

INVENTED SPACES BEYOND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS:
LIVING TOGETHER WITH SYRIAN REFUGEES
AND PRACTICES OF NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS

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INVENTED SPACES BEYOND LEGAL ARRANGEMENTS:
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AND PRACTICES OF NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Glbeyaz Sert, certify that

- I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have fully acknowledged and documented in my thesis all sources of ideas and words, including digital resources, which have been produced or published by another person or institution;
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ABSTRACT

Invented Spaces Beyond Legal Arrangements: Living Together With Syrian Refugees and Practices of Neighborhood Associations

Refugee incorporation literature tends to concentrate on macro-level indicators of incorporation that is mostly drawn on policy level analysis. On the other hand, refugee incorporation also has a strong societal connotation. Through merging both approaches, this thesis focuses on the local dimensions of Syrians' incorporation process via examining the activities of two neighborhood associations located in the districts of Şişli and Küçükçekmece, in İstanbul, which are, indeed, established against urban transformation. Although the aims of these two associations are quite different than acting within the refugee field, both also provide support for Syrians living in their living space. These associations oppose a top-down model of urban transformation process by demanding their rights to the city, and they try to destabilize exclusionary transformation mechanisms. I find it worth focusing on neighborhood associations that come from a perspective of establishing solidarity relations with Syrians in their own living spaces and to analyze the role of grassroots movements in the incorporation process of Syrian refugees. With this thesis, I address the question of why the native communities in some localities act in solidarity with Syrians, while a significant part of the society is taking an exclusionary stance against refugees. The activities of these associations have the potential to alleviate the deficiencies in the legal regulations the state has implemented so far.

ÖZET

Yasal Düzenlemelerin Ötesinde İcat Edilmiş Alanlar:

Suriyeli Mültecilerle Birlikte Yaşamak ve Mahalle Derneklerinin Pratikleri

Mülteci entegrasyonu literatürü, çoğunlukla politika düzeyinde analizlere dayanan makro-düzeydeki entegrasyon göstergelerine odaklanma eğilimindedir. Öte yandan, mülteci entegrasyonunun güçlü bir toplumsal boyutu da vardır. Bu tez, her iki yaklaşımı birleştirerek, İstanbul'un Şişli ve Küçükçekmece ilçelerinde bulunan ve aslında kentsel dönüşüme karşı kurulmuş iki mahalle derneğinin faaliyetlerini inceleyerek, Suriyelilerin entegrasyonun yerel boyutlarına odaklanıyor. Bu derneklerin kurulma amaçları mültecilere destek olmaktan oldukça farklı olsa da yaşam alanlarında yaşayan Suriyelilere destek sağlıyorlar. Bu dernekler, kent hakkını talep ederek yukarıdan aşağıya bir kentsel dönüşüm modeline karşı çıkıyorlar ve dışlayıcı dönüşüm mekanizmalarını istikrarsızlaştırmaya çalışıyorlar. Özellikle kendi yaşam alanlarında Suriyelilerle dayanışma pratikleri sergileyen mahalle dernekleri üzerine çalışma yürütmek, taban hareketlerinin Suriyeli mültecilerin entegrasyonundaki rollerini görebilmek açısından oldukça önemli olmakta. Söz konusu çalışmayla, toplumun önemli bir kısmı mültecilere karşı dışlayıcı bir duruş sergilerken, neden bazı bölgelerde yerel halkın Suriyelilerle dayanışma ilişkisi içerisine girdiğine yanıtlar arıyorum. Söz konusu derneklerin faaliyetleri aynı zamanda, devletin geçici koruma ile bugüne kadar gerçekleştirdiği yasal düzenlemelerdeki eksiklikleri hafifletme potansiyeline de sahip olmakta.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFAD	Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (<i>Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı</i>)
AKP	Justice and Development Party (<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>)
CHP	Republican People's Party (<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i>)
CSO	Civil society organization
DGMM	Directorate General of Migration Management
EU	European Union
FRiT	Facility for Refugees in Turkey
GIZ	German Corporation for International Cooperation
HDP	People's Democratic Party (<i>Halkların Demokratik Partisi</i>)
İMM	İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality
INGO	International non-governmental organization
İSİL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party (<i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi</i>)
MoNE	Ministry of National Education
MŞP	Mahmut Şevket Paşa Neighborhood
NGO	Non-governmental organization
TECs	Temporary Education Centers
TOKİ	Housing Development Administration (<i>Toplu Konut İdaresi</i>)
TP	Temporary Protection
TPR	Temporary Protection Regulation

UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WWRK	Women to Women Refugee Kitchen
YSK	Supreme Election Council (<i>Yüksek Seçim Kurulu</i>)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As of August 6, 2020, the number of Syrians registered under Temporary Protection (TP) in Turkey is 3,605,152 (Directorate General of Migration Management [DGMM], 2020). In that sense, Turkey is hosting “the largest number of refugees” of any nation in the world (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2019). While 61,798 Syrians have been placed in the seven shelter centers in five provinces of Turkey, the number of self-settled Syrians in the urban areas is 3,543,354 (DGMM, 2020). According to official data, there are 506,301 Syrians registered in İstanbul (DGMM, 2020). However, considering the Syrians who are registered in other provinces but live in İstanbul, the Syrian population living in İstanbul is estimated as 963,000 (Erdoğan, 2020).

Such numerical data clearly demonstrate the significance of, and also the urgency for, substantive steps towards the incorporation of Syrians into society. In this thesis, I specifically elaborate on the activities of two particular neighborhood associations in İstanbul who, in addition to their own areas of activities, have taken Syrian refugees living in their neighborhoods into their agenda. I find it worthwhile to concentrate on local actors who, I believe, have a potential to contribute to the construction of the ways of incorporation of the refugee community’s current and next generations who are “not likely to go home” (Kirişçi & Ferris, 2015).

Pertaining to the incorporation of Syrians in Turkey, “social assistance schemes, employment and health care services” are identified as three main domains in which the government and humanitarian actors i.e., non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs),

have been involved (Yılmaz, 2018, p. 2). With incrementally increased regulations via domestic policy responses since 2011, we are currently experiencing the mandate of the public sector vis-à-vis the humanitarian actors in this field (Yılmaz, 2018, p. 2). As a part of Europeanization process of Turkey and the emerging needs in Turkey, the government passed the “Law on Foreigners and International Protection Act” in April 2013 (Erdoğan, 2018, p. 50). With this law, DGMM was established as the main body to deal with migration issues (Baban, Ilcan, & Rygiel, 2016, p. 9). As of 2014, with the “Regulation on Temporary Protection”, Syrians have been granted TP status (Baban et al., 2016, p. 9). With these legal arrangements, Syrians have gained access to free health care services and Syrian children have gained access to public schools in Turkey (Batalla & Tolay, 2018, pp. 16-17). Subsequent to these legal arrangements, in 2016, Syrians have been enabled to obtain work permits by the “Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection” (Erdoğan, 2018, p. 238). And finally, as of December 2016, an amendment to the Turkish citizenship law was made that has opened the path to acquire citizenship status, but only for skilled Syrians (Akçapar & Şimşek, 2018, p. 180). Although the law was not explicitly arranged for Syrians, Syrians in Turkey obtained the opportunity to become Turkish citizens through this recent amendment.

Despite the initially-mentioned legal arrangements regarding Syrians in Turkey, these Syrians have many problems in benefiting from those formal rights granted to them. To put it differently, even though it has been nine years since the first arrival of Syrians to Turkey, there is still a gap between the formal and substantive rights of Syrians in Turkey. Hence, the discussion in general about the conditions of Syrians, and in particular the long-term trajectory of their incorporation into society is mostly identified by scholars as being a “liminal situation” (Akçapar

& Şimşek, 2018, p. 177) or as a “part of the multiple pathways to precarity” (Baban et al., 2016, p. 2).

To date, a vast array of studies has focused on the Syrian refugee issue in Turkey. Many studies have problematized the immigration policy regime of Turkey (Akçapar & Şimşek, 2018; Baban et al., 2016; Batalla & Tolay, 2018; Erdoğan, 2018; İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016; Kirişçi & Ferris, 2015; Unutulmaz, 2018); refugees’ being instrumentalized through the European Union (EU)-Turkey deal (Erdoğan, 2020; İçduygu & Şimşek, 2017; Şimşek, 2017); Syrians’ being exploited within the informal sector (Artan, Arıcı, Salduz, Güzel, & Küskün, 2018; Kavak, 2016); and host communities discomfort with the newcomers (Erdoğan, 2017a, 2018; Erman, 2017; International Crisis Group, 2018). However, after nine years of Syrians staying in Turkey, there is still not a sufficient body of scholarly research taking into account the impact of the reception context and immigration policy regime of Turkey, together with the local dimension of the incorporation process of Syrians.

As Özçürümez, Hoxha, and İçduygu (2020) highlight, based on the typology they created considering the adopted conceptual frames within the scholarly studies and policy literature on integration of Syrians in Turkey, “policy regime-oriented frame” is the most utilized approach (p. 13), whereas “socio-interactional frame has not been given significant attention,” despite the social dimension strongly embedded in the process of integration (p. 10). Socio-interactional frame implies “the nature of inter-group contacts” which have “the potential of generating solutions against challenges encountered at the community” or local level (Özçürümez et al., 2020, p. 15). In proposing to merge both frames, Özçürümez et al. (2020) present integration not only as “a policy target” but also as “a social pattern” (p. 5). In that sense, combining the analysis of immigration policy regime, which has direct

repercussions on the lives of refugees, with socio-interactional dynamics at the local level, would definitely enhance our understanding relating to the incorporation processes of refugees.

Despite the pros and cons of Turkey's immigration policy regime, host communities' growing disfavor towards Syrians and the obstacles faced by Syrians have been problematized and analyzed by many scholars till today, the roles of host communities in facilitating Syrians' incorporation in Turkey through their activities at the local level have rarely been examined in a substantive way, except in a few studies. For instance, through the report Baban and Rygiel (2018) prepared for İstanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (İKSV), they focus on the interactions between civil society groups and Syrian refugees over the cultural and artistic works they were involved in together, which at the same time foster living together practices. Presenting this research as a complementary work to the report she prepared, Paker (2019) also examines the activities of various civil society organizations (CSOs), located in Gaziantep, İstanbul, and Hatay, in which they create "participatory spaces where coexistence is made possible" (p. 5). She concentrates on different civil society actors ranging from INGOs to grassroots organizations for the purpose of ensuring "the representation of different types, tasks, and approaches of civil society actors" (Paker, 2019, p. 7). Among the activities they engage in, there are "exchange of artistic expressions and cultural activities, language courses, employment/work projects, cooking experiences, craftwork production, get-together events, and child-oriented activities" (Paker, 2019, p. 13). Both works pay attention to the potential of local/neighborhood level interactions to produce a space that strengthens "coexistence" (Paker, 2019) and facilitates "living

together” practices (Baban & Rygiel, 2018) which contribute to the incorporation process of Syrians.

Within this thesis, I analyze the activities of two neighborhood associations in İstanbul together with discussing the impact of legal arrangements on the daily lives of Syrians. To put it differently, through combining the policy regime-oriented and socio-interactional frames, I concentrate on the practices of certain local groups which come from a perspective of providing solidarity to the Syrians with whom they share a living space, namely their neighborhood. These associations are Okmeydanı Social Cooperation and Solidarity Association (Okmeydanı Sosyal Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği) (hereinafter referred to as Ok-Der) located in Mahmut Şevket Paşa Neighborhood (MŞP) in Okmeydanı in the Şişli district and Yarımburgaz Neighborhood Conservation and Solidarity Association (Yarımburgaz Mahallesi Koruma ve Dayanışma Derneği) (hereinafter referred to as Yarımburgaz-Der) located in Yarımburgaz Neighborhood in the Küçükçekmece district. These local organizations are already-established associations and they have started to act in solidarity with Syrian refugees living in their neighborhoods.

In this thesis, I raise the question of why and how these neighborhood associations have adopted relatively more refugee inclusive strategies in the midst of rising anti-immigrant sentiments. First, the neighborhood units I focus on are spaces in which generally low-income or poor families are residing and these places are subjected to urban transformation. These associations, Ok-Der and Yarımburgaz-Der, were established by inhabitants of these neighborhoods as a part of their struggle for “housing rights” in opposing the urban transformation dictated by the state and operationalized by private contractors or companies in their localities. I conceptualize these associations as grassroots movements of the locals who feel

largely excluded from decision-making and participation processes on the issue of planning of their neighborhoods. Through utilizing a rights-based discourse, they claim their housing rights as part of their constitutional rights, and their main aim is to claim their entitlement to the city and to urban livelihood. Among their aims are also protection of youth and children from drug abuse and construction of solidarity networks among the inhabitants against the structural poverty that the locals suffer from. In addition to the urban transformation issues, these neighborhood associations also bring the presence of Syrians in their neighborhoods, who arrived there mostly in 2014 and 2015, into their agenda. In that sense, in this thesis, one of my aims is to incorporate spatiality into the discussion through taking the urban transformation histories and socio-spatial characteristics of these neighborhoods into account, since these factors not only paved the way for the emergence of these neighborhood associations, but also constituted a determinant role in shaping their paths towards the creation of inclusive spaces for the Syrians.

The reason I have paid special attention to those associations is that although the aims of those local associations are originally quite distinct from supporting refugees as stated above, they do provide support to Syrians living in their districts. So, with this research, I ask the following questions: While a significant proportion of the public take an exclusionary stand towards Syrian refugees, why is it that within some localities there are deliberate attempts by locals for solidarity practices towards Syrians? Why do these local neighborhood associations take Syrian refugees into their agenda? Do their activities have a potential to alleviate the flaws in the formal channels sanctioned by the state concerning the conditions of Syrians in Turkey? What kind of solidarity mechanisms do they employ in contributing to refugee incorporation? Within the discourse of government, and prominent discourse

issued by non-state actors, volunteers, ordinary citizens or NGOs, we frequently encounter the emphasis on religious affiliation or the heritage of Ottoman culture in showing “hospitality” to Syrians (Erdoğan, 2018; Daniş & Nazlı, 2018). Does the emphasis of solidarity by those local associations have any connotations other than those of religion or Ottoman culture? In other words, what are the different modalities and connections through which these relatively more inclusive spaces for the Syrian refugees get formed?

Among their activities concerning Syrians, these neighborhood associations have been involved in organizing workshops for children, language courses, football tournaments, trips to cinema or museums in İstanbul, organizing meals for fast-breaking or Ashura, etc. Both Syrians and local community engaged in these activities. In that sense, beyond channels opened for Syrians’ incorporation into society via invited spaces, which can be conceptualized as the domain of formal entitlements (Miraftab & Wills, 2005) and despite the flaws in the institutional configurations that govern refugees’ incorporation process, these associations are able to invent new spaces to contribute to Syrian’s incorporation, particularly through their involvement in certain spheres such as social activities, formal or informal education, establishment of neighborly relations, and employment. In Miraftabian terms, these associations can be said to be “transgressive” (Miraftab, 2009, p. 32) in embracing formal and informal spaces of practices and have a potential to “transgress” national boundaries by establishing solidarity between local communities and Syrians. In that sense, I argue that they transgress ascriptive-identity-based solidarity practices. In that sense, though identities are still relevant, I suggest that these inclusive practices and solidarity building strategies cannot simply be reduced to ascriptive-identity-based networks.

1.1 Literature review

The term “integration” is found highly controversial among scholars in the area of immigration studies (Soysal, 1994; Favell, 2015). Çağlar and Schiller (2009), for instance, criticize the lenses of methodological nationalism. Soysal (1994) is interested in “macro-level process” while attacking “individual level process” (p. 30), and Favell (2015) emphasizes “the technical ‘social engineering’ quality of the term” (p. 15). All these three authors would agree that in utilizing the term “integration”, society or nation-state is portrayed as a bounded and monolithic entity. Although there are many other terms, such as assimilation, acculturation, naturalization, accommodation, etc. (Favell, 2015, p. 15), I would like to state that I will use the term “incorporation” throughout the discussion in the thesis.

Within the general literature of immigrant/refugee incorporation, scholars such as Soysal (1994) and Sainsbury (2006) concentrate on macro-level processes. Soysal (1994) focuses on “institutionalized modes and organization of membership in the host country” (p. 31). In a similar line, Sainsbury (2006) concentrates on immigration policy regimes that embody “the rules and norms that govern immigrants’ possibilities to become a citizen, to acquire residence and work permits, and to participate in economic, cultural and political life” (p. 230). Additionally, there is the other branch of the literature which can be conceptualized as bringing “Behavioural Insights” into incorporation discussions (Benton, Silva, & Somerville, 2018). Such behavioural insights are inspired by the works related to “intergroup contact theory” (Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011) and “social capital theory” (Putnam, 2000).

Intergroup contact theory claims that contact between groups and individuals has the potential to facilitate the reduction of prejudice and enhancement of trust

(Pettigrew et al., 2011). Contact theorists draw a link “between exposure and liking” arguing that exposure under optimal conditions will lead to “uncertainty reduction”, thus having the potential to enable the establishment of positive relationships between groups and individuals (Pettigrew et al., 2011, p. 275). Additionally, social capital implies “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 2000, p. 16). Putnam (2000) identifies two forms of social capital: bonding and bridging. While the former refers to intra-group relations, the latter refers to inter-group relations. These behavioral insights are also incorporated into the immigration studies. For instance, while discussing social aspects of social cohesion, Özçürümez et al. (2020) explicitly state that they are inspired by the social contact theorists (p. 6). As well, Ager and Strang (2008) attribute special value to social capital theory in discussing immigrant integration at the local level (p. 178). In the cases of Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz, how the neighborhood associations fostered the establishment of bonding and bridging social capital will be discussed via their efforts, which contributed significantly to the incorporation process of Syrians. Particularly in the case of Okmeydanı, we will also observe how meaningful face-to-face contact of the locals with the refugees mediated some of the exclusionary dynamics against Syrians, which had its roots in the misrepresentation of Syrians in the media and locals’ disfavor against the ruling party presenting itself as a dominant figure in showing compassion to Syrians.

Apart from this body of literature which relates either to macro-level process of incorporation that takes institutional organizations of a country into account or individual-level process that focuses on the nature of interaction between host and refugee communities, I made a meso-level analysis which addresses the way

neighborhood organizations link individuals with the wider socio-political context. I investigate the role of neighborhood associations in refugees' incorporation at the neighborhood level. In doing this, I believe investigating the nature and history of the related neighborhood associations is important. What kind of local associations are they, and what are their defining characteristics? I also think that it is necessary to situate these local actors within a broader country-level context concerning immigration policies, reception context and framing practices. Thus, it will be beneficial to scrutinize what kind of spaces these associations open in tackling the flaws in the institutional configurations composed of government policies and reception context that govern refugees' incorporation in Turkey.

On the other hand, I find it valuable to study locality not only as a place but also as a community and neighborhood in which social relations are embedded. I will utilize the term "space", instead of "place", which implies geographical boundaries (Gambetti, 2009). Space here will be used as a site of dynamic locality that is related to the broader context in which social relations are created (Massey, 1994, 2005; Dikeç, 2005). Locality is approached as concrete spaces within which the broader dynamics of social cohesion are actually constituted. Hence, I believe, neighborhood associations can serve as an important unit of analysis in exploring the interface between refugees' pathways of incorporation and the materialization of immigration policies in Turkey.

Last but not least, I also prioritize bringing a comparative perspective via this research. Through elaborating the similar and divergent aspects that these two neighborhood associations, namely Ok-Der and Yarımburgaz-Der, demonstrate in their practices through showing solidarity towards Syrians, I aim to map the different modalities of incorporation, if any. It is also important to underline that these

associations are members of the Union of Neighborhoods (Mahalleler Birliđi) which is composed of more than 70 local associations located in İstanbul, İzmir, Eskişehir, and Kocaeli. The Union of Neighborhoods defines itself as justice seeking neighborhoods in the face of the threat of rent-seeking urban transformation towards their residential areas and their lives; hence they make a call for all citizens whose rights are violated, who are ignored and deprived of their lives and their neighbors.¹ Despite their common feature that is being a member of the same organization which is the Union of Neighborhoods, it is necessary to avoid melting them in the same pot, since each organization is also locally situated. Hence, mapping their incorporation methods, and the dynamics behind it, might help to reveal that there can be other avenues which render local inclusion of Syrians possible.

1.2 Methodology

This thesis is based on two qualitative case studies drawing on semi-structured in-depth interviews with 30 people, participatory observation, as well as reports, articles, and official documents on Syrians' incorporation in Turkey and also on Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz districts.

With this research, I propose a meso-level analysis. In order to understand what kind of spaces the neighborhood associations invent in their localities, the flaws in domestic policy domain targeting Syrians in Turkey should also be scrutinized. Hence, elaborating on the practices and approaches of neighborhood associations *vis-a-vis* Turkey's reception context and immigration policy regime provide a solid ground in discussing alternative channels the local associations invent in the context of refugee incorporation. In this sense, relating to immigration policies of Turkey and

¹ Retrieved March 15, 2020, from <http://birumut.org/kentsel-donusum/mahalleler-birligi/>

reception context, secondary sources composed of domestic laws and regulations, books, articles and reports are utilized within this research.

The associations I have focused on were both established and went through a process of resisting the urban transformation process in their living space. Therefore, I have firstly benefited from the literature on space-making practices of grassroots organizations. As opposed to the top-down model of urban transformation which is also market-centered, they generate counter-hegemonic action through claiming their right to the city to destabilize the exclusionary mechanisms of transformation. In addition to this, I also engage with theoretical discussion about immigrant/refugee integration. Through linking neighborhood associations' insistence on their right to contest and establish their own terms of engagement and participation in the place they live with their efforts to provide solidarity to the Syrians living in their locality, this thesis attempts to contribute to the literature through conducting an empirical research on the roles of these neighborhood associations in Syrians' incorporation process. To that end, I adopt a socio-interactional frame and involve the conceptual discussions about analytical categories of invented and invited spaces of practices.

I conducted my field research between November 2018 and March 2020. I made field visits to Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz on an occasional basis between November 2018 and March 2020, particularly when there were events organized by the associations, for instance, workshops, Ashure days, or visit to museums in İstanbul. On the other hand, between August 2019 and October 2019, I volunteered to facilitate dance workshops for children in Yarımburgaz-Der, so I went to Yarımburgaz then on a weekly basis. Throughout these field visits, I also made participatory observation and had informal conversations with the people there. It was also valuable for me to participate in events in which the refugees and the local

community come together. In that regard, I gained a chance to observe the nature of contact between the local communities and Syrians living there. I also paid special attention to make field-observation in the neighborhoods, since it offers a valuable opportunity for me to understand the general environment in which works of the associations are handled. Moreover, a mapping of the field's setting (Berg, 2009, p. 215) is also important to gain insight into the visibility/invisibility of refugees in the public domain in each particular place.

The interviews were conducted in December 2018, January-February-March 2020, and July 2020, with members of the associations, Syrians who live or once lived in the neighborhood, outside volunteers of the associations, and also mukhtars of these two neighborhoods. I have interviewed one member from both associations twice, in December 2018 and again in March 2020. The former interviews were conducted during my preliminary research in the neighborhoods and I decided to benefit from these prior interviews also in this research, with interviewees' permission. All interviews, except one which was conducted online in July 2020, were done face to face. The interviews lasted between twenty minutes and two hours. They were type-recorded with the permission of the interviewees. In order to keep their names confidential due to possible security concerns, I have used pseudonyms. Furthermore, I have obtained ethical approval from the university's ethics committee for this study (see Appendix A).

In Okmeydanı, I conducted interviews with 11 people; seven of them are local residents from Ok-Der, three of them are Syrians, and one is the mukhtar of the neighborhood, for the purpose of obtaining general information about the neighborhood. It is necessary to underline that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, two of the interviews with the Syrians which I planned to handle in March 2020 were

cancelled and I was unable to reschedule them since the situation is still not over. It was not possible for me to do an online interview with them due to a lack of technical facilities. Among these interviewees, except for the mukhtar, there were three male and seven female interviewees. Their ages ranged from 30 to 62.

In Yarımburgaz, I made interviews with 15 people; seven of them are local residents from Yarımburgaz-Der, seven of them are Syrians, and one is the mukhtar of the neighborhood. Again here, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, an interview that was planned with another member of the association was cancelled and I was unable to arrange an online interview with him since he had become infected. Among these interviewees, except for the mukhtar, there were six male and eight female interviewees. Their ages ranged from 26 to 57.

Furthermore, I have also conducted four interviews with volunteers supporting the associations from the outside. Although the activities of the associations can be framed as place-based, they are not place-bound. Hence, the efforts of the outside volunteers constitute another component of their endeavor to establish solidarity with Syrians. One of the volunteers is an urban planner from the Union of Neighborhoods, and the other three have become acquainted with the associations through their efforts to act in solidarity with Syrians. All of them have relations with both associations and engage in their activities to differentiating degrees and within varying periods. I would like to state that one of the interviews with the volunteers was conducted as an online interview. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the original face-to-face interview was cancelled, however we managed to reschedule it for July 2020.

I employed semi-structured interviews in which a structure was set beforehand; however, a space was also provided for the interviewees to talk about

their own experiences and prospects. Semi-structured interviews also allowed me to obtain further details through providing me a space to ask the interviewees to elaborate on certain issues when deemed necessary. Questions were organized to be open-ended since this “allow(s) respondents to answer in their own words; no options are imposed in them” (Rich, Brians, Manheim, & Willnat, 2018, p. 147). The main aim of the interviews with the members of the associations was to search firstly for why they have been willing to establish solidarity with Syrians, which is quite contrary to prevalent oppositional voices in the society. Is it their organizational strategy? Is it their origins? Or is it the social fabric of the neighborhood? Thus, I investigated the origins of the associations, what their initial aims were and then their current objectives. Secondly, it was also important to understand how exactly they create inclusive spaces for Syrians. What kinds of practices and strategies do they utilize in inventing new spaces that contribute to the incorporation of refugees?

During interviews with the Syrians, I worked with an interpreter who translated from Arabic or Kurdish, depending on the mother tongue of the interviewee, to Turkish. I would like to also underline that I can understand Kurdish to a certain extent, so the interviews conducted in Kurdish gave me more space to better manage the conversation flow with the interviewee. In the interviews with the Syrian inhabitants of the neighborhoods, the questions concentrated mostly on their experiences and the challenges they encounter in society in general and within the neighborhood in particular. What are the difficulties they suffer from and how do they evaluate the impact of the neighborhood association in their lives? How do they experience neighborly relations there?

In the interviews conducted with the outside volunteers, the questions focused mainly on their role in the activities of the associations, their own

experiences in the neighborhoods and their observations relating to the social interactions between the host communities and the Syrians.

Furthermore, being critical of the subjectification of Syrian refugees, I take the agency of Syrians into consideration throughout my research, both during my presence in the field and during the analysis and interpretation phase of my study. At that point, I also feel the responsibility to express that, since identities are socially constructed and can be temporary and permeable, as well as multiple, every time I use the word “Syrian” in this thesis, I will be worried about attributing an identity to them or falling into the trap of labelling them.

Besides that, most of the existing studies approach Syrians in Turkey as a homogenous entity; however, among them there are not only Sunni-Arabs but also Kurds, Turkmen, Yazidis, Armenians and Alevis. In that sense, I also gave weight to collecting information about Syrians’ main demographic attributes in each neighborhood, that I believe might affect their incorporation process.

This thesis also has certain limitations. Firstly, within the immigrant/refugee integration framework, while the relations between host communities and immigrants/refugees come to the forefront, amid other issues immigrants’/refugees’ own perception and aspirations considering their integration process are also attributed importance. However, discussing the perceptions and aspirations of refugees themselves goes beyond the scope of this research, since my focus is built more around how the activities of the neighborhood associations play a role in contributing to the incorporation processes of Syrians, particularly based on the areas such as education, employment, social connections, conflict resolution, etc. which can be attributed, in general, as being among the pillars of the incorporation process.

In addition to this, the time interval I have concentrated on has also been for me a challenge, since in this thesis, I focus on the activities of the associations between 2015 and March 2020, nearly five years. I have conducted my field research between November 2018 and March 2020, which means I have not witnessed firsthand the period before November 2018 but rather have relied on the narratives of the interviewees. This situation also created a problem for me in some instances e.g., the interviewees may have had some difficulties in remembering the details or exact dates of an event, when they talked about the past retrospectively. To tackle this situation, I pursue two main strategies. Firstly, I have utilized the social media accounts of the associations as an archive to trace the details about the narrated activities. Most of their activities are posted in their social media accounts and I have created detailed timelines for each association from 2015 to the present. This enabled me to crosscheck the details I encountered in their narrations via the social media accounts. Secondly, to further overcome this challenge, I tried to conduct interviews with outside volunteers who have engaged in activities in different periods. One of these interviewees is a person who had participated during the whole period, while the other three engaged in activities over different shorter periods.

1.3 Organization of the thesis

In the second chapter, I introduce the reception context and immigration policy regime of Turkey together with the main actors involved in the refugee issue in Turkey. In order to provide a background for further analysis, the gap between formal and substantive spaces of rights concerning Syrian refugees under the state's immigration policy regime and reception context are analyzed in this chapter.

In the third chapter, I present the theoretical framework of the study. Firstly, I make a conceptual discussion on immigrant/refugee integration and then I underline the policy level and societal level dimensions of integration. In line with that, I present the actors, besides the state, who play a role in the refugee incorporation process such as CSOs, grassroots organizations, and civil society initiatives, having a potential to contribute to living together practices with the newcomers through establishing social relations with the refugees at the local level. With the second part of this chapter, I engage with the literature on space-making practices of neighborhood associations from below. Then I link the struggle against socio-spatial injustice they encountered in their living space with the space-making practices that have the potential to open also a space for refugee inclusion. I also benefit from the concepts of invited and invented spaces created by the neighborhood associations which will later on be incorporated into discussion when I analyze their activities considering the Syrians living in their neighborhoods.

