⁹ For non-Syrian refugees (that is, those who were granted “Conditional Refugee” or “Subsidiary Protection” statuses) camp is not an option as they are assigned to satellite cities, which are at times referred to as “semi-open camp” or “semi-open prison” by refugees themselves (Biner 2016). Denizli is one among more than 70 satellite cities in Turkey.

of spatial confinement and enclosure are key to refugee management, conditions specific to the urban, social, and political configuration of Denizli also need to be delineated. They have played a significant role in construction of neighborhoods where both impoverished populations were offered conducive conditions to settle and aid and compassion were directed. For this reason, I focus on the scalar peculiarities of the city rather than taking it as a mirror reflection of broader national and transnational contexts. Denizli, as an urban locality, has its own history of industrialization, its own relation to capital, to displacement as well as to humanitarianism. As Glick-Schiller and Caglar (2015, 3) argue, “cities have their own governance regimes, economic and spatial development plans and powers (...)”. It is more than “a straightforward repository for the policies of the state” (Darling 2017, 184).

In Denizli, two big neighborhoods stood out as providing shelter to displaced and impoverished populations. The spatial organization of the neighborhoods was fully implicated in the history and politics of the urban context of Denizli and social relations formed through aid penetrated the spatial organization of not only neighborhoods in question but also the larger urban context. In order to outline how Islamic humanitarianism has become a part and parcel of the everyday production of space of these neighborhoods, I will first outline the urban structure of Denizli. An important relation in this respect is informality which has been integral to the construction of the neighborhoods where aid relations were concentrated, but it is also a crucial relational form in the urban context as well as in the establishment of humanitarianism as a force in the city, which I will focus in the next section.

Informality as a rule

I tried and failed for weeks to get an appointment from the Denizli office of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) that is the only state office in charge of refugees in the city. It is responsible for registration, issuing and extension of residence permits, keeping

track of weekly sign-ins to prove that refugees registered in Denizli did not leave the city unnoticed, reporting refugees who failed to show up for three consecutive sign-ins to law enforcement and revoking their asylum applications, and issuing travel permits and permits to relocate in other cities. The job description of the DGMM was strictly bureaucratic as the Directorate was established in 2013 to civilianize asylum and migration bureaucracy which had formerly been in under the jurisdiction of a special branch of law enforcement called “the Foreigners’ Police” (Sarı and Dinçer 2017). Talking to the DGMM officers about the migration management in Denizli and how a state office would assess the city’s response to refugees was of particular interest to me although I was not directly focusing on refugee groups. They sounded reluctant to give me an appointment, giving the reason that they were very busy and understaffed and could not make time for a meeting. Also, remembering what other migration researchers told me about their experiences with the DGMM, I was convinced that my effort was anyway doomed to fail. Along with UNHCR, the DGMM came to be known as an exceptionally mysterious institution among the migration researchers in Turkey because it was almost impossible to get an official permit to have an interview. Researchers were waiting for months to get security clearance and most of them failed. Those who managed to get official permit, on the other hand, were saying that in interviews one could learn nearly nothing but what was already written in the law and regulations because DGMM officers were repeating what they were officially allowed to tell, which was not much.

One day, however, my failed efforts turned around when I went to meet with officers of SYDV (Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation) which was in charge of distributing state sponsored welfare assistance and determining prospective beneficiaries (see Chapter 3). Their jurisdiction was expanded following the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement signed in March 2016 and the office, in collaboration with the Turkish Red Crescent, was commissioned to determine the local beneficiaries of and allocate the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN), the

largest cash transfer program in the world. They were, in other words, was in charge of the so-called “EU money”, the EU funds³⁰ for humanitarian aid to refugees in Turkey in exchange for keeping refugees within the borders of Turkey. For this reason, they had access to vast information about refugee households as well as other forms of humanitarian assistance refugees are given.

I felt that they wholeheartedly answered my questions and gave me lots of information about how the SYDV worked. They were however aware of the institution’s bureaucratic and financial limitations. Perceiving themselves as committedly Muslim humanitarian workers, who happened to have the privilege of getting paid by doing benevolent work, they sometimes were transgressing the institutional limitations and choosing to help beneficiaries by referring them to other aid organizations when the SYDV failed to meet their needs or address their demands. Their close links with other aid organizations in Denizli emanated from these officers’ personal relationship to Islamic humanitarian networks and as, one of them reflected, “these connections had proved themselves useful so many times” because “they were not bound by bureaucratic rules and could be much more efficient and flexible in their aid activities”. Notions of efficiency and flexibility attributed to civil society were in line with the neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state which was criticized for being too heavily bureaucratic an apparatus to address needs of people as well as with the relegation of state responsibilities to civil society organizations. However, in the case of Denizli, efficiency and flexibility not only meant civil society’s ability to act faster, it also designated the so-called non-state actors’ ability to swiftly and deftly mobilize informal relations or navigate within informality to organize aid as they were not bounded by bureaucratic and legal rules that limited their room for maneuver for aid. When they found themselves in bureaucratic quagmires, especially in the case of

³⁰ The initial agreement was 3+3 billion Euros to be granted to Turkey for humanitarian and social cohesion aid to refugees. However, later in June 2021, the EU pledged to grant an extra 3.5 billion Euros to Turkey. See <https://www.dw.com/tr/türkiyedeki-sığınmacılara-325-milyon-euroluk-yardım/a-59998860>

addressing needs of people who were not eligible by SYDV conditionalities, they were appealing to their own “informal” networks and refer beneficiaries to other aid organizations which could usually find solutions, albeit often informally. Especially regarding refugees’ applications, the aid conditionalities were rather heavy and restricting, and the solutions would often fall out of the SYDV jurisdiction. “Why turn down people”, one of the officers said, “while you know you can figure it out using *other ways*”. Getting the job done, especially if the job was to help someone in need, outweighed the formality in a state office, but what was even more striking was that this was comfortably utterable for everyone in a government office. Later, the more I spent time in Denizli the more I came to see how informality was a constitutive aspect of the urban structure utilized by state offices, municipalities, humanitarian organizations, and aid-receivers themselves.

At the end of the meeting, I asked them if they could recommend anyone that I should meet, and the two women asked me if I had talked to DGMM. When they learned that I didn’t, somehow surprised, they told me that I should. The two offices were located in the same building along with other government offices, and the SYDV officers told me to go upstairs and walk into the DGMM. In the meantime, they promised to make a call for me. So, I did what they said, hesitated and not hoping much.

The DGMM office was located on a long corridor and at the entrance was a facial recognition machine through which registered refugees did their weekly sign-ins scanning their faces in the machine. The office was not crowded but a feeling of tenseness could easily be sensed. I also joined the bureaucratic aura of tenseness and anxiously knocked on the first door I saw and introduced myself. The official immediately invited me in, offered me tea, and we started talking. He was one of the two officers in the Denizli DGMM, his superior was not available to talk right now but he was going to answer my questions as much as he could. He at the outset made it clear that he was having this conversation only because the SYDV officers who he had

been familiar for a long time called and asked for it. Despite the caveat, he was forthcoming about his views on refugees, on the DGMM, and the state's migration policies. He shared his discontent with refugees, with the working environment and his boss, his views about problems in the institutional arrangement of migration management in Denizli. Immediately after, he asked me not to share his views with his boss, these were his personal opinions that he wouldn't want to share in the office. I nodded and reiterated that this conversation was confidential and not for inspectorial purposes.

As our conversation continued, I asked about on which grounds the office gives the deportation orders. He told me that the law stipulates deportation in cases of violation of "public health, public security, and public order". Of course, these were very vague concepts and I wanted to know which concrete occasions or incidents laid the ground for deporting refugees. He then told me that they recently issued a deportation order for an Iranian refugee for the suspicion of engaging in prostitution and disturbing the public health and public order. Also, he told me that it was usually the Iranian refugees "who caused troubles" since "they did not fit into our moral understanding". By the unfit, he actually meant that the Iranian refugees in Denizli are LGBTI+ people, Christians and Bahai groups. He also mentioned that those groups were violating the law, working informally although they did not have work permits. I then asked about the Syrian refugees who were working in the informal sector. His reply echoed what I would repeatedly hear in my stay in Denizli: the state allowed Syrian refugees to work in the informal sector knowing that it was the only way that could make their livings.

Informality however was much more embedded in the relations of the urban context than "looking the other way" to allow *some* refugees to make their livings in the informal sector. After a couple of hours I spent in the building accommodating provincial offices of the central government, I was told that the central welfare institution of the state was relying on informal networks in the city to fulfill their tasks, the migration management unit of the state was

comfortable to make ideologically driven arbitrary decisions on which migrant groups were to be allowed in informal relation and which were to be criminalized, and even more strikingly for me, I was quickly made part of conversations about informality as the pretty normalized way of achieving things. They could easily communicate with me to me about these relations either using it as a justification for efficiency or as a moral yardstick of acceptable form of including or excluding refugees.

As I had further chance to observe and be among people who were active in not just the humanitarian aid but also in the field of migration, I further found out that informality lied at the heart of Denizli's functioning in many respects. It was often justified as "other ways" to handle things that might have been way too complicated to solve officially. But the ways in which informality was employed had become rather a rule than finding efficient roundabout ways. It became how myriad forms of relations were governed, including but not limited to aid relations, housing, and labor. I must note that I do not take informality as the other end of regulated and formal market and socio-spatial relations. I take it as, what Colin McFarlane (2012) describes a construct which concurrently functions as a "territorial formation", an "organizational form" that is the logic organizing labor relations, and a "governing tool". This logic, "informality as a rule", was intrinsic to the economic and urban development of the city.

Urban informality in its broadest sense means the "manifestations of informal processes in the urban environment" (AlSayyad and Roy 2004). In the 1960s and 1970s, urban informality as a conceptual framework was developed in the context of Latin American cities' growing urbanization. Although in the meantime the concept has travelled to other contexts such as South Asia (see works of Roy), the Middle East (see works of AlSayyad and Bayat), and Africa, it has remained a dominant narrative of urbanization of the Global South. While the concept assumed different meanings in various contexts, it also expanded theoretically. It grew from a spatial concept utilized to analyze the unregulated spatial relations mostly by the marginalized

communities living in the urban space to a “site of critical analysis” (Banks, Lombard, and Mitlin 2020). Today, informality covers not only unregulated use of urban space as in the case of squatter settlements but also the organization of labor and economy, and a tool of governing (McFarlane 2012).

More importantly, the formal-informal divide was unsettled as an epistemological demarcation allowing certain forms of intervention. Instead of dichotomous approaches, co-constitutive nature of formality and informality is brought to the fore to develop more thorough analyses of power structures behind the construction and operation of urban informality. This approach, of course, required a methodological reversal from focusing on the groups of people located at the informal end of the dichotomy to the construction of urban informality as “a fragmented domain of multiple and competing” power relations (AlSayyad and Roy 2004, 1). In 2018, Ananya Roy, a leading scholar on urban informality, invited scholars to “shift our gaze from the figure of the urban subaltern to the political potency of the state” (Roy 2018, 2245). By shifting the gaze, Roy (2018:2245) means refusing “to become an accomplice to categories and cartographies of rule”. She underlines the importance of unpacking how these dominant and hegemonic cartographies and categories are constituted in relation to the state and, how, in effect, they reinforce and reproduce the political potency of the state. Paying attention to legal and political construction of informality also entails focusing on differentiations within these constructions. For example, while discussing urban planning and development in South Asian cities, Roy (2018, 2245) contends that informality differentially “enact[s] the criminalization of subaltern informalities and the (invisible) valorization of elite informalities and illegalities.” Therefore, instead of myopically focusing on the one or the other end of the formal/informal divide, Roy underlines the need to unpack the differentiations within the informal. The differentiation, of course, is not only between the subaltern informalities and the elite informalities excluding the former while surreptitiously advancing the latter. Roy (2004) draws

a more nuanced picture of “indeterminacies of inclusion and exclusion” that creates differentiations among the urban subaltern. Urban informality is a mode of urbanization, an organizing logic: “a system of norms that governs the process of urban transformation itself.” It operates on the basis of gendered, classed, and racialized social norms determining which form of informality will disappear and which one will thrive (Sanyal 2014). Therefore, it is a governing logic that creates separation not only between the urban elite and the urban subaltern, but also among the urban subaltern on the basis of “differentiated inclusion” (Roy 2004, 149).

Roy’s approach starts from macro processes in which the (capitalist) state stands out as the main actor which polices, regulates, formalizes, or illegalizes certain groups of people and livelihoods. For Roy (2018), seeing informality as an organizing logic allows us to see how the state consolidates its political potency as it polices, and at times determines, the arbitrary line between the legal and the illegal, the formal and the informal. This ability allows the state to strengthen and, at times, renew its authority upon the urban subaltern. However, Buire (2018) aptly criticizes Roy for contributing to the “myth of the state” as an encompassing and coherent unit. In a similar vein, I contend that policing the indeterminacies of inclusion and exclusion is not solely at the hand of the state but, depending on the context, is achieved through an assemblage of local government, local organizations and networks. The government of urban informality and urban subaltern, hence, is deeply entangled with the local context. In Denizli, informality is conceptualized by the local actors beyond the formal/informal divide and understood in various forms depending on the nature of the social relations: a housing system, labor organization, neighborhood relations, relations with public actors to facilitate and “get things done”, and in aid relations. In what remains I will outline how urban informality in Denizli has become a rule and effectively utilized by the neoliberal restructuring of the city.

Urban Informality in Denizli

Denizli, a medium-scale city with approximately one million population, is one of the most industrialized cities of Turkey. As a part of the attempt to present Denizli as a global brand in textile, now, it is called the “textile capital of Europe” (Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2015). For a long time Denizli has been depicted as one of the successful examples of urban economic growth in Turkey, in other words, along with other Anatolian Tigers, it thrived during the neoliberal era (Bedirhanoglu and Yalman 2009; Doğan and Durak 2014). Scholars widely outlined the reasons behind this so-called success: transition from import substitution economy to export-led industrialization to be able to compete in the world market paved the way for increasing industrial investment in low-paying, low-tech, labor-intensive sectors such as food and textile in cities such as Denizli and Gaziantep (Bedirhanoglu and Yalman 2009). This in turn, entailed systematic attack on organized labor force or, better yet, increasing investment in areas where labor is already disorganized yet disciplined due to the traditional form of labor organizations. In the case of Denizli, the neoliberal restructuring not only created but effectively benefited from already existing informality and unorganized labor force. Therefore, I argue that urban informality in Denizli, encompassing not only informal organization of labor but also informal socio-spatial relations and informal forms of solidarity, has been a mostly invisible yet considerably influential aspect of urban transformation.

The reasons underlying this is manifold: first, the character of the labor organization of the city has always been based on the family and rural ties where people’s main production site is their houses. That is to say, outsourcing textile and weaving work to the rural population was the main production organization of the city as early as 1950s (Türkün-Erendil 2000). At the time, main production site was the household, household workers and, specifically, women and children, did not have wage or social benefits accorded to formal labor. The fundamentally informal character of labor remained intact, especially with regard to already vulnerable groups

whose labor power could be easily devalued, such as women, internal migrants, racialized communities, and more recently refugees. Early industrialization attempts starting in the 1960s was built upon the relocation of rural textile production, which was based on the family labor, in the city center. New attempts at industrializing textile production required the traditional producers to move to the urban center in order to benefit from the urban infrastructure such as water and electricity networks. However, this move was rather unregulated which made it possible to set up small textile workshops in the inner city and resulted in mushrooming of textile workshops alongside the residential areas until the construction of the first industrial zone in the 1990s.

This form of labor organization did not allow workers to organize and mobilize for various reasons. To begin with, workers were either family members who were characterized as not workers but “self-employed households”, normalizing non-wage labor of mainly women and (unmarried) children in the household. Also, the spatial distribution of textile workshops in the inner city and near residential areas allowed newcomers to set their own informal settlements near workplaces creating an environment of neighborhood organized around a textile workshop. This spatial organization was narrated as solidaristic because the neighborhood people who moved from rural areas were usually extended family members or acquaintances. They could work and live in the same neighborhood where every resident is at the same time a friend or a relative, and employer-employee relationship was invisibilized or framed as part of neighborliness. Informal labor and informal housing somehow interlinked in the composition of urban development of the city in a very peculiar way: as a form of non-market solidarity in a way to efface capitalist relations behind it. Moreover, employment and housing became interwoven with non-market forms of solidarity and charity flourishing in newly developing residential/industrial neighborhoods. Even after the heavy industrialization of the textile industry as a result of the governmental development projects, household production continued

in the form of subcontracting, and it largely relied on the family labor and neighborhood-based charitable relations only grew further to become a part of everyday production of the urban space.

Second, presence of the large and vibrant textile industry has made the city a center of attraction for internal migration since the 1960s. In different periods, Denizli received internal migration from rural areas and neighboring cities due to industrialization of agriculture and ensuing increase in surplus labor power, in a sense, residue of agricultural labor force, which could only be absorbed into labor force in the industrialized spaces. Later in the late 1980s and throughout 1990s, Southeastern cities of Turkey gave migration as a result of ongoing forced displacement and internal conflict. And many displaced families came to Denizli, again, due to employment opportunities. These migrants were quickly absorbed by the industrial production, predominantly as informal workers. Migrant workers settled in or built informal settlements in close proximity to the production site, offering workers low housing costs. In the 2010s, after Denizli was designated as a satellite city, Afghan and Iranian refugees were settled in the city by the UNHCR. After 2013, increasing number of Syrian refugees became the residents of the city, not by UNHCR settlement but by their own choice. Many of my interlocutors told me that employment opportunities (arguably in the informal sector) were one of the reasons why Denizli became a preferred city for refugee groups.

Curiously, prevalence of informality enabled the city to become a rich place and offer employment opportunities to refugees and internal migrants in Denizli. However, it was also the presence of a large source of labor force which made possible the continuation of informality, foreclosing labor organization and unionization. Today, Denizli has the least unionized labor force in Turkey with the rate of approximately 6% (Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2015)³¹.

³¹ Also see, Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions (February 2019). “DİSK-AR Sendikalaşma Araştırması: Türkiye’de Sendikalaşma, Toplu İş Sözleşmesi Kapsamı ve Grevler (2013-2019).” [DİSK-AR Research:

While informality of labor organization leads to low-paid jobs and no social benefits, other forms of informal relations, particularly non-market and traditional solidarity which in the last decades was co-opted by Islamic charity, served to compensate the subsistence difficulties caused by the labor organization.

Multiple forms of displacement and dispossession coupled with precarious working conditions, sweeping the large part of industrial organization, led to wide income gaps and social aid has become an integral part of their lives for most of the residents (Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2015). Social assistance programs developed by the state in the post-1980 period, with the advent of neoliberal policies, have been very important sources of income in the city (Ünlütürk-Ulutaş 2015; Ünlütürk-Ulutaş and Kamber 2016). Despite being the tenth richest and one of the most industrialized cities of the country, field of social assistance is large, dynamic, and imbued with multiple actors. Even though the unemployment rates in the city is lower than the national average, this does not automatically follow the employment self-sufficiency nexus. The majority of currently employed population of the city are also aid recipients of some sort.

Besides the formal welfare benefits given to impoverished households, informal forms of aid-giving which had long been a part of subsistence in Denizli became all the more important. In the field, many of my interlocutors proudly talked about the vibrant scene of charity as a long-lasting tradition of the city, arguing that this can rarely be found in other contexts. Going back to early industrialization attempts, social solidarity and charity was deeply ingrained in urban relations with the urban poor. Interestingly, aid-giving has also long been made a part of the labor organization. I was told that charitable relations and traditional forms of solidarity between the employer and the workers as well as among the workers date back to times when the textile workshops were installed in the informal neighborhoods and were seen not as a

Unionization, Collective Bargaining and Labor Strikes in Turkey (2013-2019)]. İstanbul, Turkey. Available at <http://disk.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Sendikalar-Arastirmasi.pdf>

distinct site of production but as a part of neighborly relations. Although informed by Islamic commands, charity and solidarity at the time was seen as a traditional duty of neighbors to each other.

In the late 1990s, city's charitable networks which had usually operated informally, as a form of local solidarity, was effectively absorbed by the emergent Islamist politics for two reasons: first, the Islamist parties and their networks were strikingly systematic, disciplined, and organized in reaching out to the urban poor (White 2002). Secondly, the local elite, particularly the local industrialists who had traditionally been generous donors, became a vibrant voting bloc of the Islamist parties. This was not only because they align with Islamism, but also because Islamist parties encouraged investment in the Anatolian cities in an attempt to challenge the Istanbul bourgeoisie (Doğan 2007; Durak 2011; Buğra and Savaşkan 2014). With the consecutive political victory of the Islamist parties in local and general elections³², the social and political scene in Denizli were widely Islamized and the humanitarian volunteers reinterpreted their stance and practices from the viewpoint of Islam and its command to help those in need. Islamically driven aid motivation in a sense expropriated other local forms of solidarity and assumed a strong place becoming nearly the only possible form of making sense of charity.

Today, employers maintain informal ties with the workers in production places and deliver regular as well as one-time aid (mostly during the Islamic holidays) to the workers. On the one hand, combined with the extensive utilization of informal labor force and wide subcontracting to informal textile workshops, the local elite could easily capitalize on the unorganized labor

³² At the local elections, formerly center right mayor of Denizli lost to AKP's candidate in 2004 and since then Denizli has been an AKP stronghold in the consecutive local elections to this day. As for the general elections, in the 2002 election which AKP took the power and established the first single-party government since 1989, AKP came out as the first party in Denizli getting 24.17% of the total votes. Since then, AKP's electoral success has went up and down but AKP has always been the victorious party by 43% in 2007, 46,6% in 2011; 39.7% and 45.7% in two consecutive elections in 2015; and 40.7% in 2018 elections. For more information, see Electoral Archive of Supreme Election Council, available at <https://ysk.gov.tr/tr/secim-arsivi/2612>

force while increasing their profits and becoming an important rival in global textile production. On the other hand, the local elite also allocated material resources to the Islamic humanitarian networks (whether channeled to the Islamist parties, local administration, or to the civil society networks) to be delivered mostly to the urban poor employed mostly in the informal labor market. While extending informality, local industrialists utilized traditional forms of solidarity almost as an “informal taxation”.

As I have been discussing throughout the dissertation, the scene of charity is not limited to employer-worker relations, neither is informality limited to labor organization. Quite the contrary, informality has spread through the urban structure, although unevenly and generating differential results for “subaltern informalities” and “elite informalities” as Roy (2018; 2004) reflects. Different forms of charity, as I related in the introduction of the chapter, have also been indispensable part of the city’s perception among its own residents. However, both charity and informality are unevenly distributed through the city. As a result, it generated spatial concentration of both, generating a physical and symbolic confinement of marginalized populations, including refugees and the urban subaltern who were simultaneously informal workers and primary receivers of the Islamic charity in certain neighborhoods. Today, Islamic humanitarianism focused its attention primarily to these neighborhoods to include them not only in the aid relations but also the moral community they have established and institutionalized in Denizli for the last three decades. In the next section, I will map out how aid was spatialized to certain neighborhoods, most notably to two of them that are host to Syrian refugees along with many other impoverished groups.

Spatializing aid

As I discuss throughout the dissertation, various discourses of difference, legal regulations and asylum policies located Syrian refugees as a vulnerable group for whom compassion and

humanitarian sentiments are called for. I also argue that the arrival of Syrian refugees -which had far exceeded sovereign control of the Turkish state to stop- was promptly incorporated into the regime of charity which has been long a strategy of the AKP era politics for governing impoverished populations. This had implications for Syrian refugees: on the one hand, they were provided with access to certain basic needs at a time they faced difficulties; on the other hand, this seemingly welcoming attitude located them among the most marginalized populations in Turkey who have long faced displacement, dispossession, and impoverishment. In Denizli, too, spatial concentration of aid played out similarly. Refugees were drawn to or encouraged to settle in certain neighborhoods with dynamic aid relations. This was, in a very material sense, assisted them to build a new life. However, this new life was almost priorly conditioned due to spatial arrangements wrought out of historical and political configurations of the places they started inhabiting.

The places in question were built in the peripheries of the city, first as part of the industrial/residential neighborhoods but later when the industrial site was moved, they remained in the peripheries but close to the industrial sites. They are geographically close to each other and share a similar trajectory and demography. One of them was constructed on a flat terrain while the other is more on a hilly terrain. When they were first built in the 1960s and 1970s, they were working class neighborhoods constructed through informal housing and throughout decades, they were formalized gradually but continued to host textile and construction sector workers, internal migrants coming from neighboring cities or from Kurdish cities, and Roma population. They, in a sense, hosted populations that were sharing similar socio-economic conditions and however differently marginalized, all were somewhat displaced and dispossessed in their biographies.

In their effort to grasp urban socialities in places hosting migrants, Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar (2015, 15) offer to expand the definition of displacement as “experienced by large

numbers of people whether or not they have moved to another residence, city or country.” In that respect “displacement includes not only mobilities including border-crossing migration but also the increasing precarity of those considered locals who experience various forms of dispossession under neoliberalization: unemployment, part-time employment (...) lower wage rates, forced relocation, loss of social status (...) and downward social mobility” (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2015, 15). Thus, it includes cultural dislocation, social disruption, material dispossession and political disenfranchisement (Hyndman 2000).

In parallel to this broadened definition of displacement, the neighborhoods were also shaped through multiple and overlapping forms of displacement and emplacement – former textile workers who lost their statuses following the global downward pressure on wages; people who are excluded from the welfare provisions of the state; precarized laborers due to neoliberal policies; internal migrants; individuals with broken family ties; long-term property-owning residents and refugees. When, in 2010s, they became the main place of residence for refugees who share similar socio-economic conditions with the local residents, these neighborhoods drew even further humanitarian attention. These neighborhoods in late 2010s turned into a hub for humanitarian attention for Islamic humanitarian networks, municipalities, and state-sponsored social assistance programs. As opposed to everyday charity that flew through the urban center, these neighborhoods, sheltering settled and newcomer marginalized and impoverished populations, became loci of an emergent and gradually consolidating “moral imperative to intervene and a form of government” (M. I. Ticktin 2011, 274).

This of course does not mean that other social relations did not exist in these neighborhoods. As Doreen Massey (1994) points out, spaces are constructed from numerous social relationships which are embedded in and co-constitutive of power relations. The population of these neighborhoods were culturally, linguistically, and ethnically immensely diverse to enable various forms of socializations. Also, the majority of the dwellers were working in the

industrial sites or in the textile sector. Many others were in and out of cycles of unemployment as those who were and could be intermittently assimilated into labor. Yet others were working in jobs that were pushed to the margins of understandings of labor, such as waste collectors and “beggars” (for lack of a better word, I am using the term people who made their living by begging) – racialized jobs that were attributed to the Roma community. This myriad of different labor relations, co-constituted and merged with the spatial ones, created various segments in the neighborhoods that were somehow located in the spectrum of informality although almost everyone in the neighborhoods was in that spectrum, one way or another. In addition, concentration of such diversity of populations that were ethnically and racially marked as “threatening” or “criminal” (particularly the Kurdish and the Roma, later to be joined by Syrians who were seen as a “potential threat” whose containment was delegated and self-delegated to Islamic humanitarianism) in one place led to abandonment and criminalization of neighborhoods by the rest of the city, including the municipality, this abandonment and exclusion, in turn, opened even more space for Islamic charity to take on a protective and moralizing role in the neighborhoods. However, all these relational, cultural, and political heterogeneities went rather unseen while neighborhoods were remade into humanitarian hubs inhabited by people who were defined solely by their needs and failure to meet those needs. Although there were very material reasons that drove Syrian refugees to move into these neighborhoods, primarily affordable housing, I sometimes could not help but thought that Syrians settling in these bounded spaces of humanitarianism where they shared not only socio-economic conditions but also similar forms of marginalization with the other dwellers inadvertently led to their immobilization spatially and politically while enabling them to have better access to “basic needs” through humanitarian aid.

The hilly neighborhood was formed in the late 1960s as an informal working-class settlement and was formalized only in the late 1980s (Keçeli 2012). It is still known to be a working-class

neighborhood in close proximity to the industrial zones of the city. As the neighborhood expanded after the 1980s, it hosted not only working class families migrated from rural areas to the city center but differentially impoverished and empowered groups. Built on a hill, the neighborhood topographically and socio-spatially resembles a pyramid.³³ As various waves of migrants settled in the neighborhood starting from the 1960s, they created a socio-spatially vertical settlement: the early-comers settled in the downhill parts while the late comers as well as socio-economically excluded groups were located at the top. With the gradual formalization and growing marketization of housing land in the late 1980s, the upper side of the neighborhood was allocated to the socially excluded groups as well as the late comers, namely, Kurdish migrants, the Roma people, Syrian and Afghan refugees and those who could afford land only at the cheaper parts of the neighborhood. The neighborhood still maintains its informal character - not exactly in terms of spatial regulations since the housing was largely formalized but in terms of being one of the primary settlements for refugees who do not hold an official status as well as for industrial workers of the informal labor market.

The other neighborhood was constructed more horizontally although even within the neighborhood there was a vertical structuring. There were certain streets occupied exclusively by the Roma who made their living through waste-picking and begging. Also, there were “enclaves” settled by the Kurdish community. Those parts of the neighborhood looked rather abandoned by the rest of the neighborhood community as “no-go zones”. The arrival of Afghan and Syrian refugees appear to have blurred this class- and race-based segregation of the neighborhood as they chose to move in the most affordable apartments they found. Informally developed housing market also forced them to do so. Local residents of the neighborhood started renovating their storages, basements, or attics that were previously used as storage rooms for letting out to refugees. Being very small places, they were hastily turned to one-

³³ Personal conversation with Çağla Ünlütürk-Ulutaş, 2017.

bedroom apartments which would normally be unsuited to families. Also, they were not registered as house spaces, therefore, informally built and rented out. Informality notwithstanding, these places were cheap and offered to refugee communities as “gifts” from locals who would otherwise would not let them their apartments for such “ridiculous” prices. In one of the aid delivery preparations at the neighborhood, I was also asking about who lived where, under which conditions, and for how much rents, a woman living in the neighborhood helping with the preparation explained,

“Neighborhood people are giving Syrians shelter as much as their conditions allow. Look, we have renovated our first floor to rent them for ridiculous rents. The *bakkal* (small market) down the road emptied the storage and rented it to four young refugee men. They are workers here and the neighborhood provides them with food.”

Entangled with informality, humanitarianism that became an inseparable part of the neighborhoods’ access to social reproduction grew effective in reconfiguring the meanings attached to and social relationships unfolding in those neighborhoods. It spatially tied many different marginalized groups to certain places in the urban context. These neighborhoods were not only physically close to industrial sites where finding a job was relatively easier –albeit informal and precarious– or where rents and living expenses were cheaper. They were also places, for those who could not afford, where it would be more feasible to find apartment; to furnish houses through donations; to have access to fuel for winter; and to have access to food and other day-to-day necessities through humanitarian networks. This worked in a double way: refugees and other potential aid receivers settled in these places because they were the loci of aid distribution; therefore, the more potential aid-receiver settled there, the more aid was channeled to those neighborhoods. Thus, they have been rendered spaces conducive to humanitarian encounters between local humanitarian networks and aid-recipients, including refugees. In a way, these places were built as and/or grown into hubs of humanitarianism but also of bounded spaces of humanitarian government physically, socially, and politically enclosing the displaced and the impoverished.

It is against this background Islamic humanitarian activities took shape. In the next chapters, I will focus on how humanitarian *encounters* between (refugee) aid-receivers and aid-givers are negotiated.

Chapter 4: Abstract “Similarities” and Situated “Differences”: How Islamic Humanitarian Actors Negotiate Refugee Encounters

In the previous chapter, I offered a genealogy of how Islamic regime of charity, flourished at the heart of and emerged through workings of the “marriage of neoliberalism and Islamism” (Atasoy 2009), was proposed as a solution to what have been problematized as impoverishment and displacement. By problematization, I do not mean to challenge or neglect material and unequivocally real hardships produced by impoverishment and displacement. Problematization, in a sense, is a gaze through which to offer specific solutions to particularly framed problems. Didier Fassin (Fassin 2012:7) defines “problematization” as a historical process through which “we come to describe and interpret [the world] in a certain way, bringing problems into existence and giving the specific form, and by this process discarding other ways of describing and interpreting reality, of determining and constituting what exactly makes a problem”. It is in this respect Islamic regime of charity should be seen as one specific way of interpreting these issues among many competing and struggling interpretations, although it has managed to become the dominant framework in Turkey.