In light of the theoretical framework provided, in the fourth and fifth chapters, I concentrate respectively on the Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz cases. Here, I utilize the interviews conducted for this thesis to provide a close look at the social and political outputs of the activities of these associations. Within these chapters, I firstly present the details about the urban transformation pressure these neighborhoods are under and then I discuss the driving force of the inhabitants in establishing neighborhood associations against the transformation they face. In doing that, I analyze the particular socio-spatial context of these localities. Then I link their contestation to the top-down policy making processes and the aims of establishing their own terms of engagement and participation within the space they live in with their attitudes towards the Syrians who moved to the neighborhoods. I delve into the

principles and standpoints they prioritize, because of their relevance in explaining why they decided to take Syrians' presence in their neighborhoods into their agenda. I attribute special importance to these associations as grassroots movements, since they carry the potential to contribute to living together practices with the newcomers at the local level through established social relations.

Furthermore, in these chapters, I also elaborate on the particular practices they engaged in considering Syrians. I focus on the wide range of efforts, such as organizing in-kind aid distributions, workshops for children, formal or informal education, playing a mediatory role in cases of tension between locals and Syrians, establishing neighborly relations, accompanying Syrians when they try to access public services, etc. In doing that, I also present the ways their activities created invented and invited spaces of practices. Additionally, I discuss how they managed to establish social bridges between Syrians and local residents, as well as social links which refers to relations with the governmental bodies. At the same time, I analyze how they contributed to the strengthening of social bonds between the refugees. Lastly, I examine the impacts of their activities on Syrians' daily lives which carry the potential to alleviate the hardships Syrians face due to the flaws in the immigration policy regime of Turkey.

In the sixth chapter, I present a brief summary of the research question I addressed with this study and my findings in this research. I also specify the contributions of this thesis to the literature. Lastly, I present the limitations of this research together with my suggestions for further study.

CHAPTER 2

RECEPTION CONTEXT AND IMMIGRATION POLICY REGIME OF TURKEY

This study focuses, in general, on the role of neighborhood associations in the incorporation process of Syrians. In particular, with this research, I attempt to situate the activities of neighborhood associations pertaining to Syrians within a broader country-level context in order to discuss what kind of spaces they are able to produce through which they make certain contributions to the Syrians' incorporation process. To discuss their contributions, it is necessary to elaborate on the challenges and opportunities Syrians have encountered in Turkey due to the reception context in, and immigration policy regime of, Turkey.

Considering the incorporation of refugees/immigrants, multiple factors and actors come to the scene, hence before moving into the nature of relations the native members of the neighborhood organizations established with the refugees living in the same locality, it is essential to present the general background relating to the presence of Syrians in Turkey. Reception context in, and immigration policy regime of, Turkey are the most constitutive parts of the environment within which Syrians settle.

In this chapter, firstly, I scrutinize the reception context in Turkey which is determined by the interplay of multiple elements. In that sense, I discuss what kind of framing practices are mostly utilized related with the Syrians in Turkey. Then, I touch upon the governmental response towards them from the beginning of their arrival to the country. I also present the host communities' general attitudes towards Syrians. Then I provide brief information about the state and non-state actors operating within the refugee field in Turkey. Secondly, I focus on the immigration

policy regime of Turkey through concentrating on domestic policy responses particularly within the areas of education, employment, and citizenship which are three main pillars of inclusionary or exclusionary mechanisms.

2.1 Reception context: Framing practices, foreign-immigration policy nexus, host communities' attitudes, and actors in the field

Social, political and economic entitlements of immigrants are mainly based on their entry categories and the reception context. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) mainly categorize the reception policy of a government as “exclusion, passive acceptance, active encouragement” (p. 93). On the other hand, with their field research conducted in İstanbul, Daniş and Nazlı (2018) widen this definition through adding “state and non-state actors,” “the nature of the relations between them,” framing practices of government, and the role of civil society into reception context (pp. 1-2).

Additionally, sending and receiving country relations (Jacobsen, 1996) and foreign-immigration policy nexus (Gökalp Aras & Mencütek, 2015) also determine the reception context in which opportunities and challenges of immigrants are embedded. There is a link between the foreign policies of states and their responses to mass refugee influx, hence there is an interplay of governments' foreign policy and asylum policy in creating differentiating responses to mass influxes (Gökalp Aras & Mencütek, 2015).

Based on Portes and Rumbaut's (2006) categorization, it can be claimed that in the initial period, Turkey took an active encouragement stance in welcoming Syrians fleeing the conflict in their country. It has been nine years since the conflict in Syria first broke out, and very important phases and changes both in Turkey and in Syria have occurred which lead to a certain transformation in the government's

approach, albeit with several consistencies. While Turkey pursued an “‘open-door’ and humanitarian asylum policy at the initial stages of refugee flow” (Gökalp Aras & Mencütek, 2015, p. 193), currently it sends “mixed signals of brotherhood and forced repatriation” (Tosun & Ayaşlı, 2020, p. 197). Despite many developments in immigration policy regime of Turkey in terms of rights and entitlements granted to Syrians, their presence in Turkey is still viewed from a perspective of temporariness.

Framing practices also give shape to the reception context of immigrants. The term “framing” is used to underline “what and whom are included and excluded” (Gasper & Apthorpe, 1996, p. 8). Apthorpe states that “Rival ways of naming and framing set policy agendas differently... Poverty framed and named as economics and mechanisms, and poverty framed and named as politics and institutions, are very different theories of poverty and likely to lead the different policies” (Apthorpe, 1996, p. 24).

Studying framing practices and “discourses is important to better understand the context in which refugee reception mechanisms operate” (Danış & Nazlı, 2018, p. 4). Syrians have been perceived as “guest”, temporary residents, and Turkey, by its own President Erdoğan, ascribed a meaning to itself as “ansar”, one who helps immigrated Muslims (“Erdoğan Suriyeli sığınmacılara seslendi,” 2014). The Islamic ansar-muhajir metaphor is utilized here to draw the analogy between the Turkish population and Muslim Medine residents who welcomed their co-religionist Meccanians who immigrated during Hejira. Moreover, with such a framing, Syrians in Turkey are portrayed as a homogenous entity, despite the fact that among them there is a non-Sunni and non-Arab population composed of Alevis, Christians, Kurds, and Armenians.

The ansar-muhajir metaphor provides an exemplary illustration of the main symbols and moral standpoints which are frequently used to legitimize Turkey's action towards Syrians from the very beginning of their mass arrivals. It is presented as if Turkey complies with its historical responsibility as seen in the case of Syrians today, something which has its roots in Islamic values and also in the culture of the Ottoman Empire. With such wordings, it is claimed that it is inherent in Turkish and Islamic identity to be the first to help and support those in need.

Additionally, the reception context of Turkey considering Syrians' presence in the society is also prevailed upon by framing practices of "hospitality" (Erdoğan, 2018; Daniş & Nazlı, 2018). In that sense, for the state, Turkey hosts their Syrian guests which connotes helping and giving of aid to people in need. Far from being a rights-based approach, portraying refugees as "guest," or "people in need" who deserve "the mercy and good intention of our country to welcome them" is a part of a disempowering attitude that sees Syrians as passive subjects, instead of imagining them as active, rights-bearing agents. Although language or rhetoric is presented as a neutral system of signs (Hajer, 1993) and incontestable, since the wordings are composed of "traditional values", "humanity" or "conscience", such articulations in a subtle way serve to create asymmetric relations between "guest" and "host" population. Such framing not only implies an asymmetric relation between the host and the refugee community, it also lays a burden of responsibility on them not to "overstay [their] welcome" (Stevens, 2013, p. 19).

The political, international, and ideological conditions behind framing and labelling practices are important since they have a role in determining certain consequences for individuals and immigrant communities. Although the entry category of Syrians is "war refugees", in Turkey they are not officially

acknowledged as “refugee” due to Turkey’s putting geographic limitations on the 1951 Geneva Convention. Instead, as of 2014, three years after Syrians started to move to Turkey, with a policy regulation called Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR), the state has granted TP status to Syrians in the country. On the other hand, the label “guest” and the status “TP” constitute an impediment to social cohesion and refugee incorporation, not only in the government’s policy framework but also in the perception of the host community. According to one of the findings of the survey conducted by Erdoğan, it is a fact today that an important proportion of the Syrians, it is estimated to be more than 80% of them, are not expected to return to their country of origin (Erdoğan, 2018, p. 245). Although, today in Turkey, it is presented that the rights granted to Syrians in terms of health, education and employment under TP are same as the rights granted for those with refugee status, Regulations on TP does not determine a time interval for their stay (Erdoğan, 2018); it is open-ended, and thus the status of TP is quite fragile. TP status is evaluated by Özçürümez et al. (2020) as “counterproductive for social cohesion processes at all levels in the long run” (p. 13).

Though the status of Syrians in the country seems secured by law through TPR, in practice, it is mostly presented as a service that is left to the discretion of the government (Erdoğan, 2018, p. 59). For instance, at the current stage, even though the conditions in Syria have not become suitable for return, there are “intensifying public debates on return options” (Özçürümez et al., 2020, p. 2) in which the government is also involved.² In relation to this, the political debates held around the presence of Syrians in Turkey dominated the elections in 2018 (Tosun & Ayaşlı, 2020, p. 196). Compared with the initial period, Erdoğan (2020) evaluates the shift

² Please also see <https://t24.com.tr/video/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-35-milyon-suriyeliyi-topraklarina-gonderecegiz,11637>

that happened in the government's discourse as "from ansar-muhajir to sending back".

Starting from the earlier stages of the crisis in Syria, Turkey has assumed the uprising there would be over within a short period of time with the overturn of the Asad regime; thus, regarding the presence of Syrians in Turkey, the government approached the issue as a temporary situation (Erdoğan, 2020). Rather than the development of a coherent resettlement plan for Syrians coming to the country in masses, for a long time, it has been the Asad regime in Syria that is on the government's agenda (Erdoğan, 2020). However, the political deadlock in Syria gained a new dimension with the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) as of 2014, hence Turkey received a growing number of refugees (Erdoğan, 2020). Turkey opened camps in the border regions upon the first arrivals of Syrians and the number of the camps has reached 26 in total (Erdoğan, 2020). However, as the numbers increased, the Syrians began to diffuse to the cities in Turkey through their own efforts.

According to Erdoğan (2020), since the issue for the state was built on temporariness in all aspects, a resettlement plan could not be made for refugees. At this stage, almost all of the Syrians became urban refugees³ and they started to live in city centers with the host community (Erdoğan, 2020). In that sense, related with the foreign policy trajectory of the government, the persistence of assuming Syrians' presence in the country as a temporary phenomenon has hindered the development of a coherent integration plan or social cohesion policy.

Besides the government's approach, the reception context is also related to host communities' responses to the "newcomers". High numbers of Syrians, settled

³ As stated in the introduction chapter, currently, the number of Syrians who live in the urban areas reached 3,543,354 (DGMM, 2020), which corresponds to more than 98% of Syrians in Turkey.

via their own efforts in urban areas, increasingly bring into question local communities' attitudes towards them; in other words, it comes with concerns about local communities' absorption threshold regarding the newcomers. On a societal level, there is the "fragile and reluctant" form of "social acceptance" (Erdoğan, 2017a, p. 7). Related to the public perception of Syrians, according to the survey conducted by KONDA, three fourths of the respondents find cities less secure due to the Syrians presence, see Syrians as a threat to the economy in Turkey, perceive them as causing the decrease in employment opportunities, and believe that they themselves are not culturally similar to Syrians (Konda Barometresi, 2016, p. 33). Confirmed by Erdoğan's study, "62.9% of Turkish society feel that they are either "very distant" or "distant" from the Syrians" (Erdoğan, 2017a, pp. 22-23).

In some instances, a reluctant form of social acceptance leads to tension between the host communities and Syrians. According to the findings of another report, "Intercommunal violence... increased threefold in the second half of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016. Growing grievances in Turkey's largest metropolises Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir are driving inter-ethnic rivalries, socio-economic inequality and urban violence" (International Crisis Group, 2018, n.d.).

Moreover, aiming to benefit in the subsequent sections, I find it beneficial to present the comparison made on the basis of political party affiliations. In terms of their attitudes/perceptions towards Syrians, a certain polarization within the host communities revealed itself. When looking at political party affiliations, compared with voters of Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) and People's Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP), voters of Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) and Nationalist

Movement Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP) are more inclined to be against any contact with Syrians (Konda Barometresi, 2016, p. 32).

Finally, regarding the reception context in Turkey, there are also various actors, including state and non-state bodies, that are responsible for the immigration issue with the mass influx of Syrians since 2011. Batalla and Tolay (2018) categorize these actors within three terrains in total: national, local and international levels. At the national level, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı, AFAD) and DGMM take the central role. Initially, Turkey, approaching the issue as emergency management, gave a central role to AFAD (Erdoğan, 2020). While AFAD was responsible for the administration of the camps together in cooperation with the Turkish Red Crescent in providing food and shelter until March 2018, responsibility for the management of the camps and “the provision of services such as healthcare lie exclusively with the DGMM” (Cloeters et al., n.d., p. 11). DGMM is also responsible for the registration process of Syrians (Batalla & Tolay, 2018, p. 10). On the other hand, at the local level, the role of municipalities comes onto the scene in providing services to the Syrians settling in relevant localities in the cities (Batalla & Tolay, 2018, p. 10). However, “municipalities have lacked adequate funding” and lacked “legal backing” since the budget of the municipalities are determined according to the number of “citizens” located in the municipality, which means “foreign residents—i.e., Syrian refugees—are not counted in the population total” (Batalla & Tolay, 2018, p. 11). On the other hand, while Erdoğan underscores the lack of legal backing in the services of the municipalities to the Syrians, he highlights the concept of “fellow-citizenship” in the “Municipal Law No. 5393” that at the same time has the potential to open a way to provide services to Syrians (Erdoğan, 2017b, p. 40). Despite this issue of “fellow-

citizenship”, Erdoğan underlines that this “does not assign a mandatory duty on” municipalities to make spending for the Syrian population settling in their district (Erdoğan, 2017b, p. 40).

On the international level, there is “the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT)” initiated by the EU in 2015 as “the coordination mechanism to financially assist the Syrian” population in Turkey (Batalla & Tolay, 2018, p. 14). The widely-known six billion Euro support to Turkey is coming through the FRiT (Batalla & Tolay, 2018, p. 14).

Aside from state institutions and organizations, there are non-state actors organizing activities mostly “linked with humanitarian assistance, protection, case management, education, livelihood, and community building/cohesion” (Cloeters et al., n.d., p. 27). Additionally, either through interacting with public institutions or sharing their experiences/expertise with state officials, some NGOs contribute to increases in state capacity (Paker, 2019, p. 16). Mackreath and Sağnıç (2017) mainly categorize NGOs, INGOs and CSOs as “operating along various political ideological lines, ‘rights based’ groups, ... ‘faith based’ groups, ... solidarity groups, volunteer initiatives” (p. 10). On the other hand, many studies underline that there are over-centralisation attempts by the government on the immigration issue (International Crisis Group, 2018; Daniş & Nazlı, 2018; Mackreath & Sağnıç, 2017). Especially, many of the civil society organizations currently operating in the immigrant issue in Turkey have “strong ideological and organizational ties with the governmental institutions or actors” (Daniş & Nazlı, 2018, p. 3). Rather than being non-governmental organizations, Daniş and Nazlı (2018) label them as “pro-governmental organizations” which are “selectively” permitted by the government to run their activities concerning the refugee field (p. 13). Hence, there is the

domination by organizations that are closer to “the governing party’s position” in the field. For instance, the government has put a restriction on accessing refugee camps, and the Humanitarian Aid Foundation (IHH), that has close links with the government, has been the “first NGO” that is “able to obtain access to the refugee camps” (Batalla & Tolay, 2018, p. 12). Or many of the “NGO-run learning centres” have been subjected to signing authorization protocols with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE); in short, they are subject to the permission of the state in operating their activities (Biehl, 2019, p. 17; International Crisis Group, 2018, p. 20; Nimer, 2019, p. 13). In other words, they are forced to stop their non-formal education activities, especially their language courses and vocational trainings concerning Syrians. As a part of centralization attempts on the part of the government, only the NGOs with whom the government selectively cooperates are given permission for their teaching activities later on (International Crisis Group, 2018, p. 20).

Additionally, the declared state of emergency right after the coup attempt in July 2016 particularly has deteriorated the conditions under which civil society operates its activities (Paker, 2019; International Crisis Group, 2018). The “space for civil society shrinks” under the atmosphere of high suspicion of the government regarding NGOs and INGOs (International Crisis Group, 2018, p. 1). In that sense, a significant body of the CSOs operating in the field of immigrants recently “are not independent of the state and its institutions” (Danış & Nazlı, 2018, p. 3).

All in all, reception context is composed of multiple factors and actors. Various aspects such as commonly circulated framing practices, i.e., hospitality and the ansar-muhajir metaphor, by the government pertaining to refugees’ acceptance into the country; the government’s foreign policy trajectory and its consequences for

the lack of resettlement planning for refugees; shifts in the government's attitudes over the last nine years from pursuing an active encouragement stance while accepting refugees to discussing return options for them though the war in Syria has not ended; host communities' widespread disfavor of Syrian refugees; and state and non-state actors operating in the refugee field, each play a determinant role in shaping the conditions in which Syrians maintain their lives.

Meanwhile, the government has made various legal arrangements in the areas of health, employment, education, etc. till today, and though these regulations have created certain opportunities for Syrians, they have also posed challenges in many aspects. There is also significant discrepancy between the formal entitlements and the availability of rights in practical terms. In trying to benefit from the rights granted to them, Syrians face manifold obstacles.

2.2 Immigration policy regime of Turkey and various entitlements for Syrians

Immigration policy regime in a broader sense is “the institutional arrangements” of a state “to regulate admission and integration of newcomers” (Faist, 1995, p. 222). For Sainsbury (2006), composed “of rules and norms that govern immigrants’ possibilities to become a citizen, to acquire residence and work permits, and to participate in economic, cultural and political life,” it is the embodiment of the regulations which determine the mechanisms of immigrant’s inclusion or exclusion (p. 230).

The first arrivals of Syrians to Turkey was in April 2011. However, because of the government’s assumption of temporariness, as discussed in previous section, the first major legislation was enacted two years later, in April 2013, with the “Law on Foreigners and International Protection Act”. With this law, the establishment of

a separate directorate, called the DGMM, under the Ministry of Interior, was decided as being the main body responsible for dealing with migration issues in Turkey (Baban et al., 2016, p. 9). As Erdoğan states, the DGMM was able to enter into service in April 2014 and the number of Syrians in Turkey by the end of 2014 was more than one and a half million (Erdoğan, 2020). As of November 2014, Syrians have been granted TP status with the “Regulation on Temporary Protection” (Baban et al., 2016, p. 9). With these arrangements, primary and emergency healthcare services became available for Syrians, and Syrian children were given the right to enroll in public schools in Turkey (Batalla & Tolay, 2018, pp. 17-18). Syrians who registered with the Turkish authorities and obtained TP identity documents are entitled to access these services in the cities/provinces in which they are residing⁴ (Cloeters et al., n.d.).

Until 2016, the issue was commonly framed as an “emergency situation”; however, from 2016 onwards, with certain “legal and institutional transformation,” terms such as “harmonisation–cohesion/social cohesion” began to be reflected within the official rhetoric (Özçürümez et al., 2020, p. 8). When it comes to the year 2016, the number of the registered Syrians in Turkey was nearly three million (Erdoğan, 2020). In that sense, it can be claimed that it took five years for the government to acknowledge the necessity of long-term planning for the protracted stay of Syrians in Turkey. In relation to such a shift, particular legal regulations in the domains of work permit, education and citizenship have been enacted. Several examples for subsequent official arrangements reflecting a transformation in the government’s

⁴ For further information please see the “Geçici Koruma Kapsamında İzlenecek Kayıt Süreci, Hak ve Hizmetler ile Yükümlülüklerle İlişkin Bilgilendirme Broşürü [Information Leaflet on the Registration Process, Rights and Services and Obligations to be Followed within the Scope of Temporary Protection]” in the following link:
<https://www.goc.gov.tr/kurumlar/goc.gov.tr/Yayinlar/Brosurler/GK-turkce/GK-Bilgilendirme-Brosuru.pdf>

approach can be listed as; declared commitment of MoNE to integrate all Syrian children into the public education system; enactment of the Regulations on Work Permit which entitle Syrians to apply for work permits in Turkey; and amendments made to the citizenship law which create an opportunity for Syrians to apply for Turkish citizenship.

Syrian students were granted the right to enroll in public schools as of 2014. However, prior to 2016, there was a mandate of “a dual education system” for Syrian children in Turkey (Batalla & Tolay, 2018, p. 17). There were two options available for them. They could either register in public schools and receive education within a mixed environment, together with the host communities. Conversely, they could register in the Temporary Education Centers (TECs) and receive education in Arabic in line with the Syrian curriculum, which was modified by the Ministry in 2014 (Unutulmaz, 2018, p. 8; Batalla & Tolay, 2018, pp. 17-18). In that respect, recognizing the conducted educational activities of Syrian communities under the TECs was also a reflection of the temporariness assumption of the government. With the acknowledgement of the protracted stay of Syrians, the government “decided in early 2016 to phase out TECs” (Batalla & Tolay, 2018, p. 18).

Related to such a transformation occurring in the government’s attitudes, by August 2016, the MoNE decided “to fully integrate all school-aged Syrian refugees into the formal national education system” (Unutulmaz, 2018, p. 10) and the Migration and Emergency Education Department was established under the MoNE. Although Syrian children were granted rights to register in public schools in 2014 (Cloeters et al., n.d.), by 2016, the total percentage of children receiving education, including the ones in the TECS, was still only around 37%; to put it differently, approximately 500,000 Syrian children in Turkey were outside of the education

system at that time (MoNE, n.d., 2020). As the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2013) asserts, there is the risk of raising of "a lost generation," since related with the protracted crisis in Syria, thousands of Syrian children have been deprived of education either in the destination countries or within Syria (p. 2).

Despite the above stated developments, accessing education is still a great challenge for Syrian children. According to MoNE, particularly the Migration and Emergency Education Department under the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning, as stated above established in 2016, the number of school-aged Syrian children between the ages of 5-17 is 1,082,172 in the 2019-2020 education period (MoNE, 2020, n.d.). For the same period, the number of Syrian students is declared as 684,919 (MoNE, 2020, n.d.), which means approximately 40% of Syrian children are currently out of school.

Although Syrian children were given the right to attend public school in 2014, there are many obstacles these children face in accessing the right to education. For instance, child labor is a common phenomenon among Syrians, especially in the textile and agricultural sectors (Erol et al., 2017, p. 32; Uyan Semerci & Erdoğan, 2018, p. 35; Tosun & Ayaşlı, 2020, p. 194). Because of issues related to poverty, many Syrian families depend on their children to work and contribute to the household budget, hence most of them, working in the informal sector, do not attend schools. Additionally, due to the discriminatory environment in the schools and peer pressure, some of them might prefer not to go to school (Tosun & Ayaşlı, 2020, p. 192).

In addition to the arrangements made in the area of education, another legal transformation occurred relating to Syrian's access to the formal labor market as of

2016. With the “Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection” in January 2016, Syrians are entitled to obtain work permits (Erdoğan, 2018, p. 238). The terms for applying for a work permit are defined under Article 5 (1) and (2) of the Regulation as follows: “Foreigners under TP can apply to the Ministry for a work permit six months after the temporary protection registration date” and “work permit applications are made by the employer” (Resmi Gazete, 2016, own translation). Additionally, with Article 8 (1), an employment quota is imposed stating that the number of foreigners under TP cannot exceed ten percent of the number of Turkish citizens employed in the workplace.

Despite the Regulation, the number of Syrians who have managed to obtain a work permit up to today has remained quite low. As of March 31, 2020, only 31,185 Syrians have been granted work permits (Refugees Association, 2020). The reasons behind this can be evaluated as such: The regulations on work permits imposes certain restrictions. For instance, it is bound to the discretion of the employer to apply for the work permit. In addition, “employers do not have enough incentives to hire Syrians in the formal labor market and prefer to hire them informally to evade taxes and social security payments” (Batalla & Tolay, 2018, p.16). Furthermore, “Syrians work mostly in the sectors characterized by informality such as agriculture, construction and textile” (Tosun & Ayaşlı, 2020, p. 194). According to Erdoğan (2018), this is related with several factors, i.e., language barriers, high unemployment rates in Turkey, and the fact of informality being already common in the economy of Turkey (pp. 238-39). Even with the Regulation that allows for Syrians to obtain a work permit, “the lack of implementation of the policy” is also of concern (Şimşek, 2018, p. 13). Therefore, a discrepancy between formal arrangements and real practice reveals itself in the area of obtaining work permits.

Despite the Regulation, a significant amount of the Syrian population is still “employed in the informal sector,” and the number “estimated” as “one million” (Akçapar & Şimşek, 2018, p. 184). Comparing the number of Syrians in the informal sector, estimated as one million in 2018, the number of Syrians who received work permits between 2016 and 2020, which is around 30 thousand, represents a very small proportion of the Syrian labor force in Turkey.

Another important pillar of inclusionary mechanisms in immigration studies is centered around the legislation relating to citizenship in the country of destination. As of December 2016, “another amendment to the Turkish citizenship law was introduced and accepted” that has opened the path to the acquisition of citizenship status for Syrians (Akçapar & Şimşek, 2018, p. 180). The law was not explicitly arranged for Syrians, however Syrians in Turkey have obtained the opportunity to become Turkish citizens through this recent amendment.

Although Syrians obtained the right to become citizens in Turkey with this last amendment made to the citizenship law in 2016, it is only possible on exceptional criteria (Akçapar & Şimşek, 2018, p. 180). With the law, only the skilled immigrants or the immigrants who have the potential to make investment in the country are targeted. In that sense, the law is evaluated as remaining “selective, targeting Syrians with cultural and economic capital as well as mostly those coming from a Sunni background” (Akçapar & Şimşek, 2018, p. 177). Exceptional citizenship criteria and selectivity imposed by the arrangement reflects itself in the numbers of Syrians who are able to obtain Turkish citizenship. Though there are more than three and a half million Syrians in Turkey, as of November 30, 2019, the “[n]umber of Syrians who got Turkish citizenship is 110,000” (Refugees Association, 2020).

Considering the conditions within the areas of citizenship, employment, education, housing and health, Baban et al. (2016) describe Turkey as “a country that provides” Syrians “with limited citizenship rights and limited opportunities for legal employment” (p. 3). As discussed above, despite the legal arrangements that invite Syrians to benefit from the rights granted in specific areas such as education, labor market, or citizenship, the reality is not always in compliance with rights promised by the laws. Shortly, in practice, Syrians have limited access to education, formal employment, and citizenship. Additionally, while there are legal arrangements through which Syrians are defined as rights holders in the various areas such as education, labor market and citizenship, in most cases, accessing those rights is limited in practice. Therefore, a gap between formal and substantive rights or structural constraints might be at play when immigrants try to benefit from the rights granted to them, which consequently constitutes an impediment for them in terms of their incorporation into wider society.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Conceptual discussion and involved actors: Integration, incorporation, social cohesion, coexistence

Within the general literature concerning immigration studies, there is a broad discussion about the theoretical and empirical bases of various terms such as “integration,” “incorporation,” “assimilation,” “acculturation,” “naturalization,” “accommodation”, etc. (Unutulmaz, 2012). These terms are utilized within the area of immigration studies based on particular context, historical and political roots. According to Unutulmaz (2012), the most frequently incorporated term has been “integration” since, on the one hand, some find other terms such as “assimilation” or “acculturation” as not being “politically correct,” hence unacceptable; on the other hand, terms such as “multiculturalism” or “race relations” have fallen from grace since applied policies have not created desired consequences in practice, hence have become unpopular or gradually have been taken out of circulation (p. 140). There is a long-standing epistemic divide between scholars about what the term integration has come to mean and how to implement a successful integration model. Castles, Korac, Vasta, and Vertovec (2002) underline that “[t]here is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated” (Castles et al., 2002, p. 114).

The term “integration” has been problematized by many scholars (Favell, 2015; Schiller & Çağlar, 2009; Soysal, 1994; Unutulmaz, 2012). In contesting the term, Soysal (1994) states that by integration they “assume an individual level process, and they emphasize the demographic, social, or cultural characteristics of

migrants as the major explanatory variables” (p. 30). Framing it as incorporation regime, she attacks the notion of “individual level process” that holds immigrants responsible for integrating into the wider society (Soysal, 1994, p. 30). Hence, instead of “integration”, Soysal (1994) proposes the term “incorporation” which is seen as “a wider process that takes place independently of the integration of individual or perceptions of such integration” (pp. 30-31).

Schiller and Çağlar (2009) also criticize the “ethnic lenses” of “methodological nationalism” as an explanatory tool in integration discussion. Instead, they propose to situate the discussion within the “local/global nexus” through contesting the dichotomy between citizen/noncitizen, as they concentrate on the processes of “dispossession”, “displacement” and “emplacement” that are crosscutting issues both for citizens and noncitizens (Schiller & Çağlar, 2018). Favel (2015) emphasizes “the technical ‘social engineering’ quality of the term” (p. 15). All three of these authors would agree that in utilizing the term “integration”, society or nation-state is portrayed as a bounded and monolithic entity. But, there are diversities within nation-states based on culture, religion, class, ethnicity (Schiller & Çağlar, 2009). Additionally, globalization has also challenged the territoriality of the understanding of “cultural belonging” as well as the rights and duties based on membership status (Soysal, 1994).

The term integration is defined by UNHCR (2002) as an enduring and a “multi-dimensional” process relating to “conditions” and opportunities for “active participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country of resettlement as well as to refugees’ own perceptions of, acceptance by, and membership in, the host society” (p. 12). Opportunities for becoming citizens and enjoying “full and equal participation in society” are also emphasized by

UNHCR (p. 13). Although it is obvious that this approach, being far from unidimensional, takes not only immigrants but also the host society into consideration, the term “integration” implies that refugees integrate into a coherent and bounded whole which is also found problematic as stated above.

In the general discussion regarding the integration of immigrants, “socio-economic parity with the native majority population” comes to the forefront (Simonsen, 2017, p. 3). To put it differently, a “genuine equality of access to services” is sought between refugees and the wider society (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 181). Indicators of migrant integration are generally categorized under the headings of “labour market,” “employment conditions,” “education,” “housing and living conditions,” “risk of poverty and social exclusion,” and “active citizenship” (Eurostat, 2017). In addition to the policy aspect of integration, the “means of social connection between refugees and those other members of the communities within which they settle” is also crucial since integration is a two-way process of “mutual accommodation” (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 177).

Attending to both policy and social aspects of integration, Özçürümez et al. (2020) state that while the former is framed as “policies, institutions, and practices that facilitate refugee integration and inclusion” (p. 4) through contributing to refugees’ resilience in the wider society, the latter is understood as “inter-group interactions that mitigate and reduce tensions in a given society” (p. 6). In that sense, integration is approached “as a social pattern and a policy target” (Özçürümez et al., 2020, p. 5). It is also important to underline that instead of “projecting more demanding forms of societal interaction involving strategies of acculturation and identity-building,” Özçürümez et al. (2020) propose “a narrow definition of social cohesion manifested through inter-group interactions that can mitigate or resolve

conflict” between the host communities and refugees, hence “a general atmosphere of diversity” can be maintained in the society (p. 6). In that sense, within this thesis, I acknowledge the perspective proposed by Özçürümez et al. (2020) with their definition of social cohesion, rather than approaching the concepts of social cohesion or integration as a part of an acculturation or identity-building process.

In order to contribute to the development of cohesive integration policies, Ager and Strang (2004) introduce a framework as indicators of integration through identifying ten domains under four categories. Factors influencing integration process are categorized as “means and markers” related with employment, housing, education, health; “social connections” composed of social bridges, bonds and links; “facilitators” such as language and cultural knowledge, and safety and stability; and “foundation,” referring to rights and citizenship (Ager & Strang, 2004). According to their framework, while an achievement in a domain serves as a marker of integration, it can at the same time be approached as a means to other ends relevant to integration (Ager & Strang, 2004, p. 13).

Far from proposing a causal chain in the process of integration, they claim that there is a complex web of linkages between domains, each one with a potential to influence the others, hence a multi-dimensional interaction between the domains is at hand (Ager & Strang, 2004, p. 5). For instance, “employment can lead to further benefits in other areas across the framework such as language competence and social connections” or vice versa (Ager & Strang, 2004, p. 5). Inferred from such a multi-directional chain of influence, I claim that inter-linkages can also be drawn between the domains of social bridges (between groups), social links (with the structures of the state) and social bonds (within groups) under the social connection theme. To put it differently, I argue that, construction of social bridges between the host

communities and refugees can lead to the establishment of social links. For instance, thanks to established social bridges in a neighborhood, members of the local community might provide support to refugees in accompanying them on visits to hospitals or educational institutions through which they are trying to receive governmental services. From this perspective, I analyze the impact of established social bridges, bonds, and links on the incorporation process of Syrians via the cases of Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz.

Şimşek (2018) incorporates the aspect of social bridges from Ager and Strang's framework into her research and lists the following determinants as having crucial roles in integration process: the host society, the refugees themselves, their legal status, the availability of rights, and the relation between the refugees and the host community. It is widely recognized "that refugee integration is typically a partnership of government and non-government organisations and the refugee and wider communities" (UNHCR, 2002, p. 10). In that sense, there is a wide array of studies analyzing the role of CSOs, NGOs, or local governments in immigrant incorporation (Danış & Nazlı, 2018; Duncan, 2009; Erdogan, 2017b; Evans & Shields, 2014; Mackreath & Sağnıç, 2017; Paker, 2019). The objectives of NGOs might be composed of "providing material assistance," advocacy services for rights of the groups they represent or contributing to "the development of an inclusive environment with equal access to education, health and the labour market" for immigrants (Mackreath & Sağnıç, 2017, p. 2). Additionally, their services generally focus on such areas as "language acquisition and proficiency," "employment- related services," "housing" and "information workshops" (Evans & Shields, 2014, p. 119). In that sense, the roles of NGOs are seen as contributing to the immigrant's integration process.

Among non-state actors, there are also grassroots organizations and civil society collectives establishing solidaristic relations with the immigrants at the local level which also contribute to the integration process of refugees (Paker, 2019). In that sense, civil society actors at the local level have a potential to strengthen “the possibility of living together from the bottom up” (Paker, 2019, p. 6). Social interaction between, or living together practices of, immigrants and locals can be linked to the discussion about the impact of established social bridges on immigrant integration. Considering the role of civil society actors, Paker (2019) articulates the integration of refugees as “coexistence” that “embodies a novel understanding of engagement between locals and newcomers that transcends existing categorizations—based on given borders—of citizen and non-citizen” (p. 5).

3.2 Locality and creation of space from below

According to Dikeç (2005), space is a polemical place where a wrong can be addressed and equality can be pursued (p. 172). For him, “space becomes political” not because of the mere presence of power relations and competing interests embedded in it, but because “it becomes the polemical place where a wrong can be addressed and equality can be demonstrated” (Dikeç, 2005, p. 172). It is polemical since far from being a fixed and stable entity, it is always under construction. Similar to Dikeç, Massey also argues that space “is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed” (Massey, 2005, p. 9). It is political because the problems of injustice, that might reveal themselves in various forms such as “inequality, exclusion, segregation, and social devalorization,” having a socio-spatial dimension, can be addressed and equality can be sought (Dikeç, 2001, p. 1798).

It is important to understand under what kind of conditions the local organizations have been formed, “when, in what political context, and on what issue or issues” (Logan & Rabrenovic, 1990, p. 70). Neighborhood associations might have various aims such as to “learn about problems, formulate opinions, and seek to intervene in the political process to protect their local interests” (Logan & Rabrenovic, 1990, p. 69). In that sense, they might address wrongs and pursue equality through their collective action (Dikeç, 2001, 2005). Through the activities of neighborhood associations, “[r]esidents defend many dimensions of neighborhood, such as the land and buildings, the kinds of people who live there, their access to daily necessities, and personal safety” (Logan & Rabrenovic, 1990, p. 90). While the members of a local community are trying to tackle the injustice, they experience through either forming local organizations or establishing individual neighborly relations, they have the potential to form “place-based” solidarity relations (Stijn, Nick, & Maarten, 2017, p. 12).

On the other hand, they do not operate on their own, rather they have their key allies or opponents that might be state, municipality, local administration bodies, private entrepreneurs, and other local organizations or individuals residing in or outside of the neighborhood (Logan & Rabrenovic, 1990, p. 71). Hence, as Massey (1994) underlines, “we need to conceptualize space as constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global” (p. 264).

Opposing the “top-down” strategies of official urban planning, Mack (2013) illustrates through the case of Geneta, a town in Sweden, that the inhabitants of the neighborhood had engaged with various activities which had transformative effects

on the physical material of the environment they live in as opposed to the top-down strategies of official urban planning. She labels these practices as “urban design from below” (p. 156), which aims at creating a “room for alternative public spaces for the cultural and social practices” (p. 157). In other words, the local community “reacts against neoliberal planning’s attempts to simulate inclusion and participation” (Mack, 2013, p. 154). Therefore, urban space becomes a scene in which several actors are at play, rather than a space shaped by a singular entity of top-down planning. In that regard, space is “the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity” and it is recognized as a “coexisting heterogeneity,” because space is “a product of interrelations” (Massey, 2005, p. 9). Although spaces “may be a source of conflict ... it has also provided opportunities for both officials and new groups, including immigrants, to make themselves seen” (Mack, 2013, p. 180). That is why, in Chapters 4 and 5, I discuss how the neighborhood associations Ok-Der and Yarımburgaz-Der organize their struggle from below against the urban transformation process.

In urban theory, the efforts of grassroots activism are usually approached as “from below,” taking “the form of community activism or advocacy planning” (Mack, 2013, p. 157). Additionally, grassroots organizations or movements may push the limits of “formal citizenship”, named as “invited spaces of citizenship” in order to create a new space for “inclusive citizenship and just cities” (Miraftab & Wills, 2005, p. 201). The invited spaces of citizenship are called as formal spaces, which are created or sanctioned by government and donors’ interventions (Miraftab & Wills, 2005, p. 209). On the other hand, those formal spaces are occupied by the actions raised from below, named as “invented spaces” by Miraftab and Wills (2005, p. 209). Both invited and invented spaces are thought to go hand in hand for the

formation of inclusive participation (Miraftab & Wills, 2005, p. 201). In the cases of Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz, while the inhabitants are benefiting from the formal channels in utilizing their rights as citizens to form collective action via the means of neighborhood associations, they at the same time create non-formal solidarity mechanisms as a survival strategy against the transformation pressure their neighborhoods are under. In addition to this, their established practices in terms of inventing spaces to cope with the challenges they face pave the way also for the creation of alternative non-formal mechanisms considering Syrians. In that sense, while they are pushing the boundaries of formal rights and entitlements granted to Syrians, for instance in trying to access education or healthcare services, they simultaneously engage in inventing alternative spaces which make significant contributions to the incorporation process of Syrians.

“Invented spaces” is also expressed as “the spaces of insurgent citizenship” and its forms “are found both in organized grassroots mobilization and in everyday practices that, in different ways, empower, parody, derail, or subvert state agendas. They are found, in other words, in struggles over what it means to be a member of the modern state” (Holston, 1999, p. 167). Sites of insurgence can be “homeless, networks of migration, ... employee-owned factories, squatter settlements” (Holston, 1999, p. 167). The issues such as “accessing to housing, property, sanitation, health, education, child care, and so forth on the basis of citizenship” raise basic questions about the scope of rights and entitlements in a way that poses challenges in urban space (Holston & Appadurai, 1996, p. 197). As will be elaborated in the cases of Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz, the inhabitants suffer from socio-spatial injustice owing mainly to the precarious status of their settlements, which is also related to

their socio-economic backgrounds, hence they are under the pressure of being dispossessed or displaced.

There is also an imaginative aspect of invented spaces that facilitates moving “beyond formal citizenship to a substantive one which concerns an array of civil, political, social and economic rights, including the rights to shelter, clean water, sewage discharge, education, and basic health” (Miraftab & Wills, 2005, p. 201). The division is drawn between formal and substantive ways of practicing participation in order to highlight the struggles of excluded residents for inclusive and active citizenship. The policies imposed in a top-down way might be encountered with resistance by the urban poor through the creation of non-formal realms, as well as formal ones, as invented practices (Miraftab & Wills, 2005, p. 201). A practice might come “to mean more than taking up invitations to participate, extending to autonomous forms of action through which citizens create their own opportunities and terms for engagement” (Cornwall, 2002, p. 50). And, “cities may be especially salient sites ... for considering the exhaustion of national modes” of formal citizenship practices (Holston & Appadurai, 1996, p. 190).

Drawing a distinction between formal and substantive citizenship and calling invented spaces for active participation create here challenges the classical citizenship model of liberal thought that defines citizenship as “a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed” (Marshall, 1992, p. 18). Similarly, “modernist political project is the doctrine- also clearly expressed in the tradition of civil of positivist law- that the state is the only legitimate source of citizenship rights, meanings, and practices” (Holston, 1999, p. 157). So, acknowledging the alternative claims to the city takes down the claim of the state as

the sole legitimate source of citizenship and makes different meanings and practices graspable. Although the laws and regulations situate citizens in an equal status, utilizing the equality stemming from formal procedures might not entail substantially active participation and well-being of citizens in the society. “Formal citizenship refers to membership in a political community, ... the nation state. Substantive citizenship concerns the array of civil, political, and social rights available to people” (Holston, 1999, p. 168). It is “the shortfall of legal procedures as formal, claim-making channels for the poor and the ineffectiveness of the existing ‘invited spaces’ for practicing citizenship” (Miraftab & Wills, 2005, p. 207).

Acknowledging the other(s)’ citizenship and its urban creation does not necessarily mean a relationship of dichotomy between analytical categories of invited and invented spaces: “The two sorts of spaces stand in a mutually constituted, interacting relationship, not a binary one” (Miraftab, 2009, p. 39). Grassroots movements as the actors of “invented spaces of citizenship” use “hegemonic system’s political openings to make counter-hegemonic moves, and vice versa” (Miraftab, 2009, p. 35) and “[w]hen formal channels fail, they innovate alternative channels to assert their citizenship rights and achieve a just city” (Miraftab, 2009, p. 37).

Claiming the “invented spaces of citizenship” also means a claim in terms of “the right of ages and sexes..., rights of conditions..., rights to training and education, to work, to culture, to rest, to health, to housing...the right to nature...against noise, fatigue, the concentrationary universe of cities (as cities are rotting or exploding)” (Lefebvre, 1996, pp. 157-158). As Dikeç underlines (2001), “the rights that Lefebvre conceptualizes are established through lived experience and social relationship” (p. 1791). The “right to the city” is “the interests ... of all the

whole society and firstly of all those who *inhabit*” (Lefebvre 1996, p. 158). Taking inhabitation as a premise to claim right to the city, on the one hand, removes the borders between citizens/natives and non-citizens/refugees, and on the other hand, expands the meaning and operations of citizenship in a similar way to the from-below citizenship approach. As will be discussed, the members of Ok-Der and Yarımburgaz-Der take inhabitation as a premise in their attitudes towards Syrians through framing their activities as part of neighborly relations which transcends the binary categorization of citizen/non-citizen or local/refugee.

On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind that in the absence of “a right to difference,” claiming right to the city may cause “one group claiming hegemony over space” because of “competing economic interests, gentrification pressures and/or ultimate clashes over norms and values” (Öz & Eder, 2018, p. 1030). Or, while active participation could be utilized to establish “new transnational and diasporic identities”, it is at the same time possible for residents “to segregate their communities ‘from the evil outside,’ closing, fortifying, and privatizing their relation to those deemed outsiders” (Holston, 1999, p. 171). To put it differently, the city or the local might turn to be the sites of articulations of “fanaticism”, criminality or violent conflict (Holston, 1999, p. 169; Öz & Eder, 2018). At that point, “grassroots mobilizations and initiatives outside the formal arena of politics ... should be carefully characterized according to their historical origins, their political and cultural roots, and their agendas” (Miraftab, 2009, p. 43).

Furthermore, space-making practice of insurgent citizenship is conceptualized as “insurgent planning practice” that is seen by Miraftab (2009) “as counter-hegemonic, transgressive and imaginative” (p. 32). Insurgent planning practice:

transgresses false dichotomies, by public actions spanning formal/informal arenas of politics and invited/invented spaces of citizenship practice. It transgresses national boundaries by building transnational solidarities of marginalized people. It transgresses time bounds by seeking a historicized consciousness and promoting historical memory of present experiences. (Miraftab, 2009, p. 46).

Hence, invented spaces of practices carry the potential to open localities also to immigrants/refugees through establishing solidarity networks among natives and newcomers. Solidarity refers “to a sense of belonging, feeling of togetherness and cooperation” (Candaş & Buğra, 2010, p. 294). While “the existence of solidarity” is generally “attributed to ascriptive identities or myths of common descent” which is based on ethnic and religious affiliations (Candaş & Buğra, 2010, p. 294), neighborhood associations can play an important role in building mutual trust and social cohesion through transgressing the understanding of ascriptive-identity-based solidarity.

When it comes to the activities of neighborhood organizations in Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz, I argue that the invented and invited spaces of practices have also created the possibilities for establishing solidarities with the Syrian refugees inhabiting the neighborhood. Within the processes of their space-making practices in different issues, amidst their struggle for right to the city, they also generated an inclusionary space for Syrians while they address the wrong and seek equality at the first hand relevant to their living space. Through benefiting from formal channels and also producing various informal realms, the associations play a role in filling the gap between the formal and substantive rights of refugees stemming from the drawbacks of reception context and immigration policy regime of Turkey. In that sense, thanks to the social interactions they established with the refugee counterparts living in the same place, they contribute to the incorporation process of Syrians at the local level.

CHAPTER 4

THE CASE OF OKMEYDANI

In this chapter, I focus on the case of Ok-Der, located in MŞP in Okmeydanı, which I find as a crucial case due to its contribution to the incorporation process of Syrians. It is a neighborhood association established for the purpose of objecting to the urban transformation process. The members of the association have also engaged in a wide array of actions which constitutes a basis for the formation of a civic solidarity with the Syrians refugees living in their neighborhood.

This chapter strives firstly to examine the driving force behind their acts of solidarity with Syrians and secondly, to analyze their activities considering Syrians that have served as a ground for fostering refugee incorporation. To that end, before discussing their main motivation in deciding to establish solidaristic relations with Syrians, I find it necessary to elaborate on the socio-spatial context in which the association emerged which I start with the discussion of the social history of Okmeydanı and the historical background of MŞP including the migratory flows into the neighborhood. I also elaborate on the property problems of the inhabitants that has played an important role in shaping the neighborhood's pathway towards an urban transformation process including its legal dimensions to give a sense of the urban resistance history. I find these details relevant because they facilitate a better understanding of the situation in the neighborhood⁵ that later on gives rise to the establishment of Ok-Der.

⁵ As stated in the methodology part, in MŞP, I conducted interviews with 11 people; seven of them are local residents from Ok-Der, three of them are Syrians, and one is the mukhtar of the neighborhood. Within this chapter, I will benefit from the interviews with the volunteers as well. These interviews were conducted in December 2018, January-February-March 2020, and July 2020.

In the third section, I engage in a discussion about how the inhabitants organized against the urban transformation process, what kind of an organization Ok-Der is, and what kind of a mission the members of the association attribute to themselves. In analyzing what kind of an organization Ok-Der is, I will mainly benefit from the works of Logan and Rabrenovic (1990) on neighborhood associations and Miraftab (2009) on grassroots movements. Additionally, in analyzing the aims of Ok-Der, I will utilize Dikeç's (2005) conceptualization of space framed as a political sphere in which a wrong can be addressed and equality can be pursued (p. 172). Understanding the nature of the association together with its objectives is important since both have had a significant impact on the decision to take the presence of Syrians into the association's agenda.

In the last section, I concentrate on the activities of the association considering Syrians and the impacts of these activities on their incorporation process, particularly within the domains of social connections, education, employment, and health. During the discussion, in order to examine what kind of spaces they managed to create owing to their efforts in establishing solidaristic relation with the Syrians, I will also touch upon the challenges Syrians face due to the drawbacks of the immigration policy regime of Turkey and the reception context in Turkey. In doing that, I will mainly benefit from the socio-interactional frame in light of Ager and Strang's (2004) framework pertaining to the roles of social bridges, social links, and social bonds in immigrant integration. Moreover, drawing on Miraftab's (2009) analytical categories of invited and invented spaces, I will conceptualize the practices of Ok-Der as a formation that built both upon invited and invented spaces of practices through which they contribute to Syrians' incorporation process. I also delve into the specific details about one of the important outputs of the endeavor Ok-

Der put into considering Syrians, which is the Women to Women Refugee Kitchen (WWRK). Since it has a central role within the discussion of the contribution to refugee incorporation, I have prioritized analyzing the process towards the establishment of WWRK together with its effects on the lives of Syrian women under a separate section.

4.1 Social context of Mahmut Şevket Paşa Neighborhood

MŞP, administratively, is within the borders of Şişli district and is located in the southwestern part of Şişli (as shown in Figure 1). Geographically, the D-100 international highway, commonly known as E-5, which goes along with the east-west axis of İstanbul and connects the Anatolian and European sides through the Bosphorus Bridge, is located just in the northern part of the neighborhood. Due to its geographical proximity to the nearby centers of Mecidiyeköy and Beyoğlu, and also to public transportation facilities such as bus, dolmuş, and Metrobus, its location is central and accessible within the city. The neighborhood is also on the intersection of three municipal districts which are Beyoğlu in the southern part, Kağıthane on the western edge, and Şişli on the northern side. For instance, Şişli district center is around three kilometers away from the neighborhood.

As of 2019, the official population of the neighborhood was 18,753.⁶ On the other hand, according to the mukhtar, the *de facto* population of the neighborhood is around 60,000 including also the inhabitants, either citizen or non-citizen, whose residence registrations are not in the neighborhood.

⁶ This information is obtained from Turkish Statistical Institute.



Figure 1. Mapping the Okmeydanı Case
Borders of Şişli marked by the red line and MŞP, seen in the south-western part, marked by the blue line (prepared by the author via google maps)

In that sense, the neighborhood has a high density of population, which can be observed even with a short stroll around the neighborhood. Obtained from the interviews and the mukhtar, a significant proportion of the residents in the neighborhood are from Sivas, Erzincan, Tokat, Mardin, Ordu, Giresun, Trabzon; most are low-income families.

Looking at the last election results can give us insight into the political characteristics of MŞP. In the general election of 2018 and the local election of June 2019 (see Figure 2), it was the CHP, the main opposition party in parliament since 2002, and mostly associated with being a social democrat secular party, received the largest number of votes.

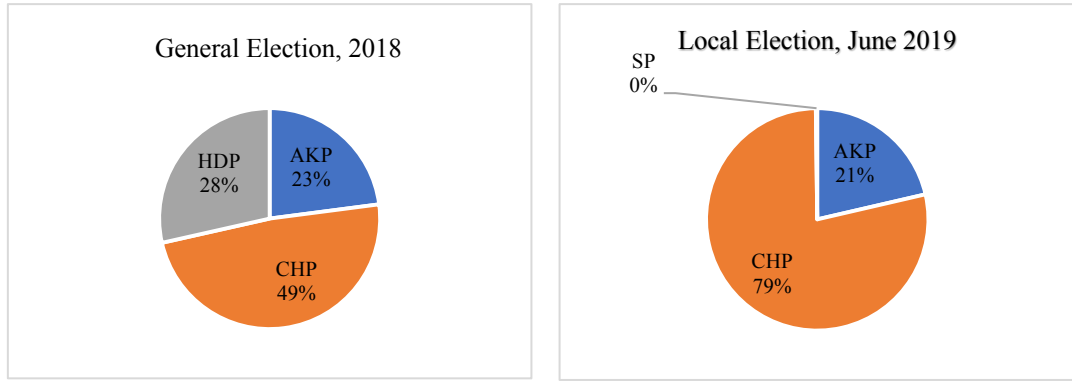


Figure 2. The ratio of votes of the first three parties in MŞP
Source: [Supreme Election Council (YSK), 2018, 2019]

In the general election of 2018, the total number of registered voters in the neighborhood was 13,771, and voter turnout was 89.22%. CHP received the highest number of votes with 5,389 votes, while HDP, a pro-Kurdish party, came in second with 3,167 votes. AKP, governing party in Turkey since 2002 and currently associated with being an authoritarian right-wing pro-Sunni party, received 2,547 votes.

In the last local election held for the candidates for İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality (IMM)⁷, CHP again came in first, receiving the highest number of votes by 9,298, while the number of votes received by AKP and SP (Saadet Partisi, SP) were 2,535 and 24 respectively (see Figure 2). The total number of registered voters at that time was 13,792 and voter turnout was 87.37% in the neighborhood. The fact that this neighborhood has overwhelmingly voted for opposition parties also point to the major discontent in the neighborhood which may be related to both the urban transformation process, as well as persistent poverty and low income. To what extent

⁷ It is important to note that HDP declared to support CHP in most of the metropolises in the local election of 2019. HDP's main aim was to defeat AKP in the local election, hence HDP decided not to nominate a candidate for the IMM election. That is why HDP as a party is absent from this pie chart. Moreover, the local election in 2019 was held in Turkey in March but the election was decided by the YSK to be held again for IMM in June 2019 and June election has been here taken into consideration as the last election.

is this voting patterns related to relatively dominant Alevi and Kurdish population also remains a valid question.

4.2 Property problem and urban transformation process: Historical background and legal dimensions

The roots of the property problem in MŞP go back to the “legal status of land property” in Okmeydanı determined during the Ottoman period (Arslan, 2014). The land was used as a site of archery trainings. Related with the archery practices, it takes the name of Okmeydanı⁸, literally meaning arrow-field in English. By Sultan Beyazıd II it was “registered as the property of Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation ..., which means the lands allocated for public interest and cannot be sold or turn into private property” (Yıldız, 2019, p. 46). There was no construction on it during the Ottoman period, besides those such as arrow monuments and Okçular Tekkesi (the lodge for the archers) (Arslan, 2014; Yıldız, 2019). Similarly, in the Republican period, Okmeydanı was registered by the General Directorate for Foundations in 1938 “as the charity land as Sultan Beyazıd II did, officially” (Arslan, 2014, p. 56). In other words, the legal status of the lands in Okmeydanı was preserved in the Republican period till 2001, something that I will elaborate on in the following parts below.

The land was registered as charity land which means it was forbidden to be sold or turned into private property. However, it was, at the same time, reserved for

⁸ MŞP is widely known as Okmeydanı, which is actually the name of a wider territory. Although there is no consensus about the borders of Okmeydanı, mostly it is argued to be composed of seven neighborhoods today, namely “Mahmut Şevket Paşa, Piyalepaşa, Fetih-tepe, Piripaşa, Keçecipiri, Kaptanpaşa and Kulaksız” neighborhoods (Yıldız, 2019, p. 6). While MŞP rests within the municipal borders of Şişli, the others are administratively within the borders of Beyoğlu district (Arslan, 2014, p. 78).

the public interest. Since it was declared as charity land which could be allocated for the public interest, the land was provided to Albanians, who took refuge in the Ottoman Empire after the Balkan Wars in 1912-1913, for the purposes of farming and animal breeding (Arslan, 2014, p. 57; Uşaklıgil, 2014, p. 125; Yıldız, 2019, p. 52). As a result, Albanians became the first settlers of Okmeydanı.

The second migration wave to the area after Albanians coincided with the 1950s in the Republican period. As it is stated that “previously there were Albanians here who were cultivating the land and, later on, they sold these lands to the newcomers”⁹ via non-legal means, although the lands were still owned by the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation (Mukhtar of MŞP, personal communication, February 10, 2020). By newcomers is meant the migrants who came to the neighborhood as a part of the rural-to-urban migration flow that started in the 1950s related to the industrialization process in Turkey. Thus, it constitutes the second migration wave to the area after Albanians. The second group of settlers, who were actually workers coming from the rural to the urban in order to earn a livelihood, faced accommodation problems in the city, thus they began to build *gecekondu* (“built overnight”) to solve their housing problems.¹⁰ In this way, a squatting process emerged in the neighborhood. Since the *gecekondus* were built outside of legal procedures, they were framed as a squatter settlement, and the dwellers were not seen as right holders. Since then, despite various amendments pertaining to the legal status of the land in the neighborhood, property problems of the inhabitants have

⁹ Translated from: “Öncesinde Arnavutlar vardı burada ekip biçiyorlardı ve sonrasında onlar bu arazileri gelenlere sattılar.”

¹⁰ It is important to underline that this situation is not peculiar to this neighborhood. “The rapid urbanization in Turkey led to the emergence of squatter housing in the urban areas, called *gecekondu*” (Yıldız, 2019, p. 23), hence *gecekondu* settlements had become a common phenomenon in Turkey after the 1950s. They can be framed as “informal occupation of public or private lands” by the migrants coming from the rural to the urban (Arslan, 2014, p. 45).

been ongoing. The urban transformation process encountered in the place currently has added another dimension to the issue for the inhabitants. Because the legal status of their houses is quite fragile, with the transformation process, the inhabitants face the threat of displacement.

The property problem of Okmeydanı as a *gecekondu* settlement has been affected by several regulations arranged by national and local authorities. Till the 1980s, *gecekondu* owners were not accepted as right holders, they were rather seen as occupiers (Arslan, 2014, p. 2). Law no. 2981 dating back to 1984 known as a zoning amnesty recognized *gecekondu* owners as right holders during the Özal government. The purview of law is defined as covering the buildings that are constructed against legislation concerning construction and permits (emlak kulisi, 2015). The amnesty was decided to cover the constructions built on the lands belonging to the treasury, municipality, special provincial administration, and General Directorate of Foundations (emlak kulisi, 2015), which means *gecekondu* owners who constructed their buildings on the property of the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Foundation in Okmeydanı were entitled to register for the zoning amnesty. As granted by the law, upon their payment of 2,000 Turkish liras to the bank, they could get *tapu tahsis* (“title deed allocation”) documents which constitute the basis for the title deed to be given to the right holders after the reclamation plan or cadastral plan are made (emlak kulisi, 2015). However, in light of lawyer Kaya’s explanation about the process after the 1984 zoning amnesty, Arslan (2014) states that,

the residents of Okmeydanı could not get benefit from this amnesty law even if they deposit 2.000 TL in Ziraat Bank to get their *tapu tahsis* documents. Because of the suits opened more than 3000 for the *actio negatoria, adequate pay* by Foundations. (p. 67)

The issue is more complicated than it seems, so property problems in Okmeydanı have remained mostly unresolved till today. Furthermore, in 2001, a regulation made

by the government with the law no. 4706 opened up ways for “barter of real estate between foundations and treasury” in Turkey (Arslan, 2014, p. 72) and removed “legal barriers on selling foundation land” (Arslan, 2014, p. 90). Therefore, after 2010, the treasury and municipality became the authorities which are in charge of power concerning once foundation-owned lands in Okmeydanı (Arslan, 2014) and it is no more the Fatih Sultan Foundation as an agency involved in the process but the treasury (Milli Emlak¹¹) and municipality as governmental agencies with whom the inhabitants without title deeds, or owing *tapu tahsis* documents, are trying to solve their property problems, so to overcome the threat of losing their houses.

In addition to the property problem, Okmeydanı was declared by Beyoğlu Municipality in 2014 “as risky area under the law no:6306”, called Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk (Arslan, 2014, p. 73). In other words, it is declared that Okmeydanı consists of buildings that are not earthquake resistant, which paves the way for the implementation of urban transformation projects. Rather than taking the legal arrangements as given, for instance, regarding law no. 6306, it is important to underline that urban regeneration projects have come to mean rent-seeking activities in which, “the exchange value of urban space took priority over the common good, even over democratic procedures” (Dikeç, 2017, p. 12). Via such projects, displacement and dispossession of old neighborhoods is used as a tool to generate revenue and profit for the rich. Far from considering the common good, and contrary to what is widely alleged by the bureaucrats, and instead of running the process in a participatory and democratic way, urban transformation projects are widely applied in a top-down way (Dikeç, 2017, p. 12).

¹¹ General Directorate of National Real Estate, operating under the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning, is responsible for the management of immovable properties owned by the Treasury.