That Islamic regime of charity was offered as a solution to impoverishment and displacement also meant it gave specific form and specific way of interpreting these problems. They were situated in culturalized, populist, and binary readings of history which allowed the Islamist ideology to claim that subjection of certain people to impoverishment and displacement was due to the fact of them being *Muslim*. Therefore, historical problems and deep-seated inequalities and injustices were reduced to “single issue problematization”: the religious persecution. Political, social, and economic inequalities embedded in the history of Turkey, of course, are not peculiar to populations identify themselves as Sunni Muslim. However,

difficulties, injustices and inequalities faced by other populations, namely non-Muslim groups, non-Sunni groups, non-Turkish groups, and those who face other axis of discrimination such as gender, class, sexuality, and disability were either erased and forced out of Islamic regime of charity or were subjected to other forms of problematizations the solution to which is not unfrequently suppression and coercion. Through changes in the Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era, this understanding could be projected to the international context, grounding on transnational Muslim community, the Ummah.

However, single issue problematization based on shared religious identity is hardly sufficient to explicate or solve inequalities. The inequalities and differences, that exceed and outgrow the confines of problematizations need to be negotiated in everyday. Especially in relation to Syrian refugees, this has become all the more urgent because claims to shared religion were challenged on two fronts: first by the history of nation-building that emphatically casted Arab populations of the Middle East outside the nation-building process and second by the sovereign injunction to govern mobility, particularly but not exclusively, the international cross-border mobility commanded by the nation-state regime of mobility that I have outlined in the first chapter. This chapter will zoom into the local context and bring an ethnographic discussion of how this negotiation unfolds among Islamic humanitarian networks in Denizli and how they navigate their encounters with Syrian refugees. I bring in two main mechanisms of postulating constitutive differences and they work in tandem, although sometimes in contradictory ways. The first one is situating loss (of state and national community) at the heart of producing knowledge of the refugee. The second one is almost Orientalizing culturalist discourses which postulate national differences between the Turkish and the Syrian communities. Before moving on to these mechanisms, I will flesh out the processes of abstraction of the refugee figure through references to religion.

Production of the (Abstract) Refugee: Politicized and Humanitarianized

In ending the previous chapter, under the heading of “Political Imperative for Compassion”, I discuss how the Syrian refugee figure (*muhajir*) has been produced as an abstraction and located in a regime of representation. In this regime, the Syrian refugee is postulated as an *abstraction* which embodies both the parables of Islam and the history of how Islamism and contemporary Islamic charity in Turkey have claimed the political power of problematization of displacement and dispossession. Through workings of abstraction, Islamic humanitarianism in Turkey managed to produce a refugee figure both politicized and humanitarianized, or more precisely, humanitarianized through the politicized representation of forced migration due to religious persecution. I also argued that the simultaneously political and humanitarian production of the refugee produced yet another (abstract) figure, that of the humanitarian—a moral and political subject who circulate and act upon compassion derived from religious and political convictions. This abstraction helped Muslim humanitarians to draw parallels between themselves and the Syrian refugee population, first, by virtue of being devoted Sunni Muslims who have been persecuted and, second, by virtue of being political actors struggling against the persecution in their own ways.

This parallelization is perhaps best seen in discursive identification of aid-givers with refugee aid-receivers. The refugee figure was morally heightened by virtue of being a refugee, not because of difficulties that individual refugees face in Turkey but because of gaining a moral and religious recognition through the persecution the refugee figure endures. Sometimes, the moral high ground and glorification accorded to the abstract figure of the refugee drove humanitarians toward embracing refugeehood as a metaphor for shared vulnerability that the entire humanity faces. People who were active in Islamic humanitarian sector in Denizli, particularly those who combined their humanitarian activities with political advocacy,

frequently used the phrase “we all seek refuge in Allah” (*Hepimiz Allah’a iltica ederiz*) in their conversations, recognizing the shared weakness and the need for protection of the entire humanity before God. For them, the shared vulnerability as an ontological human condition was what equalized all in being dependent on God, and “seeking refuge in Allah” was used as the metaphor to relay and at times reconfigure the meaning of the refugee. Although it is a forceful one to draw attention to shared precariousness and vulnerabilities, it often ran the risk of “translat[ing] the literal into the metaphoric” such that refugees “come to represent something other than themselves” (Ahmed 2000: 82). The metaphoric displacement invisibilized actual experiences of inequality, persecution, and discrimination refugees face, if not subsumed individual refugees into an abstraction.

Postulating shared vulnerability as a common condition is not, of course, peculiar to Muslim humanitarians who embrace the metaphor of refugeehood as a common denominator between themselves and refugees. In fact, Judith Butler (2004) famously described “precariousness” as an existential state constituting life in general. For Butler, “precariousness is a *socio-ontological* condition shared by all” (Lorey 2015, 18, emphasis added), and it is “a universal experience of the finitude and therefore fragility of human existence” (Fassin 2018, 41). This universally shared condition, meaning that no human being (or any living being for that matter) is physically capable of living a fully autonomous life, highlights the interdependency of life forms (human and non-human): “shared precariousness is thus a condition that both exposes us to others and makes us dependent on them” (Lorey 2015:20).

However, in Butler’s argument, universal condition of precariousness is always relational and does not exist outside social and political conditions which distribute precariousness and vulnerability unevenly and which make some groups exposed to inequality, discrimination, or persecution more than others (Fassin 2018; Lorey 2015). Instead of an abstract equality of all, Butler underscores that social and political circumstances create and manage hierarchical

segmentation of precarious lives, underpinning the “differential distribution of symbolic and material insecurities” (Lorey 2015, 21). At that moment, interdependence is effectively disguised and dissolves into hierarchical segmentation which postulates some groups more “dependent” and “precarious” than others, response to which can range from care and concern to domination and violence (Lorey 2015).

“We all seek refuge in Allah” is rather different from Butler’s (2004) recognition of social and political circumstances that combine universal precariousness of life with hierarchy, even domination and violence. In the case of Muslim humanitarians who embrace the refugee as a metaphor and highlight shared precariousness, hierarchical segmentation seems to go unseen in favor of symbolic equality based on the absolute weakness of humankind in front of God. In this case, contra what Butler (and others) argues, the universally shared condition of fragility of life is stripped of the social and the political. To say, “we are all refugees in the eyes of God”, means “to conceal the substantive difference it makes when one is forced to cross borders, or when one cannot return home” (Ahmed 2000, 81). Hence, it conceals the second aspect, that is, the uneven and unequal distribution of the politically forged vulnerability. It flattens out hierarchies and material asymmetries (or take them for granted) and equalizes the two parties, refugees and humanitarians that are otherwise positioned asymmetrically and hierarchically in humanitarian and many other social relations, in abstract moral and religious terms.

Nonetheless, the inequality is there and visible in a way making it almost impossible to flatten out experiences under abstractions. Social, political, and legal circumstances produce and unevenly distribute vulnerabilities based on nation, race, gender, religion as well as legal status. And, in a system that actively creates inequality, these vulnerabilities need to be governed through various means and by various actors implicated and involved in the uneven and hierarchical relationships. What is then further made invisible in the process of abstraction of

both figures of the humanitarian and the refugee is that the unequal distribution of vulnerability and precariousness brings about and works in tandem with the “government of the precarious” (Lorey 2015; Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay 2016). Islamic humanitarian networks have assumed crucial roles in the representation and government of impoverishment and (forced) displacement that are, in the Turkish context and possibly elsewhere, important determinants in unequal distribution of precariousness as well as in the criteria for aid-deservingness. Their role has actively continued in responses to Syrian refugees. In a sense, actors in Islamic humanitarianism who adopted a discourse of shared (and abstract) precariousness of all, have become the ones who could shape and act upon the hierarchical segmentation of precarious lives through their roles in the government of the precarious.

Paradoxically, humanitarians in Denizli, on the one hand, adopted and circulated a discourse that had moralizing and politicizing impacts on the figures of the refugee and the humanitarian and that attempted to achieve a symbolic equality of both parties. On the other hand, embracing the figure of the humanitarian, they were compelled to act so as to ameliorate the suffering and address hardships which come alongside forced displacement and dispossession. Islamic humanitarianism, then, became simultaneously unifying and separating form of sociality: it united both parties under abstract and symbolic equality while it simultaneously differentiated those actors by assigning them to their politically and socially produced hierarchies between the victim and the ameliorative actor, between the receiver and the giver, between the sufferer and the spectator.

As I mentioned earlier, similarity is usually based on sharing a common Islamic faith, interpretations of persecution informed by the Islamist historiography in Turkey (see the previous chapter), and on being differentially positioned political actors of the same abstract moral order and members of the imagined community of Muslims. The construction of difference, on the other hand, was not only achieved through the affective distance between the

suffering and the witnessing. It was also interlinked with a series of other differentiating factors inherent in state/nation/citizen nexus (Soguk 1999) as the dominant global order, humanitarianism, and the primary tension in the Islamist ideology in Turkey.

First, the dominant global system is established on a nation-state centric model that designates “the hierarchy of citizen/nation/state not only as natural but also as necessary to the peaceful, stable and secure organization of local and global politics” (Soguk 1996, 23). Refugees in that model are postulated as not only anomalously different from citizens merely for the fact of being refugees, but they also are effectively made “the site of statist practices which (...) endeavor continuously to re-articulate the state-centric imagination of life possibilities in local and global interactions” (Soguk 1996, 23). Islamic humanitarian networks in Denizli, in their discourses, embraced such statist differentiation between the citizen and the refugee and circulated it various discursive practices that, at the same time, are useful for mobilizing compassion. Second, in humanitarianism, the presumption that one side is always already dependent on the other for meeting their needs (however short term it may be) underwrites the asymmetry between the aid-giver and the aid-receiver, in favor of the former. In Turkey too, Syrian refugees’ incorporation in the regime of charity in Turkey (see the previous chapter) immediately located them at the receiving end of humanitarian relations reaffirming the hierarchy produced by humanitarianism. Finally, in Islamism, the constitutive tension that has for decades remained unsolved is the conflict between the national and the transnational; between being citizens of a nation-state and being member of a transnational community of Muslims, the Ummah – that I have discussed at length in the previous chapter.

This chapter will be an attempt to think through this contradiction between abstract (religious) similarity and situated differences. I argue that the co-existence of two seemingly incompatible positions does not disrupt the flow of humanitarianism but rather becomes a productive one. Unlikely combination of similarity and difference in the same discourse of Islamic

humanitarianism provides humanitarian actors with a relatively large room of maneuver for deciding on for whom the compassion will be mobilized and to what extent; determining who will be aided with what forms of aid; specifying degree and intensity of social relationships; and identifying individuals, families or groups that will be included in or excluded from the moral communities established through aid.

In what follows, I will discuss how actors in Islamic humanitarian networks in Denizli negotiate this contradiction and navigate their encounters with Syrian refugees. I will argue that discourses of difference often outweigh discourses of similarity and symbolic equality, without, however, fully dissolving the latter. The chapter is primarily based on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in Denizli in 2017, but I will also discuss various moments that I had encounters with discourses that were shared by Islamic humanitarian networks and shaped their responses to Syrian refugees.

2013: “A person’s true worth” – Keeping Humanitarianism at the Border

A series of encounters that drove me towards this research started in 2013, when I was working as a research assistant at a project coordinated by Hacettepe University on social cohesion of Syrian refugees in various cities of Turkey including metropolises and border provinces. At the time, the official name given to Syrian refugees was still “guest” and the temporary protection regulation had not yet been drafted. For the project, I was tasked with having interviews with NGOs with no further specific criteria: it could be human rights advocacy NGOs, humanitarian organizations working in partnership with international organizations (such as UNHCR), or a small neighborhood association which mobilized their resources, which had been hitherto used for the impoverished populations of the neighborhood, for Syrian refugees. The important point was not to classify civil society but to understand how non-state actors in Turkey responded to

refugee arrivals and what they thought of the future of Syrian refugees in Turkey. I had many interviews with a variety of organizations, each having their own motivation to offer assistance: while some were strictly professional circumventing their job description with the legal framework, some others were more politically engaged in that they would mobilize advocacy for institutionalization of a more comprehensive asylum regime, and yet some others were convinced by the idea of temporariness -widely circulated and underlined by the government- and argued that what was important was to make sure of Syrian refugees' well-being (basically the physical survival) until they returned home. Both the responses and projections for future were surprisingly diverse. The head of an expert migrant NGO, working in the field since the early 1990s, said, "Syrians are not going anywhere. But there is no bright future for them here either. They will set up ghettos in inner cities which will turn into places like Chinatowns in America". Some others, conversely, were strongly convinced that the Syrian migration would be temporary; therefore, they were ready to offer every assistance in their power to enable the conditions of return, either by cooperating with the Turkish government or by offering them assistance in a way that propagates return.

One of these meetings, of the latter kind, took place with a globally renowned Islamic humanitarian organization, which I will call the Concern Foundation (the Concern hereafter), in their Ankara branch. I had worked hard to arrange a meeting, yet I had failed. They had not answered my phone calls or replied to my e-mails. To have this meeting was particularly important for me because the Concern had made the headlines in oddly contradictory ways: some newspapers were accusing it of violating the international law by helping warriors from Syria within Turkey's borders, while others were praising it for its capacity to mobilize aid and heroic courage to reach out to war zones.³⁴ In late 2013, I finally decided to show up at their door, unnoticed. I was expecting they would either turn me down or dismiss my questions. To

³⁴ I cannot share the news articles on the subject for confidentiality purposes.

my surprise, the head of Ankara office, whom I will call Abdullah, was more unreserved in his answers than I would ever expect. I spent nearly two hours in the office. We discussed the failure of international community in the Syrian crisis, the Western politics behind humanitarian aid to Muslim geographies, why the Concern did not collaborate with international organizations, and what the Turkish state and the nation should do in the face of Syrian arrivals.

I remember Abdullah had seemed surprised when I wanted to discuss Syrian refugees in particular. For him, there was not much to discuss, the position to take was obvious. He was for sure not happy with the Syrian migration in Turkey and much more disapproving of the fact that many actors in Turkey, including the state and civil society actors (among them are Islamic humanitarian organizations) were giving a hand to Syrian refugees in a way to encourage them to stay in Turkey. For him, “a person's true worth is appreciated in where they belong” (*taş yerinde ağırdır*). He argued, Syrians should live in Syria, their homeland, and, if necessary, “should have fought for their country that was rightfully theirs and not some oppressive dictator’s.” That’s why his organization preferred to organize aid to be delivered within Syrian borders. Among the displaced population in Turkey, the aid was limited to Syrian women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities (particularly those who have male family members fighting in Syria) to ensure their well-being in the border provinces. For the organization, it was also important to make sure that Syrian refugees settled near the Syrian border and not spread to the rest of the country - particularly not the Western parts. This seemed to him the most convenient method to facilitate their return, once the war is over.

He was, as far as I could understand, was advocating that the spatial fixing of Syrian refugees was the most convenient way to make sure their return. Limiting humanitarian aid to border provinces was a means to this end. His approach to humanitarian aid was not only premised on the need to prevent refugees from moving to other cities either to start a new life or look for a

job, or -for that matter- head towards Europe. He was also positing humanitarian aid as a message to convey temporariness – a message that the refugees do not need to, indeed, are not supposed to start a new life in Turkey as they would eventually go back to their country, the primary place that they belong to and live their lives. So, in their temporary stay in Turkey, their needs and (social) reproduction could and should be met by humanitarian aid.

Abdullah did not hide that the Concern and himself were taking sides with the anti-regime forces in the war which was understood as “taking place between the Sunni majority and the Shia (Alevi) minority regime that was oppressing the majority for so long”. His and his organization’s position led them to adopt a slightly different approach toward Syrian refugees, particularly in terms of who were deserving of aid. Their main aim was to ensure that the Sunni Syrian population, upon return to their rightful place, could restructure the country and act as social, economic, and political precursors in their country’s reconstruction. The Concern, in other words, was prioritizing the political engagement of Syrian refugees with Syrian politics and projecting its political choices onto aid activities among the refugee population.

Doing further research on the Concern and having further interviews, I saw that coupling their aid activities with a political and social movement dimension was their *modus operandi*, arguing that suffering that drives them to humanitarian aid had political root causes. Their political motivation was also how they separated themselves from other humanitarian organizations, Islamic or not. This political and social movement dimension was rooted in their history and alignment with the National Outlook movement in the 1990s, and volunteers and employers of the Concern were outspoken of their political activism past and present. However, they would not separate compassion from politics, because their politics was driven by injustice in the world, especially towards the oppressed nations. Therefore, they merged compassion with political activism, in fact, they made compassion what enabled their political activism in geographies they gave a hand. Their stance on the war in Syria and Syrian displaced population

was particularly politicized, driving them to delineate aid deservingness based on taking a political stance and defending their country within or outside Syria.

It was surprising to me to hear that an organization working transnationally to contribute to the well-being of the Ummah was so insistent on keeping everyone in their place - even though that place was not inhabitable for millions of displaced people- and so manifestly limiting aid to certain populations. Abdullah was profoundly outspoken about the politicized nature of humanitarianism and his approach was by no means the dominant approach to humanitarianism in Turkey at the time. He would probably have been found rather radical in his perspective towards the war in Syria and his expectations from the Syrian people. However, at the time, his thoughts on keeping refugees at border zones and amassing organized aid to refugees at the border provinces were shaped not only by the Concern but also by countless national and international NGOs as well as state institutions. That said, Abdullah's implicit take on humanitarian aid to refugees, which I interpreted as an immobilizing means that keep aid-receivers in place, shaped the way I came to see humanitarianism in general and Islamic humanitarian aid in Turkey, in particular.

After 2014 and 2015, the Syrian war reached its highest point and became drastically internationalized with the involvement of Russia and the USA against the war on ISIS within Syria.³⁵ The projections as to the end of the war became more and more blurred, forced displacement was rampant and the claim of temporariness of the Syrian population in Turkey was debunked. After that point, refugee mobility within the borders of Turkey could not be intercepted any more, and Islamic humanitarian regime started mobilizing its efforts in different localities and operated in more different ways that are still immobilizing yet not solely

³⁵ "Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State" (October 28, 2019). *The Wilson Center*. Available at <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>

spatially. Immobilization was at work politically, economically, and spatially in areas far away from the border.

Abstract Similarities and Situated Differences: How Islamic Humanitarian Networks Located Syrians in Local Aid Relations

2017: Negotiating the Place of the Syrian Migration in Local Humanitarianism

In 2017, in Denizli, when I contacted with the volunteers of the Concern, their stance toward the war or the political nature of their humanitarian activities had not changed, yet the way they saw Syrian refugees was drastically different. Four years after my first conversation with Abdullah, the head of Ankara office, and knowing that this was a very centralized organization spending a lot of time, resource and effort to extend the same political stance and language to its volunteers in localities through pedagogical activities, I was expecting a similar stance. Volunteers in Denizli, conversely, embraced the *ansar-muhajir* parable and committed themselves to the *ansar* role. They rearranged their aid activities to include Syrian refugees and expanded their informal information network to learn more about where Syrian refugees settled, if and how they could find accommodation and job, and what the best ways to provide them assistance were. They were rather welcoming of Syrians and cooperating with the city and district municipalities, neighborhood headmen (*muhtar*), neighborhood imams, schoolteachers, and other informal neighborhood networks to reach out to Syrian households, most of the time unknowing and unquestioning (so they told) their political position in a city at the opposite end of the Syrian border. Of course, their activities to collect trucks of aid to be delivered within Syrian borders continued through fundraisings and event organizations to collect donation. Neither had they stopped on their political activism or organizing public political events such as symposiums, press conferences, and demonstrations in public squares

to show their solidarity with various oppressed groups in the world, be it for the Rohingya, Palestinians, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, or the Syrians.

Comparing Differences: “Home” and “Away”

Volunteers of the Concern, while they were recounting their aid activities, were still prioritizing their transnational activities over the domestic and local ones. For them, people in Turkey were less in need of aid compared to other oppressed geographies which they themselves can travel and see with their own eyes. State of destruction and destitution they witnessed in other places was incomparable to what was going on in Turkey where people were still had many means for support and solidarity such as their extended families, the state-sponsored welfare assistance, and municipality aids without necessarily needing the humanitarian organizations. In the house visits to aid-recipient households that I was invited, volunteers showed me the household conditions time and time again to prove their point: even the poorest household in Turkey (pointing to the ones we visited) was in a far better situation than the ones they had seen in other geographies, in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Syria, Palestine, and many other places to which they had extended their hand.

Indeed, bringing in a comparative perspective to determine deservingness was key to the Concern’s symposiums, in-house meetings and trainings, and their PR activities where they promoted their humanitarian aid activities and collect donation. In such activities, volunteers supported their narratives with photos and images from places they travelled to and delivered aid. The primary aim was to mobilize compassion among the viewers, which was an important condition for collecting donation and recruiting volunteer labor force. The images were expected to speak for themselves, without necessarily conveying the words of those who were photographed. In a similar vein, discussing refugee images in newspapers, Liisa Malkki (1996, 390) says, “this newspaper photograph helps us to see how ‘the refugee’ is commonly

constituted as a figure who is thought to ‘speak’ to us in a particular way: wordlessly. Just the refugee's physical presence is ‘telling’ of his or her immediate history of violence. So we tend to assume, at any rate.”

Joining the international humanitarian regime hinging on visuals of suffering to convey their messages, the Concern’s assumption that the power of the image would convey the terror of suffering and create the desired effects in the spectators was carried all the way through primary schools. In 2016, the Concern had signed a protocol with the Denizli Directorate General of National Education which assigned the organization with the task of teaching and promoting benevolence in public schools. The volunteers who took turns to teach benevolence at schools were also hoping that they would incite a sense of responsibility and care among the youth. They would bring money boxes with them to schools and asking children to donate a share of their pocket money for people whose photos they had just seen and whose suffering they had witnessed from afar. When those donations accumulated, volunteers would give them to the organization to be used in an overseas humanitarian mission. Once it is used, the children who donated their pocket money would, this time, see the photos of how their donations contributed to benevolent purposes. Once again, the images would be shown, but this time the images of happier people whose suffering was momentarily healed.

Besides the photographs assumably talking in place for suffering, the testimonies narrated in such events were testimonies *by* humanitarian actors –hence of the first-hand witnesses– who had mediated the donor and the receiver. The silencing of the sufferer by humanitarianism is a widely discussed topic in the literature, including on humanitarianism and refugees (see *inter alia* Rajaram 2002; Nyers 1998; Malkki 1996; 1995a). For these authors, who work on the rather Western humanitarian organizations, silencing of the refugee (the universal suffering subject, see Malkki 1996) does not necessarily mean outright erasing or ignoring of refugee experience. It rather means the (re)production of knowledge of refugee lives by

humanitarians/experts who, by virtue of their witnessing, translate these experiences to remote (particularly Western) geographies as part of the dominant (Western) knowledges (Rajaram 2002).

I would like to expand on this analysis: in the case of humanitarians in Turkey, narration of suffering was taken away from the sufferer, who lived far away anyways, and was claimed by the humanitarian actors who were afforded mobility back and forth the geography of suffering and the geography of spectatorship. In doing so, they could maintain the prerogative not only to produce knowledge about the suffering and the sufferer but also, by virtue of mediation they undertook, to compare and contrast differences between the geographies of suffering and the geography of benevolent spectatorship. After participating in-house and public activities, I thought their PR method was built on accentuating the differences between Turkey and all other geographies where aid was delivered. In the comparison, Turkey was postulated as a well-off country, not torn apart by a war, or ruined by a natural or human-made disaster, and hence, as a country to be grateful for. But also, it was a country that was generous enough to protect and provide for oppressed geographies, sharing its resources with others who do not have access.

Selime, an articulate and charismatic Qur'an teacher and political activist, also the head of women's unit of the Denizli branch, was very active in these PR activities. She was also one of my primary interlocutors in the Concern, guiding me through the activities of the organization locally, nationally, and internationally. Besides the Concern related issues, when we met she would tell me about her political activism that she had inherited from her family and the politics in Denizli, in general. Thanks to the convenience of her family structure, she said, she was more flexible to spend time on humanitarian work, so a part of her humanitarian work was traveling to other countries as part of the organization's humanitarian missions and, after the mission ended, she would come back with lots of memories to tell other volunteer

women what she saw, what her impressions were. She was commissioned by the Concern headquarter to join the humanitarian task force to Sri Lanka after the floods and landslide in May 2017. While telling me about the two-week long journey to Sri Lanka, she shared her excitement, but also that she did not know what to expect and could only hope that she could be of help. When she came back, she said that the way she saw Turkey had totally changed after she witnessed all those lives in Sri Lanka.

She was also hosting a show in a local radio where she discussed issues of religious and moral nature, told religious parables to learn lessons from, gave pieces of advice to the audience derived from the Islamic resources and Islamic history. Her audience was mainly woman; she would tackle issues and answer questions about everyday life coming from the audience about matters that are pertinent to “women’s lives” such as manners, difficulties faced by teenage girls and young women, marriage, childrearing, care work, compassion in everyday life.

This radio show was also a good opportunity for her to tell her observations from places that she went. Most of the time, she came back from the humanitarian missions upset and shaken with what she saw, things that she felt obliged to tell to demonstrate suffering in those geographies. When she came back from Sri Lanka, she told about her field visit to Sri Lanka as well, lamenting the situation there. People’s homes were at the forefront in these stories, as for her home was also central theme on her radio show. They were narrations regarding the physical conditions of homes of aid beneficiaries: they were not *even* houses (as we know it) but rather shacks and huts; there wasn’t any access to clean water, hence, no toilets or bathrooms inside the houses. Hygiene conditions were unattainable. Their roofs were made of leaves of tropic plants or straw; walls were mud; and the homes were simply uninhabitable. While narrating the everyday of other people, she would simultaneously use these narratives demonstrate how lucky those who lived in Turkey were. In such episodes, she would finish her radio show by extending her prayers to those geographies and extending her gratitude (*şükür*)

for the privilege of living in Turkey, a country that did not turn its back on the oppressed and suffering populations and a country where the population did not endure such disasters.³⁶

As I argued in the previous chapter, social relations generated through the mobilization of compassion always already imply a distance between the spectator and the sufferer (Berlant 2004). This distance, in the case of the Concern and its volunteers, was achieved not only through according some people with the “ethics of privilege” (Berlant 2004) of seeing (and choosing not to see) the suffering. It is also achieved through making the difference spatial (and symbolic, as I will argue later) between where the suffering happens and where the witnessing takes place. In accentuating the difference, the Concern somehow managed to elevate citizens of Turkey (regardless of the suffering experienced within Turkey and by citizens of Turkey) above the suffering, to the level of spectatorship. But the insistence on the comparison worked in other ways than persuading and encouraging the Turkish spectators to become ameliorative actors in the face of disasters. Arguing that people in Turkey always had access to sufficient (and domestic/national) means to heal their and others’ wounds, it continuously underlined what other geographies lacked in contrast to what Turkey did not: wealth, protection, national and local solidarity, and -on top of all of them- a strong and safeguarding state.

³⁶ When I first listened to her, I remember how much I was frustrated to hear the things she said, especially her (and her fellow volunteers’) insistence on the absence of humanitarian catastrophe in Turkey. It was not about the degree of intensity of humanitarian catastrophe, and I was not comparing the situation in Turkey with other geographies. However, at the time (starting from 2015 and continued throughout 2016), there was an intense civil conflict between the Turkish armed forces and the Kurdish movement. Turkish armed forces were bombing the cities, causing dozens of civilian casualties. By 2017, hundreds of people had died, Kurdish cities had been irreparably demolished, hundreds of thousands of Kurdish people had been displaced, and violence and human rights violations had reached an unprecedented level since the 1990s. All these conflicts led to a further crackdown on media, civil society, and academia – basically everyone who had uttered and stood up against the rights violations. See Schenkan, Nate (February 3, 2016). “Emerging Threats in Turkey: Political Trends in 2016”. *Freedom House*. Available at <https://freedomhouse.org/article/emerging-threats-turkey-political-trends-2016>.

Comparing Differences “at Home”

Arguing that people in Turkey was considerably better off compared to many other geographies, the Concern limited their aid activities to certain local populations in Denizli. They preferred to depict their support to the native population in Denizli as “moral support and assistance” which they also combined with material aid. Their goal behind offering moral support was to make sure no one feels abandoned and alienated in their own country and city where they belong but also to gathering both aid givers and aid-receivers under the same roof of a moral community informed by dedication to Islamic causes such as commitment to the Sunna,³⁷ shared family values as commanded by Islam, and creating shared spaces for Muslims to come together.

Moral assistance would include house visits, social get-togethers for parents -particularly for mothers-, social activities for children such as excursions to natural or historic sites or amusement parks, and collective fast-breaking organizations in public spaces during Ramadan. Based on this comparison between people in Turkey and all other geographies they provide aid, they had sorted deservingness among the local population on the basis of not only “material needs” but also “moral needs”. Before they started aid provision for Syrian refugees in Denizli, their main target groups within the local population were “orphan households” (*yetim haneler*), meaning children who lost their parent(s) and female-headed families as the primary unit in need of moral support combined with material provision. In fact, Adem, the president of the Denizli branch of the organization, telling me why the orphan households were of utmost important to them, said, “we need to approach orphans with a particular delicacy. If they are not claimed, they would be inclined to all kinds of evil. A kid without a father cannot establish auto-control. We are establishing the control that fathers would have.” For Adem, the loss of

³⁷ Traditional Muslim laws based on the prophet Muhammad's life and actions, used with the Quran to guide Muslims.

father leaves the household without moral bearing: kids are the innocent ones (M. Ticktin 2017) while women are exempted from the moral order of things or spared the capacity for independence; therefore, both are in need of support and being included in the moral community of humanitarians.

This approach to aid aiming to safeguard a moral community in Denizli took a distinct shape when it came to Syrian refugees living in the city. Syrian refugees were seen as a group of people who had lost their homeland and hence lost their access to protection and national solidarity. Also, based on volunteers' *in-situ* observations, Syrian refugees' need for material aid was much more intense, although volunteers refused to sever material aid from moral assistance. Absent a means for linguistic communication (none of the volunteers spoke Arabic, and many Syrian refugees were not fluent in Turkish), it of course was practically reasonable to create social relations through material aid.

However, the way Syrian refugees in Denizli were represented among volunteers of this organization, I thought, was resembling more to the way humanitarian aid to "remote" geographies were portrayed and recounted. Photos and images were much less in circulation, however, narratives were, once again, underlining the difference between Syrian refugees and the community of citizens of Denizli (and by proxy of Turkey). These narratives were based on house visits to Syrian households or conversations with other residents, imams, schoolteachers, and mukhtars of neighborhoods where refugees were settled. These conversations, I was told, were particularly about the living conditions of many Syrian families in Denizli: children were in distress for the lack of good care, houses were dilapidated and "uninhabitable", and they were all in "misery" due to lack of means of living. Ayşen, the head of the *Bereket* Association, once reflected on one of her visits to a Syrian household and said,

"Home looks like a makeshift shack from outside. We went with the friends [her fellow humanitarians] to see if we can provide them anything. Kids, you know, look neglected.

Their hair, clothing, everything was, you know, looked miserable to me. I don't even know how many people live in this home. It was not a big place, it looked like it was planned to be a storage room, turned into a house later. It seemed like there were more than one family inhabiting there and some elderly people. (...) In the living room where they hosted us, I saw many mattresses piled up at the corner of the room on top of each other. I think there were multiple layers of carpets, too. Everything was in a very bad condition. I felt really sorry and wanted to do something, especially for the kids".

Drawing attention to impoverishment and lack of material needs was not surprising, given that it was based on an "objective" observation as to whom to aid, what specific needs were, and how these needs could be addressed. And it is, for many humanitarian organization in Denizli and beyond, a common way of operating to set a bare minimum of needs (Rozakou 2016; Redfield and Bornstein 2011; Redfield 2013) and look for what is missing from this set of basic needs which are usually identified as food, shelter, fuel (for heating), and hygiene. For those humanitarian organizations which cannot address these needs from their own resources and depend on external funding (be it grants or philanthropic donations), circulation of narratives underlining what is missing from the picture of "basic needs" (not unfrequently requires a political conflict on needs interpretation, see Fraser 1989; 1987) is an important and usually effective means for mobilizing compassion. However, to diagnose what is missing from the (imaginary of) the complete picture (i.e., to identify what are the exact needs to be addressed) does not only serve a practical purpose of assessing and addressing needs. It works in much more intricate ways in terms of who does the "needs-talk" (Fraser 1989), who does the needs assessment, who defines what are the basic needs and their lack thereof, and how and for whom these needs to be addressed. After all, "need is also a political instrument, meticulously prepared, calculated, and used" (Foucault 1978 quoted in (Fraser 1989, 291). All these intricate workings of identifying and addressing needs also become what hierarchically positioned aid-givers and aid-receivers (but also between those who need aid and those who do not), transcending seemingly material needs and producing discourses of difference that often lead to real and symbolic forms of subordination and subjectification (Hall 2017). Before moving

on to how Muslim humanitarians construct and act upon discourses of difference, I will briefly discuss the house visits and needs assessment in Denizli.