By 2018, the first phase of the urban transformation project had been initiated in Okmeydanı, which is within the borders of Beyoğlu district, by Beyoğlu Municipality.¹² Regarding the preparation of the urban transformation project planned to be carried out in MŞP, which is within the borders of Şişli district, it is stated in the 2018 activity report of Şişli Municipality that:

authorization has not been made to our Directorate [of Urban Transformation operating under Şişli Municipality], and upon the decision of the Vice Presidency [of the Municipality], it [the preparation of the project] was decided to be executed by the joint works of the Plan and Project Directorate and the Real Estate and Expropriation Directorate. (Şişli Municipality Activity Report, 2018, p. 148)

Furthermore, as of 2012, regarding Beyoğlu and Şişli districts, IMM prepared a master plan, called “Okmeydanı Historical Sites Areas for Protection and Interaction Area 1/5000 Scale Master Plan”. However, citizens filed appeals in the court and managed to stop the execution via court decision several times.¹³ But the municipality has been continuing to make another master plan each time, and again, it is objected to by the citizens. Finally, also as stated in Figure 3 below, in the lawsuit filed, the İstanbul 3rd Administrative Court decided to cancel the implementation of the 1/5000 scale plan on 06.11.2017, which was lastly prepared by IMM in 2016, on the grounds that it was not in compliance with the city-planning and the public interest. Moreover, the urban transformation project in Okmeydanı has distinctive characteristics due to the area’s implicit features: the area is large, the density is high, and the social structure is mixed (Uşaklıgil, 2014, p. 126). In addition to this, while IMM is preparing a 1/5000 master plan, it is the responsibility of the

¹² Retrieved March 7, 2020, from <https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/okmeydaninda-100-bin-kisiyi-ilgilendiren-donusum-basladi>

¹³ Retrieved February 26, 2020, from <https://www.ibb.istanbul/CouncilDecision/RefIdIndex?refId=49901>

district municipality to prepare a 1/1000 Scale Implementary Development Plan to initiate an urban renewal project (see Figure 3).

ŞİŞLİ - MAHMUT ŞEVKET PAŞA MAHALLESİ RİSKLİ ALANI

13/08/2012 tasdik tarihli Beyoğlu ve Şişli İlçesi,

• 18.03.2016 tarihinde 552 sayılı kararı;
• PLAN ONAMA SÜRECİ Beyoğlu ve Şişli İlçeleri Okmeydanı Tarihi Sit Alanları Koruma Amaçlı ve Etkileşim Geçiş Sahası 1/5000 Ölçekli Nazım İmar Planı, İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi İmar ve Şehircilik Daire Başkanlığı Şehir Planlama Müdürlüğü tarafından hazırlanmış; İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediye Meclisinin 12.01.2012 tarih 134 sayılı kararı ile uygun bulunarak İstanbul II Numaralı Kültür Varlıklarını Koruma Bölge Kurulu'na iletilmiştir. Söz konusu plan, İstanbul II Numaralı Kültür Varlıklarını Koruma Bölge Kurulu'nun 26.07.2012 tarih 627 sayılı kararı ile uygun görülerek İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediye Başkanınca 13.08.2012 tarihinde onaylanmıştır.

• Açılan davalarda İstanbul 3. İdare Mahkemesi tarafından 06/11/2017 tarihinde 18.03.2016 tarihinde 552 sayılı kararı ile onaylanan Okmeydanı Tarihi Sit Alanları Koruma Amaçlı Etkileşim Geçiş Sahasına ilişkin 1/5000 ölçekli Nazım İmar Planı'nın şehircilik ilkelerine, planlama esaslarına ve kamu yararına uygun olmadığı gerekçesi ile yürütmeyi durdurma kararı verildi.

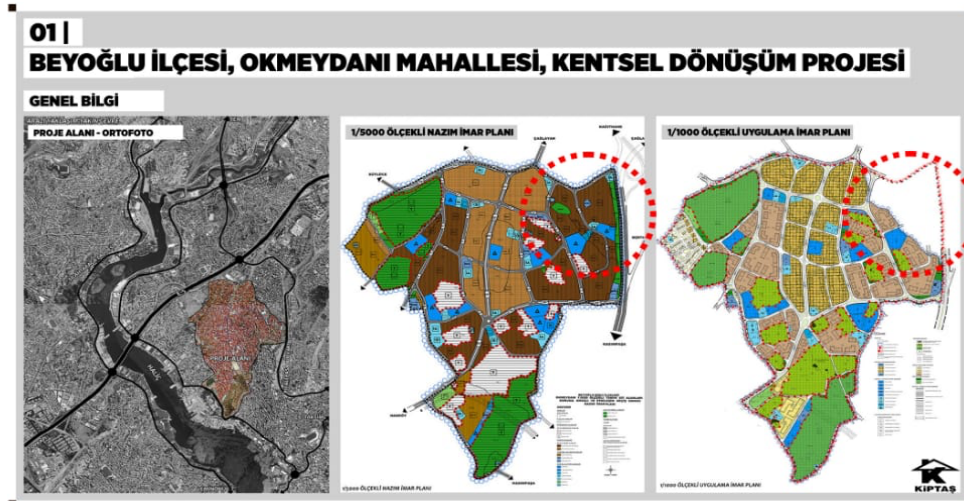


Figure 3. Okmeydanı urban transformation project

The first image shows the Okmeydanı/Beyoğlu urban transformation project implementation area, the second image is 1/5000 master plan for Okmeydanı and MŞP marked in the red circle, and the third image shows the area of 1/1000 plan for MŞP marked in the red circle.

Source: [KİPTAŞ, n.d.]

Though there is no transformation project prepared by Şişli Municipality, the neighborhood is under transformation pressure since 2012.

All in all, since the zoning amnesty of 1984, it has been 36 years, and the property problem of the inhabitants in MŞP has not been solved. If it is accepted as having started from the 1950s, when *gecekondu*s were first constructed in the area, the property problem has turned into a protracted deadlock for nearly 70 years in the district. With the recent developments, urban transformation pressure has been added to the property problem of the inhabitants, due to the fact that without title deeds, inhabitants remain in a more precarious position with weaker bargaining power or facing the threat of losing their houses without any rights.

According to the information I obtained from the mukhtar (headperson) of the neighborhood, MŞP gained neighborhood status in the year 1969. Parallel to the settlement process in Okmeydanı as explained above, the settlement in the neighborhood is reported to have been developed late in the 1950s. After 1960, the place started to get crowded with the rural-to-urban migration flow. The initial migrants to the neighborhood in the Republican period, which actually constitutes the second migration wave to the area after Albanians, as explained above, are stated, by the mukhtar, to have been from Sivas, Erzincan, Tokat, and Ordu. With the kinship networks, the population has gotten crowded over time. The main reason why the migrants had chosen there is explained as such:

Transportation for work is easy to reach. There was a shipyard industry. The shipyard in Haliç and Kasımpaşa, and the industrial area in Kağıthane provided job opportunities. In Karaköy, the tradesmen were concentrated, some started working there when they first arrived. (Mukhtar of MŞP, personal communication, February 10, 2020) (for the Turkish version of the excerpt see Appendix B, 1)

Employment opportunities in the industrial urban centers nearby had an effect on those who migrated to İstanbul and chose MŞP, and the settlers started to construct *gecekondu*s either on glebe or public land.

Furthermore, one of my interviewees who has been living in the neighborhood for 53 years, since 1966, and who is retired from Haliç Shipyard located on the Golden Horn, gave a brief outline of the recent past of the changes that have occurred in the nature of construction in the neighborhood from *gecekondu*s to unplanned apartment buildings:

When I arrived, *gecekondu* construction was continuing. There was nothing around our house. We were playing ball... *Gecekondu*s increased to be built over time... This process continued until the 1980s, again under the supervision and control of the state, these *gecekondu*s became widespread until the 80s with the implicit approval of the state... There is a law that Özal enacted in 1984, the law no. 2981. It brought an amnesty to *gecekondu* owners. People received a *tapu tahsis* [title deed allocation] document in return for a receipt of 2,000 lira as required by law. This allocation document would allow you to get the land when zoning plans were made... During the mayorship of Gülay Atıĝ [Aslıtürk, elected from the Motherland Party (ANAP) in 1994], we witnessed a period of pillaging. Contractors came and demolished those *gecekondu*s, and erected buildings like matchboxes. There is no zoning or something else. No projects, nothing. They came here and erected them... This multistorey building movement began in the 90s. It continued until the third period of Sarıgöl [one of the subsequent mayors of the Şişli district] and in that period, another wave of immigration came in the 90s, with the forced displacement of the Kurds in the Southeast Region, that is, exile to the west. (Rıza, personal communication, February 11, 2020) (see Appendix B, 2)

As he stated, in the 1960s, the squatting process was in its earlier times and it accelerated throughout the 1970s. While *gecekondu* houses were single-storey buildings, in the 1990s multi-storey buildings started to be constructed, without an effective urban planning, with the involvement of contractors. By the 1990s, the neighborhood witnessed the third migration wave with internally displaced Kurds' migration to the area. In that regard, I would like to underline that people I have

interviewed are second generation rural-to-urban migrants whose parents migrated and settled in the neighborhood in the 1960s.

In that sense, I would like to underline that there is a constant influx of migrant groups coming into the neighborhood. The migration waves of the people who moved from the rural areas to MŞP, as a place close to industrial urban centers, by the 1960s, and the internally displaced Kurds by the 1990s, have led to a social diversity in the neighborhood. However, their class position can be said to be similar to each other. The inhabitants are mostly low-income families.

The process of migrant groups coming in continued with the arrival of Syrian refugees, fleeing the war in Syria, to MŞP around 2014. Although the exact number of Syrians living in the neighborhood is unknown, it can be said that the neighborhood hosts a significant proportion of Syrians. The official number of Syrians living in İstanbul is available only at city and district level, but neighborhood-based data are not available. However, based on the information I obtained in the field, it is known that there are more than 500 Syrian families living there.

Within such a context and related to the property problem and urban transformation process discussed above, the neighborhood association, Ok-Der, was established in 2014 by a group of residents who initially nominated a candidate for the neighborhood representative election and, receiving approximately 2,850 votes, came in third in the election. They had a say about the problems of the neighborhood, mainly the property problem and the top-down model of urban transformation; then they decided to establish an association.

4.3 The neighborhood association in Okmeydanı: Ok-Der

In this section, I will examine how Ok-Der emerged so as to resist the urban transformation process, what their organizational strategies were in the initial period of its establishment and what kinds of missions the members have attributed to Ok-Der, which in turn determines the agenda of the association.

4.3.1 Organizational structure of Ok-Der

It is stated that currently they have 80 members. On the other hand, I have observed that there are approximately 8-10 members actively taking initiative in organizing activities. All members work voluntarily based on the time and energy they can devote. The average age of members is high, most of them are retired. In terms of gender distribution, women are quite visible and also actively engage within the executive board of the association. They pay special attention to different member's alternately becoming the president of the association. Deliberation and equal participation are important principles for the members.

4.3.2 Emergence of Ok-Der and its agenda: The making of an insurgent urban citizenship

Okmeydanı was declared in 2014 as a risky area under law no. 6306, called Transformation of Areas under Disaster Risk. Upon this development, the founding members of the association underline that they became aware of the emergency of the situation for them because their house properties lack secure legal status due to the ongoing property problem in the neighborhood, which has been already discussed in section 4.2 above; they are now faced with the threat of becoming dispossessed. In other words, for the inhabitants, the property problem of the neighborhood, a once-

gecekondu settlement, gained a new dimension with this declaration, and this development in turn triggered the establishment of Ok-Der. When the association was established, it is generally reported as they started to delve into the legal dimension of the process through the Şişli Municipality's archive. Legal regulations arranged up to that time, including the municipality's reclamation plans, were collected and read by the members of the association. To claim their rights, they needed also to understand the current situation of their rights, which were for the first time recognized by the zoning amnesty under law no. 2981 in 1984.

During my informal conversations, one of the members of the association argued that though they have been living in that neighborhood for nearly 50 years, they had not known about the details of the process which is also under the responsibility of the local government. This means they did not know what kind of arrangements had been made by the district municipality to solve inhabitants' property problem from 1984 until that day. They realized that the local government had not done anything about their property problem. Then, Ok-Der tried to obtain the zoning plan of the neighborhood and identified blocks, plots, and layouts within the neighborhood's land. Five kinds of parcels of land were identified; 1- the ones belonging to the treasury (Milli Emlak); 2- the ones municipally-owned; 3- the ones with *tapu tahsis* documents taken after the zoning amnesty in 1984; 4- the ones as personal property of non-Muslim people, but *gecekondu* settlements built on their lands¹⁴; and 5- the ones owing title deeds. Though they identified five kinds of parcels of land, some of them overlap with each other. For instance, the ones with *tapu tahsis* are still owned by the treasury and there are also lands owned by the treasury without any *tapu tahsis* document. In addition to those, there is also an

¹⁴ Three different persons identified as absentees. Despite all efforts, the associations could not find neither themselves nor their heirs presumptive.

unplanned area composed of 12 parcels, for which the municipality has not yet made any plan. The association created a map showing each and every parcel and put it on the blackboard in the association to identify whose buildings were constructed on what kinds of land.

As stated by Rıza, “Since the status of the lands was independent of each other, the solution methods were also different. They did not know each other either. We created a WhatsApp group for them, we made them meet each other”¹⁵ (Rıza, personal communication, February 11, 2020). For instance, the association has reached the people who had constructed their buildings on the lands privately owned by the above mentioned three persons, belonging to persons from the non-Muslim community, but who are absentee landowners. They then gathered together people residing on these types of lands and formed a WhatsApp group to communicate news of any developments about the status of their land. As Rıza showed me during the interview, there are 191 people in total in one of the WhatsApp groups, composed of inhabitants residing on privately owned lands. Similarly, they reached the people without title deeds or who are living within the unplanned area. Whenever there is a need to write a petition within the process or assign a document to the municipality, the association closely follows the process, informing people about the details and directing them what to do either individually or collectively.

I encountered many times during my visits people coming to the association to ask about the process, getting advice in collecting their papers or writing a petition to be sent to the responsible governmental bodies. By conducting such work, it is clear that the association aimed at reaching more people in the neighborhood, thus

¹⁵ Translated from: “Arazilerin statüleri birbirinden bağımsız olduğu için çözüm yolu ve yöntemleri de farklıydı. Birbirlerini de tanımıyorlardı. WhatsApp grubu haline getirdik bunları, birbiriyle tanışır hale getirdik.”

gathering more people in forming their collective action. Putting it differently, it is part of their organizing strategy, because by doing this they claim they make an endeavor to solve the property problems. They believe in acting collectively; otherwise, they will be deprived of any power to put pressure on governmental bodies toward solving their property problem.

They were not only seeking to organize collective action merely with the neighborhood residents, but also, they sought wider coalitions outside their locality. According to Logan and Rabrenovic (1990), neighborhood associations generally do not operate on their own, instead they often seek wider cooperation with other local organizations or individuals within or outside the neighborhood (p. 71). As in the case of Ok-Der, they also entered into cooperation with a wider organization that is the Union of Neighborhoods, for the purpose of participating in, and having an effect on, the decision-making processes considering their living space, beyond the local scale. Ok-Der has become a member of the Union composed of more than 70 associations and cooperatives located in İstanbul, İzmir, Eskişehir, and Kocaeli.¹⁶ Through mobilizing around a roof organization, activities of these local associations go beyond the neighborhood scale.

Within the body of the Union of Neighborhoods, there are also volunteers whose professions are urban planning or law, so on many occasions, they collaborate with member associations providing necessary knowledge about the technical or judicial dimension of the process. For instance, together with urban planners, they examine master plans or via the advice of the lawyers, they file an objection in court. This process also empowers member associations in obtaining detailed knowledge about their rights and entitlements as urban dwellers whose positions are fragile

¹⁶ Retrieved March 9, 2020, from <http://mahallelerbirligi.org/kategori/mah/>

which might also involve being deprived of an occupancy permit or residing in an area that is declared as a reserve area by the state. To give several examples in order to understand what is the purview of law no. 2981 (known as amnesty law) or law no. 6306 (known as disaster law), what are these laws' potentialities or restrictions, or what does 'reserve area' mean, etc., member associations, in case of need, receive voluntary consultancy from the professionals in the Union.

Neighborhood associations might have various aims such as to “learn about problems, formulate opinions, and seek to intervene in the political process to protect their local interests” (Logan & Rabrenovic, 1990, p. 69). In this regard, they can address the wrongs and pursue equality through their collective action (Dikeç, 2001, 2005). Similarly, in addition to learning about the technical or judicial dimension of their property problem, member associations under the Union share their demands together with their solution suggestions on various platforms, i.e., political party visits and public meetings. Via their attempts, they engage with multi-scale actors from local to national. Among the activities of the neighborhood associations under the umbrella of the Union of Neighborhoods, there is also the preparation of a letter of undertaking for the signature of political parties and candidates prior to general and local elections. They demand the commitment of the candidates to make an effort, with their own words, “to protect our houses and neighborhoods under threat of ‘urban transformation’ and to gain legal security.”¹⁷ They demand to be recognized as rights-holders even if their houses lack legal status. At the national level, they also arrange visits to the chairmanships of political party groups at the parliament in Ankara, for instance for legislative proposals they have prepared.¹⁸

¹⁷ Retrieved March 11, 2020, from <http://mahallelerbirligi.org/simdi-secim-oncesi-verilen-sozleri-yerine-getirilme-zamanihaklarimiz-icin-hep-birlikte-bir-adim-daha/>

¹⁸ Retrieved March 11, 2020, from <http://mahallelerbirligi.org/mahalleler-birligi-ankara-degerlendirmesi/>

Additionally, as of February 2020, 56 member associations from 14 districts of İstanbul came together with the IMM in order to discuss possible solutions for their property problem and agreed upon two concrete proposals: Participation of six people offered by the Union within IMM's urban transformation desk and formation of a council together with IMM, which will meet once a month, where representatives from all districts will attend.¹⁹

They attach great importance to engaging in such endeavors since they would like to participate within the decision-making processes relating to the issues which would later on have tremendous impact on their lives. They also perceive the urban transformation process as a part of rent-seeking activities carrying out by contracting companies, which is seen as predominant in the governmental bodies ranging from local to national, via which they will be dispossessed. Referring to the problem of urban transformation, Taylan underlines that they struggle against this process because it means for them to be dispossessed. Since governmental bodies treat the population there as if they were occupiers due to having houses on treasury lands, they have been struggling to solve their problems with their attempts to legalize their settlement. Most of the residents there do not have title deeds. Taylan argues:

It is our business to do something about the problems in our neighborhood. While we ask the inhabitants what kind of place they want to live, others say they want to demolish this place... They want us to be dispossessed. When you are dispossessed, you have no right to defend yourselves in a legal sense. Then you will be said good-bye... This is a great danger. What's the aim of dispossessing you? Their aim is to make the transformation in an easier way and fill their pockets... The contracting lobby is predominant in all of the existing political parties and municipalities. Municipalities, in fact, should provide public services. But they do all the contracting works except for public service. (Taylan, personal communication, December 17, 2018) (see Appendix B, 3)

¹⁹ Retrieved March 11, 2020, from <https://www.facebook.com/okder2014/posts/2795038180561498>

In underlining the danger of dispossession, he also criticizes the rent-seeking activities of official urban planning that is imposed in a top-down manner and which leads to exclusion of the inhabitants from the decision-making processes about the places they live in. Thus, they think that they have to collectively fight against the risk of becoming dispossessed.

In a similar way, together with criticizing the framing practices of the local government about their gentrification attempts, Rıza brings criticism against the process pertaining to urban transformation project run by the Beyoğlu Municipality as follows,

The realization of that project means that there will be an exile from here. Because this is a very large area that includes 100-110 thousand people. They think of the place where so many people have lived as a field, they see it as an empty land, that is, they ignore your property rights with the prepared project. Where will so many people be placed? Who owns which rights? None of this is clear. They may force you to move to Kayaşehir or social housing in other places. Moreover, they will force these people to abandon by leaving them in debt. The previous mayor of Beyoğlu, Ahmet Misbah Demircan, said: “We will turn this place into a Champs-Élysées” with the project he prepared. Where is the Champs-Élysées? Today it is the most famous and most expensive place in the world. Can people on a pension of 2,000 lira live in Champs-Élysées or make a living there? Ahmet Misbah Demircan tried to sell this project in the World Real Estate market in Cannes, France. He went with tens of contractors and tried to sell this urban transformation project. (Rıza, personal communication, February 11, 2020) (see Appendix B, 4)

Rıza vehemently denounces the speech²⁰ of the then-mayor of Beyoğlu district for his rent-seeking approach through underlining the uncertainty and precarity imposed upon the inhabitants for the sake of filling contractors’ pockets.

In light of the above-mentioned perceptions of the members, although solving their property problem and legalizing their settlement are the main motives behind the establishment of the association, it is also among the aims of the association to

²⁰ Retrieved February 27, 2020, from <https://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/gundem/133551.aspx>

object to the top-down model of urban transformation which is found to be market-centered, rather than taking the public good into consideration. To that end, they generate a counter-hegemonic movement in claiming their right to the city to destabilize the exclusionary mechanisms of transformation. As such, the members of Ok-Der provide a good example to practices that generate “insurgent citizenship.”

4.3.3 Going beyond the urban transformation issues: Building solidarity and forming urban citizenship

Activities of Ok-Der are not restricted to their struggle for gaining legal security considering their settlement. In addition to their urban transformation agenda, with the formation of a neighborhood association, they also decided to intervene in certain areas they identified as problematic in the neighborhood. For instance, having its roots in the socio-spatial context of the neighborhood, they address the low quality of education in the neighborhood school, or the fading away of neighborly relations.

In addressing the low quality of education in the neighborhood school, Taylan pays attention to two issues, that the neighborhood is mostly resided by low-income families, and the neighborhood becoming a highly politicized place since the 1970s with the rise of working-class struggle there; he states:

It is difficult to receive a good education or to have good teachers in poor neighborhoods like ours, ... the teachers are not likely to prefer a school, which is located in such a poor neighborhood, to work. For example, there were no teachers coming to our school in 2014... Either there was the lack of an efficient school management. The children seemed as if they become polarized related with the political fabric of the neighborhood. You heard certain slogans in classrooms from little kids. But you see, on the other hand, there was no one who made a significant effort to include them in, integrate them into society. (Taylan, personal communication, December 17, 2018) (see Appendix B, 5)

It is important to underscore that it is generally accepted that Okmeydanı has been a politicized region since the 1970s. In terms of political activism, MŞP, which is seen

as an Alevi settlement with a leftist background, is considered to be the most radical one (Kurt, 2008; Gül, 2016). After referring to the politicized nature of the neighborhood and the poverty there, Taylan continued to explain the reason behind their drive to engage in the issues of education quality there as such:

Just as we said we have to intervene in the issue of the property problem of the inhabitants or intervene in the municipality's work through reminding them that their job is to solve this problem here, then we said we have to intervene in the school issue. (Taylan, personal communication, December 17, 2018) (see Appendix B, 6)

Therefore, after the association was established, they got in contact with the neighborhood school to learn about the school environment and contribute to overcoming the problems there. As a result, they managed to construct a relationship with the parent-teacher union (*okul aile birliđi*) in the neighborhood school and with the school principal via which they thought they can get involved with the issues in the school and help solve the problems. On the other hand, contrary to their constant agenda concerning the property problem and urban transformation, the education issue has not taken a central role in their activities. After establishing the association, they put the education issue on their agenda for a certain period of time and engaged in above-mentioned attempts. However, the relations formed with the teachers and the school principals in that period have enabled them to create a channel, forging a link between the Syrians and the neighborhood school. I will be elaborating on this later on.

As a part of their insistence on establishing their own terms of engagement with, and participation in, the place they live, the second common theme, either implicitly or explicitly again related to poverty, is related with restoring neighborly relations, framed as *komşuluk hukuku* ("neighborhood contract"), which is claimed to have faded away after the 1990s with the apartmentisation process in the

neighborhood. With the below statement, Leyla underscores their feelings of comfort and security during *gecekondus* settlement times in the past which have a root, for her, in the neighborly relations they established thanks to helping each other, reciprocity, and familiarity with the environment. Then, she complains about their feelings of estrangement due to the dense housing with new multi-storey buildings by stating,

During the period our *gecekondus* were being built, people were acting in solidarity with each other and when they did not have money, they went to ask their neighbor for a loan of money. We wish to revive the life in which you could leave your child in your next-door neighbor's house when you'd go to a market. Because of apartmentisation, these relationships started to degenerate. Nobody started to say hello to anyone. New people who moved to the neighborhood went unrecognized. We used to leave our homes and walk around the street without locking our doors, we used to go to the grocery store. We would come back, sit in front of the doors. The key was in the door, so even you as my neighbor could open the door and enter. (Leyla, personal communication, January 16, 2020) (see Appendix B, 7)

The association is seen as a means to overcoming that estrangement since they attempt to create a space where people cooperate with each other especially for the problems they face, hence easing each other's lives. Thus, through the formed neighborhood association, they at the same time intend to contribute to the neighborly relations. To help each other, for instance, activities called hanging clothes (*askıda kıyafet*) and toys barter (*oyuncak takası*) were organized around August 2014, in the initial period when the association was established. They would hang clothes on certain corners in the neighborhood so that they could take each other's clothes in order not to have to spend money on clothing. The one who needs could take clothes from there and the one who has unneeded clothes could bring them there. Regarding the toys barter, they argued that since their children easily get bored of a toy at home and want a new one, they could bring their children's toys to the association and exchange them with another toy brought in by another resident.

To be further examined below, it was during the activities of hanging clothes and bartered toys that they first encountered the Syrians living in their neighborhoods.

Taylan also mentions about their low-income background and the need for solidarity in order to survive when expressing the reason behind the activities such as clothing and toy exchanges as such “because we are the people of a poor neighborhood, we need solidarity”²¹ (Taylan, personal communication, December 17, 2018). He continues, stating that organizing a local association comes to mean for them both claiming a right to the city and creating a channel to establish a solidarity network which he calls *komşuluk hukuku*. To protect themselves from the effects of a disintegrating and disempowering atmosphere in the society, he says this:

The thing we know is that the only way to protect our own habitats is to establish *komşuluk hukuku* and to be tight-knit with each other. The more success we have in this, the more we have the chance of living here in a better way. The more we fail to do this, they will destroy our neighborhood like Fikirtepe [a neighborhood in Kadıköy]. Why? Poor people have no other choice but to stick together... we need solidarity because only through establishing solidarity can we survive. (Taylan, personal communication, December 17, 2018) (see Appendix B, 8)

There is a kind of moral economy being instrumentalized. As Buğra (2013) adopts the concept of “moral economy”, coined by E.P. Thompson, in her analysis on poverty and social policy in Turkey, in the absence of a social state, people stay in a position to rely on communal or familial ties to maintain their lives. Similarly, here organizing around an association is seen as an important pillar of the moral economy for its members in tackling the problems arising from their socio-economic status. Equally important, they are living in a neighborhood that is under the pressure of urban transformation. Hence, they attribute great importance to establishing solidarity relations with each other for the purposes of both tackling the effects of

²¹ Translated from: “Çünkü biz yoksul bir mahalenin insanlarıyız ve bizim dayanışmaya ihtiyacımız var.”

poverty and standing back to back in defending their living space against the urban transformation process. Later, they include Syrian refugees who have moved to the neighborhood within these solidarity networks that they frame as *komşuluk hukuku*.

As Mack (2013) illustrates in the case of Geneta, inhabitants of the neighborhood had engaged in various activities which had transformative effects on the space they live in via their strategies to establish an “interventionist approach to urban form” (p. 180). She proposes the term “urban design from below” (Mack, 2013, p. 156) in analyzing residents’ efforts to create a “room for alternative public spaces for the cultural and social practices” (p. 157). In the case of Okmeydanı as well, the inhabitants developed interventionist approaches from below to the space they inhabit via various actions relating to the problem areas they prioritize addressing, as seen in the cases of; their struggle against the transformation process in their neighborhood through forming a neighborhood association, their survival strategies to counter poverty conditions through establishing *komşuluk hukuku*, their efforts to overcome the feelings of alienation framed as stemming from the expansion of apartment buildings in the neighborhood since the 1990s through reviving neighborly relations and constructing solidarity practices among themselves, and their attempts to intervene in the low quality of education in the neighborhood school through establishing contact with the school principals. Such practices are in line with Miraftab and Wills’ (2005) analysis, which points out the potential of grassroot organizations in pushing the limits of formal citizenship, which is framed as invited spaces created or sanctioned by the state, in order to create inclusive citizenship and attain social justice (p. 201). In that sense, while they are benefiting from the formal space entitled the citizens to form collective action via the means of a neighborhood association, they at the same time develop interventionist

approaches to the space they live in through inventing informal channels with the aim of tackling the socio-spatial inequalities they are experiencing. Furthermore, innovative practices of the members of Ok-Der also reveal themselves when it comes to their efforts considering Syrians living in MŞP, which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

4.4 The arrival of the Syrian refugees and practices of coexistence

Ok-Der has embarked on additional work through taking the presence of Syrians in their neighborhoods into their agenda. The association has become a good example of civic solidarity with Syrian refugees living in their neighborhood. It is mostly stated that it was early in 2015 the association first encountered Syrians living in their neighborhoods, a year after the association was established. The activities of hanging clothes and toy barter started around August 2014 and continued for nearly a year, as also seen from the posts shared in the Facebook account of the association. When they hung the clothes on the shutters in front of the association, they saw Syrians were among the people coming to take clothes. When the Syrians first became visible in the neighborhood, the members of the associations thought that the government has been already looking after them and even giving them financial aid.

As Leyla states,

when we hung those clothes, our paths crossed with the Syrians... We were just seeing them from the press. We did not know anything about the refugees from Syria at that time. As far as we learned from the press, we thought that the state already supported them, the state gave them everything. (Leyla, personal communication, January 16, 2020) (see Appendix B, 9)

If we look retrospectively to the association's first encounter in 2015 with Syrians in their neighborhood, it had been nearly four years since the first migration wave of Syrians to Turkey, in 2011, after the outbreak of conflict there. However, till

their first meaningful contact with Syrian refugees in the association dating back to 2015, the inhabitants still had not known anything except what they heard from the media, either social media or print media, about the situation of Syrian refugees in Turkey. On the other hand, the reason why they had not had any direct contact with Syrians living in the neighborhood until 2015 might be related with the high density of population in MŞP, which might diminish the probability of coming across the Syrians there. Considering the period prior to their first face to face encounter, Rıza has a similar narration as Leyla in stating that “When they started to come to Turkey and this neighborhood, we heard that the state helped them, paid their rent, gave them pensions, etc.”²² (Rıza, personal communication, February 11, 2020).

Therefore, when they first encountered a Syrian woman taking hanging clothes put in front of the association, they asked her,

Do you need it? She said yes, we need it. She came, and we chatted a little. We did not believe when we heard that the state did not give any support. Then we said, can we come and visit you? She said, of course, we would be very happy. We went there, and nothing, there was nothing in the house. Is everyone like that? Everyone is like that. We were startled, we asked how could that be the case? Really? We were ashamed of our humanity when we saw that first-comers, unfortunately, were given the worst places for excessive rent by the self-seekers of this neighborhood. So, we invited all of the friends in the Association to a meeting. We said there was such a thing in this neighborhood. While we were establishing this association, we wanted solidarity for ourselves; but some were worse off than us, then we gave ourselves up. (Taylan, personal communication, March 5, 2020) (see Appendix B, 10)

In that sense, they first reacted against Syrians taking clothes from there. As illustrated by the survey of Erdoğan (2018), differences in political positions play an important role in shaping the approaches of host communities towards the Syrians in Turkey (p. 115). Since it is thought that Turkey, especially President Erdoğan, played a crucial role in the crisis in Syria and in Syrians’ coming to Turkey, significant

²² Translated from: “İlk gelmeye başladıklarında Türkiye’ye ve bu mahalleye gelmeye başladıklarında, devlet yardım ediyor, kiralarını veriyor, maaş veriyor falan diye duyuyorduk.”

differences have been observed between the approaches of those who oppose the AKP and those who support the AKP (Erdoğan, 2018, p. 115). As presented via the last election results in the initial part of this chapter, MŞP in general has oppositional political characteristics with a leftist background. Following a similar line, Ok-Der takes a dissident political stance against the ruling party. Related with it, the members of Ok-Der tended to believe in a reactionary way that the state was already protecting the Syrians and looking after them. Both misrepresentation of Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey in the media and the ruling party's presentation of itself as a dominant figure in showing "compassion" to Syrians deepened their antipathy towards the Syrians especially among the people who are critical of policies of the ruling party, that is AKP.

However, as time passed, the association started to get in touch with the newcomers. Owing to the human contact they established with the Syrians, they saw that Syrians' living conditions is not the same as what they thought initially. In that sense, in the Okmeydanı case, we observe positive effects of face-to-face contact that facilitates the elimination of prejudice based on misinformation. Referring to the representation of Syrian refugees residing in Turkey in the media or by the government, Leyla states, "so, everything was a lie. When we look at what they experienced, what was said by the state and in the press did not match what we saw at all"²³ (Leyla, personal communication, January 16, 2020).

During my conversation with the Syrian informants, it is stated that many arrived in the neighborhood by 2014. This is also correspondent with the period around 2014, when the war in Syria gained a new dimension with the rise of ISIL, which is also reflected in the drastic increase in the number of people fleeing from

²³ Translated from: "Yani hikayeydi söylenen şey aslında. Yaşadıklarına baktığımızda devletin ve basında söylenen şeylere baktığımızda hiç örtüşmüyordu birbiriyle."

Syria.²⁴ Syrian refugees I have interviewed with talked about their conditions when they first arrived as follows:

It was difficult when we first arrived, it was very difficult. For example, there was nothing in my house. I had just arrived. My husband bought a mattress, we were sleeping on the floor. He bought blankets for me and my daughter. There was a small television, but no table under it. It was very difficult when we first arrived. (Ayşe, personal communication, February 18, 2020) (see Appendix B, 11)

The first house we rented was very damp ... We were sleeping on the floor. We had nothing... I had neither carpet nor any document. No pillows, nothing. We used to fold dresses and place them under our heads and made pillows. We had everything there [in Syria], we had to leave them and come here. When we got here we had nothing, it was very difficult. (Nergis, personal communication, February 26, 2020) (see Appendix B, 12)

As they state, because they fled the war, they left everything and could not bring anything with them. They are self-settled urban refugees, not getting any accommodation services either from the state or any other institutions, so they have to take care of themselves. Also, very precarious housing conditions further deteriorated their situations.

Regarding her first encounter with the association, Ayşe, a Syrian woman with Turkmen origin and living in MŞP since 2014, refers to the hanging clothes period and states:

I was pregnant with my second daughter. A friend of mine said, "There are clothes and some other stuff there. Go and get it whenever you want, if you need it." So, I came here and met Taylan. I gave him my number and told him that I was pregnant, so if any baby clothes would come, he could call me or for any other stuff. I said if something comes, call me. Then came the cradle. They called and told me to come and take the cradle... I was pregnant, and the hospitals asked me for a referral, they were wanting a referral at that time. I called Taylan and Leyla. Hospitals are asking for a referral paper to accept me. That's why we went to the hospital together. (Ayşe, personal communication, February 18, 2020) (see Appendix B, 13)

²⁴ Retrieved March 17, 2020, from <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-50434154>;
Retrieved March 17, 2020, from <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>

When she heard about the hanging clothes there, in search of support, she visited the association. As seen from her statements, the association met her needs in providing a baby cradle. It was indeed obtained via the communal solidarity network of the association. Additionally, she received support from the people in the association in dealing with the obstacle she faced during her pregnancy related with the medical procedures. She was, at the same time, the person with whom the association first started to visit other Syrian families in the neighborhood, since she knows Turkish well and can make translation from Arabic to Turkish and vice versa. She is a Syrian with Turkmen origin, and she speaks Arabic as well. Turkish as the common language between the members of the association and she facilitated their interaction, since they could have a talk with her more easily, contrary to other instances, which will be discussed later on.

The member of the association coming across the severe living conditions of Syrians, hence, felt responsible to do something about that issue. Incrementally, they started to get acquainted with the Syrians living in their neighborhood and when they visited their houses, it is reported that there were almost no domestic utensils. To put it differently, in the homes they witnessed, there was no bed, blanket, heating stove, armchair, etc. which are seen as basic household necessities. Below are the narrations of the interviewees who visited Syrian families after their initial encounters in the association during the hanging clothes time.

That day, for example, we received our pension. They had no food, there were no glasses, no curtains. Until we went there, the neighbors next to them gave them chairs and a carpet. We wanted to give them 50 liras as a contribution that day so that children can eat something, we also went shopping for them. (Leyla, personal communication, January 16, 2020) (see Appendix B, 14)

It was snowing when we went to a family. We went to a family in need and there was no stove at home. They had two disabled children. Well, we thought, after all, we live on pensions, so we are not very rich people. We

may even be poor compared to other people. We came home, we did not have two pennies to rub together. We came home, Leyla went home. I went home. My conscience pricked me. I called Leyla. I said get up, let's go to the hardware store, buy it with a credit card. I couldn't rest. We went, bought a stove, bought coal, and brought them to that family. (Nejla, personal communication, February 4, 2020) (see Appendix B, 15)

After such encounters, members of the association decided to bring surplus blankets in their homes to give to the Syrians they encountered in the initial periods. As one of the interviewee states "In the early days, when we came to the meeting, we were bringing pasta and milk to give people in need, for example"²⁵ (Nihan, personal communication, February 14, 2020). Additionally, Leyla and Nejla, later on, took the above mentioned handicapped children to the hospital to receive physiotherapy, since their family face difficulties in reaching medical treatment due to language obstacles and lack of knowledge about the healthcare service procedures in Turkey.²⁶ Although Syrians under TP are granted to benefit from healthcare services in Turkey, as widely emphasized in the field, they face a lot of difficulties in hospitals due to scant interpreters there. It is reported that, even if there are interpreters, they are assigned to one department, hence, no interpreters in other departments in the hospital.

After their first encounters, they tried to support the Syrians families via in-kind assistance, e.g., providing blankets, supply of provisions, and heating stoves via their own resources. After realizing that this issue goes beyond their own capacity, through the internet, namely via the association's Facebook account, they made a call for outside support; this is when volunteers began to organize around the association intensely. With the involvement of volunteers and outside donations, the association

²⁵ Translated from: "İlk zamanlar, toplantıya geldiğimizde makarnayla geliyorduk, süt getiriyorduk mesela ihtiyaç sahibi insanlara vermek için."

²⁶ Leyla and Nejla are still in contact with that family though the family moved from the neighborhood and went to Beyoğlu. During one of my visits to the association, I encountered an instance that Nejla had reserved some clothes sent to the association by volunteers, to give that family.

managed to organize more regular in-kind aid, including providing clothes, supply of provisions, footwear, heating stoves, coal, household cleaning supplies, baby's nappies, beds, refrigerators, stationery supplies, etc. and contributed to the organization of many workshops and courses, via volunteers, for the children, which both Turkish and Syrian children attended.

Especially from early in 2016 until mid 2017, for a year and a half, Ok-Der started to organize regular in-kind assistance for the Syrians through their volunteer network. Among their volunteers there were individuals, student groups from various universities, and several groups called 'Refugees, we are Neighbors' Solidarity Network²⁷, Spartakistanbul²⁸, and Ahtapot Volunteers²⁹. Together with them, the association started to distribute incoming goods on a regular basis according to needs priority of the families. As I have also verified via Ok-Der's Facebook account³⁰ they distributed more than 200 tons of coal and nearly 50 heating stoves to the families in need in the winters of 2016 and 2017. Moreover, 30 beds and bed bases, and hundreds of blankets were distributed. And again in 2016 and 2017, stationery supplies and footwear were delivered to around 200 children living in the neighborhood. They reported this in-kind assistance was not only distributed to Syrians in the neighborhood but also to native families in need from Turkey. Furthermore, every month for a year and a half, there were regular distributions of food and clothing aid.

For in-kind aid distribution, they started to keep a recording list. Based on their records, it is stated that Ok-Der has distributed assistance to more than 800 families; around 300 of them are from Turkey, and around 500 are Syrian families.

²⁷ Please see <https://multeciyimhemserim.org>

²⁸ Please see <https://www.facebook.com/spartakistanbul/>

²⁹ Please see <https://www.ahtapotgonulluleri.org>

³⁰ Please see <https://www.facebook.com/okder2014/>

In total, they reached approximately 6,000 people composed of both Syrians and families from Turkey. Having a recording system reflects their wish to be fair in distributing the aid. The reason for keeping records is explained by them as not in order to demonstrate how many people they have been helping, but rather due to their concern for distributing goods in a fair way. Their aims were to categorize families according to the urgency of their need.

It is crucial to underline another dimension of the in-kind assistance process. Some of the Syrian inhabitants of the neighborhood participated in the process of distribution of goods. Even though widely stated by the members of the association, they improvised as they went along, the process was organized in a participatory way. Two main factors paved the way for the process evolving as such. On the one hand, there was a language barrier between the locals and the Syrians. Among the Syrians who came to the neighborhood there are not only Arabs, but also Kurds and Turkmen. Though all Syrian people there speak Arabic, not all of them know Turkish or Kurdish. However, among the native people in the association, the only common language is Turkish. Within the process, people from Syria who know Turkish were invited by the association to accompany them to make translation while they were visiting Syrian households to deliver in-kind aid. Thus, the association welcomed people who could play an intermediary role in doing translation for them.

On the other hand, it was also the Syrian women themselves who liked to take initiative voluntarily in helping the association in their bulk of work, since they were in an endeavor to deliver aid to the Syrians in the neighborhood. For instance, Evin, who is Kurdish, came from Syria to Turkey in 2013 and since then, has learned a bit of Turkish, and speaking in broken Turkish, explains her motivation for

participating in the activities of the association to establish solidarity relations with Syrians in the neighborhood as follows:

You know, when we first came from Syria, I had a lot of trouble. I wanted nobody to go through what I did, nobody to see what I saw. I wanted to help them, we were going to their houses to see what they need, what is missing. I wanted to help them. For example, one day we went to the home of a newly arrived family. They had nothing. The house was under the ground, their situation was pretty bad. We looked at what is missing at home. Later we found another rental house for them. We got them out of that terrible house. We did a lot of things because I was enjoying that. I wanted to help. (Evin, personal communication, February 20, 2020) (see Appendix B, 16)

Expressed by Evin, the association together with Syrian volunteers, amid other solidarity practices, also has engaged with finding a house for those who are in dire straits. Evin's narration about finding a better house for a refugee family or Ayşe's statements above about receiving support in accompanying her to hospital are just two instances amid many others. Stated commonly by the interviewees from the association, as far as their energy and time suffice, they are dealing with these issues. Whether through providing in-kind aid, accompanying Syrians to receive medical services, or finding a house, the association has tried to conduct various solidarity practices to mitigate hardships in Syrian refugees' living conditions in their neighborhood.

For a while later, one of the native people in the neighborhood who is from Mardin, a southeastern city in Turkey, and knows both Arabic and Kurdish, visited the association to participate in the process voluntarily. She was Eylem, the only person from Turkey now among the women in WWRK. Since she knows Arabic and Kurdish, in addition to Turkish, her incorporation into the process has also eased language obstacles between both groups, people from Syria and from Turkey.

All of the interviewees reported the frequency of time they were spending in the association as almost every day for the mentioned one-and-a-half-year period.

When goods were received to the association, firstly they sorted out the goods then they made phone calls to people, based on the list made, in order to invite them to come and take the delivery of incoming goods. In order to avoid any possible disorder, they were calling people group by group each day. As Syrian women I have interviewed told that every day they spent approximately two or three hours in the association to do the necessary work. Ayşe describes the general situation and the scheme of things at those times as such:

For example, I would go to the association every day. Taylan used to come at 3:30-4:00 p.m. He would immediately get in and open the door. We would come with them. All the people knew it was open from four to six. They were coming, we were here... Secondhand clothes would be brought mostly. You do not know its old version. There were large iron tables. They were all covered with clothes. Clothes, shoes, stationery supplies would be brought here, and school bags were distributed. There would be events for children. The event would be on Saturday or Sunday, for example. The items were often put in boxes and pushed to empty places within the association. (Ayşe, personal communication, February 18, 2020) (see Appendix B, 17)

I have traced the physical situation, also outlined by her in the above statement, i.e., cardboard boxes, clothes, stationery for the children, or dry goods organized on the tables, in Ok-Der when the goods came and also the activities organized at the weekends, through the post shared in the association's Facebook account. Besides the period I have witnessed since the end of 2018, for the previous period, their Facebook account, indeed, functioned for me as an archive to see the videos or photos mentioned frequently during the interviews.

In addition to distributing the goods within the association, there were also times they went directly to the houses to deliver aid. Especially during the period that heating stoves and coal were distributed, Eylem mentions about the conditions under which they made needs assessment collectively through going from house to house in the winter as follows,

I remember we were going all the way down the streets. I remember I got so wet [showing her knees, since it had snowed]. We had street representatives, we went from street-to-street, house-to-house to detect who has a stove, who doesn't, who needs coal and who doesn't. With Ok-Der, I know that we detected and distributed them together. (Eylem, personal communication, February 20, 2020) (see Appendix B, 18)

As she underlines, even under hard conditions, they were in an endeavor to get the aid to the people in need. Moreover, living in the same neighborhood and the association's being within walking distance from their home provided them an opportunity to easily engage in such activities.

Above, Eylem addresses also the street representatives. In the interest of saving time and energy, the association has formed a body of street representatives. Instead of calling people person by person each time, for a while later, they started to assign representatives and form WhatsApp groups for certain streets to ease communication. Additionally, when there were incoming goods, instead of calling each person, they started to inform people over WhatsApp groups, formed for each street, about the time they can come and take the goods.

It is mostly the Syrian women, especially those who have taken initiative as an active agent in the process mentioned previously, who have become representatives of the streets they live on. Each representative has taken responsibility to detect either newcomers, mainly Syrian families came later on, or families from Turkey, native families in need, in the street in which they reside. At this point, it is significant to recall that the solidarity network established to deliver aid to Syrian inhabitants had been enhanced to include also families in need from Turkey. Additionally, there were the Syrian refugees, thanks to their involvement in the aid distribution activities of the association, among the people taking responsibility within the process. To put it differently, they were also Syrian women themselves helping families from Turkey who live in poverty. Regarding such a

practice of Syrian women's distributing in-kind aid to the families from Turkey, I argue that the solidarity network had become interwoven, rather than unidirectional and refugee/local divide, indeed, dissipated. Referring to the perspective of Paker (2019), who articulates refugee incorporation as "coexistence" that "embodies a novel understanding of engagement between locals and newcomers that transcends existing categorization—based on given borders—of citizen and non-citizen" (p. 5), I claim that coexistence within the same locality enabled them to invent a space, during the aid distribution process, in which such an engagement between locals and refugees facilitated transgression of existing categorizations of citizen/non-citizen or locals/refugees.

When it is related to distributing aid, questions about the issues such as transparency, just distribution, or put it differently, the possibility of clientelism come to mind. At that point, it is necessary to underline that the involvement of both Syrians, who took the initiative to participate in the process, and outside volunteers, mainly donors themselves or intermediary people, can be read as a sign of the association's dealing with the distributions justly and with transparency, since all actors have the chance to see how the process is managed, from taking registration to delivering by hand the goods to the families in need.

During the interviews with the Syrian refugees, I have paid special attention to obtain their own evaluation about how all these activities have had an impact on their lives. In addition to economic benefit of receiving in-kind assistance, which played a palliative role in their lives, especially during the time their household and living conditions were extremely fragile, owing to their participation within the solidarity practices as an active agent, such as by making translation, allocating their time and energy for aid distributions, taking responsibility as street representatives

etc., the whole process played another role for them through contributing to their socialization in their new environment.

All the Syrian women I interviewed emphasize that they did not go out of their home during their initial period of arrival to the neighborhood, because they felt insecure. They mostly spent time at home, either because of a language barrier or because of not knowing the environment. For instance, mentioning the difficulties she experienced in the initial period of her arrival to the neighborhood, Evin states,

It was very hard. I couldn't leave the house anyway. I don't know, I was afraid at home. I did not speak the language. I wouldn't know anyone here, so I wouldn't know. It was difficult for me, it was very difficult. But after getting to know them, I was going out every day ... That period was very difficult for me when I first arrived. Then I got out of the house, it was good. (Evin, personal communication, February 20, 2020) (see Appendix B, 19)

Getting involved with the association's activities for Syrian refugees in their neighborhood made her feel good, since she started to go outside, get in touch with other people, hence socialize. In that respect, Ok-Der has played a role for Syrians to establish social relationships within their living environment. In that sense, the space created via the activities of Ok-Der enabled Syrians to construct social connections: social bridges, bonds and links, which contribute to their sense of familiarity with and security in their surroundings.

According to Ager and Strang (2004, 2008), while social bridges refer to the connections between the host and refugee communities, and social bonds refer to the established intra-group relations, social links refer to the relations with the structures of the state, such as government institutions and public services. These differentiated forms of social relationships and networks are included within the indicators of the immigrant/refugee integration framework by Ager and Strang (2004, 2008) under the theme of social connection. In addition to this, they also identify three other main themes: "means and markers" (employment, housing,

education, health), “facilitators” (language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability), and “foundation” (rights and citizenship) (Ager & Strang, 2004, 2008). Rather than proposing a causal chain for the process of integration, they underline that whereas markers can be approached as signifiers of integration, they can also be rendered as a means to integration and “there are such complex inter-linkages between all of the proposed domains” (Ager & Strang, 2004, p. 4). For instance, “[a]ccess to – and progress within – the education system serves as a significant marker of integration, and also as a major means towards this goal. Education creates significant opportunities for employment, for wider social connection and for language learning” (Ager & Strang, 2004, p. 16). Within this perspective, during my field research, I also paid special attention to examining the inter-linkages between the domains such as social bridges, bonds and links to understand how Ok-Der contributes to the incorporation process of Syrians.

Participation of Syrian refugees within the process of in-kind aid distribution organized during the initial periods has facilitated the establishment of not only social bridges between the native inhabitants and the Syrians, but also social bonds with the other Syrians in the neighborhood. As stated by Evin, she carried a sense of strangeness and did not feel secure, so was not going outside much, since she neither knew anybody there, nor understood Turkish. However, she mentions that “after getting to know them, I was going out every day” (Evin, personal communication, February 20, 2020). This process, to a certain extent, helped her to socialize and brought her a sense of familiarity with the surroundings. In addition to social bridges and bonds, owing to the space the association created, Evin also met with an NGO operating in the refugee field from a gender perspective. As stated earlier, the association made an announcement via social media to receive support from outside;

this NGO was one that came and visited the association at those times. Through the space the association had opened, Evin had the chance of become acquainted with another agent, an NGO, which later on contacted her and offered her a job. That is how Evin has started to work there as a part-time employee. She is still working there three days a week. In that sense, though it was an unintended consequence, for that particular case, the activities of the association, even in an indirect way, contributed to the creation of a means of livelihood for a Syrian woman.

Among the other activities Ok-Der conducted, there were workshops/social activities in the association, e.g., painting, play dough, paper plate, playing workshops, and Turkish and English courses for children. In January 2016, a meeting was held in the association together with Syrian inhabitants in order to discuss the needs of their children. Then, with the human resources and social capital of the volunteers, mainly university students, the first social activities were initiated early in 2016 which would continue every weekend for nearly two years.

Both Syrians and local children were engaged in all these activities, except for Turkish courses. Turkish as a foreign language courses were provided for Syrian children as supplementary courses, since the language obstacle constituted an impediment for them to incorporate into school. Between 20 and 45 children attended each of the activities i.e., workshops and language courses, which continued for a year and a half on a regular basis on the weekends. For instance, English classes were divided into two when number of children reached 45. Regarding the effect of these activities on children's lives in general, Evin tells about her observation:

For example, at school, I am talking about the past, not now, they were uncomfortable with Syrian students, Turkish ones did not talk to Syrians, they could not get along with each other. They were beating them, asking them why they were coming to school. But when they came there [to the workshops], they were painting and singing with them, the children were

enjoying it. Their morale was bolstered. (Evin, personal communication, February 20, 2020) (see Appendix B, 20)

The period she mentions was 2016 and 2017 and underlining that it was in the past, she tells about the discriminatory conditions Syrian children faced due to peer bullying in the school. Given those circumstances, the activities held in the association are evaluated by her as having a positive impact on the children's mood.

In a similar way, Nergis, a Kurdish Syrian woman living in MŞP for six years, describes the effects of the activities on her then five-year old child as follows,

The workshops also helped my daughter a lot. My daughter was very introverted; because she was a girl who lived through the war. She was not talking and making friends. She was always sitting in a corner. Then she started talking, making friends, participating in plays. She was also introverted at home. She started talking to me at home. I saw a good influence of it on my daughter. (Nergis, personal communication, February 26, 2020) (see Appendix B, 21)

In light of the aforementioned activities, it can be said that the place of the association sometimes was being turned into storehouse and other times, especially at the weekends, becoming a playing field or a school. On one occasion, the place was even turned into a medical room. On February 19, 2016, a medical screening was held within the association for Syrian refugees facing difficulties in accessing health services. Examinations were carried out behind a curtain set up in a corner of the association. The event was posted on association's Facebook account with this announcement: "Our association has turned into a medical room today. Health screening is being carried out by the health department of Şişli Municipality upon our request, for our refugee neighbors who have difficulties in accessing health services."³¹ In addition to this, another event was held in April 2016 for the wedding of a Syrian couple in the neighborhood. Two refugees who were marrying were

³¹ Please see <https://www.facebook.com/okder2014/>

supported by being provided with necessary household goods, and some members of the association attended the wedding. It was posted on the association's Facebook account as "Household goods for our refugee neighbors who are going to marry."³²

Since they frame the cause of forming a neighborhood association with dealing with the problems of the neighborhood, the situation of poor Syrians residing in their locality was seen as an issue to be taken into their agenda and their framing started to evolve towards living together.

The refugee problem is our common problem, a common problem of this neighborhood. Since we have refugees in every street in this neighborhood, we cannot ignore them, and if neighbors want to live peacefully in their streets, they, too, have to admit this as our common issue and they have to be involved in that issue. So, to ignore refugees, to exclude them, to see them poor is not something we find acceptable. (Taylan, personal communication, December 17, 2018) (see Appendix B, 22)

Their formula came to be establishing *komşuluk hukuku* also with the Syrians. As discussed in section 4.3.2 "Emergence of Ok-Der and its agenda: The making of an insurgent urban citizenship," they already had a mission to establish a solidarity network, which they called *komşuluk hukuku*, via the means of the neighborhood association, in order to tackle the socio-spatial injustice they suffer from. When it came to the Syrian inhabitants, they also decided to include them into the neighborly relations they had already formed. Taylan underlines the point that "When we established the *komşuluk hukuku* with them, we were relieved"³³ (personal communication, December 17, 2018). Besides the humanitarian aspect in developing solidaristic relations with Syrians when the locals first encountered them face-to-face, they also saw this issue as a security issue. When Taylan mentions *komşuluk hukuku*, he at the same time means knowing each other and having a sense of security in the neighborhood. As argued by the contact theorists (Pettigrew et al.,

³² Please see <https://www.facebook.com/okder2014/>

³³ Translated from: "Onlarla komşuluk hukuku kurunca biz de rahatladık."

2011), meaningful social contact framed here as *komşuluk hukuku* played a role in reducing uncertainty for the natives, thus enable the establishment of positive relationships with the newcomers. As other native interviewees state, they were also afraid of possible unrest in the future due to their new neighbors, with whom they were not familiar. So, it has also a pragmatic dimension for them. It is expressed that *komşuluk hukuku* needed to be established because of the possibility of various troubles occurring due to danger of rising polarization in the neighborhood.

Instead of references to Islamic Ottoman Empire values prevailing in the reception context of Syrians in Turkey, people in Ok-Der utilize an alternative frame that they call *komşuluk hukuku*. I have not encountered any phrase referring to host-guest relations either during the interviews, nor during my field visits. Contrary to the widespread framing practice of host-guest relations which implies a hierarchy between the host community and the refugees, the association seems rather to have an approach that equalizes the two communities, the locals and the Syrians, in the sense that they share the same space. Being inhabitants, whether they are natives or newcomers, is sufficient to establish a horizontal relation among themselves. It also implies living together practices. Articulating such a frame, *komşuluk hukuku*, plays a crucial role in contributing to the refugees' incorporation process, since the host-guest dividing line between locals and refugees melts away. In this regard, referring to the Lefebvrian understanding of right to the city (Lefebvre, 1996), as Dikeç (2001) highlights, it is “established through lived experience and social relationship” (p. 1791). Far from binary categorization of citizen/non-citizen or local/newcomer, inhabitation taken here as a premise has facilitated the invention of alternative spaces of practices, which contributes to the refugees' incorporation process.

Referring to Dikeç's (2005) conceptualization of space, I approach their activities as addressing the wrongs in their living space via the means of forming collective action around the neighborhood association. They insist on their right to contest and establish their own terms of engagement with and participation in the place they live. Through this, they try to invent transformative mechanisms in struggling against the socio-spatial injustices they suffer from. In that sense, I conceptualize their endeavor as organized from below via which they claim their rights to the city. However, claiming right to the city is not a mere premise of pursuing equality (Dikeç, 2001, p. 1790). As Öz and Eder (2018) underline, if right to difference is not taken into consideration, claiming right to the city might lead to "one group claiming hegemony over space" related to various reasons, for instance: urban transformation pressure, competing interests and conflicts over norms and values (p. 1030). That is why I have paid close attention to what kind of organization Ok-Der is through concentrating on its aims, its history, and the time and the context in which it emerged. Hence, I elaborate on the mission the members of Ok-Der attribute to themselves, their standpoints and perceptions pertaining to the issues they found important in their living space.

Their guiding principle is sharing the same locality with the Syrians. Similar to their other problems relating to the neighborhood, they perceive the refugee issue as something to be intervened in. While *komsuluk hukuku* comes to mean for them knowing each other and having a sense of security in the neighborhood, they have simultaneously developed a critical perspective against the polarization atmosphere in Turkey. One representative of Ok-Der also stresses this: "Today, we live in an atmosphere that separates society into segregated units, but we do not want it to be so

in our neighborhood”³⁴ (Taylan, personal communication, December 17, 2018). He refers to increased social and political polarization in Turkey and their intention to secure their locality from the impacts of this polarization. Then he adds that due to their involvement in the issue, contrary to other parts of the city, there have been no fights between the local community and Syrians in their neighborhood. Hence today, he states they feel safe in their space.

It is also crucial to underline that Ok-Der has a considerable zone of influence within their locality, hence an impact on local residents in shaping the general environment within the neighborhood. In order to deal with the reactions from the local community against the Syrians, Ok-Der uses their domain of influence in MŞP. For instance, an interviewee from Ok-Der states that some of their neighbors showed very offensive behavior against Syrians and the association argued against such practices via developing their own strategies.

When we heard that the neighbors had behaved this way against refugees, treated them as if they are non-human, we told them “we will not deal with your individual cases about urban transformation ... If you want to receive our support, stop such treatment.” For instance, we made interventions about the amounts of rent. We told them “If you rent your apartments out to Syrians with high rental fees, ... then we will subject you to make payments to us when we write a petition for your cases.” Normally we always chase the cases in court or write a petition, in case of need, for homeowners, free of charge, since we work voluntarily ... But if someone says, “I will benefit from and swoop down on the new inhabitants” who escape from their country and seek refuge here, we are sorry, but we too know how to swoop down on that homeowner. (Taylan, personal communication, December 17, 2018) (see Appendix B, 23)

In that sense, they try to set up a common understanding in their neighborhood, so the attitude of the association can be said to be effective in restraining reactionary attitudes of the locals.

³⁴ Translated from: “Bugün insanları ayırıştırın bir atmosfer içerisinde yaşıyoruz, bizim mahallemizde de böyle olsun istemiyoruz.”

Considering their reactions against the raising social and political polarization in Turkey and considering also their critical approach against the discriminatory attitudes of some locals, I argue that they have a perspective which at the same time values the right to difference principle, since they are seeking to create an alternative living space through their attempts to mitigate conflict and eliminate exclusionary practices of one group towards the other.