Who does the Needs-Talk? Needs Assessment and House Visits

A significant part of aid-giver and aid-receiver encounter in Denizli consisted of determination of aid recipients and their needs. It was a systematic process which had four steps: first, application by the aid claimant or notification about the presence of individuals or households in need of aid; second, investigation of the conditions of the aid claimant to determine whether or not they could be aided; third, the delivery of aid; and finally, the monitoring of aid through regular visits or information gathering. The entire procedure usually revolves around the house space of the applicant and its proximity such as neighborhood, and nearby mosque and school. For the SYDV, and I reckon, for other aid giving groups (which are not authorized to access information about people's official income documents), it was working both as a supplementary and as a substitute to the official means-test. Although the SYDV, as a state institution, does run a means-test, they argued they nonetheless need the house visits to verify the official documents. Also, one of the officers said, "not everyone reports their full income. Let's say the person is a street vendor and makes enough money to live but still comes and applies to the Foundation." Aware of the volume and scope of the informal economy in Denizli (see Chapter 5 on space), they could not fully trust the official documents without actually *seeing* the living conditions.

I was made aware of how these house visits are a constitutive part of the aid relations in our meeting at the SYDV (the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation, for more discussion see Chapter 2), which was also one of my very first encounters in Denizli. The other humanitarian groups adopted a very similar procedure as it was conducive to have on-spot and

in time observation about the aid applicant's (or aid-receiver's) conditions, to monitor "attempts of deceit", and keep the relations with the aid-receiver community going.

In our interview, the officers told me the SYDV's aid allocation structure. Accordingly, the process starts with filling an online or hardcopy form by the applicant, in order to start the procedure. Once the applicant fills the form, the form is evaluated in the Foundation and then the eligibility examination process starts. The front workers are sent to pay unnoticed visit to the applicants' house and evaluate the conditions of the house. This evaluation includes checking the conditions of the house, looking into the coal bunker to see if anything is stored there, judging the clothing of the house residents, having a look at the kitchen and taking their photos to be later presented to the Board of Trustees³⁸, the main decision-making body of the Foundation.

Later, within the process of investigation, the front workers talk to the neighbors of the applicant, local head of the neighborhood (*mukhtar*), the Imam of the neighborhood mosque and to the teachers of the applicant's children (if applicable). The main aim of the whole process of investigation is to confirm the statements given by the applicant. Even after the applicant is found eligible, the Foundation reserves the right to pay unnoticed visits to the applicant's house during the process of assistance. One of the officers told me this system was to preempt the potential attempts for deceit on the part of the applicants and that they had seen so many of such attempts and they had to be discreet about the allocation of limited resources. The same process applies to the refugee applicants who are registered in Denizli. However, the procedure cannot be as thorough, I was told, since the refugee households are more isolated and less in relationship with the rest of the neighborhood; and in the absence of a common

³⁸ The Board of Trustees consists of the local government officers such as the Governor or the District Governor (depending on the administrative unit), mayors, provincial Director of the National Education, Provincial Director of the Family and Social Policies, Provincial Health Director, Provincial Director of the Food, Agriculture and Livestock, Mufti, the heads of various civil society organizations and philanthropic citizens of the city.

language, it is more difficult to communicate with them. Thus, the determination process for the refugees usually consisted of house-visits, checking the conditions of the houses, and some information they gathered from here and there.

In our meeting, the SYDV officers highlighted that the procedure was not peculiar to the Foundation, it was a common practice among various institutions (state or non-state). One officer continued,

“Our front workers try to keep the distance between the beneficiaries. We do not want to get involved in people’s homes, but you know, we need to find a standardized way to discern who is eligible. Some NGOs go even further, I know some of them opening the fridge and checking inside the pots and pans to see what was cooked that day. They go inside the bedrooms and check the wardrobes to report how many pairs of pants the residents have.”

Following the house visits, the decision-making process for Islamic humanitarian networks continued quite similarly to that of the SYDV. This time it was not the front workers but the volunteer women who paid visits to the houses under examination for aid eligibility. They were chosen purposefully among women: not only because care work (and social service) is historically constructed as a feminine job, but also because they were observing conservative gender norms. Female volunteers were deemed less threatening and intrusive to one’s home. Also, especially for female-headed homes, men’s visit was regarded inconvenient. As not only caring subjects but also as nonaggressive and harmless subjects, women were the faces of humanitarian networks in the examination process.

These procedures included detailed information about applicant’s life as well as their needs, relationships of the household members to each other and to the outside, and how these needs and relations affect their eligibility. The information gathered during the exploratory or later-stage house visits would be confirmed with the other residents or by other informal information networks. In the case of refugees, the procedure was mostly similar but at times would differ because the humanitarians would be involved in the process of finding and furnishing their

houses from the very beginning. Many houses in which refugees dwelled were, in fact, found, rented, and set up through humanitarian networks. House was found through these networks, sometimes humanitarians rented out their apartments to refugees for symbolic amounts. A wide range of houseware is provided by the humanitarian networks from kitchenware to mattresses and blankets, to carpets and curtains. Not only food and fuel but also home-making turns into a form of aid and later, of sociality. Therefore, sometimes aid activities could also continue in a less systematic fashion, especially if the need was regarded urgent.

Following the house visits, the findings would be presented to the administrative body, if the network is actually an NGO, or to the other volunteers if the aid was organized by a group of volunteers. The network then would discuss which households and families were to be prioritized and how the aid would be delivered. Most of the time, the aid would be in-kind or as vouchers which were delimited to certain items. In-cash aid was not really favorable for various reasons. First, the donations were usually in-kind. Not only because donors sporadically donated certain items from their homes for second-hand use but also because there was a donation economy in Denizli. Islamic humanitarian networks and other local well-off philanthropists who sometimes made individual donations to be allocated by the Islamic humanitarian networks had made deals with the local markets and stores. Not unfrequently, the owners of these stores and markets would be part of the Islamist networks in the city. The humanitarian networks would buy vouchers or coupons from these stores for limited purchase of certain items. For instance, at the beginning of the school year, children of the aid-recipient households would be given vouchers for a certain amount from a local store where they could only buy purchase school-related items such as uniforms, stationary, school backpacks, and shoes. The fuel allowance would be similarly contracted to a local coal store and distribution would be handled by that very store to the aid-receiving households. Islamic humanitarian aid

in the city, in a sense, had created its own economy through which to be in solidarity with other local tradesmen who were part of the Islamist movement.

The second reason for preference of in-kind aid was pertinent to a general mistrust towards aid-recipients. The Islamic humanitarian networks wanted to know that the aid they allocated for genuine purpose of addressing the need and cash assistance was difficult to monitor in this respect. Ayşen of the *Bereket* Association quite plainly explained to me this preference, which was shared by other humanitarian networks as well as the SYDV who told me that they had to be alert vis-à-vis attempts at “welfare frauds”:

“If I give this money, I want to know that this is paid for essential things. I don’t know if this person will buy cigarette or something else with the money we donate. That’s why we usually give aid in-kind so that we know it is used for necessary things. Our donors also think similarly. They want to know where this money goes to. They want to come and see how their alms is used and sometimes they want to see the household before donating. Once you give the aid in-kind, there is no such problem.”

Although they opted for in-cash aid for reasons of efficiency and convenience (also for a thriving local economy based on aid distribution), this option led to a situation where the needs of the aid-recipients were known and determined in a process where aid-recipients themselves were emphatically excluded. It may be argued that the needs assessment is grounded on a rather objective process of “basic needs”; however, this argument fails to shed light on the contemporary politics of aid which takes for granted and depoliticizes the unquestioned “predefined” basic needs (Fraser 1989). Also, it occludes the social character of needs and needs-satisfaction which are determined either by central organizations such as the SYDV or (dominant) local groups who were ascribed the position to give aid.

This structure needs assessment and needs-interpretation (Fraser 1989) brings me to the final stage of the aid sociality, that is monitoring of aid allocated. House visits were also critical in monitoring the use of aid and for gathering data to determine whether aid would be extended.

Sometimes, these visits took the shape of social interaction in which no aid was delivered but the humanitarian networks went for showing their moral support to the beneficiaries. Some other times, they would just “drop in” to ask after their well-being. While some of the visits were notified, friendly visits were usually not. In these friendly visits, the humanitarians (exclusively women) would ask not only the well-being of the residents, but also if the residents needed anything, if there was any problem that they could address. Besides these house visits, informal neighborhood networks were largely at play. For example, elected local heads of neighborhoods (mukhtars) and imams were the main sources of information for Islamic humanitarian networks in the neighborhood in question. They would inform the humanitarian networks about not only who was in need, but also who exploited the aid, who consumed alcohol or cigarettes instead of buying food and fuel for one’s household and even who was selling the aids given to oneself as a source of income. These networks of information were established based on a shared humanitarian principle which required to help only those “genuinely” in need.

Humanitarian aid, social relations organized around aid networks, or personal relations of the Islamic humanitarians worked, at the same time, as part of the knowledge production processes through which aid recipients were determined, aid applications or demands were examined, needs were interpreted, and spatial socialities could become known. Knowledge about the Syrian refugees’ everyday, their lives and needs were also produced and acted upon through these processes. This knowledge production process, however, was one-sided and hierarchical because it was based on the assumptions of what a refugee would need. Those who did the needs-talk in the NGO or network meetings, house visits or monitoring activities were not those who were in need. In the case of refugees, then, this information gathered through such socialities about material needs of individual refugees was espoused with the knowledges about the abstract figure of the refugee constructed through legal regulations and discursive practices.

That is, in the literal absence of a common language and the meanings attributed to the refugee figure occluded the possibility of a more intersubjective process of needs-interpretation and needs-satisfaction in which aid applicant refugees themselves could be a part of the process. In the next section, I will discuss how these material needs were associated with being “refugee” and were ascribed more abstract meanings pertaining to the lack of state protection.

“Discourses of Difference”: From Material Needs to Immutable Lacks

As the social relationship with the Syrian community grew, these discourses of impoverishment and material needs were accompanied by many others that lent themselves to a slip from the lack of material means to abstractions of “lack” that were immediately associated with displacement, with being a refugee –the lack of a home, the lack of national solidarity and support, a homeland (*vatan* or *memleket*), and the lack of a state that provides and protects. All these abstractions of lack were in place to metaphorically replace forced displacement. At this point, it appeared that the politicized figure of the refugee that was discursively cherished and (metaphorically) embraced by humanitarians become subsumed under a more state-centric reading of the refugee, that is, as a person who, having lost the protection of a nation-state, is suffering those “lacks” that need to be addressed. That is to say, the problematization of displacement became a more layered: while the abstract figure of the refugee, as I discussed above, was associated with fleeing *religious* persecution, material impoverishment and dispossession the refugee faced became an almost naturalized property of being a refugee, that is, being bereft of *native* state and community protection. The difference that was so underlined, therefore, did not lie solely in the living conditions although it made a good starting point for aid relations and for initiating an aid-based sociality. While the refugee figure came to be

defined with reference to what it lacked, what is missing in its present, abundance of lacks made possible to draw the distinction as well as produce and circulate discourses of difference.

In Denizli, it appeared to me that the aid relations not with the Turkish citizen aid-recipient that was given predominantly “moral support” but with the Syrian refugees broke the (imaginary) spatial distance between the aid-giver and aid-receiver, or the parties of compassion as the spectator and the sufferer. As I mentioned above, the Concern was particularly careful about drawing spatial distance between Turkey and other geographies that they gave hand. They were able to do this comparison because they were able to travel all those places and see for themselves. Although more local, Denizli-based networks did not have such an opportunity to make that comparison by themselves, they were well aware of the conditions in other geographies thanks to publicizing activities of the Concern but also to pro-government news channels and newspapers broadcasting Turkey’s generosity beyond the national borders. In Denizli, on the other hand, they were sharing an urban space with Syrian refugees whose images of suffering (especially moments concerning war and border crossing) were being televised in a much more spectacularized fashion but whose everyday was unfolding before the eyes of the humanitarians. Therefore, the spatial/geographical distance between the sufferer and the spectator could not apply in Denizli but the distance could not be cancelled out either.

The distance between the two was reconstructed in other ways, through “discourses of difference” (Hall 2017) appealed to as a way of making meaningful distinctions. For Stuart Hall discourses of difference have “always to be seen as articulated with the operations of power - with the real and symbolic effects of subordination and subjectification” (Hall 2017, 81). Discourses differentiating groups of people from others, then, need to be made sense of within and speak to how the current power relations work. They are informed by historical and ideological constellations which confer meanings onto certain groups of people. It is important not to lean on understandings of “difference” *per se* as what creates subordination, instead, it

is necessary to identify which “differences” are fabricated and put to work effectively within the discourses of difference that lay the groundwork for the conditions of subordination and subjectification. In what remains, I will discuss two main mechanisms of constructing discourses of difference: centralizing loss of state protection in refugee biographies and Orientalizing refugees *as* Syrians who were first and foremost Arab, hence, not only different but also underdeveloped *compared* to Turkish citizens.

Situating loss in refugee biographies

Zeki and his family were my primary interlocutors in the neighborhood. The neighborhood was critical for me because it had become one of two hubs of Islamic humanitarian activities (see chapter 5 on Space). Besides the neighborhood, however, I spent quite a lot of time at their home, helping organization and distribution of aid or just socializing and catching up with Zeynep, Zeki’s daughter who was only a little younger than me. After a couple of weeks spending away from the neighborhood, I went to Zeki’s house both to visit him and his family and to ask if there were any planned aid activities in the neighborhood I could volunteer and be of help. Zeynep, opened the door, invited me in and told me that his father was seeing some people in the neighborhood. A couple of nights ago, a fight, “an unfortunate incident”, said Zeynep, between a Syrian family and some locals had happened in the neighborhood. The fight had gotten out of hand and communities became involved. Her father found himself in the middle to pull apart the fight. Things had been cooled down, but hostility continued, so did the possibility of a new fight. At the time I went, Zeki was visiting other households that were involved and trying to establish peace in the neighborhood. After a while, Zeki came home. He seemed upset and worried, murmuring angrily. After a couple of glasses of tea, he started talking to us about what happened.

A couple of nights ago, while children were playing on the street, a car with four young men from the neighborhood drove very fast, almost hitting the children. Children, who happened to be Syrians, were afraid and shouted after the car in Arabic. In the meantime, the parents left their homes and started shouting at the young men with the car. Once, as Zeki told, the young men realized the children were Syrian, they started shouting back, insulting them with slurs, and telling them to leave the country. The rest of the neighborhood became involved in the outcries, and the fight got more and more violent. At some point, some people in the local community started stoning Syrian households and the Syrian grocery in the neighborhood, shouting swearwords, and threatening them to kick them out of the neighborhood. At that point, a Syrian child knocked Zeki's door. They did not want to call the police, afraid that the police would take side with the Turkish people who assaulted them. Instead, they decided to come to Zeki, an ally in the neighborhood and a respectable resident, to ask for his help to stop the fight which had become increasingly violent and frightening for the Syrian people in the neighborhood. Zeki went with the child, stopped the fight, and since then he had been visiting the households involved in the fight, trying to talk them out of the hostility. He was particularly worried about the Syrian households and the grocery which had been damaged. Those places needed renovation as the windows and doors were broken and places turned into a mess.

He was angry with the local population that they were instigating hostility against Syrians who had nowhere else to go. Threats to kick the Syrian community out of the neighborhood was especially concerning because this could cause a spillover effect in other neighborhoods. But he was also upset that some people did not understand the suffering Syrians were going through. When he visited local households, he was telling them why Syrians came to Turkey, hoping that they would empathize and stop doing what they were doing. "These people", he started recounting to me what he was telling other households, "some of them did not even have their identity cards on them. One day, they went home and saw that their home was no

longer there. It was gone, bombed, destroyed. So, they came here.” “That’s why”, he said, “we work for them, they need us and our help because they literally have nothing here, not a family, a friend, not even a bed for the night!” He demanded everyone to understand that Syrian people had lost their homes (“*evini yurdunu kaybetmiş*”) and their safe spaces and to act with compassion and sympathy instead of seeing them as enemy. Although he was not hopeful that the local people would cultivate empathy, he was trying to convince everyone at least not to pick fights with Syrian people.

For Zeki, “loss” marked the refugee biographies as the distinctive feature calling for cultivating compassion. “Loss”, later I more and more noticed, was an emic term used widely among Islamic humanitarian circles as *kayıp* or *kaybetmek* (literally loss and to lose, respectively)—one that is often pronounced to characterize refugee populations as those who have lost, who are deprived of their home and homeland as their safe spaces (“*evini yurdunu kaybetmiş*”). It is what makes them more vulnerable, more in need of sympathetic approach but at the same time what made them *different, not like us*. The loss -a powerful term capable of elicit sympathy but also evocative of trauma- underpinned the discourses of difference, rendering refugeehood graspable and intelligible.

“Loss” as an emic term was rather effective in operationalizing representations allowing hierarchizing differences: it allowed cultivation of sympathy, reaffirmed the anomalous and out of place position assigned to refugees, and rendered refugeehood graspable for others. It was, on the other hand, intimately linked to an act of *diagnosis*. I call this act diagnosis because addressing the loss required the identification of what was missing in the once putatively “complete” body. This diagnosis was based on imagination of completeness, hence, on difference between those who suffered loss and those who diagnosed it. Effective diagnosis precipitates a formula or plan for treatment, as in a medical operation, or, as what Foucault (1977) called, “therapeutic interventions.” Diagnostics of loss (i.e., pinpointing and anchoring

what is missing), on the other hand, produced two forms of subjectivities, one for the refugee figure, whose biography and life trajectory were open to interventions, and one for the humanitarian aid worker who was empowered and entitled to diagnose the loss and could call for intervention. In the Syrian biographies, the loss of the state protection and homeland played the crucial part not only for mobilizing compassion but also for “knowing what defines them as refugees”. Peter Nyers (Nyers 1999, 21) once stated, “refugees have been negatively defined as registering a twofold lack with respect to questions of political identity (citizenship) and community (nation-state).” Zeki’s years-long struggle to have the neighborhood community accept Syrian refugees was also shaped by a similar attempt of narrating refugees as people who lost their everything and, hence, who deserve the locals’ sympathy.

For sure, in the case of refugees, displacement and dispossession were the primary point of departure to define lacks and hence spot the difference: in the eyes of humanitarians, the refugees had lost their home and homeland, which in a sense made them particularly vulnerable and in need of humanitarian aid. This conception was not peculiar to volunteers and employees of Islamic humanitarian NGOs in Denizli. It was, in fact, widely discussed and circulated among Islamist circles as part of their pedagogical activities. Social encounters and co-habitation with refugees within Turkey’s borders were relatively new phenomena for many Islamic humanitarian organizations; learning and producing knowledge about refugees came alongside and concurrently to these encounters. Associating the refugee figure with loss quickly became a part of learning, producing knowledge, and talking about refugees, and it proved rather useful for mobilizing compassion among volunteers and donors. This was, of course, not applicable solely for Islamic humanitarianism; however, combined with discourses of similarities (identifying the person who is suffering from the loss as a Muslim), narratives of loss could quickly elicit empathic responses, keeping discourses of difference intact, at the same time.

In December 2017, near the end of my fieldwork, I attended a public conference on refugee law in Istanbul. The conference was organized by a group of law students who also volunteered at an Islamic human rights NGO, which I will call Association for Refugee Rights (ARR). ARR was itself founded by lawyers who had been affiliated to the Islamic humanitarian organization I mentioned above. Some lawyers were specialized in the field of human rights law while others undertook human rights cases not as their field of expertise but as part of their “humanitarian work”. All of them had been part of Islamist movement in the 1990s and early 2000s. ARR’s then-president Ahmet, who was also one of my interlocutors, was one of those lawyers. His specialization was bankruptcy and enforcement law, but he would take pro bono cases such as deportations and human rights violations of refugees in Turkey. For him, pro bono lawyering to refugees was the “*zekat* (alms) of his profession”. He and his fellow activists in ARR frequently gave conferences and speeches in public events where they talked about refugee rights, humanitarianism, and human rights. That day, at the conference, Ahmet was one of the speakers along with two university professors and a representative of another faith-based human rights NGO. He began his speech by explaining how he himself defined the refugee:

There are many definitions of refugeehood, but I have my own. I contend that, [refugee is] a person who puts everything they could put in luggage, who is dragged by from a country where they are unwanted to another where they will become unwanted.

When Ahmet proposed this refined and succinct definition of the refugee, the rest of the audience -mostly lawyers and law students- nodded, confirming that abandonment and loss of meaningful bonds were the features defining the refugee. Having involved in many deportation cases and having been active in refugee rights advocacy for many years, Ahmet did not rely on the legal definition but rather put forth an affective one based on being abandoned by one’s country of origin and being unwanted in any other country. He continued his speech based on this description which, for him, was the main reason why human rights NGOs, humanitarian organizations and concerned fellow Muslims should embark on to remedy, or at least

ameliorate, this abandonment refugees face. For Ahmet, irreplaceable loss became the main attribute through which various representations come to “know” who the refugee is. It created not only a means for intelligibility but also mobilizing compassion.

Besides sympathetic connotations, though, the difference based on loss can immediately become a nativist one (De Genova 2018) and turn into the difference between the citizen and the refugee, the former being the one with a state to provide and protect as well as with meaningful bonds and relationships with co-nationals. Implicit in this differentiation was not only a hierarchy between the two but also an admission of suffering the reason for which is attributed to statelessness. Ayşen, the founder of a women-only humanitarian organization which I will call *Bereket* Association, once said, “Everyone should have a homeland (*vatan*). I cannot find otherwise in my heart. One should have a country, a state, a home. Here, without the protection of a state, they [Syrian refugees] live in terrible conditions. They work for extremely low wages. For that reason alone, I want them to return.”

“Don’t get me wrong,” Ayşen continued, “I do not have any problems with Syrians being here. I am doing whatever I can to help them,” referring to her humanitarian activities at the *Bereket* Association. Her experience in the field was the basis of her observations. Her spectatorship had made her cultivate a compassionate approach to Syrian refugees, but she was still thinking that no measure of compassion or humanitarian assistance could actually undo the essential reason of the suffering: being bereft of a state protection due to being a refugee. She had observed the situation and come to the conclusion that the suffering she witnessed and worked to ameliorate could not be fully remedied unless Syrian refugees resettle their countries, re-obtain state protection, and recuperate their losses by reestablishing their relationships with where they were originally rooted, in other words, reinstate their citizenship in Syria. Embedded in her sympathy with the Syrian community was the presumption of loss which precludes the refugees to peacefully settle and own the place in a new community.

Of course, loss inherent in displacement has far-reaching consequences faced by the displaced (Dunn 2017). Elizabeth Dunn, in her book, *No Path Home: Humanitarian Camps and the Grief of Displacement* (2017) , provides a very detailed analysis of the relationship between displacement, loss and grief. Going beyond the material meanings of loss, she contends,

“Displacement marks the loss of symbolic meaning, everyday practice, and a sense of self. Much of this loss is connected to a loss not just of property, but of place: the sites where laws and rules are enacted, where daily routines are carried out, and where people’s memories are attached and constantly brought forth” (Dunn 2017, 179).

Focusing on the spatial boundedness of identity and agency, Dunn argues that displacement comes with an “existential crisis” (2017, 179) and a crisis of the sense of self which is conditioned and shaped by the social relations within and bound by that place. Displacement, thus, incites another crisis, the crisis of one’s place in the world. In his thoughts on exile, Edward Said, in *Reflections on Exile* (2002, 325) touches upon the very same problematic of how one’s identity and existence is bound by one’s place and how the severing of this link, as in the case of dislocation and displacement, reveals a human tragedy: “looked at from the bleak political perspective of modern mass dislocations, individual exiles force us to recognize the tragic fate of homelessness in a necessarily heartless world.”

While discussing the human tragedy caused by massive displacements, Edward Said, however, continues with a warning against this state centrist solution to displacement. Drawing on Simone Weil’s writings in the war time England in 1942, Said states,

“A generation ago, Simone Weil posed the dilemma of exile as concisely as it has ever been expressed. ‘To be rooted,’ she said, ‘is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.’ Yet Weil also saw that most remedies for uprootedness in this era of world wars, deportations, and mass exterminations are

almost as dangerous as what they purportedly remedy. Of these, the state—or, more accurately, statism—is one of the most insidious, since worship of the state tends to supplant all other human bonds.” (Said 2002, 325)

In Ayşen’s account as well the permanent solution she could offer to the suffering of Syrian refugees was an appeal to the restoration of the state protection (“I want them to return”). The dominant lens through which to see and relate to the world was the inter-*national* system (Malkki 1995), and compassionate approaches to displaced populations did not necessarily unsettle the dominant way of seeing. In fact, in a system where the state is established as the entity to “subsume all other relations of meaning and subject-making” (Rajaram 2018, 8), access to state protection and lack thereof became what underpinned both the compassion and the difference, simultaneously.

Although for many humanitarians like Ayşen permanent solution to the essential reason behind the refugee suffering was (voluntary) return, in 2017, for Syrian refugees in Turkey return was not an available option even from a statist perspective. Humanitarians knew that the war in Syria was far from over and none of them had any realistic prospect about whether, how, and when a war-torn country could be reconstructed and under which political conditions that could actually be achieved. After running the diagnostics, as it were, to know and produce knowledge about the refugee figure and after identifying the loss that would fix the refugee subjectivity to the lack of state protection which solutions were there to offer?

In the previous chapter, I argued that the arrival of Syrian refugees coincided with the heyday of Islamic charity regime that had far-reaching impacts economically, politically, and socially. The ways in which forced migration and impoverishment were problematized and re-interpreted by the Islamist politics in Turkey comfortably designated Syrian refugees as aid-deserving subjects. Also, the Islamic accounts of forced migration allowed for a politicized and humanitarianized production of the refugee which allowed for compassion and a shared

political position between the refugees and the Islamic humanitarians. Hence, both the state and the humanitarian organizations effectively mobilized aid, extended their hands to Syrian refugees and proudly promoted their acts for everyone who had the means to aid. On the other hand, Islamic humanitarians operated within the contemporary political universe -national and global- which was fundamentally based on the hierarchical differentiation of the refugee and the citizen, and in the humanitarian infrastructure –faith-based or not– which was grounded on a relation of dependency that could easily cancel out the symbolic equality of Muslims in vulnerability and dependency on God. Where the discourses of similarity made it possible that Syrian refugees were incorporated into the regime of Islamic charity, the discourses of difference gave form to and set the boundaries of the charity extended to refugees. It also drew the boundaries of where to place refugees physically, socially, economically, and politically: the way similarity and difference was negotiated also defined how refugee needs were determined and what kind of “therapeutic interventions” were to be formed as well as laid the base of the future of humanitarian sociality in Denizli. In other words, the negotiation also underpinned the government of refugees by and within humanitarian relations.

The “discourses of difference”, however, were not limited to a generalized distinction between the “refugee” and the “citizen”. It proved significantly effective in mobilizing compassion, but the limits of compassion were also drawn through distinct discourses of difference, that is, in a sense, more historicized and essentializing. Besides being known as abstract figures bearing the double loss of political identity (nation-state that provides and protects) and national community, they were also being known as *Syrians*, as a homogenized national community. The contradiction, then, was that Syrian refugees were on the one hand dehistoricized by being consigned to their abstract losses, on the other, they were overly historicized as people who were known by their national allegiances, that is, being Syrian Arabs. Next section will be a

brief discussion of the latter pillar of discourses of differences: how nationalized and homogenized histories seeped into the language of Islamic humanitarianism.

From “Syrian Brethren” to “These people”: Essentializing Differences by “Orientalizing” Discourses

The research I mentioned at the introduction of this chapter ended in early 2014. The research was novel in that it was one of the first research projects focusing Syrian refugees in Turkey and it was rather broad in scope since the research had involved interviews with state institutions, non-state organizations, international organizations, Syrian refugees, and the local community. The research team was allowed to conduct fieldwork in refugee camps in the border provinces. It was surprising because the entry to camps was not open anyone but select group of government officials, much less to researchers. One of the main findings of the research was that contrary to what was expected both by the state and by the larger population, the Syrian refugee community would stay in Turkey, building new lives here. Also, the research concluded, the promotion of the idea of temporariness should immediately end and a comprehensive social cohesion framework should be initiated.

At the time, everything was hanging in the air; nothing much was known about the Syrian community or government policies, and the public opinion had clung onto temporariness. The only thing known was the enactment of a new law (LFIP, drafted in 2013 and put into force in April 2014) that would eventually provide a comprehensive framework for asylum. So, the head of the research team thought the results should be published but even before that, these findings should be discussed with other stakeholders. Therefore, the team decided to organize a symposium with the participation of a wide array of people including academics from Turkey and beyond, bureaucrats, civil society representatives, and officers of international organizations, in short, the stakeholders of refugee government in Turkey.

The symposium was held in March 2014, sparking a debate about the future policies that Turkey would and should adopt. But before the debate started, there were a series of opening speeches lined up according to the state protocol. The first speech was given by Veysel Dalmaz, the “coordinator governor” appointed in 2012 by the state to exclusively attend to Syrian refugees.³⁹ His primary duty was to supervise refugee camps and ensure coordination between border provinces where Syrian refugees settled. I was already bored and trying to keep myself busy until the long line of bureaucrats finished their addresses and the actual debate started. Veysel Dalmaz started his speech exactly as I expected: Refugees were the honorable guests of this country; their country was under the oppression of a dictator who subjected Muslim populations to unspeakable forms of violence and persecution. “No one”, the governor said, “would want to leave their home and homeland”. Alas, they had to flee their country to seek refuge in ours, so, they should be approached with care and compassion. Also, the Prophet Mohammad had entrusted Muslims to each other’s care, and as importantly, the Ottomans were always welcoming towards *muhacirs*, we, the heirs to the Ottoman tradition, should honor their legacy. Everyone who was remotely involved in Turkey’s asylum regime since the coming of Syrians in 2011 was already familiar with these words and, I think, it was at that moment the other participants lost their interest in what he had to say.

In what followed Governor Dalmaz started to talk about refugee camps at the borders. As a high-ranking bureaucrat the governor’s perspective was in line with the official discourses. The main point was that the facilities in the refugee camps in Turkey were found highly praiseworthy in the international community. They were full-fledged residential spaces designed to look not like a camp but more like a neighborhood with the school, hospital, markets, recreational areas, and playgrounds in it. Indeed, the camp administration was also

³⁹ “Turkey appoints governor for Syrian refugees at borders”. (January 14, 2013). *Hürriyet Daily News*. Available at <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-appoints-governor-for-syrian-refugees-at-borders-39014>

attempting to make the camp feel like a residential area, involving refugees to decision-making processes in matters that were directly related to their lives. Apparently, there were also elections held at the camps to elect representatives of the communities in the camps. At that moment, the governor's speech took a surprising turn and he said, "these people [Syrian refugees] did not know what democracy was, they did not know elections. Here, we teach them democracy. We teach them how to live together, how to clean the front of their houses. We give them responsibility for their own lives, here, in the camps, they are learning all these things." His words did not seem to attract much attention, no one seemed as startled as I was. As a matter of fact, these words of his did not even make the official symposium report written afterwards, although to my mind they were conveying a particular form of knowledge about not only Syrian refugees or refugees in general, but also about Syrians imagined as a nation.

In the course of the same talk, that is, in approximately twenty minutes, the way Syrian refugees were represented shifted from fellow Muslims entrusted to each other by the words of the Prophet to infantilized "these people"⁴⁰ (*bunlar*), lacking democratic and civic virtues. He translated the difference between need for humanitarian aid and willingness for giving it into a difference between the people of Turkey and the people of Syria, instantaneously singularized both groups into a startling level of generality, flattened out differences within and similarities between the groups, and hierarchically positioned them. Ironically, though, both forms of representation were calling for humanitarian action from the people of Turkey that were postulated as the inverted image of refugees. What was asked and suggested as humanitarian action, however, was beyond the provision of basic needs and immediate relief of suffering: it

⁴⁰ This is actually quite an interesting phrase which does not have direct correspondence in English. In Turkish, "*bunlar*" does not involve an extra word to signify human subjects but rather is used as third person plural for both human and non-human subjects. This being the case, "*bunlar*" as a way of addressing a group has pejorative undertone that lacks acknowledgement and respect to the group called for. Even more interestingly, "*bunlar*" is all too frequently used by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in his 20-year-long political leadership to refer to a wide array of oppositional groups, including the Kurds, the civil obedience movements such as Gezi protests, the parliamentary opposition, the LGBTQI+ movement, and then some, to defame and discredit their not only political claims but also legitimate and rightful existence in the country.

was expanded to the applied lessons on democracy and civic virtues. Once again, the comparison between the refugee and the citizen, but maybe more importantly between the Turkish nation and the Syrian nation so generalized took the central stage for making certain groups known. And once again, as part of the contradictory regime of representation, what the Syrian people lacked (both as refugees and as Syrians) was diagnosed and relevant responses were formed.