Another field of intervention of the association is related to the area of education. It was 2016 when the association decided to initiate efforts to register Syrian children into the neighborhood school. Although Syrian children were given the right to enroll in public schools in 2014, there were many challenges in accessing the right to education. It can be related to several factors, i.e., lack of implementation of the policy, the fact of child labor being widespread among Syrians due to precarious life conditions, or a discriminatory environment in the schools and peer pressure. As of 2016, the total percentage of Syrian children receiving education in Turkey was around 37% (MoNE, n.d., 2020), and the situation in MŞP was not independent from that country-wide picture. There was a serious discrepancy between the formal arrangements and the real practice. Therefore, as a neighborhood association attaching importance to education, as discussed within the part of their involvement with the issue of low quality of education in the neighborhood school in the initial period of its establishment, Ok-Der paid special attention to supporting Syrian children to benefit from public education.

Owing to the constructed social bridges, the members of the association were aware of what was happening in the Syrians' lives in general. Referring to the attempts of the Syrians to enroll their children into the neighborhood school, Leyla narrates,

They couldn't enroll their kids in the school. We asked what's going on. When we went [to the neighborhood school], we learned that there were actually no obstacles and they could enroll them in school, and 76 children were enrolled³⁵ there at that time. (Leyla, personal communication, January 16, 2020) (see Appendix B, 24)

Despite the Regulation on Temporary Protection, which entered into force in 2014, and which grants Syrian children the rights to receive public education in Turkey, the interviewees from Ok-Der state that the neighborhood school still in 2016 did not accept to register Syrian children. Hence, there was a discrepancy between the laws and its execution. The reason in MŞP was related with the arbitrariness of the school principal. At that time the principal refused to register Syrians claiming that they would not be able to adapt, hence they would disturb the order of the school. Acting within the invited spaces of rights, the association went to the Provincial Directorate of Education and told them that these children have to receive education. It is also stated by Taylan that “the law is something, the practice is another thing. We objected to this practice ... and we managed to enroll them in the neighborhood school”³⁶ (Taylan, personal communication, December 17, 2018). Even though formal channels stayed short, the association forced the boundaries of formal mechanisms and enabled 76 Syrian children to access public education.

On the other hand, there were also Syrian children without a TP identity card. The legal regulations entitle only children with a TP identity card to receive education in public schools. In spite of this restriction, the association pressured the Provincial Directorate of Education for the children who lacked TP identity cards. Then a formulation of registration was found. Based on the efforts of the association, Syrian children without ID cards were able to register to the school as guest students.

³⁵ It is also reported in the news by CNN TÜRK. Please see <https://www.facebook.com/okder2014/videos/1002219733176694/>

³⁶ Translated from: “Yasa bir şey, uygulama başka bir şey. Biz bu pratiğe itiraz ettik...ve onları mahalle okuluna kaydettirmeyi başardık.”

In that sense, Ok-Der also pushed the limits of formal channels and managed to enroll those children in the neighborhood school in the second school term in 2016. Through these means, established social bridges contributed to Syrians' access to the education system.

The shortfall of formal procedures and the ineffectiveness of existing invited spaces, determined by immigration policy regime of Turkey for participation of the Syrian children in the education system, was able to be overcome thanks to the developed informal solidarity mechanisms with the Syrians. This is in line with Miraftab and Wills' (2005) argument, which states that imposed policies or existing formal practices might encounter resistance from below through the creation of non-formal realms, besides formal ones, as invented spaces of practice (p. 201). Both invited and invented spaces are approached as going hand in hand for the formation of inclusionary mechanisms (Miraftab & Wills, 2005). As in the case of Ok-Der, informal mechanisms stemming from established social bridges or solidarity practices at the local level led to the achievements in the formal sphere within the domain of education.

Additionally, to facilitating children's enrollment in the school, Ok-Der also pressured the neighborhood school to open a Turkish language course for Syrian adults. Related to their efforts to open language courses for adults in the school, Leyla mentions about the first reaction of the relevant authorities,

MoNE was saying they [Syrians] can come to Public Education Centers [Halk Eğitim Merkezleri]. We said these people don't have money either, they can't go to public education centers. Look, we came, and we brought them here. Finally, we had a meeting at school. 100 refugees went to that school, they told about their challenges. They were enrolled for courses. (Leyla, personal communication, January 16, 2020) (see Appendix B, 25)

Taking courses in the school within the borders of the neighborhood would be more convenient for adults since it is within walking distance. However, most of the

refugees would prefer not to travel, or would not be able to afford the travel expenses in order to go to the offered Public Education Center. Public Education Centers operating under the authority of the MoNE are non-formal education institutions that provide people with knowledge through, for instance, foreign language courses, literacy courses or vocational-technical courses. These services are also made available by the government to Syrian refugees. Therefore, the authority that the association talked to at that time tried to direct Syrians to take the literacy courses from there, but the association for practical reasons insisted on opening that course at the school. As a result, Turkish literacy courses were opened at the neighborhood school. In this regard, social bridges established between the refugees and Ok-Der and also social links with the governmental services constructed owing to the efforts of the association have contributed to the language acquisition of Syrians.

Additionally, Ok-Der contributes to the construction of a relationship between Syrian parents and the school through organizing a meeting at the association for Syrian mothers to get acquainted with the school staff and to inform the school administration about the needs of Syrian parents in terms of their children's educational issues. Ok-Der's being in contact with the neighborhood school via their relations with parent-teacher union and with the school's principal enabled Syrian women to make contact with the school more easily and even facilitated them in taking on a role in the issues at the school. It can be said that these practices to a certain degree eased the difficulties Syrian parents and children face at school. For instance, Evin started to help the school administration in doing translation from Arabic to Turkish and Nergis entered the parent-teacher union in the school via the efforts of Ok-Der.

At first glance, it might seem that it was only the Syrian refugees who were in need of help, however the needs of the school and Syrian parents were bidirectional. To put it differently, it was also the school in need of support due to language barriers since there was no translator there. Hence, school administration was also facing obstacles in communicating with Syrian parents. Though the laws and regulations grant education rights for Syrian children, they face, in practice, many difficulties in benefiting from these rights. Although it is known that MoNE, in collaboration with UNICEF, has started to appoint translators to schools in which there are high volume of Syrian children, imposition of these appointments does not correspond to the period before 2017.³⁷ Hence, at that time around 2016, there were no translators appointed to the neighborhood school. In order to overcome language barriers and to ease communication between school staff and Syrian parents, Evin, one of the Syrian women in an active contact with the association as previously stated, started to go to the school to do translation there, in cases of need, for instance, during Syrian children's enrollment. I find it important to underline that although Evin does not have any child and is an unmarried woman, at that time, she was voluntarily helping the neighborhood school in easing their job for nearly a year.

Furthermore, for the 2018-2019 school year, Ok-Der also played a role in including a Syrian parent into the parent-teacher union as a member at the neighborhood school. Eylem³⁸, who is a former member of the parent-teacher union, states that,

There were problems with Syrians. We as the association wanted a Syrian to be included in the parent-teacher union... Nergis attended. She was attending the meetings. If there would be a problem concerning Syrians, she was taking care of it. (Eylem, personal communication, February 20, 2020) (see Appendix B, 26)

³⁷ Retrieved February 16, 2020, from <https://www.mebpersonel.com/ogretmen-atamalari/okullara-suriyeli-tercuman-ogretmen-h218528.html>

³⁸ She is the only member from Turkey in the WWRK and she is also a member of Ok-Der.

In this way Ok-Der has played an active role in opening a channel to alleviate the difficulties Syrian children and their parents face at school. So Nergis became a member of the parent-teacher union. Regarding the details of her position, she mentions,

I was going to school every day and staying there with them from morning till two o'clock. I was fetching the documents from the parent-teacher union to the principal's office. The children would talk to me if there was a problem. I was waiting there until noon if Syrian children had problems, so that they could understand the school more easily. (Nergis, personal communication, February 26, 2020) (see Appendix B, 27)

Apparently, it was due to efforts of the association that enabled a Syrian mother to participate within the parent-teacher union. It is stated that in this way, for the first time, a refugee parent had joined the parent-teacher union. In that sense, it can be argued that the association contributes to the participation of Syrians in formal entities, in this case it was made possible by means of the parent-teacher union. In that respect, Ok-Der has played a role for Syrians to establish social links with institutions such as the school in their locality, which eases the incorporation process of them into the wider society.

As stated previously, Evin can speak Turkish, even if broken, so this enables her to collaborate with the school administration via making translation from Arabic to Turkish and vice versa. On the other hand, when I asked Nergis how she could communicate with the people in the parent-teacher union and with the school administration, since she does not speak Turkish, she states that “There were also Kurdish people in the parent-teacher union. Kurdish friends there were translating”³⁹ (Nergis, personal communication, February 26, 2020). Nergis is a Syrian Kurd and there are also Kurdish people from Turkey among the parent-teacher union. Hence,

³⁹ Translated from: “Kürt olanlar da vardı okul aile birliğinde. Oradaki Kürt arkadaşlar çeviriyorlardı.”

Kurds from Turkey there have played an intermediary role. This situation she describes reveals that Kurdish, a common language between Syrian Kurds and Kurds from Turkey, becomes a facilitator in enabling communication and interaction between Syrian refugees and local people.

Last but not least, with the contributions of the volunteers from outside the neighborhood, the initial solidarity practices have turned into the establishment of WWRK participated in by 17 women in total, 16 of whom are Syrians and one of whom is a native woman from Turkey, with the purpose of creating an income channel for the Syrians. Particularly three people from Ok-Der and four volunteers from the outside took active roles at the beginning of the process. With the following section, I will elaborate on, firstly, the process towards the establishment of WWRK through the contributions of Ok-Der and volunteers. Then I will analyze how the space opened through WWRK has contributed to the incorporation process of these Syrian women. Lastly, I will touch upon the current situation in WWRK.

4.5 Contributing to the resilience of Syrian women: The case of WWRK

Towards mid-2016, the association called for a meeting with Syrian women in order to discuss their needs. As stated by Pervin, a volunteer since 2016 from the outside giving her support to the association regarding their solidarity practices with the Syrians, that meeting was turned into contemplating together on what can be done as a solution for the sustainability of their lives. In Pervin's own words,

We are constantly bringing supplies to these people. We enroll children in school. Stationery aid, clothing aid, etc. One day, something happened in a meeting: One of them stood up and said "You always give us something. So, what can we do?" Then the issue turned to be "So, what can you do?" And this turned out to be the establishment of the Kitchen. (Pervin, personal communication, July 2, 2020) (see Appendix B, 28)

As she states, in the meeting, a Syrian woman, who was actually Evin, asked what they could do in addition to the endeavors of the association and the volunteers. The women in the meeting were mainly composed of those who were contributing to association's activities during the in-kind distribution process and also those who were bringing their children to the workshops and waiting for their children at the association during the workshop, so they had become acquainted with each other. Hence, it can be said that the formation of a kitchen with Syrian women dates back to mid-2016 for the purpose of creating an income-earning capacity for them to stand on their own legs rather than depending constantly on outside aid. It is reported by the members of Ok-Der that they asked Syrian women what kind of activity they would be able to engage with to generate an income. Upon that, the women told that they can cook. That is how the idea of making jams and pickles has come out, which would take, a while later, the name of WWRK. Through the transforming effects of their neighborly relations, the idea of earning their livelihoods has been brought to life, embodied in the idea of the Kitchen.

Though they knew they would need a kitchen to produce the goods, due to lack of resources, they decided to initiate the process with the resources at hand. In the first phase, thanks to the volunteers, around 750 Turkish liras were collected to initiate the idea of making jams and pickles. Equipment was bought, and for their first meeting to make jams and pickles, the place of the association was used as a kitchen.

However, due to inadequate technical infrastructure of the association, as the women state, it was very toilsome to prepare jams there. Therefore, the women decided to gather in groups within their homes. Since propane cylinders would be expensive, they preferred homes which have natural gas. In the initial times, they

made a decision to cook and pickle in groups of four or five people based on their knowledge. While one group cooks pomegranate jam, the other group cooks quince jam, and another group deals with pickles.

During the distribution and sales process, they received support from the volunteers. As I stated previously, especially three people from Ok-Der and four volunteers from outside took active roles in the initial periods of the initiative. On the other hand, since various people came and went in different periods, the interviewees were not able to state an exact number of volunteers who participated within the process. However, based on my observation in the field and the information obtained from the interviews, it can be said that approximately 20 people voluntarily participated within the whole process. As Eylem states,

When the Kitchen was first established, we started with pickles and jams. We were doing it at home in groups. Groups were bringing jams to the association. We were preparing them, volunteers would take them and distribute them to cafes, selling them. (Eylem, personal communication, February 20, 2020) (see Appendix B, 29)

By means of the support of the volunteers, their products were delivered to various locations in İstanbul, including cafes, shops, cooperatives, and individual consumers. In due course, several news reports were made about this initiative of the Syrian women.⁴⁰ Then they initiated to open stands in kermises/fairs and university festivals. Together with the people from Ok-Der or volunteers they started to attend to those events to sell their products.

After a while, by mid-2017, they were contacted by the German Corporation for International Cooperation⁴¹ (GIZ) for support. They were granted 10,000 Euro

⁴⁰ To see the news about Woman to Woman Refugee Kitchen in the press, please see <http://kadinkadinamultecimutfagi.org/suanda-kkmm/>

⁴¹ GIZ is a governmental body of Germany established for development aid purposes and also cooperates with the EU. For further information, please see <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/290.html>

for the initiative. With this grant, expenses for the professional equipment of the kitchen were covered. Ok-Der searched for a place for WWRK and they rented a place opposite the association on the same street. Rent for the store for the first year was covered collectively thanks to the solidarity network already arranged around the association. As stated by Pervin, with the campaign they organized in order to create a solidarity fund, at that period, they received donations from people worldwide:

There were people who sent 10 liras from İzmir, there was also a church that sent 250 dollars from America. For example, a friend of mine who lives in Spain organized a kermess for this at her school. They sent 400 dollars. In point of fact, people from Turkey and around the world collected a year's rent for the Kitchen. (Pervin, personal communication, July 2, 2020) (see Appendix B, 30)

In that period, they managed to collect approximately 10,000 Turkish liras. With this fund, they covered rental expenses of the Kitchen for 12 months. In addition to this, a small amount of money remained with which they bought play equipment for the children, which will be discussed below. The women now had their own independent place.

Additionally, volunteers of Ok-Der also provide support to the association within this process with their know-how. Aylin was one of them who dealt with the reporting process of the grant. As a university student, she is among the volunteers supporting the activities there. As she underlines, thanks to the grant, professional kitchen equipment was brought. Regarding the reporting standards the donor requests from its beneficiaries, she also states that "GIZ is a funding agency under the German Ministry of Development. It had a lot of details, you need to know English to write a report, but there are no permanent personnel in the association for

that issue”⁴² (Aylin, personal communication, February 27, 2020). Nobody at the association knows English, and neither they are familiar with such a reporting process. At that point, thanks to their know-how, volunteers from outside gave support to the association and the women in WWRK.

The idea of a kitchen was put into practice with 15 Syrian women in the initial period. Their number reached 17 with the addition of two more women. It is stated that they negotiate acceptance of a new woman from outside with an insider’s reference. If there is a woman who would like to participate in WWRK, firstly she has to be nominated by someone within WWRK. Upon acceptance by all the women after a deliberation process, the new member is included into the Kitchen. One reason for such a practice is legitimized by women through claiming that they want to make sure they can work together. The other reason is explained through emphasis on the inadequacy of received orders in order to maintain their workplace and cover their expenses. The kitchen is not always open, they work if they receive an order. As stated in the interviews, while they are working in the kitchen two or three days a week, if they receive high number of orders, they might go and work there five days a week. For instance, during the periods of Christmas or March 8 Women’s Day they receive more orders. In addition to their working upon receiving an order, they also attend charity bazaars/kermess to generate income, but this is not on a regular basis.

Thus, WWRK has remained till today as a small-scale operation. From 2017 to 2019, WWRK was composed of 17 women. Aside from Eylem, who is from Turkey, 16 women are from Syria and have Arabic, Turkmen and Kurdish origins. Currently there are 10 women working there. Except one of them who entered into a regular job, the others were reported to be settled in third countries, such as

⁴² Translated from: “GIZ zaten Alman Kalkınma Bakanlığı’na bağlı bir fon kuruluşu. Çok fazla detayı vardı, İngilizce bilmek gerekiyor rapor yazmak için. Bunun için sabit bir çalışmanı da yok oranın.”

Germany, America or Estonia via formal procedures. Since the number of orders are still low, they do not think to include additional women to the Kitchen. As they state, in some months, they have difficulty even in covering the rent expense which is currently around 950 Turkish liras. That is why, they argue, they do not think to recruit new members to the group.

Upon a professional kitchen's establishment, they created a food menu and started taking meal orders in addition to jams and pickles. Currently, only if there is an order do they make jams and pickles. At all other times, they generally cook meals. And after 10 people remained, it is stated that they ended up working separately in groups and now they work all together when an order arrives.

In contributing to income-generating practices for Syrian women, the association also involved with place-making practices. In order to construct WWRK, it is expressed that the association made a call for support from the inhabitants living in the neighborhood. Taylan states: "We called the neighbors working in the construction sector to help us in building the Kitchen. The people who are construction workers, head dyers or electricians came, we made a collective work"⁴³ (Taylan, personal communication, December 17, 2018). He underscores the collective work they did. In a similar way, Rıza, who painted the wall of the Kitchen, gives details as follows,

We did the painting, whitewashing, we set up the electricity, we did whatever we could. We went there and came back, carried a lot of things. We could not contribute financially, we had small expenses of course. We went to buy cornices, we bought curtains. We paid for those. For example, I painted there. Another friend of ours did the electrical work. We had to help him to reduce the cost. (Rıza, personal communication, February 11, 2020) (see Appendix B, 31)

⁴³ Translated from: "Mutfağı yapmak için, inşaatta çalışan komşuları yardıma çağırdık. İnşaatçı, boyacı, elektrikçi geldiler, kolektif bir iş çıkardık."

In order to lower the cost, they developed a strategy based on collective work via the participation of inhabitants during the construction process.

Additionally, while the plan of the place was being drawn, women's particular conditions were also considered. Since most of the women in the Kitchen have young children, a playground for children was reserved on the premises. Play equipment such as indoor playground mats, play fence and toys are brought by means of solidarity practices owing to wider network the association established over their volunteers from outside. Eylem states that they were bringing their children when they are coming to work in the Kitchen and would put one of woman in charge of taking care of the children. She explains their practice as follows:

At first, the children were younger, most of them would not go to school. We were assigning a woman among us to take care of the children. Children were forbidden to enter the kitchen area, because we're cooking there, after all. It would not be possible if our children were there to distract us, so the assigned woman was taking care of the children. She was preparing breakfast for them. She used to feed them and play games with them. We as the rest of the women worked. Now the children are grown. Some go to school, so they don't come. (Eylem, personal communication, February 20, 2020) (see Appendix B, 32)

Previously their children were not school-aged, and since they have nobody to look after them, they had to bring their children to the Kitchen. Currently, they ended such a practice since their children now go to school. As I have observed and also according to their statements, when there is an order, they arrange their schedule to be completed by the time their children get out of the school in the afternoon. So, they come to prepare the orders in early in the mornings and finish their work as much as possible by the afternoon. In the afternoon, they take the children from school and go home to complete their household chores. They open the kitchen if an order arrives, which also gives them time to deal with their own domestic work.

As the women who participated in WWRK express, they have various responsibilities including taking care of the children or doing housework which they are unable to transfer to someone else. In that regard, spatial proximity of the Kitchen, that is for them within walking distance, has been a facilitating factor in easing their lives. The Kitchen is located within the neighborhood and is close to their homes, so they can easily go there and return home without losing time or making any expense. Referring to a project of an NGO which was proposed to the Syrian women prior to the opening of the Kitchen, Eylem talks about the spatial distance which would have posed an obstacle for them:

There are women among us whose children are attending school, and there are women whose spouses come home for lunch... At that time, they told us that they would buy a complete building and build a kitchen section there. A kitchen section, a sewing section, and other stuff. Women can come and visit. Where? In 4. Levent. We can't go there. Do it somewhere in Okmeydanı, that's okay... Women will take the bus from here every day to 4. Levent? ... We have children, we have spouses who come home for lunch... we cannot go there every day... so it did not work. It was difficult to get from here to there. We needed a shuttle, which we did not have. (Eylem, personal communication, February 20, 2020) (see Appendix B, 33)

Considering the particular conditions of the women, the kitchen's location in the immediate vicinity can be said to be a significant facilitator for them. The location of the association and the Kitchen are within walking distance for them, hence they can easily access there without using any transportation. As Eylem argues they could not work if WWRK were not in the neighborhood, since they need to do the domestic chores and also take care of the kids. While they can take children from school and take care of them, they can go from morning to noon and work in WWRK.

Furthermore, for women, the problem was not limited only to the geographical proximity of the Kitchen. They were also faced with the resistance of their husbands. Most of the women in the Kitchen do not have previous working experience, they were homemakers while they were living in Syria and most of them

reported that they faced difficulties due to their husbands' initial objections against their participation within WWRK. Even Evin who is a single woman, and was a working woman in Syria, complained about her younger brother posing a challenge for her to work in the Kitchen. Relating to the reaction of the men around them, Evin states:

None of them agreed. The men were asking why we were going to the Kitchen. I am not married, but for example, my brothers were asking why I was going to the kitchen. The husbands of the women were saying that they were neglecting their children and their homes by going to the Kitchen. (Evin, personal communication, February 20, 2020) (see Appendix B, 34)

However, owing to women's insistence on working, in time, they have managed to break the resistance of the men around them. For instance, Nergis expresses the transformation in her husband's approach as follows:

It was difficult when we opened the Kitchen. When I went to the Kitchen, I was arguing with my husband every two days, he was asking me why I neglected the children. Then he got used to it slowly. He saw that I could manage my home, I could also manage the Kitchen. Now he's joking with me, he says "Nergis, don't you have meetings?" (laughter). He says, "Did something happen? Have you been elected chairwoman?" (Nergis, personal communication, February 26, 2020) (see Appendix B, 35)

Rather than staying in a passive position in being exposed to the pressure coming from the men around them, women in WWRK have struggled for opening a space for themselves to freely participate in WWRK. As active agents, at the end, they have obtained certain achievements in this issue. Nergis' husband has made his peace with her working in the Kitchen, so he even jokes with her about the internal structure established within WWRK. As seen in the above quote, Nergis' husband teases her about the meetings women are participated mainly owing to civil society's interest in the WWRK, it can be giving an interview to the newspapers or attending a TV program.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Retrieved March 24, 2020, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVpC25xw3vs;>

Furthermore, relating to the internal structure of WWRK, I would like to underline the following detail. One woman among them is chosen as a representative for a temporary period of time who is responsible for attending meetings or interviews. In that regard, they have the chance to gain experience in raising their voice via various platforms in the public space as active agents. In that respect, Nergis highlights that WWRK has paved the way for them to make close friendships with other women and also to establish contact with a wider community outside their locality. She states:

We could not work in Syria, we did not go out. But now even if we don't receive an order, we miss each other. We miss our friends. We come here sometimes and have breakfast together. I see here as our second home. The Kitchen added a lot to our lives. Everything is not related to money. We both learn and travel, see the world, and attend meetings. They come and see us. We go. It's something new to us. (Nergis, personal communication, February 26, 2020) (see Appendix B, 36)

She firstly makes an implicit comparison between their life in Syria and in Turkey and then she gives details about how WWRK has affected their lives in a positive way. According to Nergis, their affiliation with WWRK has opened for them a socialization space, which was unavailable for them in Syria. In that sense, WWRK contributes to their life through empowering them and fostering gender awareness.

The Syrian women involved in the activities of the association had not previously known each other. Neither were they in contact with any other Syrians in the neighborhood. During the interviews, they state that in the initial periods, they had not gone outside much, so did not meet anybody new. It has taken time for them to become familiar with the neighborhood and the people residing there. Activities carried out in 2016 have functioned for them to become acquainted with other Syrians living in the neighborhood, which later on turned into establishing close

Retrieved March 24, 2020, from <http://gazetekarinca.com/2017/01/bir-mutfaktan-fazlasi-kadin-kadina-multeci-mutfagindaki-kavanozlar-umut-dolu/>

friendships. In that respect, it can be said that Ok-Der has played a role for Syrians to strengthen their social bonds in terms of in-group connection, the connection among Syrian refugees. This contributes to their feeling of security and comfort due to the established friendships, which undeniably affect their incorporation process in a positive way. To put it differently, the process has contributed to the development of community resilience. In that sense, WWRK has become a basis for not only economic but also social empowerment for the women.

Although the association has played a role in opening a space in which local people and the refugee community gain a chance to know each other, it can be said that their encounters have not yet turned out to form close friendships. On the other hand, it has given Syrian women a chance to form in-group friendships, which strengthens their feelings of belonging and also gives an opportunity to them to establish solidarity practices with each other. For instance, when they have a thing to do outside, they can leave their children to someone at WWRK or if one has a work outside, the other can pick her child up at school. She brings the child to her own home and takes care of the child until her/his mother comes. Additionally, during my field visits, I even witnessed their going to the neighborhood bazaar together. Though by in-group, I mainly mean Syrian women who participate in WWRK, there is also Eylem, from Turkey, who constitutes an exception here. Hence, I argue that establishing a meaningful contact around a common goal, in this case through WWRK, can be a significant factor in forming closer relations, it might either be being close friends or visiting each other's house on a frequent base. It is this meaningful contact which is absent between the natives and Syrian women, that constitutes an impediment to form closer relations. Further, I argue that it is meaningful contact which plays a role in setting a ground for cultural interaction, for

instance, that might result in learning to cook each other's meals or to speak each other's language.

Returning to the usage of “home” as a metaphor in Nergis’ statement above, I would like to underline that other women also describe the Kitchen either as a family or as a second home. When I asked what “home” or “family” means for them, they said it means security and comfort. On the other hand, whereas “home” or “family” as a metaphor might generally imply feeling of belonging, familiarity and security, it might also connote gender inequality, unpaid domestic labor or domestic violence. Therefore, although the concept of “home” or “family” does not always connote security or well-being, especially for women, here when they describe the Kitchen as their second home, I read the meaning they attribute to WWRK as a place in which they feel safe and comfortable.

In terms of their sense of belonging and feeling of security, Nergis states, “For example, I go to Taksim or Osmanbey, I cannot breathe there. But, when I come back to Okmeydanı, I say ah, I come to my home”⁴⁵ (Nergis, personal communication, February 26, 2020). Then through referring to the presence of people from Ok-Der in their lives, she continues as follows,

They are aware of us, we know that we will not be overcome here. If we have a problem, we go and tell them, they help us. We were afraid that they [referring to the locals] would cast us out, neighbors would do something wrong, they would shout at us, we were afraid because we had no rights here. We were afraid to back then, but now we are not afraid anymore after we were acquainted with the association, so we know that there are people who will help us. (Nergis, personal communication, February 26, 2020) (see Appendix B, 37)

She underlines her feelings of insecurity and her fear of being subjected to discrimination when she first arrived in the neighborhood due to their fragile status

⁴⁵ Translated from: “Mesela Taksim’e gidiyorum, Osmanbey’e falan, nefes alamıyorum. Ama geliyorum geri Okmeydanı’na, oh be, evime geldim diyorum.”

in Turkey. Relating to the ill-treatment they encounter, for instance, when they go to the provincial bureau of migration management, Nergis shares her general experience as follows: “When we go to the immigration authority, for example, to renew identity cards, we are treated like animals there. Sometimes they touch us with their hands and show us the door, they don’t even let us talk”⁴⁶ (Nergis, personal communication, February 26, 2020). On the other hand, due to her positive encounters in the neighborhood, in time, meeting with people that she can trust has contributed to her overcoming feelings of insecurity especially in the neighborhood.

Similarly, Evin expresses about her adaptation to the place she lives in, stating that:

We got used to it a little bit, we learned this place. We’re going out now. We know the neighborhood. It used to be difficult, now it is difficult, but it used to be more difficult. We didn’t know anybody before, we didn’t go out. Now is better than before. Better because we learned the language a bit. We started going out. We know our neighborhood. When we first arrived, we were not a part of this place, yet we are now. We were away from our family at that time, now we have become a little bit a someone from this place. (Evin, personal communication, February 20, 2020) (see Appendix B, 38)

Feeling like a stranger when she first came in, now she feels belonging here. In other words, she sees herself now as a local inhabitant living in the neighborhood.

As seen from their statements, they currently, more or less, acknowledge the place they live in. It can be said that due to multiple factors, such as the role the association and WWRK plays in their lives, the experiences they gained via the activities of the association, and also the time passed since the day they arrived in the neighborhood, have cumulatively functioned in developing their sense of belonging to, and security in, the neighborhood. In that respect, the space created via the endeavors of Ok-Der contributed to the establishment of social connections which at

⁴⁶ Translated from: “Göç idaresine gidiyoruz mesela kimlikleri yenilemeye, hayvan muamelesi görüyoruz orada. Bazen elleriyle temas edip bizi kovuyorlar kapıdan, konuşmamıza bile izin vermiyorlar.”

the same time facilitated their incorporation process not only at the local level but also in a wider context in which they were enabled to access governmental services, as seen in the cases of the registration of their children to the neighborhood school and utilization of the services provided by governmental bodies to the adult refugees for Turkish language acquisition.

Although the Syrian women are in contact with the local community via the space the association opened, I observed that there are very few friendships formed between both communities, people from Turkey and from Syria. While they are mentioning “we know each other”, this relation has not yet turned into getting closer to each other, for instance being friends or going to each other’s houses. The exception is Eylem who is the only member of WWRK from Turkey. Since they have gathered around a common goal, working in WWRK, they have had a chance to establish friend relationships with each other.

As I have observed, and I have also experienced the same situation, language barriers are still obstacles to developing closer relationships with Syrians living in the neighborhood. It is certain that language is a crucial facilitator, “understood as removing ‘barriers’ to integration” (Ager & Strang, 2008, p. 177); however, it is almost impossible to advance the relationship when you do not speak the same language. Now they have started to understand Turkish, but they have trouble speaking. If I give an example from myself, I have also experienced the same situation. During my field visits, I am also unable to communicate in a fluent way with the Syrian women because I do not know Arabic. I know Kurdish, but I cannot speak it fluently. It is clear that without regular exercise, though you can understand a language which is not your mother tongue, it might hard to speak fluently in practice. Therefore, in my daily contact, language has been a barrier for me, too.

On the other hand, living together implies cultural plurality which goes beyond peaceful co-existence or living free from conflict. Therefore, I have paid special attention to understanding to what extent cultural interaction or cultural exchange between people from Turkey and Syria happened in the field I studied. Therefore, either during my field visits or in my interviews, I have also traced practices which pave the way for learning each other's languages or each other's food till today. I approach the notions of living together and living-space as a dynamic process in which the interaction is a two-way process, not unidimensional. As a result of this dynamic process, groups from different backgrounds, be it ethnic, linguistic or religious, might conduct more hybrid cultural practices through affecting or being affected by one another. Therefore, I also asked my interviewees whether they learn each other's languages or traditional cuisines. At that point it is important to underline that despite frequent emphasis of the interviewees from Ok-Der about language barriers being as an obstacle for communication, nobody among the native people till today have learned any Arabic or Kurdish from their Syrian neighbors. However, I believe living together also involves being influenced by each other, because it is a dynamic process. It is normally expected that even without a deliberate attempt, if it is frequent, mere exposure to a foreign language might result at least in learning some words or phrases, yet this has never been the case for natives from the association.

It is certain that the space Ok-Der opened via its activities in which Syrians and local people come together has created an opportunity for Syrians to learn Turkish. Everyday life interaction between them has also paved the way for Syrians to practice Turkish either via being exposed to Turkish or staying in a Turkish speaking environment. It is undeniable that these practices have contributed to

Syrians learning Turkish. However, the positioning of local people within this situation also carries importance. It is understandable that natives attribute importance to Syrians learning Turkish, because they believe that knowing Turkish will make Syrian refugees' lives much easier in Turkey. On the other hand, it has been nearly six years they are living together, so without any attempt to learn also the languages Syrians speak in order to ease communication and interaction with them, I think the natives' insistence on language barrier have turned in time to be a mere normative attitude. In other words, except for Eylem, I have observed that no person, even if a little, have bothered to learn Arabic or Kurdish as a result of their interaction with Syrians living in the neighborhood. I interpret this situation as the reluctance of native people to abandon their comfort zone.

As stated, the only exception can be said to be Eylem. The situation of Eylem is unique, since she already knows Arabic. On the other hand, she improves it owing to her active interaction with Syrians in Arabic language. She expresses the improvement in her language competency in Arabic as follows: "I am originally a Kurd. My Arabic is from my mother. I could not speak Arabic fully. I had broken Arabic. I learned Arabic among them [referring to Syrians there]. I am advanced now I'm speaking quite fluently"⁴⁷ (Eylem, personal communication, February 20, 2020). She does not have trouble understanding Arabic, but it was hard for her to speak fluently in the initial periods. Although the situation of Eylem differs from other natives since they do not know any Arabic but Eylem does, it can be said that she wouldn't have been able to advance her Arabic if she had not established a meaningful interaction with Syrians there.

⁴⁷ Translated from: "Ben aslen Kürdüm. Arapça dilim de annemden gelme. Tam bir Arapçam yoktu. Çat pat bir Arapçam vardı. Arapçayı tam onların içinde öğrendim yani. İlerlettim şimdi baya akıcı konuşuyorum."

Furthermore, in terms of cultural interaction, the women in WWRK express that they have learned to cook each other's traditional dishes. For instance, Eylem, the only person from Turkey, has learned to cook the national dishes which are attributed to belonging to Syrian cuisine, and Syrian women also have learned to cook meals which are attributed to belonging to Turkish cuisine. Such a practice is a good example of what I understood from living together. However, for the native community in the association, similar to the absence of any interaction in terms of learning the languages Syrians speak, there is no such an interaction in terms of exchange of food culture.

Another issue I have tried to understand is the reason behind the termination of systematic/regular activities of Ok-Der pertaining to the distribution of in-kind aid and workshops organized for the children. As stated previously, regular in-kind aid distribution lasted a year and a half and regular workshops and activities lasted nearly two years, mainly between 2016 and 2017. Related to the non-continuation of these regular activities in Okmeydanı, several factors are coming to the forefront. The first one is pertinent to a sign of fatigue among the members of Ok-Der. The other factor might be claimed to be connected to the nature of voluntary activities which could not be made permanent in some instances. The political and public agenda in 2015 on Syrians triggered voluntary people's interest to initiate activities to provide help to Syrians, but this remained temporary. Another aspect is certain disagreements raised among the volunteers who participated within the activities of Ok-Der in time.

It is important to underline that the in-kind aid distributions they organized were large-scale activities. As discussed previously, while they distributed coal and heating stoves on a seasonal basis for two years in the winters, they delivered

supplies of provisions and dry goods on a monthly basis, which continued for a year and a half. Furthermore, though not as regular as the others, they engaged also in distribution of clothes, footwear, baby's nappies, and stationery supplies. However, all these were time- and labor-intensive activities and a sign of fatigue revealed itself among the members of the association. Related with it, Taylan claims that they do not have a capacity to organize these activities all the time: "From the very beginning, we were aware that we were not capable of providing stuff and food lifelong. But since this was urgent, we had to do that at that time"⁴⁸ (Taylan, personal communication, March 5, 2020). Referring to 2016, he emphasizes that providing in-kind aid was seen as an urgency at those times since Syrian refugees had just arrived in the neighborhood and there were lots of obstacles for them to earn their livelihoods. Similar to Taylan, other interviewees underscore the issue of their capacity, time and energy. Organizing campaigns for in-kind aid and then organizing its distribution require time and energy, and over time they got exhausted, so regular campaigns were ended. The other point underlined by the interviewees from Ok-Der is that the Syrians became more and more settled as time passed. In the earlier period following to their arrival, it is stated that their living conditions were much more difficult than now and most of them did not even have a job.

The second factor is related with the volunteers' involvement within the process. There were the two emblematic occurrences in 2015 which are stated to play a role for volunteers to gather around the association to act in solidarity with Syrians. However, after the agenda lost its influence incrementally, the temporary nature of informal voluntary works showed itself. The fact that volunteers from outside

⁴⁸ Translated from: "En baştan itibaren biz bu eşya, gıda meselesini ömür boyu sürdürebilecek bir kapasitede olmadığımızın farkındaydık. Ama bu acil olduğu için bizim bunu o dönem yapmamız lazımdı."

contacted the association and started to gather around it is generally attributed by the interviewees to two emblematic occurrences that took place in 2015. The first of these is the death of Alan Kurdi, a Syrian three years old toddler died at sea⁴⁹, the other is the march of Syrians from İstanbul to Edirne in 2015⁵⁰. At that time, the Syrian refugee issue was quite a hot agenda not only in Turkey but also across the world. Volunteers from the outside generally decided to do something about the refugee issue in this process and started searching for establishing solidarity initiatives. Yet, as time passed, the number of volunteers started to melt away, just like many volunteering activities that could not be sustained. As Rebelo (2020) states in her article considering her experiences in formal and informal solidarity networks as a practitioner aiming at helping asylum seekers and refugees in various countries such as Greece, the United Kingdom and Ethiopia, “the sustainability of informal solidarity initiatives is constantly at risk”, due to certain challenges informal solidarity networks encounter (p. 156). It might be due to the difficulties in coordinating voluntary activities in a permanent way since volunteers are mostly act as short-term staff, the limitation of public fundraising or the pressure from governmental authorities (Rebelo, 2020).

In addition to that, volunteers in Okmeydanı fell into several disagreements among each other, which also played a role in systematic activities to fade away in a gradual way. In some contexts, “[t]he hierarchization and division of work among people who started off as informal volunteers can trigger conflicts and misunderstandings” (Rebelo, 2020, p. 157). Furthermore, it is possible for activists and volunteers to have “different ideas about how to work with asylum seekers” and

⁴⁹ Retrieved May 2, 2020, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34133210>

⁵⁰ Retrieved May 2, 2020, from https://www.bbc.com/turkce/multimedya/2015/09/150915_vid_suriye_edirne

refugees which might lead for them to stay in a position of being “unable to coordinate solutions among each other” (Rebelo, 2020, p. 152). Similarly, in the case of Okmeydanı, there was a certain kind of disengagement between volunteers, and the organized activities they supported gradually decreased. But my focus was not on the nature of voluntarism experienced there, and more on why and how the neighborhood association invent alternative spaces that have contributed to the Syrians’ incorporation process. It seems clear, however, that, this issue of disagreements between the volunteers has constituted another factor in the gradual decrease in regularly organized activities since 2017.

Briefly, the above discussed factors; sense of fatigue and exhaustion among the members, and the particular effects of volunteers’ involvement within the process constituted important determinants of the fragility of informal solidarity network and its temporality in Okmeydanı case. As also underlined by Kılıçaslan (2016) via her research conducted in Kanarya and Bayramtepe neighborhoods in İstanbul, despite embedded within a different context, informal solidarity networks might contain fragile and temporary features depending on various political, economic and social dynamics within that locality. Changing political configurations and concerns over the Syrian conflict as discussed above, might also have contributed to these growing malaises.

On the other hand, whereas mass and regular organization of in-kind contributions have ended, they are continuing currently on an irregular basis. During my field visits, I witnessed many times the incoming goods being delivered to people in need thanks to their solidarity network, but it is not arranged in such an organized way as before. For instance, during the interview with Nergis, she touches upon such instances:

I have a Syrian neighbor. They make their newborn sleep on the ground. I told Taylan that she needed a cradle. He gathered his friends. Everyone contributed a little, they went and bought a cradle and brought it with the people from the association. (Nergis, personal communication, February 26, 2020) (see Appendix B, 39)

In a similar way, whatever it is, be it clothes, cook stoves or kitchen equipment, in cases of need, in-kind support is still being organized by the Ok-Der, but on an *ad hoc* basis. Briefly, whereas in-kind aid distributions were organized previously on a large-scale basis, as discussed above, currently it has turned into a small-scale activity of the association.

When the place of the Kitchen opened, workshops organized for children were started there for a certain period of time. However, these activities have also been terminated. The reason they did not prefer to continue the workshops is explained by Eylem as follows:

It was very difficult to hold workshops for children in the Kitchen, because it was a kitchen. We had to go and open it on the weekend for volunteers. The children were coming and leaving toilet paper around, sorry but, after they took a crap. Okay, we were cleaning those but how much can you clean when you think about it? We were telling them not to get into the kitchen area, they were saying okay. All of a sudden, I'd see two-three children that were playing with spoon and fork in the kitchen area. So, yeah, we couldn't do workshops in the kitchen. Finally, we had to terminate them, because of the limitations of the space. (Eylem, personal communication, February 20, 2020) (see Appendix B, 40)

Instead of the Kitchen, the place of the association could be continued to be used for workshops. However, I have the impression that neither the women from WWRK nor the people from Ok-Der are willing to take the responsibility to allocate their time and energy to clean and then tidy up the place after the workshops. I interpret this situation as a sign of certain tiredness after two-years-long vigorous efforts spent in organizing all the discussed activities.

Similar to the in-kind aid distribution, activities related to children are also done when needed, on a spontaneous base. Though the workshops were terminated,

for instance recently Syrian women felt the necessity for supplementary courses for their school-aged children. For that issue, they asked Ok-Der for help to find voluntary teachers. Again, upon a need that arose, Ok-Der called for support from their solidarity network in order to find voluntary teachers for the courses. Currently, 15 children are taking courses at every weekend in the association. Since there is a blackboard there, the place of Ok-Der is used, instead of the place of the Kitchen.

Lastly, I would like to discuss the positionality of Ok-Der and outsider volunteers vis a vis WWRK. The main role of the volunteers was delivering jams and pickles to the sellers or consumers. Some volunteers who have know-how took the responsibility in terms of public relations or advertisement of the work done by the women in WWRK. Since women have also multiple responsibilities including doing domestic work, and since there is a certain shortage of know-how for them, they cannot allocate more time for all the processes in selling their products. Therefore, both Ok-Der and volunteers have taken roles in many processes, such as opening stands in the kermises, delivering the goods to cafes, or writing reports for the funds received. With the passing of time, women from WWRK started to take more responsibility, for instance, now they are delivering the ordered meals by taxi on their own. On the other hand, I observed that the relationship between the volunteers and the women in WWRK has been weak and they have not spent much time together. This can mostly be explained as a part of the language barrier. Due to the particular necessities imminent to the conditions of the women explained just above, the association has situated itself in a very central position. I observed that Ok-Der's such position still continues. Although the women have autonomy in terms of the internal functioning of WWRK, I argue that there is a particular shortcoming in terms of women's position that still depends on the network of the association

most of the time. For example, when mothers in WWRK would like their children to take supplementary courses, it is not the women, but the association who got in contact with their solidarity network. Women still keep themselves somewhat in the background in some matters. It is understandable that at first the association was supposed to be more involved, but after a while, women in the kitchen could take more initiative. I think, together with how much initiative women want to take and the positioning of the association both play an important role here.

To conclude, this chapter strived to examine the role of socio-interactional dynamics on refugee incorporation by taking Ok-Der as a crucial case. I have situated the solidarity practices established with the Syrians within the context of socio-spatial characteristics of MŞP which played a role in the emergence of Ok-Der. The urban transformation history, socio-spatial dynamics of the neighborhood, already established solidaristic relations between the locals, and the mission the members attribute to the association have played crucial roles in determining the path towards the creation of inclusive spaces for Syrians. In that sense, the interplay of particular characteristics immanent to the related locality play a constitutive part in understanding why and how Ok-Der were able to develop inclusive mechanisms for Syrians.

Besides many aspects of Ok-Der's contributions to Syrians' incorporation process, factors such as language barrier, association's ongoing central role, and informal solidarity network's fragility and temporality constitute the limitations of this process.

In the next chapter, I will focus on the case of Yarımburgaz. Similar to Ok-Der, the neighborhood association there, Yarımburgaz-Der, was established as a resistance against the urban transformation process and it has also acted in solidarity

with Syrians living in Yarımburgaz. Through elaborating on the socio-spatial characteristics of Yarımburgaz, I will concentrate on the particularities of Yarımburgaz-Der's activities through which they, too, contributed to the incorporation process of Syrians there. While Ok-Der's focus is, intentionally or unintentionally, shaped around the activities leaned towards the empowerment of the Syrian women over WWRK, it has been the Syrian children who are prioritized more in the activities of Yarımburgaz-Der. Similar to the case in Okmeydanı, in the next chapter, I will scrutinize why the members of the association decided to take the presence of Syrians into their agenda; what was their driving force; what is the nature of encounters between the locals and Syrians there; and through which channels do they create spaces that contributed to Syrians' incorporation.

CHAPTER 5

THE CASE OF YARIMBURGAZ

This chapter mainly aims to analyze the contributions of Yarımburgaz-Der to the incorporation process of Syrian refugees living in Yarımburgaz.⁵¹ As a neighborhood association established against urban transformation, Yarımburgaz-Der has also engaged in a wide set of actions that constitute a form of civic solidarity with Syrians residing in the neighborhood. Before moving on to the details about their act of solidarity with the Syrians, the socio-spatial context in which the association was established will be discussed, since it will, at the same time, provide an insight about what kind of principles and standpoints the members of the association have, who gather around a neighborhood association to organize collective action against urban transformation. Delving into the principles and standpoints they prioritize in their activities is important, since, I believe, that as was the case in Okmeydanı, plays a significant role in shaping their attitudes towards Syrians living in the neighborhood.

In what follows, I provide an overview of the social context of Yarımburgaz, followed by the socio-spatial developments which had a role in the establishment of Yarımburgaz-Der. Together with the urban transformation projects carried out around Yarımburgaz, the neighborhood is under the pressure of transformation today. As was the case in Okmeydanı, through considering the developments in the surroundings of Yarımburgaz, in discussing the transformation pressure, I will benefit from Massey's (2005) conceptualization of space as "the product of interrelations" (p. 9). I will focus on the details about transformation pressure the

⁵¹ In Yarımburgaz, I have conducted 15 interviews; seven of them with local residents from Yarımburgaz-Der, seven of them with Syrians, and one with the mukhtar of the neighborhood. Additionally, I have also interviewed four volunteers in total. The interviews were conducted in December 2018, January-February-March 2020, and July 2020.

inhabitants face and discuss the position members of the association develop against it. Finally, I raise the same question I raised in the case of Okmeydanı, i.e., why the association decided to take the presence of Syrians into their agenda and how they, via informal, as well as formal, practices, created an environment that has contributed mainly to the social and educational incorporation of Syrians living in the neighborhood. Once again, I use the framework in immigrant incorporation literature such as social connections; social bridges, social links, and social bonds (Ager and Strang, 2004), which imply the practice of living together in a broader sense. Additionally, inspired by Miraftab's (2009) analytical categories; invited and invented spaces, and Holston's (1999) differentiation between formal and substantive rights, I will examine mechanisms through which incorporation of Syrians has been facilitated. Through involvement in certain spheres, such as workshops/social activities, formal or informal education, establishment of neighbor relations, etc., the association invents various spaces that contribute to Syrians' incorporation process. In that sense, I suggest that, in Miraftabian terms (2009, p. 32), these practices may indeed be "transgressive" in embracing formal and informal spaces of practices and they have the potential to "transgress" national boundaries by establishing solidarity between the locals and the Syrians.

5.1 Social context of Yarımburgaz Neighborhood

Yarımburgaz neighborhood is located within the borders of the Municipality of Küçükçekmece and is situated in the northwestern part of the district (see Figure 4). Küçükçekmece, before becoming a town center, was a village of Yeşilköy till 1956 and administratively it was separated from Bakırköy district in 1987 (Şahin, 2010, p. 17). The region where Küçükçekmece district is located started becoming populated

be identified as a slum, located within the borders of Başakşehir district. In the eastern part of Yarımburgaz, there is Atakent neighborhood hosting luxury residential areas such as Bosphorus City and İstanbul Palaces (as shown in Figure 5).

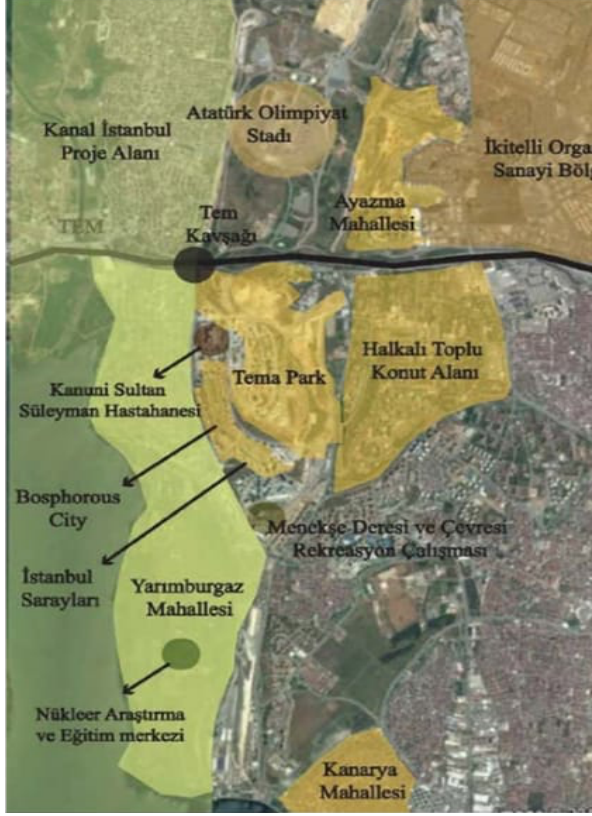


Figure 5. Yarımburgaz and its surroundings
Source: [KİPTAŞ, n.d.]

Accessing Yarımburgaz from Küçükçekmece metrobus station through public transportation takes approximately one hour. Although Atakent, Halkalı, Başakşehir, nearby locations to Yarımburgaz, have their transportation network composed of the bus, subway, dolmuş lines, accessibility to the neighborhood is very limited. There are only three İETT bus lines⁵² and two dolmuşes passing through the neighborhood, albeit rarely. The neighborhood can be characterized as a periphery.

⁵² Please see <https://www.iETT.istanbul/tr/main/duraklar/124402/YARIMBURGAZ%20MAHALLESİ-İETT-Duraktan-Geçen-Hatlar-Durak-Bilgileri-Hattın-Duraktan-Geçiş-Saatleri>

As of 2019, the official population of the neighborhood is 9,926⁵³, which is composed only of citizens. Additionally, the population of the Syrians residing in the neighborhood is 3,370⁵⁴ as of 2019. It is approximately one-third of the official population of the neighborhood. Based on these numbers the *de facto* population of the neighborhood is around 13,350, including Syrians. Obtained from the interviews and the mukhtar, a significant proportion of the citizens living in the neighborhood are generally from Sivas, Bingöl, Van, Kars, Malatya, and Trabzon. As stated by the mukhtar and also by the inhabitants, the people residing in Yarımburgaz are mostly lower-class families living on minimum wage. Moreover, the economy of Yarımburgaz is based on the textile industry (Küçükçekmece Belediyesi, n.d., p. 45). Small and medium scale textile mills are quite visible in the neighborhood.

Based on the interviews I have conducted, I would like to underline that most of the people residing in Yarımburgaz are first- and second-generation migrants, who came to İstanbul either as economic migrants, emigrating from rural regions of Turkey because of insufficient job opportunities there, or are internally displaced Kurdish people who emigrated from conflict zones because of the demolition of their villages in the 1990s. In terms of being a migrant receiving neighborhood, though clearly less central, Yarımburgaz is very similar to Okmeydanı.

Looking at the last election results can also provide us an insight about the political characteristics of Yarımburgaz. In the general election of 2018 and the local election of June 2019 (see Figure 6), it was AKP, the governing party, who received the largest number of votes.

⁵³ Obtained from Turkish Statistical Institute.

⁵⁴ While the official number of Syrians living in İstanbul is available only at city and district level, neighborhood-based data are not available. However, thanks to a confidential informant, who works within an NGO serving refugees, I have been able to obtain the number of Syrians living in Yarımburgaz as of 2019.

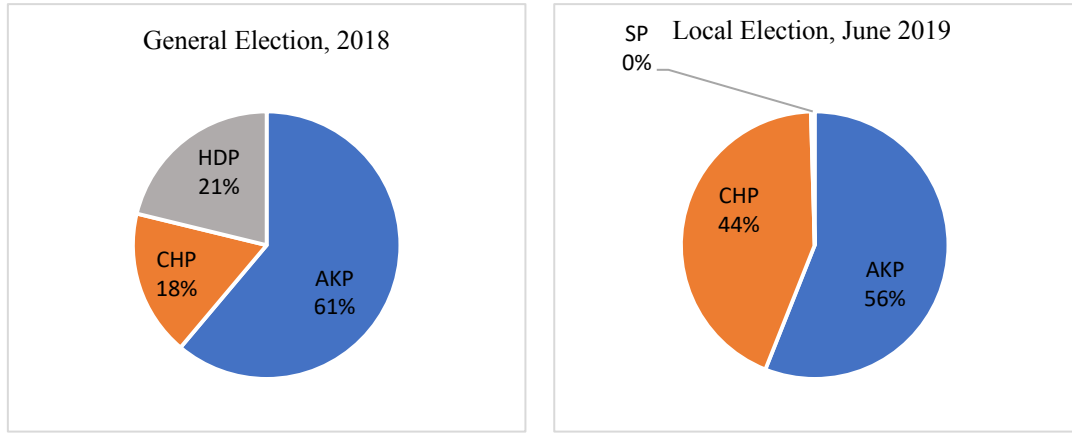


Figure 6. The ratio of votes of the first three parties in Yarımburgaz
Source: [YSK, 2018, 2019]

In the general election of 2018, the total number of registered voters in the neighborhood was 6,595 and voter turnout was 88.78%. AKP received the highest number of votes by 2,898 and HDP was the second party with 1,005 votes. CHP as a third party received 837 votes.⁵⁵

In the last local election held for the candidates for IMM, AKP was again the first party, receiving the highest number of votes at 2,942; the number of votes received by CHP and SP were 2,286 and 24 respectively (see Figure 6). The total number of registered voters at that time was 6,476 and voter turnout was 83.94% in the neighborhood. Unlike Okmeydanı, Yarımburgaz's political behavior appears to be much closer to the governing party which may have important implications in terms of the nature of the social and economic bridges being built with the Syrian refugees.

⁵⁵ Since the volume of votes received by other parties or independent candidates, if any, were statistically insignificant, I have taken the first three parties which received the highest number of votes.

5.2 Surroundings of Yarımburgaz and transformation pressure

Since the 1980s, the surroundings of Yarımburgaz have been subjected to various construction projects as a part of urban planning processes. TEM highway was opened in 1988, and Halkalı mass housing project was initiated in 1990 and completed by 2001 (Küçükali, 2015, p. 219). İkitelli Organized Industrial Zone was established in 1990 and the Halkalı Dump site was closed in 1994 (Küçükali, 2015, p. 219). This process was followed by the opening of Atatürk Olympic Stadium in 2002 and of Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Hospital in 2011, the establishment of Bosphorus City in 2011, Elite City and Soyak projects in 2013, and the announcement of Tema İstanbul project in 2015 (Küçükali, 2015, p. 219). It is important to state that some of these projects such as Bosphorus City and Tema Park, which is planned as an amusement center, in the Atakent Neighborhood (as also seen in Figure 5) have been situated on the site which was once Halkalı Dump.

In 2008, Erdoğan Bayraktar, when he was president of the Housing Development Administration (TOKİ), declared their attempts to make Atakent and Halkalı into a brand.⁵⁶ As stated by Küçükali (2015), a scholar who has studied changes in the residential area of Atakent Neighborhood since 1996, the region has gotten the attention of investors, and without losing time the private sector took its place in the process (p. 213). Due to such developments in its nearby locations, the location of Yarımburgaz has risen in value.

Another development that has an impact on Yarımburgaz is the İstanbul Canal⁵⁷ project, announced by President Erdoğan to the public in 2011. The

⁵⁶ Please see the news titled “İstanbul Kayabaşı’nda 4 milyar dolarlık yeni şehir kurulacak” [A new city of 4 billion dollars will be established in Kayabaşı, İstanbul] in the following link: <http://mimdap.org/2008/05/ystanbul-kayabathynda-4-milyar-dolarlyk-yeni-thehir-kurulacak/>

⁵⁷ It is an artificial sea-level watercourse that will connect the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara. It is declared by Erdoğan as one of the big projects of the century, as a mega project (Retrieved July 5, 2020, from <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/iste-erdoganin-cilgin-projesi-1382967>). To note that it

neighborhood is within the İstanbul Canal project site (as also seen in Figure 5). Therefore, the place where Yarımburgaz neighborhood is located has also started to be seen as an important rent area both because it has coast to Lake Küçükçekmece and because it is within the borders of the İstanbul Canal route.

Despite the transformation process occurring in the surroundings of Yarımburgaz through the big construction projects mentioned above, which have been ongoing since the 1990s, the region where Yarımburgaz is located has remained pretty much the same. Contrary to the multi-storey structures of the residential areas in Atakent (see Figure 7) appealing to the upper-class people, Yarımburgaz is still a neighborhood where three-four storey buildings are in the majority and it does not have a dense housing structure.



Figure 7. Views of Atakent neighborhood
Photos taken from Yarımburgaz side. Source: [Author's personal archive, 2020]

is a highly criticized project in terms of its economic, environmental and ecological impacts (for further details please see <https://megaprojeleristanbul.com/#kanal-istanbul>).

As Figures 7 and 8 show, these two neighborhoods have quite different spatial textures. Neighboring on prestige projects' high-price apartments⁵⁸ in Atakent, Yarımburgaz's outward appearance resembles a "slum" (see Figures 7 and 8).

The density of settlement in Yarımburgaz is not high and there are vacant lands in the neighborhood with no construction on it, as seen from Figure 8.



Figure 8. View of Yarımburgaz neighborhood
Photo taken from Atakent side. Source: [Yarımburgaz-Der's Facebook archive, 2015]

Through the photo shown in Figure 8, taken in 2015, not many changes have occurred up to the present day. The recent view of the neighborhood is pretty close to the view seen in this photo. The reasons behind the low density of settlement in the neighborhood are firstly, that there has been an ongoing zoning problem in the

⁵⁸ With the concept created, Bosphorus City is advertised as a project "carries the Bosphorus of İstanbul and the life of the Bosphorus to Küçükçekmece" (please see <https://www.sinpas.com.tr/en/projects/bosphorus-city>). In a similar way, İstanbul Palaces is presented as a "Glorious Silhouette of İstanbul, interpretation of our palaces with a modern architecture and landscape approach..." (please see <https://www.sinpas.com.tr/en/projects/istanbul-saraylari>)

neighborhood since 2008, and secondly, the neighborhood was declared as a reserve building area⁵⁹ in 2012⁶⁰.

Due to the restricted zoning permit regulations pertaining to the neighborhood, construction of new buildings has remained limited. During the formal and informal conversations with the inhabitants, it is frequently stated that the municipality does not allow them even to drive a nail into a wall. As stated by one of the residents,

Unfortunately, we are not given construction permits, we do not know what their purpose is. We have been here for 26 years; they have kept us waiting for zoning since then. You see my house, they did not let us put a brick on it, not even a nail. (Tezcan, personal communication, January 17, 2020) (see Appendix B, 41)

She lives in a penthouse apartment but there is no column in her house, the roof is just seated on the walls. Since their building is not authorized, they are not permitted to make any reconstruction in the house. In other words, the municipality does not permit them to make any changes or modifications to their houses. The zoning problem is explained by the mukhtar of Yarımburgaz as follows:

Almost all of the buildings are illegal. They are built on land with title deeds, the land has a deed, but buildings are without permission. Either there are 10 buildings taken building permit or not. There is permission for construction since 2008, but the floor area ratio is low. The floor area ratio in the neighborhood is 0.60 and 0.90. (Mukhtar of Yarımburgaz, personal communication, February 25, 2020) (see Appendix B, 42)

Before 2008, the neighborhood was not zoned for construction. However, due to the industrialization process in Turkey, as stated in the previous section, the region has

⁵⁹ Reserve building areas are determined by, upon the application of, the Mass Housing Development Administration or Administration or determined ex officio by the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning to be used as new settlement areas in accordance with the Law No. 6306, the Law on the Transformation of Areas Under Disaster Risk. Those are the areas to which residents living either in risky areas or buildings who are planned to be transported. Also, it is stated that all kinds of implementations that bring income and revenue can be made and these areas can be used as new settlement areas (Retrieved from the official website of the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning on 5 July 2020: <https://istanbulakdm.csb.gov.tr/rezerv-yapi-alani-i-95235>).