Respective representations suggested in the governor's talk were not solely based on his observations in the refugee camps; on the contrary, what he conveyed as an observation were conditioned by complicated histories: the histories of Turkey and Syria and of peoples living in these countries, history of Islam and forced migration, and history of international refugee regime. As part of the broader Islamist movement in Turkey, the governor's discourse was joining the Islamist thinking that postulated Turkey as the leader of the Muslim world as well as seemingly reaffirming the Orientalist moral distance between the Arabs and the Turks lurking in the history of modern Turkey (see Chapter 2, the discussion on how Orientalism towards Arab nations became a covert benchmark of the building process of the Turkish national identity.) Similar discourses were adopted by the humanitarians in Denizli.

As a note, due to lack of comprehensive research on modern Turkey's post-colonial present (with some exceptions that I mentioned in the previous chapter)⁴¹, it is difficult to generalize that Turkey's contemporary approach to the Arab nations is solely informed by its (post)colonial history. But it is also difficult to totally rule out this possibility, given that the rupture the Republic wanted to create has been repeatedly challenged historically and politically. That said, I am not going to suggest that Islamic conception of humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees is informed and shaped merely by Orientalism rooted in the

⁴¹ See, *inter alia*, (Deringil 2003; 2007; Ahıska 1996; 2003; 2010 Zeydanlıoğlu 2008; Ergin 2008)

Ottoman history. But essentializing differences between Syrian refugees and the Turkish people (both are imagined communities) was an important part of discourses of differences among the humanitarian actors. While in some instances they surfaced as the moral distance between the two homogenized groups, in other instance they verged on more culturalized (and at times racialized) conceptions that disapproved refugees for not having manners, being lazy, not raising their children properly, or having too many children that they could not take care of.

Sometimes, humanitarian aid conflated with discourses akin to civilizing discourses and humanitarian actors. One day, two such very similar instances happened in my presence in one of the aid delivery event. I was at the neighborhood that Zeki lived for the aid distribution preparation. While we were preparing, I continued asking questions about the minute details of aid giving. At some point, I asked Zeki how, given that he did not speak Arabic, he communicated with the Syrian community in the neighborhood about aid activities. Before giving a more detailed answer, he mockingly said “I go to street and shout ‘Mohammad’ in the air. I know that someone will definitely look at me, they are all called Mohammad in the end. And when they look, I wave my arm to signal ‘Come on’. The rest is among them, they immediately will know what is going on and will head here.” The other volunteers ready at Zeki’s house were listening to him, laughing. Later, he gave me a more detailed answer: the “Mohammad call” on the street was only for daily or weekly food distribution and everyone in the neighborhood already knew it. For other and more intricately detailed aid such as fuel allowance, vouchers, or furniture he was using WhatsApp. He would send photos and detailed information messages to a Syrian neighborhood resident who spoke Turkish relatively better, and she would take on the duty to spread the word to the rest of the Syrian community.

Still, though, shouting “Mohammad” at the street was a practical and convenient way of reaching out to the Syrian community on a daily basis regardless of whether there was anyone

actually called Mohammad in the group. It was, in a sense, a way of “interpellating” them as *Syrian* subjects – in the sense Althusser (Althusser 1970) has theorized as being interpellated by and through ideology which is “more than a set of beliefs about the world; it includes material practices within specific institutions that lead to subject formation and to the reproduction of social relationships” (Mauer 2017). Therefore, interpellation is not one-time event that makes of a subject but rather a conceptual framework to think through the ways in which “inter-subjective *encounters* in public life continually reinterpellate subjects into differentiated economies of names and signs, where they are assigned different value in social spaces” (Ahmed 2000, 23). I thought, judging by the laughing, this was an inner joke among the humanitarians. But it was at the same time an implicit acknowledgement of the homogeneity of the Syrian community under a single name, which was Arabic, which was also the name of the Prophet, and a well-known and much used name in Turkish.

Later that day, when people started to line up, other humanitarians who were seemingly familiar to the neighborhood community started to talk to and catch up with people in the queue. As I was not very well known in the neighborhood, I was watching from a distant corner. At some point, a volunteer, whom I will call Arif, was approached by a middle-aged Syrian man who looked uninterested in the food aid but had a request. The communication looked tense to me as Arif was doing gestures and head moves looking like saying no, but I could not tell. Later, when the Syrian man left, the other volunteers asked Arif if the Syrian man was *again* asking for the same thing. Arif said yes and did a head gesture meaning “what can you do”, looking weary. Other volunteers nodded disapprovingly. During the aid delivery, I asked Nuran, Zeki’s wife, what happened there, why everyone was so disapproving. She said that the Syrian man who came was so stubborn to have his son get married at the age of 17.⁴² However, the family

⁴² In Turkey, the legal age of marriage is 18; however, those aged 17 years old may be allowed to marry with the consent of their parents or legal guardian. For those who are 16-years old may be permitted to marry with the

did not have enough resources to cover wedding expenses and was asking for support from the humanitarian community in the neighborhood. The son, for Nuran, had no job, no future prospect, or no education to provide for himself and his family. Nuran continued, “He is just a child who has no responsibility, God knows how old the wife-to-be (*gelin kız*) is!”. At the end of our conversation, Nuran said, referring to the father, “He thinks he is still in Syria.”

For the purposes of this chapter, I am putting aside the heated debates on child marriage in Turkey and Nuran’s insinuation of the possibility of “child bride” included in the story, a widespread topic of news coverage about the Syrian community⁴³ in Turkey, both of which are very controversial debates in contemporary Turkey. Still, Nuran’s remarks were more of a cue that the Syrian community wanted to keep their “Syrianness”, whatever attributes it might carry, in Turkey. The Syrian father’s insistence on marrying his young son –regarded improper by the standards of the Islamic humanitarian community in Denizli– was projected onto him being *Syrian* and was no longer an individual request. These two examples were maybe difficult to generalize. But the underlying idea that the Syrians were insistently and somewhat defiantly keeping their Syrian identity outside the confines of their country and as *refugees* was rather constitutive of the discourses of essentialized differences and, not unfrequently, was foregrounded to justify hierarchies in the locality of Denizli.

court decision and with the consent of their parents or legal guardian. See, “Conditions for a Valid Marriage in Turkey” (October 26, 2018). *Refugees Association (Mülteci-Der)*. Available at <https://multeciler.org.tr/eng/conditions-for-a-valid-marriage-in-turkey/>.

⁴³ One of the most widespread “breaking news” in the media (especially among the Kemalist, anti-government media circles but sporadically in the pro-government media as well) has been about Syrian women and girls. News outlets presented them as “abused” and “vulnerable” groups both within their own communities and some malicious opportunistic Turkish people preying on their vulnerabilities. Discussions about “Syrian child brides”, “young Syrian women being sold to older Turkish men as second or third wives” (which is illegalized in the Turkish Civil Code) did not maybe make the headlines but were covered

Multilayered and Overlapping Hierarchies

The hierarchies, of course, were not limited to those between aid-receiving refugees and aid-giving humanitarians. It was more multilayered encompassing other aid-receiving communities as well as those that were excluded from the aid relations altogether. To give an account of these multilayered relations, I will give an account for a makeshift soup kitchen regularly organized in one of the neighborhoods that I have outlined in Chapter 3.

In the neighborhoods, humanitarian practices take various forms depending on the temporality and spatiality of the aid. There is a dual temporality which overlaps and inherently shapes the form of the aid: first one is regular aid determined individually, on the basis of need. Its distribution is structured around the availability of aid-givers and aid-recipients, urgency of the needs, and the like. The second one, however, is determined through an Islamic temporality based on sacred holidays of Islam such as every Friday of the week, the month of Ramadan, *Eid al-Adha* (Sacrifice Holiday) and holy nights (kandil). While the regular aids are distributed individually and usually delivered to the aid-receiving household, Islamic ones usually took place in common public spaces of the neighborhood where the aid could be accessible and visible to everyone.

One such public event was a makeshift soup kitchen at the garden to deliver soup to the residents of the neighborhood. It was set up on Fridays at 10 a.m. at the garden of a small two-story building in which one of the well-known and respected pious philanthropist family lived. The soup kitchen provided (literally) soup for approximately 500 households in the neighborhood. Every week, another philanthropist sponsored the soup kitchen; they were usually local industrialists, owners of local brands, well-off citizens of the city who were also known to be part of the humanitarian network. The family took the initiative to start the soup kitchen and took the offer to one of the faith-based NGOs, which I call Civilization Association,

which was established in 2013 with the aim of addressing the needs of the orphan families. It was founded by some well-known local figures who were part of the Islamist movement and philanthropic field in the city. The father, Zeki, was a retired legal counsellor who built himself a two-story house in the neighborhood and devoted himself to charitable activities since his retirement. With the coming of Syrians in the neighborhood, they started helping refugees to find house, furnish their houses, find temporary or permanent jobs, meet with the other members of the Syrian community in the neighborhood, and to navigate themselves in the processes of social assistance given by NGOs, municipality or the state offices.

They also let out their second floor to a Syrian refugee family headed by a young woman with two young children. The tenants pay a very little amount of rent -as a gesture- and share the building's facilities such as electricity, water and internet with the landowner family for free of charge. Zeki's family saw this as an act of faith-based charity, helping to a female-headed refugee family by providing housing and sharing with them whatever they had in their own house. All these charitable activities made Zeki and his family a first point of encounter in the neighborhood, not only for the newly arriving refugees but also for the humanitarian networks who wanted to direct their charitable efforts to this neighborhood.

On the soup-kitchen days, the queue at their garden would be very busy with lots of visitors along with aid receivers. It was also a day for weekly socialization and catching up with the neighborhood people and other humanitarians. They were asking the well-being of the aid-recipients, refugees and locals alike, if they need anything such as furniture for their homes, clothes, anything for the children. Female members of the family and other female volunteers were having a conversation with women to check if women needed anything regarding female-issues such as women's health, hygiene products, pregnancy, childcare, wedding preparations for young women, and the like. Zeki and other male volunteers were discussing issues such as expanding the aid network, finding new donors, finding a new house or job for the aid-

recipients as well as getting to know those who newly arrived at the neighborhood. Thus, the garden worked less as a private property of a family than a public space, a makeshift headquarters of a humanitarian NGO which did not only deliver aid but also monitor and keep an eye on the residents, their relations, and needs, in general. Humanitarianism, in the neighborhood, “provided a ‘structure of attitude and reference’ for understandings” of social and political issues (Jefferess 2011, 78). As a referential system for people to make sense of their immediate and remote surroundings, humanitarianism worked to prevent those issues and class, race, gender, and status-based convergences or conflicts from (re)surfacing or translated them into problems to be understood and solved within the language of religiously motivated humanitarianism.

On one such day, I had arrived in the garden early to help with the preparations and soup cooking. I had not much to do as four other volunteers were already there accompanying Zeki and his family. I and other volunteer women were sitting in the garden and planning to organize donated clothes that piled up at the backroom, waiting for the time to come. Zeki was very strict about timing, he would not start allocating the soup before it was 10 a.m. sharp. People at the neighborhood also knew it and would not come earlier. A woman, however, showed up early with food container in her hand. I did not know who she was, but she knew all the other people I was with. She stood up outside the garden, leaning on the garden wall exchanged greetings with everyone. She introduced herself to me and became part of the conversation. When Zeki came in her sight, she mockingly said, “Zeki Abi (an address for elderly men), I see that you are feeding Syrians again.” She was part of the neighborhood, knowing Zeki and his family well and was seemingly teasing. I felt stressed out not knowing what the reply would be because the woman was apparently there to get some of the food delivered. Zeki took her comment seriously and stared at her somehow vexed. He first exclaimed, “Ah for God’s sake! (*Allah aşkına!*)”, but then continued in a calmer manner: “Daughter, you have orphans waiting

for you at home. You are trying to give them food, and when you can't, you know you can knock our door. Why can't Syrians knock our door to support their orphans?" She did not reply but did not seem exactly to have given up on her views on Syrians. As a gesture and, I thought, for preemptively defuse potential tension, Zeki invited her in and gave her soup earlier than other people. After she left, he explained to me that the woman had lost his husband at a very young age with three young children. He also implied that she was suffering some psychological issues due to high stress she was under. His response was not tense and that day I appreciated what he did, but in hindsight, I think the role he assumed as a mediator reiterated neighborhood hierarchies between the aid givers and aid receivers. In doing so, he was equalizing aid-receivers in their position of aid-receiving whilst positing himself (and not various groups) as the main point of contact and dialogue.

Seeing how successful the soup kitchen had been, the Civilization Association decided to expand the makeshift soup kitchen to deliver fast breaking meal to the neighborhood in the month of Ramadan. Long before Ramadan started, fundraising campaigns for the soup kitchen started. This time, more resources were needed since it was not only soup but full course meal for around 500 households and it was going to be delivered on a daily basis. Usually associated with blessing, plentifulness (*bereket*), generosity, and festivity Ramadan brought an energetic spirit to humanitarians who worked even harder to procure aid materials. They wanted to carry this spirit of festivity and generosity to the neighborhood and spent more time there. Some days, after distributing the meal, male humanitarians were also breaking their fasts in the garden and staying there until the tarawih prayer, having conversations, mingling with some male aid-recipients and discussing religious and political issues among themselves such as organizing a fund-raising campaign to send aid trucks to Syria, organizing political campaigns for drawing attention to the plight of the Palestinians, as well as aid-related matters.

For Muslim humanitarians, the experience of religion was naturalized and diffused in everyday life, and aid was an indispensable part of it. Faith was very visible in the daily lives of humanitarians: in daily language of greeting and conversations, in the bodies of the believers (women with headscarves and men with specifically trimmed beards) and in the house decorations. They nonetheless further highlighted their piety in these neighborhoods, as their relationships to these neighborhoods, which were abandoned and uncared for by other actors in the city, was in essence hinged on religious convictions and duties. The common ground was shared abstract Muslimhood which could also exclude other communities, most prominently the Kurdish and the Roma community, but the differentially distributed vulnerabilities were there, visibly spatialized and rather difficult to undo due to conditions at play. Islamic humanitarians were mediating two otherwise segregated urban spaces of the donors and the aid-receivers, while circulating Islamic convictions of morality, solidarity, humanitarianism, and gratitude.

Mona Harb (2008, 216) argues, in the case of Lebanon, service provision produces “its own social and cultural environment, which conveys faith-based meanings and values to its beneficiaries”. These meanings and values became the benchmark of social relations between the aid-givers and the aid-recipients, which also drew the boundaries for the potential forms their interaction could take. The language and temporality surrounding the aid practices are filled with Islamic connotations, not only in terms of informing about the motivations of aid but also in terms of arranging social relations around aid activities. It facilitated the Islamization of everyday through specific days of aid distribution, incorporating Islamic language into encounters, through active participation of well-known pious figures of the neighborhoods such as imams, pious families, teachers of the neighborhood’s Qur’an course.

Besides social interactions, Islamic humanitarianism also transformed the way those spaces became known and acted upon. They came to be presented and represented through

humanitarian activities, as an aid-recipient neighborhood while effacing the historical and socio-economic conditions of how the residents were rendered ‘aid-recipient’ or ‘aid-dependent’ communities. Formerly known as working-class neighborhoods hosting a very diverse population, the neighborhoods as well as their dwellers and social relations were now consigned to Islamic humanitarian care as the only significant form of relationship, as though anchored in the immediate present (in the temporality of need and its fulfilment) with no historicity and no future to imagine them differently.

Although I argued that the humanitarian aid was spatially concentrated in certain localities that had been constructed as spaces of displacement and dispossession and that were to be effectively absorbed in the Islamic aid and Islamization of everyday, the implications of these activities far exceeded the boundaries of these neighborhoods. All these efforts to keep the spatial boundaries of aid-receiving communities intact were reversed when the spatial diffusion of the language of humanitarianism was concerned. Relying on their efforts in those neighborhoods, humanitarians could assume a role of those who could sympathize with and understand those who were deprived. This claim to awareness of deprivation was carried out in public space one day of every Ramadan. In the central square of the city, the one named after the central mosque, they organized a men-only public fast-breaking activity called “*Ümmet İftarı*” (Ummah’s fast-breaking). The significance of this annual event emerged from its political claim to draw attention to poverty and deprivation. To demonstrate that, they set up floor tables and have their “feast” (*ziyafet* –as they call it) consisting only of water, bread, and salt. After the fast-breaking, they collectively perform salaah (*namaz*, mandatory ritual prayer to be performed five times a day) in the public space and extend their prayers for those who are in destitute all around the world. That day, an important date in the calendar of Islamic humanitarian networks in Denizli, also turns into a religious socialization. After the religious rituals are completed, everyone stays there and women volunteers also join and they talk to the

public, talk about their aid events, and occasionally ask for donation or people to join them. In these conversations, they communicate the conditions that they witness and hardships that people endure. The head of the Civilization Association, Kemal, always spoke very highly of this annual event. The part that he liked the best, as he said, was to surprise people not only with an odd-looking event in which a group of men sitting on the ground and eating salt and bread, but with the conversations in the aftermath. In conveying the level of destitute and poverty and how hard they were working to heal these wounds, he liked to disconcert people's comfort zones making a "wake up call" to see what was going on "just ten minutes away from their home".

Going back to where I started this section, Islamic humanitarianism, despite working differentially for refugees and locals, it still locates them in marginalized positions and equalizes them in aid-receiving. Space, in this case the neighborhood, becomes the most visible form of this marginalization, serving almost as a proxy to their places in societal hierarchy. Islamic humanitarianism, on the other hand, socially and politically mobilizes others who can have more of an in-and-out relationship with those spaces of aid, that is, those who can easily leave those neighborhoods at will to be somewhere else. Humanitarians, be it the residents of these neighborhoods or just benevolent visitors, could mobilize themselves as benevolent public figures based on their interactions in these bounded spaces. This capacity for physical mobility (even though in as small as scale as the city) afforded to humanitarians was coupled with social and political mobilization based on and informed by humanitarian activities, which in effect located them at the heart of urban politics as *humanitarian* and *deserving citizens* which I will focus in the last chapter. Before moving on to discussion on citizenship, next chapter, I will focus on how and through which discursive and material practices aid-receiving refugees incorporated into Denizli's labor scene as one of the areas in which these multilayered

and overlapping differences were effectively used was the labor politics of Islamic humanitarian actors in Denizli.

Chapter 5: “Allah does not like who sit idly”: Productivity, Work, and Humanitarian Labor

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Islamic humanitarian networks in Denizli produce and circulate various, at times seemingly contradictory, discourses to mobilize compassion and aid as well as to keep the essentialized differences between the refugees and the humanitarians (and more broadly between the refugees and the citizens – as abstract figures) untouched, if not reinforced. I argued that the co-existence of these seemingly opposing positions creates a productive discursive and political platform for humanitarian organizations. I tried to show that oftentimes discourses of difference outweigh discourses of similarity, or at least, reduce emphasis on similarity to religious commonality –to being Muslim and to being symbolically equal by virtue of shared vulnerability in the eyes of God– abstracting possibilities of equality claims from the social and the political. While discourses of similarity allow for mobilizing compassion for fellow Muslims who are under stress, discourses of difference set the boundaries of compassion, define the forms and scope of aid, and provide a relatively large room for inclusion and exclusion of Syrian refugees from moral communities established through faith-based aid relations.

One of the ways in which the putative difference attributed to the Syrian community is constructed is through diagnosing and fixing the loss of state and homeland as the defining characteristics of being a refugee. State (and home/land) is constructed as the arbiter and guarantor of meaningful social relations and affective bonds as much as it becomes the protector of one’s safety, welfare, and well-being that presumably could not be fully achieved, hence cannot be fully demanded as part of rights claims, under another state’s protection. Loss of state protection was posited to be the root cause of all forms of suffering to which humanitarianism claimed to offer a remedy, but indeed an inadequate one that could not

substitute the protection one's state (of origin) could possibly provide. The discourses of loss, I discussed, also alluded to the risk of creating a moral void leading to the exclusion of refugees who are uncared for from the moral order and the moral community.

This widely shared perspective, defining the forcibly displaced people in terms of what they lack in their present, naturalized problems refugees may face. Problems regarding housing, employment, education, enjoyment of human rights (civil, political, and economic rights), and community building, through narratives of loss, could be attributed to the loss of state protection that could not be replaced in another state but could be to some extent relieved by humanitarian aid. Turkish state's political refusal to offer refugees life trajectories that could be different from what has been envisioned and promoted by the Islamic humanitarian ideology rendered humanitarianism normalized for the government of Syrian refugees. Humanitarian regime, working through discourses of difference, operated thus not only for addressing refugee needs that are supposedly emanating only and simply from being a refugee but also for ensuring that they would be cared for materially and morally to diminish the so-called risks putatively existent in refugeehood. That was achieved through "therapeutic interventions" which took many forms ranging from moral assistance to material aid. A more subtle working of this way of thinking and acting that postulates refugees almost already "incomplete" and humanitarianism as the solution to what is putatively missing pertained to closing possibilities of political demands and mobilizations by, for, and with refugees insinuating that equality cannot be achieved, except for an abstract one based on shared religion. So, the difference assumed between the citizen and the refugee was turned into the difference between the rights-bearing subjects and those who innately lack it, respectively.

Another way to underline differences was connected more to the essentialized and culturalized characteristics attributed to two respective imagined communities, the Turkish and the Syrians. The constitution of the imagined community of Turkishness comprised an ambivalent and often

orientalist relationship to the Arab communities that has been inherited partly from the Ottoman Orientalism (Makdisi 2002) and partly from the adherence of the Republican elites to the Western modernization. This history, although attributed by the Islamist ideology to the Kemalist elite who disavowed the Ottoman past in favor of Westernization, was influential in shaping the way Islamic humanitarian volunteers thought of Syrian refugees, as I have discussed in the previous chapters. Culturalized differences found various discursive grounds which sometimes reiterated the moral distance while other times laying the foundation for reinforcing hierarchies in the society.

The difference between the individual aid-giver and the individual (refugee) aid-receiver (usually informed by encounters and anecdotal evidence) frequently boiled down to the putative differences between the two nations. Since the main forms of humanitarian assistance was moral and economical, these two areas were the main point of constituting the divergence between and comparing the two imagined communities: the Turkish being the hardworking whereas the Syrian being the lazy; the Turkish being industrious and frugal whereas the Syrian being improvident and wasteful. But these areas were also two main points of establishing and continuing social relations, two points of the desired convergence between the Turkish and the Syrian communities. This moral differentiation of national traits allowed humanitarians to extend their moral views about manners, religion, every day, and lifestyle to the Syrian community, and these views found their most apparent manifestations in issues regarding work – waged or unwaged.

A very common humanitarian practice in Islamic humanitarian networks in Denizli was finding aid-receivers a job. Work, and the moral value attributed to it, became a major therapeutic intervention for helping refugees not only materially but also affectively settle in the host society, albeit in a hierarchically lower position. Still, finding a job as a form of assistance was rather unusual because it was less within the scope of traditional understanding of

humanitarianism undertaking immediate relief of suffering and often acting within the framework of emergency. It is generally expected that once the situation cast as emergency is over, the humanitarian aid—deemed to be a short-term response—should also be over, lending aid activities to other reconstructive and reformative measures such as development (Barnett and Weiss 2008). Finding a job, of course, was rather for later stages. The priority was to ensure shelter and food. As far as I could observe and listen to from humanitarians, aid activities for refugees often started with finding an apartment, making it habitable because they were usually in a very bad condition, and ensuring daily subsistence. Only after daily subsistence was ensured and healthcare was taken care of—thus, only after “make live” interventions (Li, 2009)—did aid for employment come into the picture as the later phase of aid, but aid nonetheless. In the meantime, aid relations would not come to an end; in-kind or in-cash aid delivery to households for whom a job was found would continue.

Although boundaries of humanitarianism have been blurred because today it “includes development, human rights, democracy promotion, gender equality, and peacebuilding” (Barnett and Weiss 2008: 6), the key distinctive feature of humanitarianism remained in the idea that it is a “response to emergencies” that are “‘sudden’, ‘abnormal’, [that] cause widespread suffering” (Fearon 2008: 52). In the case of Denizli, after almost six years (at the time of the fieldwork in 2017) since the Syrians started to settle in the city, aid relations were not necessarily coming to an end; nor were they framed under development response by humanitarians themselves. It seemed that the scope as well as temporality of humanitarianism was stretched as a regularized way of relating to aid-recipients. It was continuing under protracted (“abnormal”) conditions of widespread suffering while at the same time it was seen as a form of (“normal”) sociality. Work was particularly important in this respect because it was seen almost as an indispensable solution to ameliorate conditions of suffering

(displacement and impoverishment, in this case) while achieving and maintaining the “normal” flow of life and sociality mediated by aid.

But it seemed unusual to me for another reason. Finding a job and promoting work was relatively beyond the give-and-receive relations, it was a moral engagement demanding refugees to be part of labor relations so that they could build a life for themselves, but it was also allowing humanitarians’ even further involvement in the everyday of aid-receivers, giving them a role to mold what sort of life the refugee community ought to live. This approach to work, I thought, was curious because on the one hand humanitarians would promote work as a path to self-reliance for refugees; on the other, they did not see being employed as a reason to stop aid relations which have long been posited as a manifestation of lack of means to financially support oneself. Humanitarians, in their determination to continue aid relations with the community of wage laborers, were somewhat implicitly confirming that the nexus of work and self-reliance had been broken and the scale of “neediness” was extended to the wage laborers. In the case of refugees, this broken link was much more visible. That Syrian refugees were paid less and informally employed was accepted not only among employers but also within the Islamic humanitarian community. Therefore, another problem with the humanitarians’ criticisms about the Syrians’ lack of desire to work and failure to change their lives for the better was that the ways offered to refugees to make money and build a self-reliant life in Denizli were neither providing the said opportunities to make a living nor sufficient for building a self-reliant life. In fact, mentioned job opportunities were at the textile sector that were labor-intensive, time-consuming as well as exploitative and low-paying for everyone, including refugees and locals with no prospect of unionization or workers’ organization for demands for improvement.

Humanitarians knew about the working conditions in Denizli, they had close ties with people in the local textile industry: most of the time, textile employers were the main donors of Islamic

humanitarian networks, and quite a considerable number of textile worker families were aid-receivers due to low wages or high level of indebtedness. When it comes to Syrian refugees (and other refugee groups such as Iranians and Afghans residing in Denizli), wages in the textile sector were much lower, they did not have any prospect of formal employment due to restrictive legal regulations, and jobs were much more precarious. Then the question was why did humanitarians, knowing that paid employment would economically fall short for building a self-reliant life, see work as something to be promoted as part of their aid relations that would any way continue, particularly among refugees?

This chapter will focus on this particular aspect of Islamic humanitarian relations in Denizli. I set out to discuss how Islamic humanitarianism in the city broadened its scope to include labor relations of the locality. Promotion of work, waged and unwaged, was not only made into a way of assisting refugees, but it also endorsed moral values attached to work and productivity.

Moral economies of labor and work

In the scholarship on refugee integration in Turkey, access and incorporation into the labor market is usually understood as a way of refugee “integration” into the host society (Şimşek 2018; Ager and Strang 2008), which is seen as a transition from the past to the present and “shifting identities” by refugees from the “receiving to sending societies” (Şimşek 2018, 539). Although it is not a linear but often an overlapping process, the shifting of “old and new” identities is arguably particularly visible in labor market participation of refugees because it provides them with access to means for their own (social) reproduction; but it is also an important indicator of having and utilizing necessary social networks and resources required for access to labor market (Şimşek 2018; İçduygu and Şimşek 2016). This approach, however, assumes that refugees are granted full legal status which provide them with work permits as well as opportunities to use their skills and labor power not only for making a living but also

for being part of the society they have settled in. In the case of Turkey, this assumption does not apply. The second assumption underlying above mentioned discussions on integration is a bit more complicated: it either overlooks that the labor market within capitalism is founded on differential valuation of labor power of various (often marginalized) groups based on their race, gender, ethnicity, age, physical and mental abilities, and citizenship status or takes it for granted this differentiation in valorization of labor is so deeply embedded in capitalist systems and expects refugees to accept this differential valuation. In any case, seeing refugee incorporation in the labor market as a pathway to integration, although considerably common both in policy making and in scholarship, obliterates asymmetries and power relations embedded in work configurations and refugee government in the host society.

In the case of Islamic humanitarian networks in Denizli –contrary to labor market integration policies– issues regarding work permits, equal pay for equal work, or skill transfer and de-qualification (Sert 2016) were not of particular concern when finding a job for refugees. It was to a considerable extent a manifestation of the tacit recognition that Syrian refugees’ stay in Turkey was either permanent or long-term; and it was usually shaped by compassion, concerns of co-habitation, and ideas about the vitalness of work for living. Ideas about the vitalness of work was so deep-rooted that sometimes jobs were arranged with the employers, unsolicited and uncalled-for by the refugee community and even before there was a demand for a job. Humanitarians, as they told me, saw it as a solidaristic act to help refugees make their own living as much as possible, it was as crucial as material aid, and it was incomprehensible for the humanitarian community “how people in such conditions could turn down a job”. Work, then, was the indispensable part of earning money but also living a life, as envisioned by the humanitarians.

For the refugee community, however, working at a job was probably trickier than it was represented by the humanitarian community; it was not simply a decision between sitting idly

at home and accepting the work. Although I argued that the employment did not result in cutting aid relations for humanitarian networks, the same did not apply to the official social assistance allocated to the Syrian refugees. State-sponsored social assistance particularly was based on income test and conditioned upon the lack of alternative financial means for the subsistence of the household. In a context where work permits are either very restrictive or did not exist, working in an informal job could lead to penalties which could range from fines to deportation. When I was still in Denizli in 2017, my friends working in the refugee protection NGOs, refugee friends and neighbors, and I would hear on a regular basis that some Iranian refugees were detained to be deported back to Iran although they had refugee status by the UNCHR, and international protection status recognized by the Turkish government waiting to be resettled in a third country. The reasons for deportation decision were rather arbitrary framed under the ambiguous term of “disrupting public security, order, and morals” and deportations were almost exclusively targeting Iranian refugees. But most of the times detentions would take place in workplaces that Iranian refugees worked, and informal employment would often provide the ground for facilitating deportation decision. Some deportation decisions could be revoked thanks to solidarity movements organized by, for, and with refugees but for some others we could not learn much. Refugee networks, very well organized and closely connected, would hear about such decisions and discuss about it. Since the stakes for refugees were rather high as it could result in termination of state-sponsored aid, pecuniary penalty, and even deportation, it was not related to not accepting the job found for them but rather related to keeping employment unknown to locals, particularly those who have close political connections such as Islamic humanitarians, as possible.

That said, for the Islamic humanitarian networks, work meant more than aiding those who considerably and, for them, visibly lacked the means for social reproduction. But it was also a morally and normatively loaded aspect of work as aid which created expectations from refugees

to accept and show strong enthusiasm to work at these jobs. In a way enthusiasm and determination for work –however low paying and exploitative it was– was perhaps not directly a criterion for aid-deservingness but it was important for the inclusion into the (solidaristic yet hierarchical) moral community where people shared values, identities, allegiances, and trust (Rose 2000). Finding a job then was a benevolent act which was presumably effective in addressing material as well as moral lacks attributed to the Syrian refugee community.

Kathi Weeks (2011), in her book *The Problem with Work*, argues that contemporary capitalist modernity can be identified as a “work society”. Rejecting the social and economic theories that see work as a private, natural, and apolitical activity, Weeks argues that work goes beyond mere economic implication: it is “a social convention and disciplinary apparatus rather than economic necessity” (Weeks 2011, 7). As such, it is a social, public, and political issue. She contends: “Work produces not just economic goods and services but also social and political subjects. In other words, the wage relation generates not just income and capital, but disciplined individuals, governable subjects, worthy citizens, and responsible family members” (Weeks 2011, 8). Subjects of the “work society” are positioned within the moral economy of labor and are expected to embrace the moral values of work. These values render work into an “individual moral practice and collective ethical obligation” (Weeks 2011:11).

In Denizli, integrating refugees in the labor relations as precarious wage laborers bore a similar double function of what Weeks named “work society”. Expectation that refugees should become income generating actors and productive individuals was a key idea behind the “work as aid” among humanitarians. This played out in conjunction with a discourse that valued hard work and productivity. Together with the work contracts, refugees were expected to shoulder the moral economy of being part of the work relations. On the other hand, work found for refugees was on the informal market, highly open to exploitation, low-paid, and labor-intensive. Volunteers and humanitarians expected refugees to play their part in the moral

economy of the work regardless of the working conditions. In fact, the textile sector (and also the marble sector to a lesser extent) was presented as the best option available for refugees who did not hold working permits and citizenship rights. Thus, forcibly displaced and dispossessed subjects were positioned in the multi-layered and intersecting hierarchies of the work society. However, asymmetric relations inherent in capitalist work were usually rendered invisible by presenting jobs as a gift and a benevolent action.

Work, in that respect, transcends the economic role it supposedly plays and goes beyond providing means for social reproduction. It is promoted as part and parcel of being disciplined, moral, responsible, and deserving subjects. Importance attached to work by humanitarian networks in Denizli was particularly manifesting this moral aspect of work, postulating will to work as the criterion of trustworthiness, responsibility, and deservingness of being a part of a moral community. In the case of refugees this aspect became even more apparent, because both refugee policies and discourses on displacement and dispossession had already produced them as subjects knowable by what they lack and how they differ and readily situated them at the lower end of the societal hierarchies alongside other marginalized groups. This situatedness did not only point to particular ways for subjects to know themselves in these new reconfigurations under which they are constituted as refugees. It also hinted at “meaningful relational forces and situated realities within the globalized structures of local lives within capitalist modernity” (Kalb 2013: 3) which have the power to assign refugees in a (politicized) spectrum of worth and worthlessness. This being the case, refugees were, at least in the humanitarian imaginary, seen as compelled to prove their worth and value through work and productivity. Work was seen as the means for overcoming difficulties and even when these difficulties were not solved, as in the case of those caused by impoverishment and displacement, a moral promotion of work continued to be postulated as the solution, maybe ensuring not directly a material remedy but a moral one. Therefore, work-talk provided a

ground in which those who refused, failed, or were prevented from demonstrating the will to improve could be categorized as either “morally suspect”.

Weeks’ critique of work, very helpful to me to make sense of the workings of promoting work among the refugee communities, focuses extensively on wage work as what constituted the work society. As a feminist scholar, she of course focuses also on unwaged domestic and care work unevenly allocated by the gendered and racial division of labor and shows how the work society effectively obscures the other side of the coin, the unwaged yet similarly exploitative labor. What I will focus on in the coming sections is however a little different from Weeks’ theory in terms of valuation of work.

I will argue that Islamic humanitarian networks in Denizli incorporated unwaged work too into their moral discourses as promotion of productivity. Unwaged work here encompassed two meanings: the first one was the unwaged (gendered and domestic) work promoted to Syrian refugee women so that they could contribute to the household economy even if they did not have paid jobs and the second one was the unwaged benevolent and humanitarian work, “ethical labor” as Muehlebach (2012) calls it, that humanitarians (almost exclusively humanitarian women) engaged. While the former was promoted as part of the moral involvement with aid-receiver refugee households, the latter was attached a public value. The fact that the humanitarian work was unwaged allowed them to claim a public value and a superior place in their relations to refugees whose productivity was either rendered invisible or unambiguously tied to making a living and social reproduction. These different forms of work were intimately tied to each other, although each produced differently situated subjectivities in the humanitarian relations. Before moving to discuss how different forms of unwaged work were differentially valued, I will discuss how and through which discourses finding a job for Syrian refugees was comprehended among the humanitarians and how solidaristic rationale put

forth by the humanitarian networks coupled with, paved the way for and reproduced inequalities in humanitarianism and labor relations.

“Allah does not like those who sit idly”: Promotion of Work

Islamic humanitarian networks had started mobilizing their aid efforts for Syrian refugees as early as 2011 at the beginning of the refugee arrival, but these were often smaller scale and unorganized efforts based on physical encounters with refugees in certain neighborhoods. A more organized humanitarian work started approximately in 2013 when the Syrian population both in Denizli and in Turkey was growing and the turmoil in Syria was worsening. In 2017, when I was in Denizli, the humanitarian work had already been regularized and systematized, aid-receiving Syrian households and their everyday had become known to humanitarians. They knew a lot about the household population, how many children and dependent individuals (elder people and people with disabilities) there were in a specific household, who the family members who were able to work were, and who the family members who were willing to work were. And, thanks to their information networks, newcomers could easily be known and introduced to the aid community.

Being spatially close or living in the same neighborhood allowed many humanitarians to closely surveil how the aid delivered to the Syrian community was used as well as if the refugees for whom certain jobs were found were attending to their jobs. Close neighborhood connections and rather developed information network in the urban context allowed humanitarians to follow up on every day of Syrian families. They had close relations with the employers and other employees in the textile sector. Besides, vouchers allocated to aid-receiver households were usually contracted to the neighborhood markets which could keep a close track on what was bought by whom. This information too was known to humanitarians, some of whom were already the market owners in the neighborhoods or in the city center. Besides

the so-called will to work or the lack of it, consumption practices of aid-receivers were in sight of the humanitarians and were associated, again, with the moral values of work and productivity. They were sharing their concerns that the Syrians families did not consider their children's needs and instead heedlessly spending their already limited income and subsistence for things that were "clearly unnecessary for people in their situation." While some humanitarians were giving examples of buying cigarettes as wasting their children's livelihood on bad habits, some others were complaining that "Syrian people were idly sitting all day, without doing anything."

These concerns drove humanitarians to promote work for those who were able to work and to engage of productive deeds, waged or unwaged. Also, the moral injunction to work was attributed to the Islamic teaching which commanded hard work and productivity. Islam demanded that believers work hard and take as possibly good care as their conditions allow for their family and fellow Muslims. "Allah does not like who sit idly" was an oft-cited idiom inspired by a hadith (words and deeds attributed to Prophet Mohammad) which goes "Allah hates the healthy-bodied idle person, who is neither concerned with his worldly life, nor the Hereafter." The hadith condemns idleness and inertia and advises activity and productivity. Moreover, idleness is marked as the root of many evils, including poverty but also of spiritual evils that will be judged Hereafter.

This hadith was extensively used in the Islamic humanitarian community not only to encourage aid-receivers to work but also to inspire themselves to be more active and productive in their own lives. Recently, this tendency to inspire productivity in contemporary capitalism among the Muslim community was theorized by various scholars as "pious neoliberalism" defined as "a discursive combination of religion and economic rationale in a manner that encourages individuals to be proactive and entrepreneurial in the interest of furthering their relationship with God" (Atia 2012: 809, also see Atia 2013, 2014; Tuğal 2002, 2009; Atasoy 2009;

Dalacoura 2016). Pious neoliberalism, accordingly, acts in two directions: it sacralizes economic activities and entrepreneurship as a religious command while it rendered religious commands to work for the Hereafter profane, attributing worldly gains as an investment for the otherworldly rewards. Its inverted version then is idleness, inertia, and refusing to take a proactive stance the outcome of which is poverty and distress in this world and the other. Pious neoliberalism is equipped with the language of the market that imposes rational, calculating, and self-governing subjects but it is successfully translated into the religious language in a particular way to reinterpret religious commands from a market-oriented lens.

Pious neoliberalism does not only promote disciplined, self-governing individuals it also responsabilizes those who are subjected to poverty for not properly following the (reinterpreted) religious commands. Mohammed Faris, an influential Muslim entrepreneur who founded his UK-based faith-based self-help company called *The Productive Muslim Company* with millions of followers worldwide, takes this responsabilization one step further and extends it to the entire Ummah. He says,

“Laziness is truly a disease that destroys aspiration and determination and break the Ummah’s back. It is the source of our weakness and defeat as Ummah and the source of our humility. It is time to make serious effort to fight it (...)”⁴⁴

Faris, perhaps a perfect exemplar of the pious neoliberal, offers his followers ways to fight it and solutions that he derives from Islamic sources that he reinterpreted “to connect spirituality to productivity science and showcase the relevance of Islam in helping human beings live productive, meaningful lives”.⁴⁵ He opens online and face-to-face courses and workshops that he teaches productivity and better ways of time and energy management, writes blog posts and best-selling books to conjoin productivity with faith and help people “live the best version of themselves spiritually, physically, and socially”. In his self-declared fight against indolence,

⁴⁴ Mohammed Faris (May 12, 2012) “The Different Masks of Laziness (Part 1)”. *The Productive Muslim Company*. Available at <https://productivemuslim.com/the-different-masks-of-laziness-part-1/>

⁴⁵ See the website, <https://productivemuslim.com/our-story/>

Faris's entrepreneurship has helped him reach out to millions of people in pursuit of a better and productive pious life. However, Faris extensively focuses on and encourages people to focus on individual lives rather than pursuing communitarian aspirations to make work and productivity the center of the moral community.

Although they are seemingly inspired by similar religious teachings about hard work, for humanitarians in Denizli, who were also operating in a neoliberal context conjoined with Islam, improvement through work was as important for the person as it was for the entire moral community. That's why, productivity and work involved attempts at encouraging others to work and doing humanitarian work for the betterment of the community. Despite the differences, in both approaches there was a discernible discursive responsabilization of those whose access to means for making an independent and self-sufficient living (as well as means for social reproduction) were largely impeded. The idiom, "Allah does not like those who sit idly" came to the fore in such instances to aspire others to work as well as to remind them of the possible material and spiritual consequences of idleness. Promotion of work, then, was related to helping the self and the other become productive and earn a living as much as helping them be better Muslims.

Rabia, a committed volunteer at her 60s, seemed to be particularly worried about the way the Syrian community was living, working, and using the aid they were delivered. Every time I visited her, she mentioned similar stories about "Syrian women being obsessed with their hair" which seemed to her as an extravagant spending. She would immediately draw parallels with her own life, repeatedly telling the same story of hers: "Look, I raised four children while working hard for our shop" referring to the knitting shop she and her husband had before their retirement. "I taught my children how to look after each other while we were working. When they turned five or six, I taught them how to knit so that they would contribute to the house economy. Today, we are retired, and all my children are married, have their own jobs and own

families. Even today, I think twice when I am to buy hair dye. But these Syrian women... Whenever I visit their places, I see that they are always onto self-care, instead of making themselves useful.”

I also thought that Rabia was a hardworking woman. In fact, I had been informed about it as a result of a coincidence. When we first set an appointment to meet, Rabia invited me over to her home, saying that it would be easier for her, and we could also visit Syrian households in the neighborhood if we wanted to. On my way her home, on the bus, a woman asked me where I was going to. She had probably and rightly assumed that I was a stranger, not looking like a neighborhood resident. She asked me many questions, one after another, enough to make me feel that her curiosity was on the verge of interrogation. I had got accustomed to these kinds of questions in Denizli where people who looked like strangers were asked many questions about their age, marital status, job, reasons for being in Denizli, their city of origin, and more, until a more open conversation could start. Finally, the woman on the bus seemed satisfied with my answers and started giving information about Rabia. Even before I saw Rabia, I was informed that she was a big-hearted sister of the neighborhood, her family was very hardworking and devout people who were well-respected in the neighborhood, that everyone would knock on Rabia’s door if they needed something, and she would not turn away.

After numerous visits to her home, I came to know that the woman on the bus was right about Rabia. Her hands were always full of different things to do. After retirement and after her children got married and built their own lives, she and her husband started investing more time and energy in charitable work. They had started collecting donations for a mosque construction in their neighborhood at the outskirts of the city. Mosque construction was seen as one of the advanced forms of charitable work for various reasons. It was a large-scale and costly project for which to collect donations, hence it required lots of organizational and logistics work, knowing a large network of donors and a respectable place in the community of believers. It

was also because a mosque does not only provide a place for prayer, but it is also a public space where particularly Muslim men from various backgrounds encounter, know about each other, and discuss their and others' problems. It was therefore a physical and social hub for initiating and organizing charitable activities.

However, their mosque construction efforts were suspended because they saw a more urgent problem arising in their neighborhood, that is, the settlement of Syrian families who were in dire conditions. They had decided to re-channel their aid activities to the Syrian community. She recounted that in 2013, she encountered three Syrian children playing on the street. She thought that they were "Roma children" with no shoes and worn-out clothes. However, she realized that they were not speaking Turkish. She approached them, wanted to go to their home and visit their family at their own place. She said that she had never witnessed that level of poverty and misery before the arrival of Syrians in her neighborhood. Although there were poverty and people in need, Syrians, especially the children, were the most vulnerable. After that moment in 2013, she and her fellow humanitarians directed a very large part of their charitable energy and activities towards the Syrian refugees who were, according to Rabia, doing much better at the time of our interview.

After a while, she had become known in Denizli. When I was in Denizli, everyone already was referring to her as "*abla*" (elder sister, but also used as a respectful address to women regardless of their age). She learned by heart who needed what in her neighborhood which was one of the two neighborhoods in Denizli where the Syrian community were most densely settled. She became the first point of contact for humanitarian networks as well as for people in need. Downstairs from her apartment, she set up a storage room where she stored in-kind donations such as clothes—even a wedding dress—, furniture, domestic appliances, and smaller kitchenware like pots and pans. Her apartment and the storage room downstairs functioned as the center for collecting and distributing donations as well as a social center for encounters.

Rabia's hard work was not limited to charity. If not running around for visiting Syrian households or collecting donation, she would always be busy with chores. During late summer she would work to prepare winter supplies like tomato paste and dried fruits and vegetables. At other times, she would bake bread for her and her children. Even when we were talking, she would continue attending to chores that she could do while sitting and talking to me. Some other times, she would ask me to help her, instead of sitting and chatting, to make myself useful to reorganize the storage room that she kept durable donations like furniture and clothes or make tea and coffee while she was attending her own business. I somehow got accustomed to seeing her work all the time, but Rabia every time would say "Allah does not like who does not do anything" (*Allah boş duranı sevmez.*), almost as though she was trying to convince me to be as hardworking and proactive as she was. She wanted Syrian people, but especially Syrian women, to be hardworking and productive to ensure a better living for their family. For her hard work and perseverance was necessary for overcoming hardships and, having lived in poverty in her youth and having overcome it, she was disproving their life choices which she called "Syrian way of living" which she immediately associated with "unwillingness to work".

For Rabia, but also for the broader Islamic humanitarian community, the seemingly unchanging impoverished state of the Syrian community was tacitly explained by culturalized understandings of their unwillingness to work and not knowing how to spend their money properly to build a life that would ensure self-sufficiency and self-reliance for Syrian families. How the Syrian community lived their everyday, more precisely how humanitarians saw Syrians lived their everyday, was at times suggested as the reason for their permanent impoverishment. It appeared to me that the way she spoke of the Syrian community, especially the parts about "Syrian way of living" that she associated with "sleeping too late and waking up too late", "being obsessed with self-care", "not giving the necessary care to their children", and "being lazy and unwilling to work", "not allowing women to have a paid work and making

them sit at home all day” (these were all different aspects of the so-called Syrian lifestyle that Rabia had observed) were informed by her presumptions about the Syrians (and more generally the Arabs) as an imagined community, which, in Turkey’s national imagination, was constructed as the opposite of Turkish modernization and progress. Just like Governor Dalmaz’s sudden discursive shift from “fellow Muslims entrusted to the care and concern of the Turkish nation” to “these people” who lacked civic and democratic virtues, in Rabia’s (and also in many other humanitarians’) discourses, there could be discerned a rapid shift from “people who lost their homes and hence need our aid and compassion” to “these people” who are unwilling to work and earn money for their own well-being.

Despite her disapproval, she was thinking of herself as a devoted Muslim who was tasked with benevolence and as a firsthand witness of how much Syrian refugees, especially children, were in need, Rabia did not have any idea stop delivering aid to Syrian refugees. She would every now and then promised herself to stop arranging jobs for Syrian refugees, because “they would avoid work in ways that the Turkish people would not”, but she would not stop but find new ways to convince people that that work was helpful to them to achieve a sustainable life. Promoting productivity and work was part of the humanitarian activity but it was also the source of disappointment of humanitarians with the Syrian community. Nonetheless, aid delivery was not ceased, but finding a job for Syrian refugees was redefined as a humanitarian activity and effectively incorporated into charitable work. In the meantime, as she told me, she was resolutely trying to encourage them to be more self-reliant, more caring of their children’s upbringing, to put their lives in order and be more hardworking. Her conversations that she conveyed her hard-earned life lessons to Syrian refugees, particularly women, were for her a part of the charitable deeds, as she thought of benevolence not simply as giving aid and cutting of ties until next time but as giving religiously informed tutoring and establishing a trusting relationship.

However, embedded in this benevolence was a much less discernible working of discourses of difference which was related to the workings of capitalism which unevenly and unequally valorize labor power based on race, ethnicity, gender, and legal status. Turkey's legal regulations and humanitarians' discourses of difference constituted the Syrian community as "refugees" who were not granted a full status while at the same time whose displacement and dispossession could efficiently be put to work both to mobilize solidarity and justify inequality. Syrian labor power was regarded as "cheap labor" because the cost of their (social) reproduction was fundamentally premised on their ambiguous and presumably temporary status as refugees and on their politically and culturally "not like us" representation as Syrians. This solidarity by providing humanitarian assistance was, not unfrequently, working to address the gap between the (actual) cost of social reproduction and the low wages Syrian refugees were paid in the jobs found by the humanitarians. Solidarity by providing employment opportunities then, both enabled and worked back against to ameliorate inequality that devalues refugee labor power, an inequality which was not unknown to humanitarians. Didier Fassin (2012b) argues that the coexistence of and the tension between solidarity and inequality was what constitutes "humanitarian government"; their interplay is constitutive of the political rationality that "governs precarious lives" (Fassin 2012b, 3). Finding a job for refugees, that is, incorporating refugees into wage labor relations in low paying, highly exploitative and insecure jobs, exemplified this very interplay between solidarity and inequality; however, solidaristic reasons advanced by humanitarians, specifically casting employment as a gift provided the conditions for the reproduction and reinforcement of inequality within humanitarian relations. Leyla, a senior local representative of the ruling party's women's branch, had a much more straightforward approach about the Syrian employment in Denizli. Leyla usually preferred to present herself primarily as a politician rather than a humanitarian although she had founded and was the head of a women-only humanitarian NGO and she engaged in humanitarian aid

individually and through her party connections. Her humanitarian work was directly linked to the ruling party's politics of charity and, thus, she considered herself obligated to do charitable work to retain connections with the local constituency and local humanitarian organizations. Her approach to Syrian refugees was also motivated by her loyalty to the ruling party: “(President) Erdoğan had let them [refugees] in and now we were all tasked with providing them. We cannot fail those who are dependent on us, especially those who are our sisters and brothers fleeing the war and persecution”, she said in our first meeting. Leyla's feeling of obligation to help Syrians as a political commitment was however slightly less welcoming about labor relations that she helped to integrate refugees.

Later in the conversation, she told me, “Refugees are working in jobs that our citizens do not want to work, do not prefer,” referring to jobs such as construction, seasonal agriculture, and other labor-intensive jobs like shoe-making, food processing, and textile not only in Denizli but also in the entire country. In fact, these jobs (particularly construction, shoe-making and seasonal agriculture) that she depicted as undesirable to citizens had long been racialized and ethnicized jobs usually relegated to the Kurdish population. As Saracoglu and Belanger (2019) put, until recently, cheap labor power supply could be attained within the country through means such as forced internal displacement of the Kurdish population and politics of (racialized) capitalism that have long effectively devalorized Kurdish labor. The assimilation of Syrians into the capital as cheap labor, they aptly argue, has developed not as a result of planned policies and strategies of recruiting migrant labor but as a result of an ongoing process of governing the social implications of an unplanned and unexpectedly large refugee flow into the country (Saraçoğlu and Belanger 2019; Saraçoğlu and Bélanger 2021; Bélanger and Saracoglu 2020). Therefore, to my mind, Syrian refugees' incorporation into cheap labor was rather an attempt to assimilating them primarily into the government of mobility as controllable subjects.

As a politician, I thought, Leyla was possibly fully aware of labor politics of Turkey and of more than a decade long AKP government. Yet she preferred to continue with her comparison of development levels. She sounded rather proud that Turkey was now hosting a population of surplus labor who could take on undesired jobs. “It is just like European countries. It shows how developed Turkey has become,” she said and continued with the example of the Istanbul Airport which, at the time, was still under construction. She claimed that Bangladeshi workers were employed in the airport construction. That was, for her, a sign that Turkey was in the league of high-income nations where accumulation was achieved significantly through management, monitoring, and control of migrant labor “that the traces of the repetition of the ‘primitive accumulation’ are visible” (Mezzadra 2011). I had never heard anything about Bangladeshi workers working in the airport construction nor could I confirm what she said. Therefore, I did not know under which conditions the said Bangladeshi workers had come to Turkey; whether they had work permit or, at least, living wages; whether they were “irregular migrants” “smuggled” into Turkey to be employed in a vast public infrastructure or whether they were subjected to forced labor by the very company commissioned for the airport construction. At that point, all these scenarios seemed dishearteningly plausible to me, particularly due to hearing those from a local representative of the government that legally and politically claims the role of not only supervising and controlling migration and mobility but also managing and regulating labor processes.

It was still interesting that she had brought up the topic of Bangladeshi migrant workers in a conversation with Syrian refugees in Denizli, almost as she was drawing a parallel between two groups. What was particularly important to me though was that she had established an unmediated link between migrant labor and being a developed country admitting that citizens had the privilege of refusing the working conditions under which refugees and migrants were employed. She was possibly referring to the uneven geographies of capital accumulation which

she presented as “being like Europe” and advancing Turkey’s informal and often over-exploitative migrant/refugee labor politics as a rightful act which could be compared to that of the West.

Later, she also said that she had many connections with the textile sector employer thanks to her political clout in the city and, of course, finding a job for Syrian refugees was an easy thing that she had no reason to avoid. Her political position, I believe, somehow compelled her to caveat the informality of the jobs she arranged for refugees. Yes, she admitted, Syrians were working informally but it was an act of benevolence on the part of the state: “Although it is informal and unregistered, the state turns a blind eye to the informal employment arrangements and helps refugees earn their livelihood.” As a result, all the implications of informal work, that is low-wage, absence of social security, and precarity, should be accepted by the refugees as in accepting a gift. However, as Mary Douglas (quoted in Hanson 2015) puts it: “There are no free gifts; gift cycles engage persons in permanent commitments that articulate the dominant institutions”. In Denizli, work as gift somehow reproduced the informal labor laden capital accumulation and capitalist relations in the city, placing refugees unequally in the low paying segments of the working class and situating humanitarians at the center of capital-labor relations. This very act of finding a job for a refugee might seem very banal at first sight. However, it testifies to the complexity of the relationship between humanitarianism and work in a capitalist context.

Contrary to arguments uncritically situate humanitarianism at the sphere of the non-market, humanitarianism’s relation to capitalism is a widely discussed topic in the literature. As early as the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels wrote, “philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity” are facilitating the “improvement and stabilization of bourgeois society” (Marx and Engels, 1848/1997, cited in Cantat 2018). In a similar vein, historians of humanitarianism, Haskell (1985) argues, were

wary of the roots of modern humanitarianism which lie at the dawn of a new regime of accumulation, namely capitalism. For Haskell, capitalism generated a new sensibility regarding the abstract figure of humanity as well as human suffering. It is this sensibility that enabled liberal regimes of care at the wake of modernity (Reid-Henry 2014). However, it is also argued that this sensibility for humanity, in turn, reproduced and reinforced what causes the suffering. To take the argument further, Reid-Henry (2014, 425) contends that “similarly, with respect to the market, humanitarianism worked back against some of the worst excesses of market exploitation, at the same time as it fed into the reproduction of a system that created suffering in the first place.”

Humanitarianism, either inspired by the modern imagination of universal humanity and moral values or motivated by religious convictions and faithfulness, has various social, economic, and political implications. On the one hand, in Denizli refugees were employed because this was an act of benevolence, a way of solidarizing with them. On the other hand, stories of laziness were told about them at the same time as they were excluded from the moral economy of labor. Both of these processes were materialized through the activities and discourses of humanitarian networks. Projecting “work” and “wage labor” as “gifts”, as “acts of benevolence” not only translated the labor processes into reciprocating “gifts”; it also fueled inequalities and immobilized rights claims and the potentiality of labor politics on the part of the refugees.

Reclaiming productivity in domestic and humanitarian spaces

Although I have so far discussed work with regard to paid employment, promotion of work and productivity was not limited to wage labor. In the previous section, I discussed ambivalent relationship of humanitarianism with labor relations in a capitalist (neoliberal) locality. Wage work was not only encouraged as a moral responsibility, but it was almost imposed on Syrian

refugees by means of mechanisms of criticism and exclusion from the moral community where the textile employers of informally working Syrian refugees (and of other aid recipient workers) were a part of. The benevolent imposition of work through moral and religious discourses inadvertently located Islamic humanitarianism at the crossroad of (refugee) labor and capital in Denizli almost as an intermediary (and somewhat reconciliatory) force for capital accumulation so dependent on cheap and informal labor.

Of course, it would be much too reductionist to claim that Islamic humanitarianism in Denizli was simply working to provide cheap labor for the textile industry that historically has not faced much problem in procuring cheap and precarious labor in the context in question. I do not also simply suggest that humanitarianism was a semblance of good deeds which underhandedly promoted class interest in Denizli to subordinate labor. Promotion of work was not only at play to produce docile and obedient refugee subjectivities who were to unquestioningly participate in labor force; it was central to the moral community which was as relevant to refugee lives as it was to humanitarians' lives. It was also at the heart of the moral economy, which Didier Fassin (2018, 3) defines as “the production, circulation, appropriation, and contestation of values as well as affects, around an object, a problem, or more broadly a social fact.” Values produced and circulated around work were inherently related to the ways displacement and dispossession were problematized and were to be solved. Work was not simply a precondition of the production of “value” (in its singular form as in the market value, see Graeber 2005), it was also at the core of the “realm of values” (in the plural form, as in family or community values), which have been wrought out of political struggles (Graeber 2005) as well as cultural and historical configuration and socioeconomic circumstances in a given locality.

For this reason, the moral endorsing of productivity went beyond employing refugees although it was a crucial part. It amounted to efforts of advancement of work, waged and unwaged, as

part of compassionate and solidaristic relations that generated and mobilized the moral community. Productivity, for humanitarians in Denizli, involved promoting reproductive and domestic labor to predominantly but not only refugee women as much as it implicated the voluntary labor by humanitarians. Hence, the hadith that disincentivizes idleness was also not solely a reference to income generating activity; it was an urge to be productive for everyone to boost their relationship with God and with the moral community, and humanitarians saw their voluntary labor from this perspective.

Unwaged work, particularly feminized domestic labor, is a gendered construction that has long been marked as unproductive and non-work. “This lack of recognition of feminized domestic labor emerged with early industrialization, as unwaged household work came to stand as the (naturalized and feminized) model of nonwork that served to contrast and thereby sustain a (now masculinized) concept of work” (Weeks 2011, 63). Humanitarian relations in Denizli did not necessarily challenge this gendered production/reproduction binary. Humanitarian volunteers seemed to have taken it at face value what they heard or observed about the Syrian culture that “did not allow women to leave home to work”. In a community where values of patriarchal family held sway, humanitarians seemed to have agreed to limit provision of paid employment arrangements to male refugees.

However, particularly for humanitarian women who undertook the vast amount of humanitarian work, staying at home was, for sure, not a sufficient reason for them to disregard the productivity within households. Because, for them, work could as well be within home; it was a way of living rather than leaving home every morning to get to a workplace. They were, in their effort to expand the scope of productivity, challenging modern capitalist understanding of work that buries a tremendous amount of familial, domestic, and communitarian work (Bhattacharya 2017) that was marked as non-productive without necessarily subverting its gendered character or making it less exploitable. This broadened approach to claiming

productivity of unwaged labor was furthermore applied to the caring and humanitarian work they were engaging. They were operating in a context where unwaged labor on which the reproduction of not only labor power but also system itself is dependent has recently been expanded. Welfare restructuring in neoliberalism instigated a “crisis of care” (Fraser 2017) by, on the one hand, commodifying care work and on the other leaving countless people who cannot afford commodified care without access to vital means of social reproduction. System, failing to provide for those who cannot afford monetized care, became even more dependent on the expansion of unwaged care labor which has been simultaneously feminized and affectively mobilized as “voluntary” or “humanitarian labor” (Muehlebach 2012). Humanitarian women in Denizli was working under these conditions for the betterment of the conditions of displaced and impoverished populations and, combining their work with religious and moral values, they were considering their work productive as much as the labor recognized and remunerated by the market.

It is not a coincidence that throughout the chapter I have exclusively given examples of and discussed experiences and positions of humanitarian women in Denizli. It is not because humanitarian men were not part of employment-oriented aid relations. However, everyday encounters especially in domestic spaces were between humanitarian women and the refugee community. In humanitarians thinking, privacy and intimacy attributed to domestic spaces made women more conducive as they were deemed less “threatening” for everyone in the household. Adem, while describing their aid activities specifically emphasized that female volunteers of the NGO were primarily responsible for house visits, needs assessment in aid-receiver houses, and also for aid distribution visit that required entrance in houses. Male volunteers were usually attending the logistics for aid such as carrying aid materials to the neighborhoods or engaging with aid works that could be done in public spaces such as setting up soup kitchens. Similarly, Zeki also informed me about the sensitivity regarding the

boundaries between public and private spaces. For him, too, male humanitarians should not and cannot freely walk into other people's houses for it could cause disturbance or be misapprehended. In an effort to make his point clear, he gave the example of her own daughter. When her daughter was first engaged, he had them have a religious wedding (*imam nikahı*) officiated by an imam to religiously acknowledge their conjugal union. Religious wedding is not acknowledged by the Turkish Civil Code and is maintained as a religious command to make marriage acknowledged in the eyes of God. Zeki and his family did not challenge official wedding and he did not think that his daughter and son-in-law were officially married after the *imam nikahı*. What was important for Zeki to introduce the prospective son-in-law to the family and to the public so that he could comfortably come and go to their house. He said, "it is not that I do not trust my son-in-law, I do. But he is still *namahrem* [a stranger with no ties, blood or otherwise, to the family]. He cannot just walk into this household where my wife and daughter live as he wants to." This institution of "*namahrem*" was similarly applicable to male humanitarians, that's why their encounters to aid-receivers were exclusively limited to public spaces such as religious socializations, prayers at mosques and fast-breaking gatherings or public aid activities.

Women, on the other hand, were much more comfortable and mobile in terms of having personal interactions in domestic and private spaces, although these interactions were likely to be limited to other women and children, or the elderly. Besides the feminized features of being caring and compassionate, the codes of the religious moral community made women to take on humanitarian labor. They seemed happy to assume this role which earned them public recognition but also allowed them to have closer relationship to refugee women to whom humanitarian women wanted to set an example of productivity. They were expecting Syrian women to take a more responsible and proactive approach to contribute to household economy by taking on productive things that they had inferred from their own experiences. They were

all very hardworking women and only a small portion of their work -if any- was remunerated. Their waged work, most often, was precarious where they were laid off periodically and hired back at times of labor shortage and demand increase. Many women, for instance, were Qur'an teachers who worked often at more than one public school scattered all over the city for 9-month fixed term contracts which enabled that they could be sent to unpaid leave during the summer to be perhaps rehired during the next academic year. Besides their wage work, all of them were attending to gendered division of labor doing house chores, raising their children, attending care work, in short, taking care of themselves and their families. But more importantly, they were doing voluntary humanitarian labor and were responsible for the public good, however small their role could be. They were expecting the same from the Syrian women with whom they had established aid relations, because, as I recounted in Rabia's experience, aid relations encompassed mentoring about life in general and work, productivity, and house management in particular. In personal relations, mentoring took the shape of advice "wholeheartedly given from one woman to the other" who shared similar care and work burdens and household experiences despite their varying backgrounds.

Besides individual efforts, like Rabia's (see above), striving to motivate productivity among Syrian women, there were organized efforts to "teach how to be productive and more efficient within domestic spaces." The NGO led by Leyla was one of them. This NGO provided various trainings to lower-class unemployed women, local or Syrian. These trainings included Qur'an classes and courses on the basics of Islam, skills training such as nursing, needlecraft, childcare, elderly care, domestic economy and efficient household management. During the trainings, women participating in the courses were paid a small stipend. For the Syrian women, the NGO offered Turkish language classes. Trainings usually took six weeks to six months. Once the trainings ended, women received certificates and were helped to find a job through the networks of the NGO. Those who completed the trainings were usually employed in jobs that

complied with the gendered division of labor, and Leyla said that special needs were also taken into consideration. These special needs referred to situations in which women encumbered with other care work such as child or elderly care were employed in part-time jobs in order not to obstruct her “main responsibility towards her own children and family”.

As far as Syrian women were concerned, volunteers of this NGO also argued that Syrian women were refusing to participate in the workforce⁴⁶, but they were nonetheless accepting them to skills development courses. Volunteer women, some of whom were at the same time instructors at the same NGO, justified why they were providing skills development classes to people who were not going to use it for labor market participation by referring to their roles in contributing to the domestic lives of Syrian women who would use these skills to be more productive and efficient with their house chores and care work. Household management was an important aspect of every day and required delicate and careful attention; in the end, women were homemakers who played extremely important roles not in the household economy but also in the child development and advancement of morals in future generations. “Therefore”, a volunteer teacher of the NGO concluded, “Syrian women needed to be trained in all walks of life so that they and their children could more comfortably live among us in the future.”

Personal or organized, humanitarian labor undertaken by humanitarian women bore the implications that humanitarian labor, albeit unpaid, was done for the public good. For this reason, despite emphasis on similarities, it was actually different from the unpaid yet productive work promoted to the Syrian women in terms of the value it created in the society. Arising mostly from the welfare state restructuring that outsourced care work accompanied

⁴⁶ In my opinion, this line argument, although very widely acknowledged, was based on culturalist understanding of Syria refugees. Many research have shown that Syrian women have been active in the workforce in Turkey and their labor force participation is often a pathway to their empowerment through which they gain a position to negotiate with patriarchy at home and beyond. For a very detailed account of Syrian women’s labor force participation, see Körükmez, L., Karakılıç, İ. Z., & Danış, D. (2020), *Exigency, Negotiation, Change: The work experiences of Syrian Refugee Women and Gender Relations*. GAR Book Series No.3 Available at <https://www.gocarastirmalaridernegi.org>

with moral labor to citizenry (see Chapter 2), their humanitarian labor -which was also highly gendered- was unpaid but required lots of time, effort, and organization almost like a second or third shift in their already arduous everyday. But it derived its moral value precisely from being unwaged (Muehlebach 2012), because it was conceptualized as a “pure, free gift to the collective” (Muehlebach 2012, 11). It was an exploitative and time-consuming work, nonetheless it afforded public recognition and moral superiority to those who engaged in it as well as granted the right to shape the very collective to which they offered their unwaged humanitarian labor. This gendered public recognition had earned them the esteemed position in the society and their perspective from which they could make a comparison between themselves and the Syrian community. Social, political, and economic gaps between those who were granted the recognition through unwaged humanitarian labor and those who were known to be “dependent” on that labor iterated solidarity and inequality embedded in humanitarianism.

Chapter 6: “Alms of a nation”: Spectacle of Hospitality and Humanitarian Citizenship

Both in Chapter 3 and in the final section of Chapter 4, I discussed how aid activities in the local scale have generated different spatialities and have politically segregated areas which had already been socio-economically (and to some extent racially) isolated and relationally distant and divided. The “tale of two neighborhoods”, which had been constructed by working classes for working classes, was in a sense rewritten since the 1990s through Islamic humanitarian relations which reconfigured and rescaled the neighborhoods in the local context. The aid took place physically and symbolically in the confines of the neighborhoods whose residents were either casted out of politics by way of humanitarianization of their lives and existences or casted out of socialities altogether and abandoned by the humanitarian community due to their (implicitly racialized) perception as “criminals”, “beggars”, and “potential threats to community” as in the case of Kurds and the Roma community. On the other hand, the humanitarians who aided the neighborhoods were not only physically but also politically rendered much more mobile, as those who can have an in-and-out relationship with the neighborhood. They could carry out and speak for “the neighborhoods” to the city center as the embodiment of destitution and deprivation and as places in need of humanitarian (and, I reckon, only humanitarian) attention while they could carry their moral and political visions and imaginations in the neighborhoods, reconfiguring a space in which they were rarely part of the residential community.

This in-and-out relationship was enabled by uneven mobility of humanitarians and the neighborhood community and unevenly distributed right to speak for others and for themselves. In effect, it located humanitarians at the heart of the political constellation of the urban context that already inculcated its urban identity as a proud charity society. In this context,

humanitarian figures were allowed to make public and political appearances. This is perhaps most visible in aid to Syrian refugees for whom mobility in and out of the neighborhood, the city, and the country has become an emphatically distinct issue arguably separating them from other communities residing in those neighborhoods and creating even a bigger disparity between humanitarians and refugees. Their inclusion in aid relations, which partly reinforced their spatial and otherwise immobilization, represented the citizenship virtues and mobilization capabilities of the humanitarians, rendering them *deserving* and humanitarian *citizens*. That said, this chapter is built on a curious paradox: how a welcoming and humanitarian attitude towards refugees as the most often pronounced outsiders of the nation-state can play out to entrench nation-state centric politics in a way to configure a citizenship that is highly humanitarianized yet exclusionary.

This form of citizenship was already in the making but became especially consolidated in the 20-year-long AKP rule which promoted the problematization of issues such as displacement and impoverishment through an (Islamic) humanitarian lens. It became entangled with and situated along other traits attributed to citizenship in Turkey – the “militant” (Ustel 2004) one that is always and *willfully* ready to “protect the nation from internal and external enemies”. Both forms –humanitarian and militant citizenship– were at play in discursively and affectively disentangling citizenship from its legal-universal construction and ensuing rights and allowed some to be *more* citizens than others as well as to reshape the public in ways amicable to a select group who could attain deserving citizenship.

In this chapter, I will focus on this coupling of “militant” and humanitarian citizenship and the ways the public has been reformed in Denizli context, particularly focusing on Islamic humanitarian networks which opened themselves a political space through humanitarianism

but also through active engagement in becoming willful citizen subjects who would not avoid taking active part in the protection of the country from perceived enemies or potential threats.

The context that I found myself in was rather conducive to delineate how citizenship and public have been reimagined and reconfigured. I first moved to Denizli in January 2017, only five months after the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016, and amid the state of emergency. Back then, everyone was facing an increasing securitization of social and political spheres through very visible presence and glorification of exclusively the police (as the force that stood against the coup attempt of the military) in everyday life and also the ongoing investigations, arrests, and purge of thousands of people who were allegedly coup plotters or members of other organizations that were swiftly labeled as “terrorists”. Also, everyone was virtually pitted against each other; the mistrust in and among particularly Islamist communities was rampant. Islamic humanitarians of Denizli were striving to uphold their position as citizens “unconditionally loyal” to the unity of the state. Because the increasingly securitized and authoritarian political sphere was attributed not only to the polarization between the so-called secularists vs. Muslim majority as it has been the constitutive narrative of the Islamist politics, including the AKP reign. Since a once-ally Islamist organization was held responsible for the coup attempt, relations between the Islamist groups were stranded and skeptical of each other. Thus, public appearance in the post-coup period was an important aspect of performances of citizenship and loyalty and humanitarianism –reshaped within the national framework to help in order to protect the country– was a powerful means for public performances. Before moving on to Denizli, I will give a brief account of how the coup attempt has altered the political context in Turkey.

Repercussions of a *Failed* Coup D'état: Closed Public and Restrictive Citizenship

On July 15, 2016 in the night of a seemingly ordinary summer day, Turkey went through a historic event. Turkey had experienced many military coup d'états in the turn of almost every decade since the 1950s (military coup d'états of 1960, 1971, 1980, the postmodern⁴⁷ coup d'état of February 28, 1998, and finally the postmodern e-memorandum⁴⁸ in 2007 as well as many other failed attempts throughout), all of which marking an important political turning point. It was, however, quite unexpected because the ruling party, AKP, had consolidated its nearly 20-year-long political power in the country partly thanks to its efforts to curb the military's political power and to rule out any possibility of anti-democratic attempts at getting hold of the political power and government.

However, that night, widespread disbelief lasted rather short as the possibility of a coup d'état shockingly and unnervingly turned into a reality, causing the deaths of more than 300 people. The coup attempt was botched when all the political parties in the parliament and a large group

⁴⁷ The 1997 military memorandum, also known as "Post-modern coup," refers to a set of decisions by the Turkish military issued on 28 February 1997, following a National Security Council meeting. These quite authoritarian decisions were justified under the name of "struggle against reactionary forces" referring to the Islamist-nationalist government at the time and conjuring up the constitutive political division in the country between secularists and Islamists. During the 1997 military memorandum process, the military did not dissolve the parliament or suspend the constitutional order; the then government resigned, and a new government was formed. Despite seemingly short-lived intervention in the democratic order, the 28 February decisions had very enduring impacts on the country's political trajectory, particularly in terms of deepening the secular/Islamist division. For these reasons (continuation of the constitutional order and the long-lasting impacts despite the apparent short life of the intervention), February 28 is called "post-modern coup d'état". For more information, see Erkan Yüksel (2007) "28 Şubat'ın Anlamı...", *IV. Kuvvet Medya*, Retrieved on May 18, 2021 at <https://web.archive.org/web/20070928004326/http://www.dorduncukuvvetmedya.com/article.php?sid=3113>

⁴⁸ On 27 April 2007, the General Staff released a statement on its website conveying its concerns about the presidential candidacy of Abdullah Gül, an important political actor who has been involved in Islamist politics and was vice president of the Welfare Party during the February 28 Memorandum. The general staff agreed that "the presidential Office is the guard of secularism" and cannot be trusted to an Islamist figure (whose wife wears headscarf). Although caused lots of political concern, e-memorandum did not result in resignation of the government or political ban on senior political officers. Also, in the 2007 Presidential Elections, Abdullah Gül, against whom the memorandum was penned, was elected the 11th President of the Republic of Turkey. It was argued that the popular support for the AKP further increased by the unwanted military intervention in electoral politics. See Başaran, E. (July 16, 2016), "Turkey coup: Who was behind Turkey coup attempt?". *BBC News*. Retrieved on May 18, 2021 at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36815476>

of the population (predominantly AKP voters, but also many others) unwaveringly objected the coup.⁴⁹ The attempt remained as an insurrection by a section of the armed forces that would be halted by the next morning. That night, after the initial shock of coup attempt somehow faded, Erdoğan delivered a speech to the public via *Facetime* amidst confusion and turmoil, and he urged citizens to go on streets, squares, and airports to intercept this anti-democratic attempt. The citizens who went out to stop the coup attempt that night were later rewarded with national and religious titles of martyrs and veterans. The apparently democratic resistance against the coup attempt stopped the coup but also led to a dramatic change in the political constellation of the country.

Five days after the failed coup d'état attempt, on July 20, 2016, the government declared a state of emergency which would last for two years. In these two years, the state of emergency allowed the government to bypass parliament when drafting new laws and issuing emergency decrees. It also affected so many lives: rights and freedoms were harshly restricted; over 40.000 people who were allegedly affiliated to the coup-plotting group and other so-called “terrorist” organizations⁵⁰ were arrested; 100,000 civil servants were purged; and hundreds of media outlets and civil society associations were shut down. Such anti-democratic measures were

⁴⁹ This indicates an important shift in Turkey's mainstream politics because, until the 2016 coup attempt, all of the coups were supported by some sections of the society and those who supported the coup always believed that political cleavages and polarization could only be solved by the intervention of the military which was, by the Republican founding elite, casted as the arbiter, protector, and the guarantor of the survival of the Republic. Moreover, all coups were unequivocally supported by some capitalist groups, mainly by the Istanbul bourgeoisie because what had been presented as “polarization” and “political cleavages” was usually the class conflict that was embodied in the youth and working-class movements. In the 15 July coup, on the other hand, the so-called polarization of the country was widely accepted yet the military's political involvement was not seen as a solution by the population at large. That is to say, on another note, the “democratization” efforts that are usually attributed to the “early AKP” period (roughly between 2002-2010) and the EU Harmonization Process arguably curbed the deep-rooted political power of the military in the eyes of the majority of the population.

⁵⁰ It is difficult to locate people who were arrested under clearly defined categories. People who were allegedly affiliated to the Gülen movement were not the only ones arrested. Unionized teachers, members of Kurdish political movement, members affiliated to anti-government Islamist movements, and civil society figures and journalists were arrested. The term “terrorist” was used vaguely to and often bent the Constitution and the Turkish Criminal Code in terms of due diligence and right to fair trial. For more detailed information on the effects of the post-coup regulations, see Human Rights Watch (January 17, 2019). “Turkey: State of Emergency Ends but Not Repression”. *Human Rights Watch*. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/17/turkey-state-emergency-ends-not-repression>

justified under the “struggle against terror”, and the government used the emergency rule to also criminalize and eradicate other political opponents, including pro-Kurdish, Alevi, LGBTIQ+, feminist, non-Muslim and leftist politicians, academics, journalists, and activists. Although the state of emergency was lifted on 18 July 2018, a total of 32 presidential decrees (Emergency Executive Decrees – *Kanun Hükmünde Kararname, KHK*) passed during that period remained.⁵¹ These decrees “compris[ed] 1194 articles in aggregate (...) leading to over 1000 amendments in national legislation” regarding as diverse areas as “national defense, internal security, state personnel regime, economy and social security, administrative structure, education and health” (Akça et al. 2018:7).⁵² Later, the 2017 Constitutional Referendum that took place in the midst of the state of emergency also consolidated authoritarian measures that had passed during the state of emergency (Yılmaz and Turner 2019). As a result of the 2017 Referendum, Turkey underwent a regime change from parliamentary democracy to a “Turkish-style” presidential system through which “the AKP government has thus managed to forge a new system wherein the fundamental checks and balances and separation of powers of a working democratic regime are radically compromised” (Çalışkan 2018:80).

Besides these legal and bureaucratic regulations, the failed coup d’état and counter-efforts worked to mobilize the public (particularly the AKP proponents and electorate) to condemn coup attempts and to defend the government approved by the majority in thirteen consecutive elections since 2002.⁵³ These political mobilizations took weeks of protests dubbed as

⁵¹ For a more detailed legal analysis of what changes these degrees brought, see Human Rights Joint Platform (April 2018). “21 July 2016 - 20 March 2018: State of Emergency in Turkey”. *IHOP*. Istanbul: Turkey.

⁵² In addition to state of emergency decrees, on July 25, 2018 (following the lifting of the SoE on July 19, 2018) the Parliament adopted Law No. 7145 on the Amendment of Some Laws and Emergency Decrees that would render the SoE permanent by drafting emergency decrees into legislation. Combined, these law and the decrees outlasted the state of emergency, resulting in a sense, in the normalization of the emergency rule. For further analysis, see Human Rights Association (August 1, 2018). “IHD’s Views Regarding Law no. 7145 Regulating Permanent State of Emergency”. *IHD*. Available at <https://ihd.org.tr/en/regarding-law-no-7145-regulating-permanent-state-of-emergency/>

⁵³ Between 2002 and 2022 (at the time of writing), AKP has come out as the leading party in 13 elections (6 general elections in 2002, 2007, 2015, 2015, and 2018; 4 local elections in 2004, 2009, 2014 and 2019; 2

“democracy festivals” where pro-government people took to the streets during nights with Turkish flags and placards to curse the coup attempt. Some AKP municipalities also facilitated “democracy festivals” and “democracy marches” by providing free public transportation in major cities and handing out some food and beverages as well as gift packages full of Turkish and AKP flags and other nationalist and militarist items for the participants of the protests. Democracy festivals, thus, created an environment where popular support to AKP was not only consolidated but also visibly spectacularized through the use of public resources.

The declaration of the state of emergency was already effectively curbing democratic participation by suspending the right to assembly and demonstration except for the “democracy festivals” and by suppressing other democratic demands of the society through suspension of right to assembly.⁵⁴ However, it was not only the legal regulations which impeded the democratic demands. Protestors attending “democracy marches” joined the state’s securitization attempts that had been more visibly going on since the Gezi movement in 2013, yet that reached its peak after the coup d’état attempt (Çalışkan 2018). Participants’ demands chanted in the streets and squares were highly securitizing, militarist, and somewhat anti-democratic. They chanted slogans that sought revenge against those who were involved in the coup, but also including those who were not fitting to their understanding of nationhood. Slogans sometimes reached to such an extent that the reinstating of the death penalty which

referendums in 2010 and 2017; and two Presidential elections in 2014 and 2018. However, some of these victories were contested as the opposition parties and other political groups claimed that the elections were rigged. This option was never prosecuted despite a number of evidence presented by journalists and opposition parties).

⁵⁴ The suspension was later lifted after the state of emergency was revoked in July 2018; however, with the Law No. 7145 (see footnote no. 5), the right to assembly was considerably suppressed and diminished permanently. See, Human Rights Association (August 1, 2018). “IHD’s Views Regarding Law no. 7145 Regulating Permanent State of Emergency”. *IHD*. Available at <https://ihd.org.tr/en/regarding-law-no-7145-regulating-permanent-state-of-emergency/>

had not been executed since 1984 and finally been lifted legally in 2004 became one of the political demands pronounced in the public squares.⁵⁵

Millions of people were mobilized for political solidarity in the streets and squares. Yet, the same period was also a period of crystallization of long-lasting contestations and manifestation of conflicts not only between the so-called polarized fronts of secular vs. Islamic groups but also within the Islamist milieu. It was argued by the government and widely accepted by the public that the coup was orchestrated by an Islamist group (Gülen Community), which had close ties to the AKP government until 2013 (Tugal 2016). This being the case, Islamist circles too went under scrutiny in the securitizing post-coup environment. At the moment of spectacle of political solidarity in the streets and squares, the relations between people who more or less share a political affinity to Islamist politics (and to the AKP, to a considerable extent) were very strained and tense. Besides the relations among the people of committed Islamist circles, how the relationship between the public and the citizen had changed until then became more visible in the post-coup environment.

The democracy festivals, or the “Democracy Vigils” that lasted three weeks ended on August 7, 2016 with a huge demonstration, dubbed as “Democracy and Martyrs Rally” requested, motivated, and called directly by the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Istanbul while parallel democracy rallies also took place in almost every city of the country. Besides the government cadres, AKP MPs, ministers, former MPs, and old and new politicians, high ranking officers of the armed forces, judiciary and bureaucracy made an appearance in the rally, as a manifestation of solidarity with the elected government. Besides the head of Directorate of

⁵⁵ Karadaş, Y. (July 18, 2016). “Demokrasi mi kazandı?”. *Evrensel*. Available at <https://www.evrensel.net/yazi/77085/demokrasi-mi-kazandi>

Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*), religious leaders of non-Muslim communities participated. Many artists and celebrities of the sports world were also there.⁵⁶

The leaders of opposition parties in the parliament were personally invited by the President Erdoğan to demonstrate that national solidarity against the coup threat was beyond political cleavages and they made an appearance and gave heartening speeches regarding the unity of the country on that day. What was more striking, however, was who was *not* invited in the rally. HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party), which is traditionally known to be the successor of Kurdish political parties but also lays claim to political representation of many marginalized groups including women, LGBTI+, non-Muslim minorities, and leftist and environmental activist groups, was not invited to the rally although it was the third biggest political party in Turkey and in the Parliament and it was the part of anti-coup d'état memorandum signed by all the political parties on July 16, 2016 – immediately after the coup attempt was botched.⁵⁷ When President Erdoğan was asked why HDP was not invited, he replied “I make no difference between coup and terrorism. I do not think the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party - the illegalized armed branch of the Kurdish movement] and FETÖ [the religious organization that is responsible for the coup attempt] are two separate categories. I would not invite anyone who cooperates with such an organization. If I do, I cannot explain this to our veterans and martyrs.”⁵⁸ In hindsight, Erdoğan's words suggested how citizenship would be made increasingly exclusionary and the brewing populist rhetoric would turned into a solemn closure of the public to certain groups.

⁵⁶ “Yenikapı'da ‘Demokrasi ve Şehitler Miting’i” (August 7, 2016). *Bianet*. Retrieved from <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/toplum/177586-yenikapi-da-demokrasi-ve-sehitler-mitingi> on September 20, 2021.

⁵⁷ Firat, Ümit (August 10, 2016). “HDP ve Yenikapı Mitingi”. *Al Jazeera Turk*. Retrieved from <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/hdp-ve-yenikapi-mitingi> on September 20, 2021.

⁵⁸ “Erdoğan'dan ‘HDP Neden Yenikapı'ya Davet Edilmedi?’ Sorusuna Yanıt” (August 7, 2016). *Bianet*. Retrieved from <https://bianet.org/kurdi/siyaset/177583-erdogan-dan-hdp-neden-yenikapi-ya-davet-edilmedi-sorusuna-yanit> on September 21, 2021.

What these protests showed was not only the political solidarity people established with the elected government. They were pointing at the culmination of a long-lasting movement: they were redrawing the boundaries of the public, attempting to limit the civic participation (as well as citizenship attributes) to those who embrace a model that is simultaneously religious and nationalist, Islamic and Turkish –one that can be represented solely by the ruling party. Those who were allowed into these new public frontiers were the ones who were defined by their loyalty to the state and the nation (the content of which will be discussed shortly) and duties and obligations attributed to the citizenship (for instance, duty to protect the state from its internal and external enemies) rather than by rights.

Post-coup Denizli: Selective Humanitarianism amid the Spectacle of National Unity

I moved to Denizli in January 2017, only five months after the coup d'état attempt. The post effects of the coup attempt were still visible in Denizli. There were enormous billboards in the public squares showing the photos of people resisting against the coup attempt. The municipality and mayor Osman Zolan (2014-to date) were striving to keep the memory of resistance alive in various ways such as turning the entire city center into photo exhibition of “15 July Resistance Saga”, changing the names of public places such as public schools by adding “15 July Democracy” to their names. Most interestingly the public buses, which had been parked in front of the gates of the military quarters on July 15 to stop coup plotter troops and tanks, had just been removed and put back into public transportation duty as “veteran buses”. In 2017, on the first anniversary, “July 15 Martyrs’ Memorial”⁵⁹ was opened with a public ceremony. The statue was depicting a tank and some people sitting on, standing up, or

⁵⁹ “15 Temmuz Şehitler Anıtı Denizli’de Açıldı” (July 16, 2017). *Denizli Gazetesi*. Available at <https://www.denizligazetesi.com/guncel/15-temmuz-sehitler-aniti-denizlide-acildi-h64904.html>

lying down in front of the tank trying to stop its advance, evoking the visuals from the worldwide known resistance symbols such as those of the 1989 Tiananmen Square.⁶⁰

Besides the spectacularization of the resistance against the coup attempt, it was also visible that the coup attempt affected humanitarians in Denizli, as well. It marked an important yet dangerous moment for humanitarian men and women who had been politicized into the Islamist politics since the 1980s. Many humanitarians were quite open about their political activism during the 1980s and 1990s or were proudly telling the stories of their family members who were part of the resistance against “the despotic secular state of Turkey”. They had historically been part of the Islamist politics during the late 1970s and 1980s. Younger ones were introduced to the Islamist politics and activism through their family members. Some told me that their father served in prison for teaching Qur’an outside the officially authorized courses in the 1980s. Some others told that they were denied their right to education for attending the religious vocational high school (*Imam Hatip High Schools*) training imams— a profession open only to men. Also, schools, neighborhoods, and close social circles were critical for socialization into Islamist politics of the 1990s and early 2000s. Islamist activism in the 1990s had visibly taken human rights turn in line with other national and transnational counter-public movements in Turkey and the growing human rights activism in the wake of the 1980 military rule that had committed grave human rights violations. Islamist activists, too, were mobilized around human rights claims, which had in a sense become the most acceptable and justifiable political movement in the country due to liquidation of other -particularly leftist- political movements, against the strictly, if not despotically, secular Turkish state. In this new configuration of the Islamist movement, one of their chief demands was articulated as the true implementation of the constitutional right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion so

⁶⁰ Stromme, L. (July 16, 2016). “Turkish protestor lies in front of tank in dramatic Picture evoking Tiananmen Square shot”. *Express*. Available at <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/690173/Turkish-protestor-lies-front-tank-dramatic-picture-evoking-Tiananmen-Square-shot-coup>

that citizenship rights and entitlements are *truly* accorded to every citizen and the public would be open to everyone as promised by the republic.

Women were at the forefront of political movement of Islamism all around the country and this was no different in Denizli (Yılmaz 2013). Electoral victories of successor Islamist parties first in the local elections and later, in the 1995 and 2002 general elections by Welfare Party and AKP respectively were largely attributed to mobilization of devoted and dedicated women. The main point of contention was the headscarf ban which created an obstacle to headscarved women's enjoyment of public higher education and public sector professions. In Denizli, many humanitarian women were telling me that due to their religious convictions, they and/or their parents were not comfortable with the idea of them going to a public school where they were not allowed to wear headscarf. The only option for young women to enjoy their right to education was *Imam Hatip* high schools. However, back then, higher education options offered to *Imam Hatip* high schools were limited strictly to the faculty of theology where, again, headscarf was banned and, hence, was practically not open to female students. Hence university options for them were either totally absent or they would have to find other options such as wearing wigs or big hats to cover their hair. Moreover, strictly secular dress code in the public sector employment withheld many devoted Muslim women to work in the public sector occupations such as doctor, nurse, midwife, or teacher – occupations that were deemed religiously and traditionally compatible with femininity. Therefore, a large part of women who went to religious high schools were left unemployed. After the headscarf ban was gradually lifted during the mid-2000s, the Islamist politics had already gained a political stronghold under the umbrella of AKP. However, many generations of women were left rather limited options and without redress. Nonetheless they remained an important, well-organized, and disciplined activist group in the Islamist politics to date.

Leyla, the head of the Denizli AKP women's branch, was one of the few humanitarian women who could choose an alternative path in education and get political science education in one of the major universities of the country in Ankara. As she was reminiscing her days in university in the 1990s, she immediately made a comparison between my time at the university in Ankara in the mid-2000s and said, "You wouldn't know these days. We were protesting almost every day; we could rarely go to classes because we either would not be allowed in the school or would be boycotting classes". Her activism in university years led her to pursue a career in party politics, and since then she was an active member of the Islamist parties, first of the Welfare Party (the predecessor of the AKP) and now of the AKP. In Denizli, many humanitarians like Leyla were actively involved in the AKP or local politics; they would organize and/or join protests showing solidarity with the plight of the Palestinians, condemning the military coup which toppled Muslim Brotherhood-aligned government in Egypt, or showing solidarity with the Rohingya refugees in Myanmar and Bangladesh. After July 15, they also enthusiastically participated in the democracy marches and some of them even went out to the streets during the night of July 15 to stand up against the coup d'état attempt, risking their lives.

Women were also active in the local politics. Based on ethnographic research in one of the conservative districts of Istanbul, Ümraniye in the 1990s Jenny White (2002:3) observes, "many working-class and conservative women became political activists for the first time, going door to door to get out the vote for Welfare. Even people who were against the party, or any Islamic party, having a place in national politics spoke with awe of the extent to which the party had organized its followers, street by street." While relaying her observations about Islamist mobilization in Turkey, White also talks about women's struggle within the political organization of the Welfare Party:

“Nearly half of the more than fifty thousand registered Welfare Party members in Ümraniye were women (...) Although in the mid-1990s women were not represented at high administrative levels in the party, they developed their own political and civic networks and organizations and took leadership positions within them. (...) The activists organized fundraising activities and political demonstrations, ran discussion groups in people’s homes, *and regularly visited neighborhood women to offer assistance or simply company. They set up courses and conferences to educate other activists about the party’s principles and activist techniques.*” (White 2002: 19, emphasis added)

Similar to Jenny White’s account above, women in Denizli emphatically brought together humanitarianism, care and solidarity, and political activism. Their mobilization in and through various impoverished urban localities is argued to have brought AKP the political victory in local and general elections.

However, beyond the electoral campaigns, political mobilization of Islamist activists in the 1990s and 2000s was accompanied by humanitarian mobilization organized mainly by the Welfare Party, the Islamist party of the time, and largely sponsored by pious industrialists who were thriving at the time due to decentralization of industrial production from Istanbul to other Anatolian cities (Durak 2011; Doğan 2007; Tugal 2009). Human rights claims hinged on freedom of religion and conscience and large mobilization of humanitarian activism in the impoverished and marginalized districts of big cities went hand in hand, marking the characteristic of the Islamist movement (see Chapter 2 where I discuss the genealogy of Islamic humanitarianism in Turkey). Humanitarian mobilization also at the time was presented as a solution to various problems such as massive internal displacement and impoverishment due to securitizing and neoliberal policies of the time. Suggesting that Islamic humanitarian solidarity between haves and have-nots was virtually the only the way to sustain societal peace and order, Islamist politics managed to reshape citizenship and public in a way to make humanitarianism part and parcel of them.

On the other hand, as the Islamist movement became more institutionalized and consolidated its power in national politics, humanitarian efforts which had constituted a large part of Islamist politics beginning from the 1990s, on the other hand, were depoliticized. Women who had been politically active on the streets during the 1990s were largely pushed into the humanitarian sphere in a way to strip them off their political activism. Well aware of this, many humanitarian women conveyed their stories to me by emphasizing their or their families' activist background. Just as Leyla was remembering her university years as the years she was *actually* politically active instead of her present as the president of the ruling party's local women's branch where she mostly worked for humanitarian and charitable work, other humanitarian women were highlighting political involvement as the experience that drove them to humanitarian activism that they were involved today. When I asked what pushed her to humanitarian work, Ayşenur's first answer was "My father was an imam, a *hoca* (teacher), and an activist in the 1980s." Ayşenur herself was a Qur'an teacher and was especially working for the orphaned children at her NGO. It was difficult to delineate the direct causality between her father's political activism and her preference to be part of humanitarian work. However, in a more indirect way, she was perceiving her humanitarian work as the legacy of her father's political activism that enabled her to be more active and visible in the public sphere and she wanted to continue her father's political lineage with humanitarian activism, which, she nonetheless did not see as an outright political work.

Despite humanitarian women's self-assessment of their work, effectively mobilized and entangled human rights and humanitarian movement were now decoupled, putting the emphasis on the depoliticized humanitarian efforts. This decoupling did not only lead to depoliticization of very much politically motivated humanitarian aid in the eyes of the humanitarians, but it also somehow naturalized humanitarian assistance into the understanding of Turkishness, which is always already Muslim. Humanitarian efforts, motivated by Islamic

commands, were no longer seen as part of political campaigns and of organizing impoverished groups as well as aid-givers/donors into the same movement; they were now seen as the religious and civic duty that *every* citizen should participate – a duty the political and contentious nature of which is widely concealed.

Mobilization around humanitarian objectives -aiding to refugees or impoverished populations- still works for community building and cultivating communitarian morals and heartfelt citizenship that takes care of the self, of others, and of the nation through regular meetings, unofficial get togethers, social media accounts, seminars, or aid delivery events. Aid volunteers and humanitarian workers believe that humanitarianism “helps them keep track of themselves”; ignites a form of self-reflexivity both as a human being and as a Muslim and “teaches gratitude”. For those organizations humanitarianism also works as a form of care for the others, that are not only aid-receivers but also volunteers. They teach newcomers or young generations “charity and goodness”, “faith”, sometimes even “humanity” which will pay for not only in the afterlife but also as a way of taking care of the self, the other, and the nation penetrating implicitly political discussions around the relationship between humanitarianism and citizenship into humanitarian work. I encountered this care-triangle most openly when I was having a conversation with Zeynep about Syrian refugees.

A couple of months after I started fieldwork, one day when we were having lunch in their house, Zeynep was telling me how their household has become spiritually richer after the coming of Syrians. She gave me some examples of how so many visitors they received in their everyday life, that is, it was a form of spiritual richness having lots of visitors. Although they were not well-off, they did not have any financial hardships giving aid to those in need or sharing their food with people to whom they opened their door. She told, “once you open your heart and agree to share, it does not matter how little you have at hand.” Spiritually, on the

other hand, she also stated that their house was blessed thanks to the charitable acts they have been engaging as a family with the Syrians. They could defeat the troubles in their home space. Although she gave no further details, she made a parallel with the case of the coup d'état attempt of July 15, 2016: "Thanks to the hospitality and benevolence of our state, we are hosting so many Syrians. Hosting them and being generous to them helped us defeat the trouble of coup d'état. You see, the alms (*zakat*) of a nation are the refugees it hosts." Zeynep thought that at a perilous moment the country had faced, God had helped them to fend off the danger of coup and collective benevolence of the Turkish nation towards Syrian refugees was being rewarded. The Turkish people had shared their God-endowed national *spaces* and *livelihoods* with Syrians and, in return, they were salvaged. She was associating voluntary assistance to Syrian refugees not only with religious duties but also a duty towards one's country, almost as a citizenship duty.

In theological terms, alms in Islam are a kind of obligatory wealth tax the well-off have to pay to the community to compensate for the worse-off. Amy Singer (Singer 2002:23), a renowned historian of charity in Ottoman Empire and, in general in Muslim contexts, states, "Payment of the alms tax is one of the five basic obligations of the believing Muslim. *Zakat* is often discussed in the Qur'an along with prayer, charitable gifts or voluntary donations (*sadaqa*) and good deeds, those things that help believers gain entrance to paradise." Zakat, an umbrella term to include mandatory tax and voluntary giving in Islamic jurisprudence, has ambiguous references but is usually used to denote mandatory giving in Denizli. In theocratic regulations during the Ottoman era, zakat, usually determined –based on centuries-long and rather controversial juristic discussions– to be 1/40 of one's total income and worth, was implemented as a "tax owed to God but intended as a practice among people" (Singer 2002:24). In the Republic of Turkey, however, mandatory taxing gained a strictly secular form and casted religious forms of taxing or communitarian requitals such as zakat and sadaqa as voluntaristic

acts of believers. However, the idea underlying zakat has not changed: “property was seen as legitimate only to the degree that it met certain religious and communal conditions” (Tuğal 2017:40). In his genealogical discussion on how benevolence in Islam has -theologically- changed throughout centuries but more particularly “in the age of liberalism”, Cihan Tuğal argues that zakat is a triadic relation between God, the giver, and the receiver:

“the rich have taken their wealth from God, and they are obligated to spend it to form the community of believers. (...) God gives and expects not only prayers but affection for the poor and community formation in return. The wealthy give and anticipate heaven and increased wealth. The poor receive and pay back with gratitude.” (Tuğal 2017: 41).

This relationship, usually used to regulate property relations and prevent immense disparities and wealth gaps in the society without unsettling the hierarchical order, takes an interesting form when translated to a national-political context. Zeynep believed in the spiritual and material richness that was endowed upon her and her family by the grace of God, thanks to their charitable activities. However, the immediate connection Zeynep established between Turkey’s refugee reception and the country’s blessing was still curious. From her own position, motivations were accorded not only to the Islamic teachings which she learns, teaches, and socializes in and which will be rewarded afterlife, they were also related to the potential stability of the country in which she was a citizen. She was relating herself to a larger narrative of nationhood which was blessed through opening doors to Syrian refugees and helping them. Zeynep was not alone in associating blessed nationhood with charity and humanitarianism. Coupled with the question I posed above, the connection Zeynep made between refugee reception and the blessing of Turkey by God became even more central in terms of understanding how humanitarians organized around Islamic teachings in an urban locality locate themselves in the larger (local, national and transnational) political narratives.

Later in mid-2017, while I was going through public social media accounts of some humanitarian networks, I saw a photo of Zeynep's father, Zeki, and some other humanitarians in one of those democracy festivals in Denizli, together with some Syrian refugees holding placards. Placards were signed as "Syrian Muhajirs" (*Suriyeli Muhacirler*) and were written "Shoulder to Shoulder", "Jerusalem, Damascus, Ankara... Ummah is in Solidarity", "Syrian Muhajirs are against Coup D'état". At first glance, it can be thought that the active participation of some Syrian refugees was because the potential toppling of AKP might mean stricter and more anti-migrant policies on the part of the state. It can also be argued that Syrian refugees, who demanded a democratic government in their own countries and started a revolution in 2011, took active part in the protests with political objectives to protest coup d'état. Although all of these might be true, they still leave a question unanswered: Why does a humanitarian association post a photo of its members with some Syrian refugees, whom they provide aid, in a protest against the coup d'état attempt on their social media account where majority of the photos are aid activities?

I think, "Democracy Festivals" in Denizli as well as Syrian refugees' participation in these anti-coup protests ultimately marked the moment where the spectacle of national unity merged with politics of humanitarianism. Humanitarian inclusion toward Syrian refugees reached to the extent that refugees were, as the photos in the social media account suggest, proudly welcomed in a drastically politicized display of (crumbling) national unity. It is striking that in a context where discourses "external enemies" were articulated all too often, Syrian refugees, who are deemed "foreigner" both by legal regulations and in nation-state centric discourses, were integrated into the spectacle of national solidarity while many who hold legal Turkish citizenship were defined as the non-national others. I here do not suggest that inclusion of Syrian refugees in "democracy festivals" was due to charitable relations between Syrian refugees and Islamic humanitarian networks. That Syrian refugees were welcomed in

democracy festivals can hardly be read as an act of charity. It is a highly politicized moment both for refugees and for humanitarians in Denizli where previous hierarchies between the aid-givers and aid-receivers were momentarily suspended and the roles in solidaristic relations between the two groups reversed: at that moment, Syrian refugees were *in solidarity with* Turkish citizens with whom the relationship had started through humanitarianism.

However, I believe, the fact that the nature of the relationship between the two groups was informed by humanitarianism requires more attention in order to delve into how boundaries of the public and citizenship are redrawn. I already argued that humanitarianism serves a community building function not only between the aid-givers and aid-receivers but also among the aid-givers. More importantly for this thesis, however, is this question: how humanitarianism, a community generating activity among a group of volunteers and aid-receivers, can mobilize a different understanding of citizenship and nationhood that goes beyond universal membership to a nation-state. In other words, how this newly established community functions in terms of construction of a humanitarian public, community building, and generating citizen subjectivities, and how it separates and excludes certain groups from the public are the questions that I would like to delve in what remains.

The democracy festivals in Denizli but also nationally were, beyond showing solidarity against undemocratic attempts against democratically elected government, also a showcase for who can rightfully lay claim to the nationhood. It was a defining moment to reveal who are worthy and deserving citizens of the country to draw the boundaries of citizenship as well as of the public; who are to be included; what are to be the conditions of public political appearance; and who are to be excluded from the rightful nationhood. I start this chapter with July 15 coup attempt not for anchoring a historical turning point in the linear chronology of the history of citizenship and public in Turkey. I choose that particular event to account for how ongoing

contestations at times of anxious debates on shrinking public, crumbling national unity and diminishing citizenship acts and rights through increasing authoritarian measures have been crystallized, simultaneously manifesting “symbolic, ritualist and emotive mobilization” (Yabanci 2020: 100) of citizenry and the public.

In the rest of the chapter, I will give an account for how understandings of public and citizenship have changed in the contemporary politics and how such changes unfolded in Turkey. I have discussed previously that the development of Islamism, neoliberalism, and humanitarianism went hand in hand in Turkey, making Islamic humanitarian regime an indispensable part of the government of the impoverished and displaced populations, including Syrian refugees. In this chapter, while discussing how humanitarian citizenship came into being I will again locate it in the historical unfolding of neoliberalism and Islamism while paying attention to peculiarities and similarities of the present. In the final section, I will give an ethnographic account of how humanitarians in Denizli have, first, constructed themselves amid changing meanings of public and citizenship as well as how they navigate themselves within these new conceptions.

Neoliberalism, new conceptions of citizenship and (humanitarianized) publics

In its broadest and most often cited definition, citizenship is understood as “membership in a large-scale republic that has boundaries roughly conforming to some partly pre-existing ‘national’ community” (R. M. Smith 2001). Although located in a seemingly linear and long history originating in the Ancient Greek city states, modern citizenship is wrought out of the nation-state where rights and obligations are assigned to people deemed to be its members. The depth, extent, and content of these rights vary according to the political context within which a certain citizenship regime is located (E. F. Isin 2002). However, at the most abstract level, a

historically specific combination of rights and duties is allocated to members of a polity on the basis of membership, hence, presuming a formal and legal equality among the subjects of rights and duties. Due to its presumption of legal and formal equality, citizenship is associated with inclusion and universalism, whereas it is -paradoxically- strictly bounded to nation-state borders in its contemporary form. This boundedness, Isin (2012) argues, enables states to demarcate between citizens and non-citizens. The division between the citizen and the non-citizen is drawn through nation-state boundaries and allows states to achieve two things at the same time: first, it allows the state to exert control over the movements, life and death of people defined as their citizen (through the inside/outside distinction enabled by the nation-state borders). Second, it enables control over the movement of those who are deemed as non-citizens.

As the generic definition given above also shows, modern citizenship, territorially enclosed, allows for an overlap of the relationship between the state and the nation and between citizenship and nationality (E. F. Isin 2012). Interchangeable use of state-nation and nationality-citizenship is, undoubtedly, more than a semantic slippage. It is a technique used by the state “to be able to mobilize citizenship as an aspect of nationalism” (Isin 2002). It is also an ideological construct to demarcate between the citizen and the non-citizen creating essentialized commonalities in the citizen body –commonalities drawn by references to the timeless nationhood. Essentialized commonalities that form the (imaginary) nation and the citizen body simultaneously are also used to cover race, gender, ethnicity, and class inequalities in the society succumbing them into a formal citizenship and accompanying rights shared by the entire nation.

The problem with this understanding of citizenship is that it only partially attends to what citizenship entails, particularly on the formal-legal aspect. It is true that in its contemporary

form citizenship necessitates membership to a territorially enclosed nation-state and a set of formally recognized rights and duties. But citizenship as an institution entails enactment of other specific features. In other words, it is “constituted out of various populations subject to a common law” yet “the process of unification presupposes a specific ideological form” (Balibar 1991). This ideological form aims at defining who “we” (“the people”, hence, the citizen body) essentially are by evoking ethnic, racial, cultural, and moral orders. Nation-states, Balibar (1991) argues, have striven not only to control population movements (that is, physical mobility and the demographic composition), but also to “the very production of ‘the people’ as a political community taking precedence of class [and other such as race, gender, religion and ethnic] divisions.” Far from taking precedence over societal divisions (inequalities), the invention of “the people” first as the nation and later as the rights-bearing citizen subjects, however, inheres a contradiction. For Ranciere, “the people” embodies two things at the same time: it concurrently denotes the name of a *whole* (usually national) community and the name of a *part* of that community. In other words, those who act in the name of “the people” are only a part of that imagined national community – a part that could constitute itself as the subject of the nation and the national history (Foucault cited in Isin 2012), more often than not, at the expense of other “parts”.

Therefore, citizenship does not have to be (and in many cases has proven to be not) inclusive of all individuals who are subject to the common law and institutions regulating citizenship. In Etienne Balibar’s (Balibar 1988:723) words, “each political regime builds the distribution of power into a specific definition of citizenship”. Given that citizenship is produced with the functioning of laws and institutions that are animated by various values, social norms, ideologies, and dominant historical narratives, the exclusionary nature of citizenship goes beyond the inherent territorial boundedness of the concept. It is exclusionary internally and externally: it does not only demarcate between citizens and non-citizens through control of

movement, it also creates hierarchical stratifications within the citizen body. Such stratifications are inherently related to “distribution of power”.

However, the assumption implicit in the formal-legal understanding of citizenship is that once granted citizenship, everyone will have equal access to the *public* where citizenship is enacted.

Habermas, in his famous definition of the public sphere argues,

“[b]y 'the public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. *Access is guaranteed to all citizens.* A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. (...) Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion –that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions – about matters of general interest.” (Habermas 1974, quoted in Eley 1990, emphasis added).

This definition of Habermas was widely challenged on many grounds. Historians showed that the ideal public sphere to which Habermas gives historical references was a “bourgeois public” which was open only upper-class white men (Eley 1990); thus, the Habermasian ideal was defined more by what it excludes than it includes. Also, the distinction Habermas makes between “private individuals” and “public matters” was subject to feminist criticisms on the grounds that it reproduces and rationalizes masculinist conception of the public and the political (Fraser 1990). What is, however, most relevant for the purposes of this chapter is the idealization by Habermas of a singular, unique public sphere where public concerns can be raised and discussed to form a public opinion. It is not only historically flawed but also politically restraining. Scholars revealed that there were a variety of ways of accessing public life and a multiplicity of public arenas: “(...) virtually contemporaneous with the bourgeois public there arose a host of competing counterpublics, including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women’s publics and working-class publics” (Fraser 1990:61). Although multiple, publics are unequally empowered and in contestation with each other. Moreover, as

opposed to Habermas's conception of the public sphere which assumes to be crowded by people who are *always already* citizens capable of forming informed public opinion, multiplicity of publics suggests that publics and counterpublics are arenas where people form, develop, and enact political subjectivities as citizens (or as those who are excluded from it) within and through contestations. The hegemonic public (among many) thus becomes the sphere where the desirable form of citizenship is enacted. As opposed to long challenged division between the public and the private, I use public as a major site of struggle where social issues unfold and boundaries between the public and the private as well as the public and counterpublics are drawn and redrawn, that is as a site of "boundary struggles" (Fraser 2017).

Andrea Muehlebach (Muehlebach 2012:18 emphasis added) goes beyond the formal-legal definition and contends that citizenship is "a formal institution entailing rights and duties as well as a modality of belonging that must be achieved through *everyday practice*." While the former is the condition of possibility of the latter, they are not readily relatable since the modalities of belonging require political interventions as to how to define and to whom to grant the belonging. That everyone is officially recognized as citizens through membership to a polity does not suffice to define belonging. Modalities of belonging, more than anything else, is about who will be the *deserving* citizens and how they will be positioned within the boundaries of the public.

Modalities of belonging not only shape imaginations of the self as citizens, as members of a nation-state or as those who are excluded from it, they also define the ways people act as citizens or non-citizens. Citizenship, through everyday practice, becomes the way through which people "learn to orient themselves vis-à-vis others and the larger collective whole" (Muehlebach 2012:18). Citizenship as a set of relations that mediate people and the public is "a crucial dimension of social, political, and moral subjectivity" (Muehlebach 2012).

Therefore, citizenship is a process that must be, first, fabricated as Balibar (1988) states, by specific ideological configurations and distribution of power and, second, performatively sustained. In this case, it is historically fabricated and performed within the historically specific form of public, through public(ized) discourses. Therefore, alterations in understanding of citizenship (beyond membership to a polity) redefine the boundaries of the public as historically and politically the main sphere where citizenship is enacted. The public becomes where different political subjectivities are mobilized (or immobilized) to act as citizens.

In this respect, it is important to rethink the relationship between citizenship and the public, where the internal boundary of citizenship is drawn. These internal boundaries are defined by long-lasting political and social struggles: which constitutive stories will be dominant, what it means to be a citizen, and which groups or individuals will be allowed to enjoy citizenship (as the historically specific combination of rights and duties) are results of political struggles shaped by rights claims and demands of people. Thus, emphasis on struggles for *claiming, expanding and losing* rights (for citizenship) (Isin 2002, emphasis added) is fundamentally related to two things: how inclusive or exclusive the definition of citizenship will be and how the boundaries of the public will be drawn and redrawn so that formerly excluded groups can insert themselves into the new public sphere to make their claims heard. Therefore, it is not only non-citizens who are excluded from the enactment of citizenship.

The experience of the Republic of Turkey is an interesting example to show that the definition of citizenship as a membership to a polity is only a partial understanding of this social and political phenomenon. In the case of Turkey, Kemalism's (the founding ideology of Turkey) strong emphasis on Westernization and secularism as the constitutive feature of nationhood, and hence of citizenship, has excluded many individuals from enacting certain forms of citizenship. For a very long time, it is argued, Turkey's citizenship regime operated on

Westernization (used almost exclusively synonymous to modernization) and the construction of the imaginary of the Turkish nation within “the league of civilized nations” (hence of “the West”) (Ahiska 1996; Üstel 2002). Such understanding of Westernization was foregrounded through the negation of religious and cultural/ethnic life and the affirmation of laicity as the foundation of the Republic. In fact, for Füsün Üstel (Ustel 2004), “[I]n practice, Kemalism did not consider citizenship as a legal category intended for the entire population, but as a feature pre-filled with certain characteristics based on origin, language, gender—and culture as an expression of all these.” The result was construction of a public with citizens embracing a Westernized and secular lifestyle and the exclusion of those who want to secure religion (Islam) or other cultural and ethnic identities as the defining feature of life and politics. Some of those who were excluded were rendered subject to various techniques such as criminalization or marginalization. Some others, especially rural populations as opposed to urban groups upon whom the republic was founded, were positioned at the limit of the division between “the people” (*halk*) and “the citizens” (*vatandaş*): while the citizens were given the upper hand of being civilized enough to be seen and heard in the public, “the people” was deemed as “yet to be civilized”, as those who need tutelage into citizenship (Ahiska 1996). The republican public, again it is widely argued, kept religious and ethnic symbols, rituals, and lifestyles out of the citizenship regime, leading to an exclusionary public sphere that contradicts with the promises and premises of the Republican public that is unequivocally and equally open to all.

The demand for other ideological forms and meanings attached to nationhood and citizenship has always existed throughout the history of the republic but they were largely marginalized. In fact, Ahmet Çiğdem (Çiğdem 2021) argues, the republican elite hoped that these demands would fade away once the republican principles were eventually internalized and religious and cultural demands melted away. The solution of the early Republic was either to (at times violently) suppress or shut down the public sphere to such demands. However, in the following

years, such demands never faded away, indeed they have become the most heated debates within Turkish politics and of the public. The reason why republican citizenship failed to fully take precedence over other socio-political cleavages is related to the contentious relationship between the public and the counterpublics (in Nancy Fraser's terms) I discussed above. The constitution of the republican citizenship and public based on Westernization, here I borrow from Meltem Ahiska (Ahiska 2003: 366), "is a process in which the non-Westerners were othered and subjected to unequal power relations but also produced their subjectivity in that very encounter." This might be true in the early republic -although only conditionally-, but I think in time the contestation went far beyond Westerners and non-Westerners conflict, and proliferated and intersected with other struggles of ethnicity, religion, gender, and class. Besides the Islamist movement that was presented as the "primacy" counter-public, working-class movements growing in the 1960s and 1970s, women's movement that had existed since the late Ottoman period and exponentially grew in the mid-1980s, and the Kurdish political movement that had separated itself from other leftist movements and become an independent political movement in the 1980s were all transcending the Westernized/non-Westernized cleavage and posing serious challenges to the foundations of the hegemonic publics of the time. However, starting from the mid-1980s but more visibly in the 1990s, the Islamist movement (partly emboldened by the political and socio-economic changes brought about by the military rule of the 1980) successfully effaced these counter-publics in favor of a more essentialized constitutive fissure in the history of the Republic (for this culturalized aspect, see Chapter 2).

Of course, the rise of criticism towards republican configuration of citizenship and the comeback by cultural, ethnic, and religious demands are not related solely to the "return of the repressed" as popularly argued. These demands, which themselves had drastically changed throughout time, for reconfiguring the 'specific definition of citizenship' (Balibar 1988) were most strongly voiced when Turkey was going through a relatively dramatic transformation

economically and politically: the 1980 coup d'état had dismantled almost all of the counterpublics particularly in the left and but also some in the right; Islam, for the first time, was *officially* and *outspokenly* incorporated into the Turkish national identity by the military-backed ideology of “Turkish-Islamic synthesis”; neoliberalization was rampant and dismantling the public; what is called “identity politics” became more visible; and the Islamist movement gained strength and, eventually, took hold of political power. Hence, the distribution of power in the ideological construction of citizenship transformed. When challenges to the Republican constitution of citizenship became more visible by religious and ethnic movements, the question as to who rightfully populate the nation and who is entitled to enact citizenship in public became also visible.

The reason why certain counterpublics in Turkey has gained the upper hand vis-à-vis others or why certain counterpublics are almost always doomed to exclusion in the current form the nation-state in Turkey cannot be accounted by appealing to binaries such as “strong state vs. weak civil society” (Mardin 1973b), “center vs. periphery”, and “Westernized elite vs. non-Western society”. As I cited above, regime of citizenship is constituted through specific ideological configurations and distribution of power (Balibar 1991) and is performed and sustained through everyday practices (Muehlebach 2012). From another perspective, David Burchell (Burchell 1995:549) argues, citizenship needs to be seen as “a social creation, as an historical persona, whose characteristics have been developed in particular times and places through the activities of social discipline, both externally on the part of the governments and internally, by techniques of self-discipline and self-formation.” The performative aspect takes place within ideological configurations and distribution of power. Although so far I have talked of citizenship and public as by definition national, ideological configurations and distribution of power that draw the boundaries of desirable citizenship to be enacted in the hegemonic public are not solely defined by the domestic politics of the nation-states. That’s why changes

in understanding of the public and citizenship is, among other things, shaped by broader, global as it were, developments.

A critical one among these developments, for many countries but particularly in Turkey, are identified as globalization and neoliberalism (J. Clarke 2004b). While globalization is argued to have undermined nation-state borders and sovereignty, neoliberalism to have dismantled the “welfare state” form which had provided relatively egalitarian access to public (both as services and as a -usually national- collective body). As global developments, those two combined, reshuffle the relations that people have with themselves, with others, with the society they live in, and with the state they are a member of –hence, with citizenship. Aihwa Ong (Ong 2006: 499) argues that “an ever-shifting landscape shaped by the flows of markets, technologies, and populations challenges the notion of citizenship ties to the terrain and imagination of a nation-state”. Besides flows transgressing nation-state borders, rights and entitlements accorded to citizenship seem to have ceased to be a governmental concern. Quite the contrary: “government is no longer interested in taking care of its citizens but wants him/her to act as a free subject who self-actualizes and relies on autonomous action to confront globalized insecurities” (Ong 2006: 501).

One technique to achieve this shift is to dismantle the public and vastly expand the sphere of the private. In this remaking, that is, in the process of vastly expanding the private, the public as a realm of collectivist struggles and as a collective identity where political demands are articulated and fought for was disintegrated and left to economized and individualized commitments:

“The neo-liberal strategy has been consistently hostile to the public realm. Its distinctive combination of anti-welfarism and anti-statism means that it has sought to dismantle welfare states, and the social, political, economic and organizational settlements that sustained them (Clarke and Newman 1997). Neoliberalism has challenged conceptions of the public interest, striving to replace them by the rule of private interests, co-

ordinated by markets. (...) It has disintegrated conceptions of the public as a collective identity, attempting to substitute individualized and economized identities as taxpayers and consumers” (Clarke 2004: 30-31).

This double process of dissolving the public and expanding the private/personal is achieved by a “double privatization” in the remaking of the public realm: the first concerns a shift between sectors, the second, a shift between spheres. The first privatization pertains to “the shift of activities, resources and provision of goods and services to the private sector” (Clarke 2004:32). This process was most blatantly seen in the shrinking public services and infrastructures in care work. When public provisions, including but not limited to daycare, early childhood education, and elderly care, are transferred to private sector, their cost is burdened on individuals, disproportionately to women (Brown 2015:105). The second form of privatization is “the shift of social responsibilities from the public sphere (where they formed part of the business of government) to the private sphere (where they become matters of individual, families and households)” (Clarke 2004: 32-33; also see Brown 2019) Various crises intrinsic to neoliberalism were tried to be solved in the private realm, more specifically in the realm of family and community with an attempt to de-politicize such crises as natural processes. Both forms, on the other hand, entail responsabilization of subjects (Brown 2015). Confronting “globalized insecurities” required people to embrace, develop or invest in neoliberal values such as “flexibility, mobility and entrepreneurialism” (Ong 2006) and urge them to be self-enterprising subjects who can deal with risks and uncertainties (Ong 2006) and enhance their competitive positioning in the society by investing in their human capital (Brown 2015).

Political and socio-economic crises were steered either towards the private sector or towards families or communities as the right (if not the sole) place to solve problems. In a sense, problems emanating from global political processes are *depoliticized*. That is, possibility of a political contestation is denied, or political conflicts are defused in or translated into other

realms, although only in an unfinished and highly contested fashion. If one aspect of depoliticization is framing political problems in economic terms, in other words, economizing them in accordance with market values (Brown 2015) and cost-benefit calculations (Clarke 2004), another aspect of it is to make them intelligible as “ethical problems” and delegating them to “community” (Rose 2000). Thus, the neoliberal project brings about not only so-called *amoral* economic consequences; it is in and of itself a *moral* project aiming at unleashing markets and morals to govern and discipline individuals (Brown 2019). So much so that, neoliberal reason, Wendy Brown (2019:11, emphasis original) contends, “casts markets *and* morals as singular forms of human need provision sharing ontological principles and dynamics.” Morality, in this respect, is neither a compulsory addendum to nor in opposition with markets; it is integral to the market orders (Muehlebach 2012). Nor does morality function as “heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions” as in Marx’s (Marx 1844/1971) famous dictum on religion. It is a constitutive part of the architecture of neoliberal subjectivity through which meaning-making processes are altered.

The ways in which crises or globalized inequalities are made intelligible and addressed are fundamentally transformed by the neoliberal strategy: they are economized, familialized (or designated to the personal/private sphere), moralized, and, I will add, humanitarianized. For instance, Heath Cabot traces how, in Greece, as a result of two overlapping “crises” -economic and refugee- “survival strategies and dominant notions of both deservingness and entitlement” “become increasingly codified through humanitarian logics and sentiments” (Cabot 2019: 705). Subjects attending and responding to the crises or subjects who are constituted through such crises change, too. It must be noted, however, once the crises abound, neoliberal and communitarian way of solving the crisis was necessarily brought to the fore, more precisely, to the public sphere. But the public here is no longer the same public that was enabling of articulating and circulating collective needs and rights claims of the citizen body. The new

public is rather enabling of and subservient to the private protected sphere (J. Clarke 2004b; 2005; Brown 2019). “The ethic governing the public life is not concerned with the equality among classes or the redistribution of wealth, but with the mobilization of affectively laboring individuals” (Muehlebach 2012: 44). But this does not mean, the public was fully and irreversibly depoliticized and subordinated to the needs of the market, it means the question as to which actors count in the public becomes all the more contentious in the face of concurrent disintegration and proliferation of the public(s). In many crises, voluntary third sector which had long been seen as consisting of the private affairs of certain individuals become the dominant way of being visible in the public realm, rendering communitarian, charitable and humanitarian relations public intervention to societal crises. With it, voluntary third sector, humanitarian communities or religious charity groups become prominent public actors who are ready, equipped, and willing to address *public* crises.

These developments, the domination of markets and morals in making sense of and addressing political processes, have altered the way politics is understood and conducted. Politics becomes concerned less with “maximizing the health and welfare of the population”, that is with biopolitics, and more with working “the techniques of responsible self-government and the management of one’s obligation to others”, hence, with what Nikolas Rose termed *ethopolitics* (Rose 2000:1399). Ethopolitics, the conflation of ethics and politics, working through the values, beliefs, and sentiments, simultaneously acts upon and relies on “individual responsibility” and “community”. (Rose 2000). This pair is important for it theoretically does justice to the twin process of construction of subjectivity in neoliberalism: a particular kind of ethical subject that attends to acts of care of the self (in the Foucauldian sense) and acts of care for others (Muehlebach 2012). For Aihwa Ong, (2006: 502) for example, the way the two formations come together is seen clearly in the East and Southeast Asian settings where “neoliberal ethics of self-responsible citizenship” is integral to citizenship obligations, that is,

to build the nation and to establish national solidarity. Hence, citizens in neoliberalism are subjected to four intersecting processes: they are activated, empowered, responsibilized and abandoned (Clarke 2005).

As the state vacates the areas of public provision such as education, healthcare, child and elderly care, etc. care work -intensely gendered and racialized- became the main domain where solidarity among people is enacted *qua* citizenship. Establishing solidarity is burdened on the citizen body in which everyone is held responsible not only for the care of themselves individually but also of their families, communities, and ultimately their nation. In neoliberal era, the space of government shifted from the national space towards particular collectivities (communities) “to which each person is bound by kinship, religion, residence, shared plight and/or moral affinity” (Rose 1999:335). Although I agree that “government through community” has been a defining feature in contemporary societies, citizenship, performed in and acted upon communities, could not be rendered as isolated in and retreated to specific collectivities. Attributes of citizenship are still capable of defining hegemonic forms of modalities of belonging and this is an inherently political process taking place through the contestation of multiple publics. Attributes of citizenship, as I reiterated a couple of times, are repeatedly asserted and attained by performances in communities that lay claim to define the boundaries of the public. These performances are informed by ideological, socio-economic, historical and cultural processes. The reason why mutual care, charity and humanitarianism have become the defining features of good citizenship and desirable public lies in the transfer of public provision to private individuals, families and communities. On the other hand, these acts of mutual care and charity are not performed in a vacuum; they are suffused with, conditioned and mobilized by other definitive axes depending on the context they unfold.

In many Western contexts, particularly in the US, neoliberal morality reinserted God, family and nation (Muehlebach 2012; Brown 2019) into the subjectification and citizenship making processes. The trio as the ideological underpinnings of neoliberalism in the US justified, for many, the anti-immigrant politics, Islamophobia, and assaults on social movements based on gender, race, class, and sexuality. Religion, family and nation are marked by “hierarchy, exclusion, homogeneity, faith, loyalty and authority” (Brown 2019:101) and derive their legitimacy as public values not through democratic processes of diversity, openness and equality but by imposing an ethos, a moral order that demands citizenship to fit in this moral order. In Greece, on the other hand, the differentiation between the “citizen” and the “alien”, constitutive of modern politics, become blurred once citizens as the victims of dispossession and refugees as victims of forced displacement started “inhabiting a shared ‘precarity continuum’” that is responded by “further encroachment of humanitarian logics into terrain of rights” (Cabot 2019).

In Turkey, on the other hand, the process of humanitarianization (as Heath Cabot argues) and popular authoritarianization (as Wendy Brown argues) occur concurrently in the process of changing citizenship and the public realm. Based on the interactions of the processes I conveyed above with historical political contestations embedded in citizenship in Turkey, moral citizenship acquired features that are selectively humanitarian and politically exclusionary. The contestations between the conception of Republican (Westernized) citizenship with other counterpublics seem to have been resolved in favor of Islamist conception of citizenship grounded on the narrative of “genuine nationhood” that is non-Western, Turkish and Muslim at the same time. However, the resolution of this historically longest lasting contestation did not lead to a public sphere that is inclusive, democratic and egalitarian. It birthed new contestations which cannot be reduced to secular vs. Islamic

polarizations, it also constructed new subjectivities that lay claim to nationhood on the basis of being Muslim, patriotic, moral, and humanitarian at the same time.

In Turkey, humanitarianization of the public sphere, that is, emerging of humanitarian relations as solutions to public problems came to the fore in the 1980s with the transformation of the welfare regime but became particularly discernible post 2002, during the AKP government. Shrinking welfare state and weakening welfare safeguarding (which had already been pretty limited historically, see Buğra and Keyder 2006; Bugra 2007) was substituted with expanding social assistance as well as promotion of humanitarian relations to the disadvantaged populations. However, the humanitarianization of the welfare regime in Turkey coincided not only with the burgeoning neoliberalism but also other political processes, namely, the rise of political Islam to the power and the accompanying populism. Humanitarian relations (as well as charity) stood out not only as the driving force out of the crises of market economy in Turkey in the 1990s and early 2000s, it, bearing Islamic connotations, could also be easily integrated into the new public/private demarcation through newly hegemonic discourses which define the essential traits of Turkishness, nationhood and of deserving citizenship. Thus, humanitarianism, outgrowing the private realm, has been one of the primary relations through which neoliberal economy, political Islam, and (nationalist-Islamist) populist politics intertwined.

Changing public realm redefined the subjectivities acting within and/or upon it. Citizenship, the actions of which have long been attributed to the public sphere, also changed with the redefinition of the public via the intertwinement of humanitarianism as a way of addressing public problems with populist politics through which Islamism and nationalism are combined. The most striking aspect of this new configuration is, as the opening pages of the chapter show, selective welcoming of Syrian refugees while some groups holding citizenship are resolutely,

and at times aggressively, excluded from citizenship and the public. Humanitarian attitudes towards Syrian refugees, on the other hand, have become the way Islamic communities take care of themselves, others, and their (imagined) nation. The next section delves into this puzzle based on historical and ethnographic accounts of how citizenship has unfolded in Turkey and how it has been mobilized by humanitarianism to refugees, the ultimate other of the nation-states.

A brief review of how citizenship (and relevant debates) unfolded in Turkey

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed that in the early Republican era, Turkish citizenship unfolded through a binary construction (if not hostility) between those who embraced a Western and secular life and politics and those who did not. The boundary between the two, of course, was a cultural construct created based on a certain understanding of what Turkish nation would be, what “the West” means, and where Turkish nation should be located in the broader global politics. The founding cadres are argued to have worked hard to ensure the assimilation of as big part of the society as they could via pedagogical interventions, secularizing and Westernizing reforms, and -in some cases- via active exclusion and marginalization of those who were supposedly incapacitated to become a “citizen” as desired.

The narrative above is largely accepted among social scientists and politicians in Turkey. In fact, this was postulated as the constitutive conflict (if not the contradiction) of the country and was pragmatically used at times to claim authority or cultural power over other groups. It was almost hastily dubbed as “center vs. periphery” populated by the military-bureaucratic Westernized elite and the society that has for centuries developed an organic identity through Islam, respectively. According to this hegemonic narrative, the conflict between the Westernized and Westernizing elite and the masses who resist Westernization by embracing

the “genuine” features of the society -Islam- started in the late Ottoman period and lingered well into the Republic of Turkey. Since Westernization/modernization paradigm was brought to the society not “organically” but dauntingly by an imposing, overbearing elite which took hold the power of the state (and state apparatuses), modernization processes failed in the society and people reacted it and further embraced their “genuine” identities. This conflict, in turn, created a cleavage, and contradistinction between the state and the society, leading to an ever-growing democratic deficit in the country. The democratic deficit, it was argued, could only be closed when the organic forces of the society can become “the center” (Mardin 1973; 1991; Göle 1997).

This narrative captures a partial, if not essentialized, construction of the citizen figure in Turkey. First of all, it reduces the distinctions between the two so-called poles into cultural differences where one party adopts and imposes Westernization by state apparatuses while the other resists it through other cultural belongings they cling on to, most particularly, the religion. Therefore, it overlooks other struggles, namely class and gender struggles, in the construction of the citizen figure and the public. Secondly, this account reproduces what it seemingly opposes: it attributes unchanging and passive features to “the periphery” in that how subjectivities are produced dialectically and dialogically is neglected if not totally erased. The periphery, in this conception, does not change its relation to its own realities (drastically changing due to capitalist integration of modernization in Turkey); their subjectivities are somehow essentialized through the narrative of genuine nationhood as opposed to “West-mimicking elite”; and their political and social positionings are defined as a reaction, or at best indifference, to pedagogical techniques designed to inculcate modern citizens and to modernizing powers of nation-state as well as capital. This framework, however, cannot explain how, after the 1980s the understanding of citizenship changed in Turkey nor, for that matter, how Islamist movement accomplished to redraw the boundaries of citizenship.

Centralized pedagogical interventions were undoubtedly critical governmental activity to incorporate bodily discipline, work ethic, and patriotism in Turkey. Füsün Üstel's (2004) seminal book "*Makbul Vatandaş'ın Peşinde: II. Meşrutiyet'ten Bugüne Vatandaşlık Eğitimi* (In Search of the "Desirable Citizen": Citizenship Education from the Second Constitutional Period to Date) brilliantly traces the official curriculum for citizenship education and attempts to produce the citizen figure at the intersection of three axes: body, mind, and soul. These pedagogical interventions -part and parcel of the nation building as a global process- worked to inculcate self-discipline and self-formation within the citizen body so that the citizens could eventually accomplish political subjectivity as desired (Üstel 2004; Üstel 2002: 277). In doing so, the state determined the boundaries of the public as broadly as possible so as to determine the codes not only of collective life of a citizen body but also of the personal/private life in accordance with the presumably Western codes. Pedagogical interventions, so to speak, worked to close the temporal gap between the citizen and the political subject in a late modernizing society, in other words, between Turkey and the civilized nations (taken as "the West").

However, if, as Üstel (2002:276) argues, the desirable citizen is formed through simultaneous inculcation of *civilité* (being civilized) and *civisme* (patriotism), these two aspects work differently, sometimes in contradistinction to each other. While civility aspect is related to cultivate a citizen body that can represent the nation as "civilized" and "Westernized", the patriotic aspect worked to inculcate a "militant citizen" for whom political (and other) belongings are defined solely with reference to belonging to the patria, the nation. This militant citizenship is built upon three main blocs: "1) patriotism, 2) citizenship rights and obligations; 3) the theme of danger and enemy" (Üstel 2002: 277). All these blocs have transformed in time and with changing ideological formations and distribution of power in the definition of citizenship. However, in a more abstract level, they are somehow persistent in contouring the

code of citizenship. The first one pertains to how loyalty to patria is delimited: for Üstel (2002), it is rather expansive in that it refers not only to the territorial borders of the country but also to cultural and ethnic boundaries. Examining the constitutional texts, Mesut Yeğen (Yeğen 2004) argues that, albeit ambiguously based on principles of secularism and civic nationalism, Turkish ethnicity has always already been at the center of formation of citizenship. To add Yeğen's account, and as I have shown in the previous chapters, Sunni Muslimhood was interwoven with Turkish ethnicity, together making up the core of citizenship.

The second bloc, citizenship rights and obligations, is established through the primacy of obligations over citizenship rights. In fact, the citizen in this conception is one who is encumbered with obligations so much so that citizenship rights matter insofar as they are enabling for the fulfillment of duties. Scholars argued that in the historical unfolding of citizenship first in the late Ottoman period and, later, in the Republic of Turkey duties have always assumed priority over rights (Gülalp 2018; Yeğen 2004; Üstel 2002). In fact, political participation, recognized as the primary political right, was effectively and strategically reduced to duty to vote, and was framed as a citizenship obligation for all members of the nation (Üstel 2002). Of course, configurations of rights and obligations have changed in the course of time in response to and with the effect of changing conjunctures as well as social struggles such as women's movement in the late Ottoman and early Republican era for civil and political rights (Kandiyoti 1996) and workers' struggles in the 1960s and 1970s for the betterment of welfare rights (Buğra and Savaşkan 2014). However, what has arguably remained unchanged and has made an even stronger comeback following the coup attempt in 2016 as the cardinal obligation is to be on full alert all the time, that is, the duty to protect the state against internal and external enemies (Yılmaz 2018; Çapan and Zarakol 2019).

Finally, the third one is development of a mindset which is organized and mobilized around an “other” in a way to inculcate a militant and alert citizen body. Of course, the “other” changes over time with the changing ideological configurations. Although all three of these blocs are intertwined and interdependent, the understanding of the “other” as danger and threat is usually what animates patriotism as well as citizenship obligations. The contradistinction between the civilized and patriotic aspects of citizenship lies in this conception of the other and it is what creates the ambivalent relationship of Turkish citizenship with its past, with the West, and with the perceived enemies internally and externally. While in the civility aspect, the West appeared as the “political future” that need to be caught up (Ahiska 2003), in the patriotic aspect, “the West” appeared as the historical enemy, the invader imperialist group of states that requires caution and alertness. In contradiction to pedagogical interventions to render Turkish nation Westernized to close the temporal gap –the time lag between the time of civilization (the West) and the time of the Republic of Turkey– the postulation of the West as an enemy reiterated the spatial distance between the West and Turkey. A similar contradiction can be found in the understanding of Islam: while in the civility aspect it is seen as the reasons of backwardness that needs to be moved past through secular reformation; in the patriotic aspect Islam is regarded as one of the main pillars to define cultural and ethnic boundaries that are - presumably- almost always under threat.

“Democracy festivals” which were organized to show the unity of the nation against perceived “enemies” was an interesting case in point. Erdoğan’s virtual *Facetime* call for taking to the streets, squares and airports to protect the nation and the country (see above) was an appeal to the century-long nationalist organization to mobilize the citizen body in the face of a threat. The primary threat, however, was once an AKP-ally Islamist group which had a wide network of organization all around the country. People were implicitly asked to organize against their neighbors, friends, against people who once might have relations. As the coup was safely

avoided, the boundaries of the “threat” was expanded to cover vaguely defined “enemies of the country” which was capable of vilifying various groups that did not fit in the newly bounded public and citizenship. The duty to protect nation against a vaguely defined set of enemies created a securitized and mistrustful environment in the country but also revived the “militant” citizen subjectivity who is ready to act in the face of a crisis or a threat. It, however, cannot be read as a direct continuation of the Republican conception of citizenship. The call for upholding citizenship duties came when the ideological construction of the citizenship and the public has already changed. Similar to the developments that I have outlined above with respect to neoliberalism, in Turkey as well the citizenship has already been framed under a communitarian logic through which care for the self, for the others and for the nation, i.e. ‘duties’ and ‘obligations’ took precedence over citizenship rights and entitlements. At the same time, the communitarian logic was made sense of through references to Islam as the main civilization that defines Turkishness.

Hinged on delineation and targeting of internal and external enemies of the state, “militant” citizenship operates on a securitizing and communitarian logic at the same time. It is securitizing because certain groups of people (internally, those whose civil and political rights have been denied historically; externally, those who have been cast as the ‘eternal enemies’ of the nation such as Greeks, Armenians, and the West, in general) are easily cast as threat at best to the public order and at worst to national security (Canefe and Bora 2003; Yilmaz 2017; Yilmaz 2018). On the other hand, it is communitarian because, besides the formal citizenship as membership to a territorially bounded polity, it divides the body of (formal) citizens on the basis of loyalty to and caring of the nation and the state. Thus, it works as a frontier internally and externally, forming communities of loyalty or of genuine nationhood while denying membership to others. These processes, of course, are not only top-down impositions by those who take hold of governmental power upon those who are bereft of it. As I quoted above, David

Burchell (1995) argues that citizenship needs to be seen as “a social creation, as an historical persona, whose characteristics have been developed in particular times and places through the activities of social discipline, both externally on the part of the governments and internally, by techniques of self-discipline and self-formation.” Communities develop and sustain their own understanding of nationhood through everyday practices. Paradoxically, though, drawing on changing configurations of power, communities –parts in the whole that is imagined to be the nation– lay claim to nationhood, to be *the* citizen body that defines the nation. Thus, certain performances of citizenship, for instance performing citizenship through caring for themselves and for the others, come to define the very essence of citizenship and is being preached.

Although it is most of the time not openly discussed, Islamic humanitarian groups in Denizli implicitly assumed positions laying claim to the performances and essence of citizenship and nationhood in Turkey. Their position was conforming to the newly drawn boundaries of the public and citizenship. They were taking active part to protect their country against the imminent threats but they were also acting within the confines of decades-long Islamic humanitarian framework. Humanitarianism had appeared to be one of the main pillars of the essence of citizenship for many reasons: it is religiously grounded; merges morality with enactments of citizenship through mobilization of sentiments to care for the self and the others; it is communitarian in that it creates communities (of aid-giver and aid-receiver) of durable, meaningful relationships from which moral codes and guidelines can be drawn; and thus it helps to produce active, responsabilized, and heartfelt subjects through humanitarian communities. However, merged with historical unfolding of “militant citizenship” humanitarianism was also significant in laying claims to the well-being of the country, investing in spiritual and religious protection of the country that God would salvage (see Zeynep’s story above), and more importantly, humanitarianism worked as a force for

inculcating and mobilization of benevolent citizens who would be aware of the threats but also carrier of the moral values embedded in Islamic humanitarianism.

Negotiating inclusion and exclusion

Throughout my residence in Denizli, my position was constantly negotiated by the humanitarians in different ways. Sometimes, they preferred to see me as a journalist doing research on their benevolent works, other times I was treated as a consultant on how they ought to organize their work, reach out to the broader public outside Denizli, and how to use social media more effectively. My general feeling was that they could not really locate me any previously known position: I was not from Denizli and despite my familial ties I was not planning to root myself there, my appearance was definitely not fitting that of a Muslim person, and I was not following any of the Islamic duties such as fasting and praying. Yet, I was there, establishing a relationship with them and curious about their activities, their everyday, their ideas not only about humanitarian aid and charity but also their views on virtually every social and political issue. For many, the way out of this ambivalence was to treat me as a “novice”, as someone who needed teaching of the basics of religion and humanitarian work. However, as I recounted in the earlier pages, I was there during the state of emergency when relations, of especially political in nature, were stranded and imbued with suspicion and I was not exempt from this context. Establishing new relations with Islamic humanitarian groups was, as required by the highly securitized context, raising suspicion and, as an outsider, I was having my fair share of these suspicions. So many times, I had to walk through long minutes of inquiries about who I was, had to answer countless questions one after another to prove that I was, first, familiar with Denizli and sharing with them a “*memleket*” (hometown) belongingness and, second, trustworthy.

Although I attributed this endeavor to negotiate my position to the tense post-coup environment, I always appreciated their welcoming attitude, either as a “novice” to be trained or as a “journalist” who would convey their good deeds to the rest of the country. Receiving phone calls from people I worked with in Denizli was not a surprising event in and of itself since they would every now and then call me to invite me over for aid activities or let me know about their social gatherings or when a guest speaker from Istanbul was about to come and give a talk. When Kemal called me that day, I thought there was an event of some sort. But Kemal had called me to give me some good news. An UN-supported NGO named International Middle East Peace Research Center (IMPR Humanitarian) had found his NGO and asked for collaboration for a project IMPR was going to conduct in Denizli. It was good news for various reasons, he and his friends had founded an NGO in 2013, which I will call Civilization Association, was relatively young compared to all other associations occupying the humanitarian field for decades and yet they had managed to make a name and was gradually getting reputation across the country. But it was also good news for the city, as Denizli was hardly able to draw the attention of national and international humanitarian organizations, let alone their funding. Despite hosting tens of thousands of refugees, Denizli was neglected by the authorities of the humanitarian sector, leaving all the responsibility to local people. Therefore, the timely and much-needed the call from the IMPR for collaboration might indicate a change and lead to the flourishing of aid and civil society both for locals and for refugees.

Kemal’s excitement for collaboration with an NGO with national and transnational reputation was also partly related to his perception of Denizli as provincial and backward in many respects, primarily civil society. He was annoyed that despite such wealth and economic development –Denizli is the tenth richest and one of the most industrialized cities in the country– certain things were as they had been forty years ago and had to be transformed. Kemal, an admired lawyer and a well-known philanthropist, was comparing Denizli, his

hometown, to bigger cities, particularly Istanbul. He had studied law in Istanbul where he was active in the Islamist movement in the 1980s and 1990s. Besides the political activism, he was in his university years was active in the literary circles which at the time had blossomed in the Islamist circles. He saw himself more as a poet than a lawyer and he assumed the role of a mentor to the Muslim youth in Denizli. He was working to import what he saw and experienced in Istanbul to Denizli, particularly in terms of civil society structure because he believed that associations and foundations were the main loci of cultivating pious, responsible, caring people and they had been long neglected in the excessive focus on political gains. His critique was directed towards the current Islamist politics in which he was still a part, but he believed that he could contribute from different angles. That's why he was not officially affiliated to AKP but was acting as a caring elder brother mentoring youth. In fact, his office, at a very central location, was a makeshift headquarter for various civil society purposes. It was sometimes the meeting spot for the literarily curious members of AKP youth section, at other times it was used as the headquarter of the Civilization Association, yet other times he would his hosts from Istanbul circles to give a speech in Denizli.

He was trying his best to inculcate a vibrant civil society scene, sometimes without getting any recognition. Their self-assigned provincialization and worthlessness, in a sense, was vindicated by the neglect of Denizli by national and transnational civil society even in such severe conditions where so many people needed assistance. Now, this was to be reversed by IMPR's presence in the city. Also, IMPR founders were well-known conservative people in the Islamic circles, therefore, the nature of their collaboration was to be consistent with the Civilization Association's principles. What he wanted from me was to be present in meetings with IMPR and give them some ideas about what could have been done in Denizli, particularly regarding Syrian refugees as it was the main field of operation of IMPR.

After our conversation on the phone, I promised to stop by at his office to discuss their collaboration further. In the meantime, however, IMPR was shut down by a presidential decree (Kanun Hükmünde Kararname) which had become the main legislative tool to bypass government and deploy authoritarian measures during the state of emergency that lasted between July 2016 and July 2018. When I arrived Kemal's office a couple of days later, he was unaware of the presidential decree and was still excited about the future projects. I had to break the bad news and tell him what happened in the last couple of days. His first reaction was disbelief, he felt the urge to confirm and ran to his computer. After some research he saw that the association was shut down on the grounds of connection to the organization responsible for the coup attempt. Its founders had left the country and some officers were under investigation. At first, he was shocked and started calling people to tell what happened. At the first phone call, which was seemingly more heated, Kemal scolded the person at the other end of the phone, who I think was the middle person between the Civilization Association and IMPR. Kemal said things like "Are you aware of the position you put us into? How do you not know that they were FETÖ [the state-given label to the Gülenist movement after the coup attempt]?" After he hung up the phone, he started calling other people. He said more or less the same thing to all of them, with a commanding voice: "we should be more careful about with whom we'll work. We cannot afford such a mistake. It does not matter how big they are [referring to IMPR], we will do our own research from now on." turned to me somehow agitated and asked how I knew. I knew only because of the news although he looked ready to be suspicious of me. After he calmed himself down, he started sharing his distress with me because of all the things such a collaboration could have costed him.

He was visibly upset but also somehow relieved that this news broke before their collaboration started, otherwise he and his association would be implicated in the alleged crimes, and it would have been a disaster for them, particularly for Kemal who had earned his political reputation

in the city through his long involvement in the Islamist movement as an activist and a human rights lawyer who stood against all forms of coup d'état, but most particularly the February 28 and July 15. He was one of the intervening lawyers in the lawsuit against the military for February 28 post-modern coup, and he could not afford to be suspected of coup d'état attempt. He was on the streets throughout Democracy Festivals, not only participating but also organizing other people to participate. He could also not risk being vilified in the Islamist circles as the religious group held responsible for coup d'état attempt had already been criminalized and labelled as “terrorist” by the ruling party.

This cycle of suspicion and inclusion continued throughout the fieldwork, but I think it was also telling about how Islamic humanitarians in Denizli negotiated their position as citizens and public figures as much as my presence there. One day, however, Selime's reaction to my presence made me think that the differentiation she postulated between me and herself (and the rest of the Islamic humanitarian community present) was more rigid and more deep-rooted. I was attending one of the rare mixed gender meetings of her organization in which they were going to plan *Eid al-Adha* (Sacrifice Holiday) activities. The entire team of Denizli volunteers were in the organization headquarter. We were sitting around the table; I was next to volunteer women and Selime, and we were chatting. Then, the meeting started and the head of the NGO, Adem, introduced me to everyone. He wanted me to give more details about what I was doing in Denizli. I did what he asked, thanked everyone to welcome me in their meeting and their organizations and sat down. Adem continued talking and telling everyone that their organization was open to everyone who wanted to be part of it. For him, “this was required by their belief and by the benevolent work, no one could be turned down much less those who uttered their willingness to be there.” I was familiar with these conversations as they were widely shared among the Islamic humanitarian organizations: being open to everyone who shared their willingness to take part in good deeds was part of their duties –to spread

benevolence to everyone. Adem then turned to Selime and asked, “Don’t you think, Selime *Hocam* (teacher, mentor)?” She said with a rigid yet almost indifferent tone, “of course, as long as they are *ehl-i sünnet*”.

“*Ehl-i Sünnet*” literally means the followers of the Sunna sect – with Shia, one of the two major sects in Islam. In Turkey, a Sunni-majority country, it is used as a proxy to “Muslim” in a way to disregard the existence of other sects –not to mention other religions, or no religion at all– in a society that is anyway irrevocably Muslim. Her reaction was unexpected for me because it was an in-house meeting where only members and volunteers of the organization could attend. Why would she need to reiterate something that was practically known to everyone in the meeting. I did not know, and still do not know to this day, if she was addressing me and expecting me to confirm that I was “*ehl-i sunnet*” or articulating her views in general. Also, she was putting a reservation to Adem’s “everyone” which had historically and politically never been “everyone” but was still used to connote the inclusiveness of benevolence not only for aid-receivers but also for aid-givers. Selime’s response somehow located me at a liminal place or somewhat hinted at how a lot of humanitarians might be negotiating my presence: I had attended their non-public, exclusive meeting upon their invitation and yet I was still suspected and might not be allowed in the realm of benevolence that was reserved for *ehl-i sünnet*.

Her remarks had (intentionally or not) drawn a boundary to whom would be allowed in the realm of benevolence. There was, however, more to what is included in this bounded realm of Islamic benevolence. This realm had been constituted hand in hand with the rise of Islamist political movement in Turkey (see Chapter 2) and it was a hard-earned public position for Islamic humanitarians as it was historically intertwined with their political activism. Humanitarian aid, an integral part of their public and political position and position as citizens,

was also to be protected, especially in the post-July 15 environment. They had showed their commitment to democratically elected government through participating in “Democracy Festivals”, but it needed to be continuously sustained and performed, and integrating “claims to protect the country” into the humanitarian work (see Zeynep’s quote above), to my mind, became conducive to performing militant citizenship within already humanitarianized aspect of citizenship.

The propagated inclusiveness of humanitarian work in Adem’s words was in an evident clash between the need to be attentive of the visible and invisible threats which was translated in Selime’s words into those who were not “*ehl-i sünnet*”. Nonetheless, humanitarians were still extending their moral community to the so-called ultimate outsiders of the nation-state not only through aid but also through inclusion in the demonstration of national unity which was under threat. This contradiction is perhaps best seen in humanitarian projects to which both the government and civil society showed commitment, especially in relation to Syrian refugees in Turkey. Discussing the plight of Syrian refugees and addressing their needs offer important moments to think about humanitarian activities, empathizing with the suffering other, discussing Turkey’s involvement in an internationalized turmoil, and the roles and obligations encumbered on Turkish citizens relating to Syrian refugees through humanitarian efforts. As I mentioned in Zeynep’s story, humanitarians in Islamic networks in Denizli regarded their charitable practices to Syrian refugees as a national duty. What recurrently caught my attention is the double motivation behind the charitable practices addressing refugees. Humanitarian work is undertaken because it is incumbent upon every Muslim who can afford charity. At the same time, humanitarian practices should be engaged because the Turkish state opened the doors for refugees, and it is the nation’s proud duty to provide care for them.

This is somehow interesting way of enacting contemporary citizenship. As I discussed above, once the moral aspect of neoliberalism reinstated “God, family, and nation” as the basis of communities of care and solidarity, the boundaries of citizenship were drawn with even bolder alertness towards those who are “alien” to the imagined unity of the nation. Anti-immigration, in many Western countries, ascended to the center of political agenda, refugees and migrants being the ultimate other within the nation-states. In Turkey, on the other hand, at both the state and the (hegemonic) public level, Syrian refugees were seemingly welcomed with humanitarian sentiments, to the extent that it turned into a spectacle of humanitarianism and hospitality. Humanitarian sentiments and hospitality came to designate the deep-rooted values of Turkishness at the heart of which lies moral sentiments. What is rendered invisible behind that spectacle is still open to discussion, but it seemed to me after my encounters that Islamic humanitarian values could be mobilized as the foundation of citizenship and public which have long been moralized and taken a communitarian character.

Conclusion

This thesis started not only out of an academic curiosity about humanitarianism and mobility it was also but also as a venture through which to question the current political affairs in contemporary Turkey. The questioning started with my confusion with the co-existence of religious compassion and violence – both at the discursive and at the practical levels. In September 2015, when I started this project, Turkey was undergoing a violent urban warfare in the Kurdish-majority provinces, civilians were killed, city centers were bombed causing forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of Kurdish people, security measures were extremely intensified across the country, and calling for peace was effectively criminalized.⁶¹ On the one hand, a section of society –and not only people who are affiliated to the Kurdish movement– was violently criminalized and their existence was securitized, on the other hand, Islamic discourses of solidarity and humanitarian benevolence were flourishing, and Syrian refugees were incorporated into these discourses.

Instead of rejecting Islamic humanitarianism as a rhetoric or a way of masquerading what is “in essence” violent, exclusionary, and oppressive, I set out to take seriously their possibility of coexistence and the repercussions of it. Hence the question: What could it mean to have these parallel practices of compassion and oppression, welcoming some and forcibly displacing others, helping some to build new lives and actively dismantling the social lives of others? When I first shared how puzzled I was about this dual practice, a professor of mine had told me there was nothing to be surprised: in Turkey, he argued, some peoples (the ones that were subjected to the oppressive face of the state policies) were securitized while others (those who were facing the compassionate face of the state policies) were not.

⁶¹ Mandracı, Berkay (October 22, 2019) “Assessing the Fatalities in Turkey’s PKK Conflict”. *International Crisis Group*. Available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/assessing-fatalities-turkeys-pkk-conflict>

However, could these –at times unruly– coexistences be easily separated as applying to definitively distinct groups? Was religiously informed care and compassion the only way through which to understand the presence of Syrian refugees in Turkey – were there other modes of relations and other forms of inclusion? Could it be possible that a group of refugees, constructed as the ultimate other in the national order of things, were not securitized *at all*? If not, then, what did the presence of Syrian refugees who were offered hospitality by the government and pro-government populations mean in this contradictory political present? How, under what conditions, through which discursive and material practices, with what exceptions were they incorporated into the language of Islamic humanitarianism?

I think, what the professor of mine was telling me was that the actual differentiation lied in *religious* commonality between the Syrian refugees to whom the government was showing the compassionate face. Religion was obviously important as an epistemic filter to delineate devoted Muslims from non-Muslims or seculars and a moral framework to act from within. But was it the only distinction drawn between the compassion and oppression, or to put it differently, was shared religion sufficient to definitively unravel the potential entanglements of compassion and oppression, care and violence, inclusion and exclusion?

Starting from 2015, welcoming discourses of Islamic humanitarianism were more and more entangled with restrictive measures aiming at regulating but also stopping migrant mobilities. Moreover, the other aspects of Syrian refugees' lives did not necessarily improve as they were incorporated into cheap and exploitative labor relations, denied a permanent status in Turkey, and were consigned to the humanitarian care in a way to constrain their subsistence to “basic needs” the determination of which was also stripped from the very subjects of the aid. With the Turkey-EU Readmission Agreement in March 2016, the restrictions on refugee mobility increased every other year yet Islamic humanitarian discourses did not cease.

It is against this background these questions I posed above gained importance for me. Also, these questions were directing me towards a new way of seeing the contemporary politics in Turkey. As opposed to a general idea which sees humanitarianism –faith-based or not– as having a limited relation to what we call “the political”, I looked at how central Islamic humanitarianism has been in the present-day realm of the political. It was, as I see and discuss it, also somewhat different from the widespread critical take on humanitarianism as “depoliticizing”. The political nature of Islamic humanitarianism was manifest in its capacity to differently “problematize” inherently politicized social issues, most particularly displacement and impoverishment. The way they were problematized by Islamic humanitarian framework, however, was not completely depoliticizing. They were situated in alternative (Islamist) historiographies and culturalist discourses in a way to produce politicized subjectivities to (differently) politicized problems. Impoverishment was attributed to the culturalist binary between Kemalist secular elite and Muslim masses – the latter being denied the existing socio-economic and cultural advantages and privileges by the former. On the other hand, displacement (almost exclusively Syrian migration) was reconceptualized as the forced displacement of Muslim masses “fleeing *religious* persecution”. Hence, I set out to delve into the historical and political conditions of possibility of the centrality of Islamic humanitarianism in Turkey (Chapter 2).

The main point of contention and contradiction for me was not only the coexistence of oppression and compassion for distinctly situated populations. It was also the tension between the nation-state centric constructions of the figure of the refugee and Islamic humanitarian framework of the figure of the refugee. Whether and how the two could be embodied by the same group of people and how it could affect the way in which refugees were addressed and related to. I pose the two as a productive tension that allows Islamic humanitarianism becomes a flexible means for subjectivities to assume various and at times contradictory positions. This

is, I think, most manifested in the humanitarian *encounters* between aid-receiver refugees and the aid-giver humanitarians. Therefore, I bring in the ethnographic account of these encounters and look at how relations mediated by Islamic humanitarianism transpire in a given urban locality, Denizli (Chapter 4).

The rest of the thesis delves into different aspects of these *encounters* as well as how they are conditioned, negotiated, and deployed for developing other moral communities. I look at spatial and urban implications of aid (Chapter 3), how (Syrian) refugees are situated in hierarchical relations next to other marginalized populations in Denizli (Chapter 4), how refugee labor is incorporated in the informal and exploitative labor environment of the city (Chapter 5), and finally, how Islamic humanitarianism produces *deserving* citizens who then become part of the restrictive and gradually closing public and citizenship regime (Chapter 6).

In delving into these encounters, I have come to realize that Islamic humanitarianism was an indispensable part of the contemporary government of mobility in Turkey, which is historically based on the intersection of forced mobility, immobilization, and forced settlement (Chapter 1). In this sense, Islamic humanitarianism was working not only to help refugees, but it also involved an aspect of immobilization that goes beyond physical immobilization but encompasses social, economic and political immobilization of refugees. With this thesis then, I brought together discussions on mobility with those of immobilization and laid out various renditions of immobilization that works in much more invisible and subtle ways than halting refugees' mobility at the borders.

Elizabeth Povinelli (2011, 109–10), in her remarkable book *Economies of Abandonment*, states, “(...) critical theorists consider (...) differentially distributed zones of vulnerability and abandonment as spaces in which, at least potentially, a new ethics of life and sociability could emerge.” Quoting Gilles Deleuze, she contends that “the point is not to discover the eternal or the universal, but the condition under which something new is produced” (Deleuze 1983,

quoted in Povinelli 2011: 109). Although it sounds bleak, throughout the thesis, I argued that conditions under which something new to be potentially created have been effectively curbed in Denizli by the urban structure, labor organization, political and ideological constellation of the urban context, and the embeddedness of Islamic humanitarianism at the heart of the city. Islamic humanitarian networks, with their close links to and implicatedness with political and economic relations in the city, have played a major role in this act of curbing.

Of course, what is missing in the thesis is the accounts and experiences of Syrian refugees themselves, who are the firsthand interlocutors of Islamic humanitarianism. The reason behind it is not only the linguistic barrier (the fact that I do not speak Arabic). This is also a methodological choice to delve into Islamic humanitarianism both as a political relation that has power to problematize displacement and impoverishment and as a practice that is offered as a solution to what is postulated as a problem. It is in this respect that I limited my research to Islamic humanitarian networks. That is why, my claim that Islamic humanitarianism works as an immobilizing force refers to a way of thinking and seeing prevalent among Islamic humanitarian networks. Further studies could greatly contribute to how (immobilizing) intersections of the government of mobility and Islamic humanitarianism are perceived, negotiated, challenged, and subverted by refugees (and aid-receivers, in general).

After more than a half-decade, when the thesis was nearing the end, a once-in-a-century global pandemic hit the world. It came in shock waves. Besides the fact that the entire world -literally and figuratively- watched how fast a virus could transgress the borders of continents, countries, cities, neighborhoods, and homes, not moving became the main injunction to follow. Majority of the world's population faced lockdowns, inter-state and inter-city travel restrictions, and recommendations to stay at home. Physical immobilization became the leitmotif of many discussions although only a few of them actually recognized those who were *forced* to move

to their workplaces, in and out of their homes, and out of their countries. The asymmetric nature of mobility was, to almost everyone's surprise, in a sense reversed: the disparity was between those who could stay at home and those who could not.

If nothing else, though, the pandemic in Turkey unleashed a discussion on extreme poverty and wealth disparity and paved the way for communities and acts of mutual aid. Many informal networks mobilized to collect and distribute donations for impoverished households, for refugee communities, for those who do not have access to healthcare and education services. Mobilization of mutual aid, to my mind, came with a certain witnessing: not only of suffering but also the inequality that caused suffering; not only of giving and receiving but also of assisting each other. What was particularly striking though was the government response to such acts. Many non-AKP municipalities launched mutual aid campaigns to assist households that could not pay their rents or bills due to Covid-related layoffs and increasing unemployment. The donations collected by these municipalities were confiscated by the government, donation bank accounts were officially frozen, and municipalities were de facto banned from being part of social/humanitarian assistance and mutual aid relations. Of course, various new ways to avoid such restrictions were found yet the question of who is allowed to give aid and under what conditions –in other words, who is the deserving aid-giver– became an interesting question, still awaiting an answer.

After two years, the pandemic has not ended. Its long-term effects are gradually becoming felt in Turkey. Along with the pandemic, so many people are suffering from Turkey's crushing economy –the Turkish lira at the edge of bankruptcy, unemployment out of control, and impoverishment to unprecedented levels. Although I finished my field research at the end of 2017, I hope that what I have presented throughout the thesis offers a deeper and more historically situated relations and resonates with what is going on today. Nonetheless, with

such drastic changes (a global pandemic and a crushing economic crisis), it remains all the more important to look at whether and how Islamic humanitarian networks which, in the case of Denizli, have limited fundraising capacities relying on local donations, continue their aid-giving activities, and whether and how their relations to Syrian refugees have changed in the face of the dire conditions the humanitarians themselves have been facing.

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