⁶⁰ Please see <https://emlakkulisi.com/kucukcekmece-yarimburgaz-mahallesi-imar-durumu-ne-olacak/277564>

started to be settled by migrants who moved there from rural areas of the country for mostly economic reasons since the 1970s. Even though in those times the place was not allowed for construction, the then-newcomers built their houses and settled there. Therefore, that is why the mukhtar indicates that almost all of the buildings there were constructed without permission, so the buildings have not had a secure legal status.

On the other hand, as of 2008, the neighborhood was opened for residential settlements, but the floor area ratio is kept low. A floor area ratio determines the total net construction area that can be built on a plot. According to the Yarımburgaz 1/1000 Scale Implementary Development Plan Plan Notes, some streets have 0.60 floor area ratio with max. three-storey building permissible, while some have 0.90 with max. four-storey building permissible (Küçükçekmece Belediyesi, 2008, p. 4). Unless a building complies with this condition, the municipality does not permit construction. It is widely stated by the inhabitants that under these conditions, building a house is made impossible. To put it differently, it is neither economical nor efficient. Therefore, floor area ratio is found very low. To compare the floor area ratio, I have checked the ratio permitted for Atakent region, the nearby location where there are 10-15 storey buildings constructed. The floor area ratio determined for the residential areas located around Bosphorus City, İstanbul Palaces, and Tema İstanbul in Atakent is either 1.25 or 1.75.⁶¹ In that sense, there is a certain discrepancy between the granted permissions for these two neighboring neighborhoods, since the ratio for Atakent is two or three times more than Yarımburgaz. In that respect, inhabitants are demanding that the floor area ratio determined for the neighborhood be increased.

⁶¹ Retrieved July 12, 2020, from https://www.sinpas.com.tr/assets/cms/PageDocument/00000/00000407_n5t6hiuibeolo.pdf

While talking about the inadequacy of the infrastructure services in the neighborhood, the mukhtar also made a comparison between the conditions in Atakent and Yarımburgaz as in the following:

Since there is no construction permit, there is no infrastructural investments, transportation is a problem. There is no high school. There is no post office now, there was one once, but it was closed due to the lack of population. The primary health care center is in ruins, no maintenance carried out. Before 2004, there was no asphalt here. The primary healthcare center was opened in 2004. The neighborhood does not have 50% of the infrastructure needs. In 2007, we collected 15 thousand signatures for the infrastructure services to be provided. I was the mukhtar at that time. 50% done, 50% left ... The municipality does not care about the slums. When there is a problem in the Atakent neighborhood, it is solved immediately. The pavement has been broken for 15 days, they do not come and fix it. We want the municipality to build a playground for children, but we cannot make them do that, because there is no public land here. We wanted an automatic barrier to the park in the stream below because vehicles enter there. It has been 5 years; the barrier has not been built yet. (Muhktar of Yarımburgaz, personal communication, February 25, 2020) (see Appendix B, 43)

The mukhtar depicts the place as a dilapidated neighborhood in calling it a slum.

Comparing it with Atakent, he at the same time touches upon the inequalities reproduced through space due to the approach of governmental bodies towards the neighborhood. According to him, because of the ongoing zoning problem, infrastructural investment in the neighborhood is inadequate and despite the residents' consistent demands, the municipality ignores the neighborhood, so does not make necessary investments. In short, it can be said that local and central governments have avoided doing their share of tasks, in terms of, for instance, road building, community health center's maintenance, improvement of transportation facilities, etc. in the neighborhood.

Additionally, in 2014, to initiate an urban transformation project there, Küçükçekmece Municipality requested from the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning to identify Yarımburgaz neighborhood as a risky area, hence requested to abrogate its reserve building area status which was determined in 2012

(Küçükçekmece Belediyesi, 2014, p. 223). In the 2014 Annual Report of the Municipality, it is seen that even the borders of the urban transformation project pertaining to Yarımburgaz are also drawn (Küçükçekmece Belediyesi, 2014, p. 223). It is still at the proposal stage; no decision has yet been made about it.

On the other hand, even though there is no official urban transformation decision for Yarımburgaz yet, the administration might make the transformation via indirect channels. As one of the urban planners who voluntarily works in the Union of Neighborhoods, Rıfat, explains,

Urban transformation can be implemented in two ways. Either a place is declared a transformation area and a new elementary development plan [uygulama imar planı] is created for it, or existing elementary development plans are arranged in such a way that it does not explicitly declare that place as a transformation area, but it is forced to be transformed in a way without considering the existing fabric of the place. (Rıfat, personal communication, February 25, 2020) (see Appendix B, 44)

Then he underlines the details about the elementary development plan prepared for the neighborhood as follows,

They do not actually declare it as a transformation area, but they put villas in the plan as in the case of Yarımburgaz. There are average parcels in the plan, it is 600 square meters. They gave 0.30 base session, 0.60 total construction area. The parcels of 600 square meters in the neighborhood are also scarce. What does this mean? You will lay 180 square meters of foundation in 600 square meters land, you will only have one floor on top of it, and if you build a duplex, you will have a terrace. You can only build a villa there. Nothing else. Therefore, even if you do not declare Yarımburgaz as a transformation area, you say that the place will be transformed with this plan. (Rıfat, personal communication, February 25, 2020) (see Appendix B, 45)

In elementary development plans, two issues come to the fore. The first thing is the building blocks that show the parcels reserved for construction and the type of area, whether it is reserved as a residential area, commercial area, or green space.

The other issue which is determined by the plan is the structure of the buildings that defines the terms of settlement structures on a building block, i.e., number of floors

or height, building coverage ratio, and floor area ratio.⁶² As is shown in the Urban Automation System of the Municipality of Küçükçekmece (KEOS E-İmar, n.d.) most of the borders of the housing zone parcels in the neighborhood are determined as 600 square meters, and as stated by Rıfat above, building coverage ratio is dictated to be 0.30, and floor area ratio is dictated to be 0.60, which means a total of 360 (600 X 0.60) square meters of a max. three-storey building can be constructed there, each floor of which is 120 (600 X 0.30) square meters in size. On the other hand, in the current settlement of the neighborhood, parcels that are 600 square meters are very rare, and ordinary people dwelling there also do not have such large parcels. Therefore, it appears that the development plan is not intended for residents to continue to live there, but it seems to be prepared for high-income people who plan to settle in the region after the planning. As underscored by Rıfat, the existing plan is not in accordance with the socio-economic fabric of the neighborhood, since ordinary homeowners living there cannot afford such types of houses. In that sense, the existing elementary development plan is seen as a part of rent-seeking strategies of official urban planning that is imposed in a “top-down” manner which also leads to the exclusion of the inhabitants from the decision-making processes about the places they live in.

All in all, with the construction of luxury residential areas such as Bosphorus City, Tema İstanbul, etc. on the land which was once Halkalı Dump, and local and central government’s infrastructural investments with the opening of the TEM highway and Halkalı Metro Station, the land of Yarımburgaz has increased in value. Today, it is seen as a precious empty land facing Lake Küçükçekmece. To put it

⁶² For further information please see http://kisi.deu.edu.tr/irem.ayhan/Uygulama%20%C4%B0mar%20Plan%C4%B1%20%C3%87izim%20Teknikleri_sunum_16_mart_009.pdf

differently, it is approached as an area that carries a high potential for profit-making via new projects. Furthermore, by putting the residents in a fragile position legally through the existing elementary development plan, their bargaining power is attempted to be reduced in this process and implementing new construction projects with the minimum amount of costs is being attempted.

Yarımburgaz-Der has been established within this context in 2015 by a group of residents who attempt to address wrongdoings in their living space and seek equality in resisting regulations. They insist on their right to contest and establish their own terms of engagement and participation. In their efforts to establish their own terms of engagement and participation with their living space, they, at the same time, have taken a wide set of solidaristic actions with the Syrians who have moved to their neighborhood starting from 2013 and accelerated particularly between 2014 and 2015.

5.3 The neighborhood association in Yarımburgaz: Yarımburgaz-Der

Within this section, I will firstly discuss the pathway towards the emergence of Yarımburgaz-Der through focusing on the perspectives and perceptions of the members of the association about the developments considering the transformation issue in their living space. Then, I will introduce the organizational structure and demographic features of the association. Since with this study, I concentrate on the activities of Yarımburgaz-Der, it is necessary to depict its general features. Also, providing a general overview will be beneficial for further discussion in the subsequent sections.

5.3.1 Emergence of the neighborhood association in Yarımburgaz

The members of Yarımburgaz-Der were previously acting together in another association that had been established in Yarımburgaz in 2014. The other association, too, was founded to solve the zoning problem in the neighborhood. The issue which is most articulated by the residents as zoning problem is linked both with the 1/1000 implementary development plan prepared by the Municipality as of 2008 and the neighborhood's being declared as a reserve building area in 2012. As a result of these developments, the residents of the neighborhood felt the need to mobilize around an association. Against being declared as a reserve building area, through the association established in 2014, the residents of the neighborhood filed a lawsuit to stop the execution in 2014.⁶³ The main drive behind gathering around an association was to raise their voice collectively. As Naif explains,

Only if three-four people come and work together, something can be achieved but when a person is alone, he or she cannot do anything. Four eyes see more than two... Let's assume that we go to the mayor. Things will change if 10 people go or 150 people go. If we are members of an association, if we get together and 150-200 people file complaints to the municipality, the mayor will say that there is a problem here. These folks will paint me into a corner; but if 10 people go, you cannot even get to the mayor, you cannot enter through the door. (Naif, personal communication, January 17, 2020) (see Appendix B, 46)

By stating that acting individually will not work, acting in a collective way is seen as essential in order to get results from their attempts. While Naif underlines the significance of acting as a group, it is also seen that getting in contact with the governing bodies and negotiating with them on matters concerning their own lives, is very difficult. Hence, via mobilizing around an association, they started their attempts to meet with the municipality and take legal action to seek their property rights. Raising the floor area ratio determined by the development plan and

⁶³ As a result of this lawsuit, the court canceled reserve building area status of the neighborhood in 2019.

terminating the neighborhood's reserve building area status were their main demands of the governing bodies.

However, in time, several disagreements arose in that association regarding how to carry out the process. As a result of these disagreements, some residents left and founded their own association, that is Yarımburgaz-Der, in 2015. Through referring to the other association, Tekin expresses the main turning points for them in giving up acting with them: "We saw that they invited academics who advised construction companies to their meetings"⁶⁴ (Tekin, personal communication, March 1, 2020). Then he continues in summarizing,

Now, these associations we talked about are associations that advocate two separate policies regarding urban transformation in Yarımburgaz. The association for which I speak advocates on-site transformation. It says that neighborly relations should not be broken, that the priority is public services, youth, women and refugees, street animals, and these are the matters that matter most. It argues that it would be murder to get construction companies in here, that other examples in İstanbul show this, that the people are not given the promised things, and that such big money, loans, big construction companies will not bring an economic or socio-cultural advantage here - taking into account the relationships here. The other association says that there should be a project here, that this situation is not sustainable, we do not live in decent houses, the houses are not earthquake resistant. Through claiming such things, and through gaining the trust of the inhabitants, they serve as dogsbody to the private construction companies that will come here via their efforts. (Tekin, personal communication, March 1, 2020) (see Appendix B, 47)

The other association wants the neighborhood to be removed from the reserve building area, but according to information provided by the interviewees, the association, previously acting together, wants the neighborhood to be subjected to an urban transformation, since they find the neighborhood as a *gecekondu* settlement and lean towards working with construction companies, which is found unreliable for some of the residents, who actually later on formed Yarımburgaz-Der. Therefore,

⁶⁴ Translated from: "Kendi toplantılarına inşaat şirketlerine danışmanlık yapan akademisyenleri çağırdıklarını gördük."

there emerged a cleavage between those who are open to working with construction companies or prominent figures in real estate sectors and those who find it unacceptable and oppose it in principle. Because I have not made any interviews with members of the other association that would have given insight into the claims made by the members of Yarımburgaz-Der, I prefer not to mention the name of the other association. To put it differently, for ethical reasons, and to not bring other association under suspicion since I have not had an interview with them, I will not include the name of the association here. Briefly, it is understood that there were differences in their approaches to possible transformation in the neighborhood. Yet, I find it beneficial to share an anecdote about one of the events that occurred between these groups in order to better explain what kind of issues are being taken into consideration by the member of the Yarımburgaz-Der in their approaches related with the way a transformation implemented in their living-space.

As Mehmet argues that they had realized, as time went by, the other association was working with the benefit of a big construction company, called Torunlar Real Estate Investment Company⁶⁵, which has close relations with the then-mayor of Küçükçekmece district. The mayor of the district two terms ago, Aziz Yeniay, who served from 2004 until 2014, after leaving the mayorship became a member of the company's board of directors as of 2014.⁶⁶ In this regard, the reason why they stopped acting together with them, Mehmet states,

⁶⁵ Torunlar Real Estate Investment Company is one of the biggest real estate companies in Turkey. It is known to have close relations with the ruling party, that is AKP. For instance, tenders for major projects such as Torun Center and Mall of İstanbul were given to Torunlar. One of the founders and the general director of the company is President Erdogan's friend from the imam-hatip school and the company has become an extraordinarily growing construction group during the AKP period. The company was also brought to the agenda due to the workplace homicide of 10 workers in the construction of Torun Center in 2014. Please see: <https://www.birgun.net/haber/yuru-ya-kulum-denen-6-sirket-104583>

⁶⁶ Please see: <https://emlakkulisi.com/aziz-yeniay-torunlar-gyo-denetim-komitesi-baskani-oldu/258234>; and

We noticed that they are working with private companies. They look cute to them to make the neighborhood theirs, they support one another, and one of them works with Torunlar. Aziz Yeniay is the former mayor. Now he has become the director of Torunlar. We noticed their relationship. We gave up on them. When we were acting together, even if they said something positive here, they go to the municipality and do something else. They try to be seen as innocent by the municipality and the company. They even got someone to talk in a meeting, “I bought a house from TOKİ,” he said, “I am a man of this business, you can rely on me. I bought a house from TOKİ for 200 liras back then. Now it’s worth 1 million.” He tried to encourage us to do the same. We said, look, whether you are a professor or a scientist or whatever you are, do not praise TOKİ to us. We know what TOKİ is doing. You show us how to fight against them easily, tell us if there is any way, or at least shut up. We showed him the door, he got in his luxury car and went away. (Mehmet, personal communication, February 16, 2020) (see Appendix B, 48)

He mentions about the relational network between several actors, which are the other association, TOKİ then-mayor Aziz Yeniay, and Torunlar construction company. To give some insight about the nature of the connection other association is alleged to have with TOKİ, Aziz Yeniay, and Torunlar, entering into details briefly about the incident that occurred over another construction project in İstanbul between 2007 and 2009 will be beneficial.

Torunlar prepared a project called Mall of İstanbul⁶⁷, composed of a shopping mall, residences, hotels, and office buildings in the region that was at that time within the boundaries of Küçükçekmece. In order to provide the land to Torunlar company to construct the Mall of İstanbul, during his mayorship, Yeniay, from AKP, changed the development plan of that region twice but failed to convince the landowners.⁶⁸ Then TOKİ entered the process and bought the land by saying that the lands would be expropriated as a school and education area. During the negotiation with the landowners, previously it was the municipality presented as the buyer, and

http://torunlargo.com.tr/pdf/genelkurul/2016_YONETIM_KURULU_UYE_ADAYLARI_300517.pdf

⁶⁷ For further information please see: <https://www.mallofistanbul.com.tr/welcome>

⁶⁸ Retrieved July 2, 2020, from <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/tehdidin-altindan-mall-of-cikti-soylyu-kalkan-oldu-1561870>

then TOKİ was included in the process. However, when landowners went to the land registry for the transaction, they were misled, threatened, and convinced to transfer their lands to Torunlar instead of TOKİ. As a result of these developments, Yeniay was indicted on charges of aggravated fraud and official misconduct on account of the fact that the lands were underpriced and Torunlar were set to gain profit in this process, since he had used his authority as a mayor in changing the status of the land determined by development plans as trade area to education area, forcing landowners to sell their lands cheaper, and then changing the plan again to make the land suitable for the construction of a shopping mall, residences, hotels and offices in line with Torunlar's Mall of İstanbul Project.⁶⁹

Through underlining the other association inviting an entrepreneur who made a profit from owning an immovable property constructed by TOKİ and who spoke as if he advocates the residents in Yarımburgaz to work with TOKİ, and also through underlining the relation of the association with then-mayor Aziz Yeniay, who is known to have close relations with Torunlar company, Mehmet expresses the nuanced differences in their approaches in not finding these actors to be reliable since an incident as in the Mall of İstanbul process might happen to the residents of Yarımburgaz.

Under the existing conditions, the property rights of the residents in Yarımburgaz are kept legally insecure since their buildings do not have construction permits, so there is the risk that they will be forced to sell their houses below value. Also due to the low floor area ratio, their property rights are restricted. Therefore, they are confronted with the low valuation of their houses. In case of a transformation, their bargaining power in front of building contractors, no matter

⁶⁹ Please see: <https://emlakkulisi.com/aziz-yeniay-hakkinda-nitelikli-dolandiricilik-iddiasi/614742>

whether it is an individual contractor or a construction company, is weakened and they are put in a disadvantaged position. In short, they oppose contractors' rent-seeking activities of underpricing their houses and getting unearned income over their properties. In Mehmet's own words, "They will market our houses as wreckage, buy them cheaply from people, then increase floor area ratio there and get a profit from it. We object to this unearned income"⁷⁰ (Mehmet, personal communication, February 16, 2020). Then he continues, mentioning a conversation that occurred between the residents and the mayor in a 2016 meeting:

Increase floor area ratio, and give the construction permits to the people, not the companies, let the people win. He said no, we will not give you permission individually. No permission for individuals, we cannot. I cannot give it, or the minister will not, but let's bring you a company, be content with whatever the company we recommend gives you. After that, let's get started right away. Otherwise, he said, you would wait 20 years. (Mehmet, personal communication, February 16, 2020) (see Appendix B, 49)

The municipality implements transformation through a contracting company who then negotiates with property owners about the price of their properties, then starts the demolition to construct new buildings. Considering urban transformation processes, as Dikeç (2017) underlines, "the exchange value of urban space took priority over the common good, even over democratic procedures" (p. 12). However, instead of being forced to bargain a price for their properties with a private company, the residents in Yarımburgaz requested from the municipality to issue a reconstruction permit for the property owners, not for private contractors. Although the residents demanded to participate within the decision-making processes relating to the developments in their living space and requested from the local government to prioritize the common good, the municipality insisted on imposing their own terms. Most of the landowners in the neighborhood have title deeds of the lands, yet they do

⁷⁰ Translated from: "Evlerimizi düşük gösterip ucuza halktan alıp sonra orada imarı yükseltip kendileri bundan rant elde edecek. Biz bu ranta itiraz ediyoruz."

not have building permits. Under this circumstance, landowners' hands will be weakened when the price of the properties is determined during the negotiation with the private contractor.

As opposed to the imposition of a transformation project prepared by the technocrats in collaboration with private construction companies, they would like to be a part of the decision-making process rather than being exposed to a top-down transformation. In that sense, similar to Ok-Der, they try to generate a counter-hegemonic movement in claiming their right to the city to destabilize the exclusionary mechanisms of transformation. Hence, also in light of the discussed issues above, a group of people decided to form their association, Yarımburgaz-Der, in 2015. As was the case with Ok-Der, as soon as the association was formed, they became a member of the Union of Neighborhoods.⁷¹ They started to meet every week with the support of city planners and lawyers from the Union to be able to have comprehensive knowledge about the legal legislation and their rights considering transformation, and then every Sunday, for nearly three months, they visited the residents street by street in order to inform them about what it means to be declared as a reserve building area and risky area and what kind of actions can be taken together to defend their living space. Together with the Union of Neighborhoods, they have followed up the process through continuing to request meetings, arrange visits, and write petitions to the responsible governmental bodies such as the Municipality of Küçükçekmece, İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, and Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning. In that sense, similar to Ok-Der, they are involved with multi-scale actors ranging from local to national. Under the umbrella of the

⁷¹ For further information please see graph commons prepared by the Center for Spatial Justice showing the network around the Union of Neighborhood:
<https://graphcommons.com/graphs/ab1eb063-745b-492c-8b0f-7ec080097841>

Union, Yarımburgaz-Der also participated within processes such as organizing the campaign of a letter of undertaking for the signature of political parties and candidates before general and local elections, attending the visits to the chairmanships of political party groups at the parliament in Ankara and coming together with the other member associations in the meeting the Union arranged with the IMM on February 2020 to discuss possible solutions for their living space.

5.3.2 Organizational structure and demographic features of the association

Currently Yarımburgaz-Der has nearly 100 members. On the other hand, as I have observed, during the time interval I have spent in the field, that there are approximately four-five members actively taking initiative in organizing activities. All members work voluntarily based on their available time and energy.

Regarding the average age of the members, it can be said that it is median age. The members are composed of retired people as well as youths. Contrary to the situation in Ok-Der, the youths in the neighborhood actively taking part in the activities of the association. At this point, it is necessary to underline one of my observations in the field that while the elderly mostly deal with the issues relating to the transformation matter, which is generally agenda based, the young members between the ages of 25-30 take initiative in organizing social activities in the associations. Because the developments considering urban transformation are occasion-based, the elderly mostly come together in case of need, e.g., to attend meetings organized with the municipality, to write petitions to the governing bodies, to attend the Union of Neighborhoods' meetings, etc. On the other hand, it is the youths who devote their time and energy for labor-intensive social activities of the association, e.g., organizing picnics, football tournaments, workshops for the

children living in the neighborhood, cooking ashura, arranging aid distribution for those in need, etc.

Contrary to the case in Ok-Der where women were at the forefront, it can be said that women were not so visible in Yarımburgaz-Der. For instance, no woman participated within the executive board of the association, neither have I seen any woman in the photos of general meetings shared in their Facebook account. On the other hand, women mostly appear in the events in which they take part, for instance cooking fast-breaking meals or Ashura or waiting for their children when there is a workshop in the association. Apart from these, if there is an aid campaign arranged by the association, women take an active role in needs assessments of the inhabitants since they are part of a particular network stemming from their neighbor relations.

While AKP votes are intense in Yarımburgaz, as presented via the last election results, the association can be claimed to be a deviant case since it is an organization where opponents of the ruling party are in the majority. On the other hand, political party identification of the members in the association varies. There are people who voted for all three parties, the AKP, CHP, and HDP, among them. A common theme comes to the forefront in the interviews that they have a principle not to do politics in the association since they believe this will divide the unity amongst themselves in their struggle to protect their living space. What they frame as “not to do politics” in the association means, indeed, “not to argue with each other over political parties.” While in the neighborhood, there are people who distance themselves to the association due to their political party affiliations, there are people supporting different parties, yet prefer to act together in the association. Nevertheless, it is necessary to underline that in the association, the people who support the AKP are in the minority. In other words, the majority of the people in the

association vote for opposition parties. It is commonly stated that voting for a party does not mean supporting the trickeries of that party. It does not matter whether it is the AKP or CHP municipality, nor does it matter which one is the ruling party, because, in Tekin's own words, "His house is moldering; he cannot build a roof. There is no amateur sports club where his child can go, there is no İSMEK⁷², no buses come to the neighborhood"⁷³ (Tekin, personal communication, March 1, 2020). He draws attention to the spatial conditions in their locality in which there are inadequate infrastructural investments and inhabitants are deprived of living in a decent house due to restricted development rights. Then, about their principle to not do politics, he continues in stating that,

These neighborhood problems brought us side by side. There are common principles about not doing politics. This is followed in seven out of 10 meetings, but not in three. Those three either do not end anyway, or we stop the meeting when it goes off the rails and discussing the country's problems. (Tekin, personal communication, March 1, 2020) (see Appendix B, 50)

It is still important to point out however that despite the fact that these associations were operating in politically quite different neighborhoods, their attitudes and inclusive strategies were quite similar.

5.4 Going beyond the urban transformation issues and navigating between invited and invented spaces

In addition to their activities in struggling to gain legal security for their settlement, in the subsequent periods, the members of the association also take the issue of drug

⁷² It is a lifelong learning center affiliated with IMM. The center provides art and vocational training courses for free for the residents in İstanbul with the aim of developing their professional and artistic knowledge and increasing their employability. It is a non-formal education organization established for the purpose of complementing formal education. For further information please see: <https://www.ismek.istanbul/tr/kurumsal.aspx>

⁷³ Translated from: "Adamın evi çürüyor, çatı yapamıyor. Adamın çocuğunun gidebileceği bir amatör spor kulübü yok, İSMEK yok, otobüs gelmiyor mahalleye."

abuse, stated to be common in the neighborhood, into their agenda and involve in several efforts to protect the youths and children from drug abuse.

Relevant to the drug abuse problem, it is commonly underlined that in their neighborhood, especially in the green area below the neighborhood, they frequently encounter teenagers using bonsai and it is well known that the presence of drug dealers is a common phenomenon especially in the nearby location of the neighborhood of Altınşehir.⁷⁴ In other words, the location can be said to have a bad reputation due to drug abuse. Mehmet shares with me one of their attempts in which they told about it to the police officers to make them take an action against it, he states that,

The parks are full of dealers. Everyone encounters them, but when we said this to the police when we said what about this situation, we got an answer as follows; They say that taking drugs is not forbidden, they cannot do anything to prevent people from taking bonzai or heroin, and people are released even if we catch them. They say that if only they carry large amounts of drugs and trade them, they can be caught. (Mehmet, personal communication, February 16, 2020) (see Appendix B, 51)

On the other hand, the youths in the association have been trying to develop their own strategy to deal with this phenomenon. For instance, they decided to organize football tournaments called Gazozuna Turnuva⁷⁵ in the neighborhood, for nearly three years, with an intention to refute such bad reputations about their neighborhoods and also, as stated, to contribute to youths' staying away from drug abuse. Behind such attempts, it can be either looking to the police to stop common drug use in the neighborhood or youth's searching for possible ways to deal with this

⁷⁴ For further information please see the news reported about the instances in and around Yarımburgaz: <https://onedio.com/haber/yarimburgaz-magaralari-tarih-olmak-uzere-350400>; <https://t24.com.tr/video/uyusturucu-saticilarina-karsi-yol-kesen-kadinlar-ekmek-peynir-gibi-uyusturucu-satiyorlar-korkuyoruz-biktik,19740>, <http://kucukcekmece.info/kucukcekmece-yarimburgaz-mahallesinde-tellerde-esrarengiz-ayakkabilar/>

⁷⁵ For further information please see: <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/turkiye/2017/04/20/kucukcekmece-gazozuna-dunya-kupasi/>

issue within the neighborhood, the members of the association can be said to have two main objectives. The first one is that they do not wish to live in a place where there is a threat to their children to get involved in drug abuse. Secondly, they do not wish their neighborhood to be associated with criminality stemming from drug use there, since this would forge further ground for the administrators to see the neighborhood as a place that needs to be gentrified through urban transformation. As Dikeç (2001) points out “social degradation,” which is produced not only socially but also spatially, might be “attributed to the concentration of ‘problem population’ in certain areas” (p. 1796). In that regard the neighborhood’s being associated with criminality due to the drug abuse problem is something that the members of the association do not wish, since they think it would form a ground for administrators to back their urban transformation attempts.

The members of the association also value continuing the old neighborly relations in which support is given to each other in hard times. It is articulated in such a way that since most of the inhabitants are poor and also face the threat of being displaced due to urban transformation, they need tight-knit relations and support from each other in order to better defend their settlement area.

As was the case in Ok-Der, organizing a local association comes to mean for them claiming their “right to the city” and creating a medium in their survival struggle through backing each other, especially against the transformation threat they face. It is stated that “this is an association where 200-300 families can support each other in tougher times”⁷⁶ (Tekin, personal communication, December 9, 2018). For instance, he mentions the foray a group of people made into the meeting of the real estate agents coming together relating to the issue of urban transformation. The

⁷⁶ Translated from: “Zor zamanlarda 200-300 ailenin dayanışabileceği bir dernek burası.”

inhabitants told them, “We will not let you enter in our neighborhood”⁷⁷ (Tekin, personal communication, December 9, 2018). They raised their voices against the real estate agents at that time through the joint action they took as a group of people.

As was the case in Ok-Der which was emphasizing *komşuluk hukuku*, Yarımburgaz-Der members also articulated in varying ways during the interviews, their need for backing each other, being tight-knit, or the necessity to organize collective action rather than acting individually, they attach great importance to neighborly relations. The social fabric of the neighborhood, which is mostly resided by low-income families, under the pressure of transformation necessitates them to be in solidarity with each other. In the absence of a social state, they rest on informal support networks, formed among the inhabitants, that are related to their emphasis on neighborly relations. For instance, Hüseyin, a 26-year-old interviewee who has lived in Yarımburgaz for 25 years and actively participates in the activities of the association, expresses that, “There are dozens of people here who can help me when I have a problem. Is a member of my family sick? My neighbor gives the keys of his car when I ask him for it”⁷⁸ (Hüseyin, personal communication, January 12, 2020).

Similarly, people around the association attach particular importance to solidarity practices in their living space. Acting in solidarity with the people in need is not a rare practice among them. When Syrians started to come to the neighborhood, even though it preceded the establishment of the association, as already-settled neighborhood residents, they initiated solidarity practices with the newcomers, but on an individual level. Pertaining to the process of getting to know the Syrians coming to their neighborhood, it is commonly stated that they were

⁷⁷ Translated from: “Sizi bu mahalleye sokmayacağız.”

⁷⁸ Translated from: “Bir sıkıntım olduğu zaman yardımına gelebilecek onlarca insan var burada. Ailemden biri mi rahatsız, gidip komşudan arabasını istediğim zaman anahtarı verebiliyor mesela.”

sitting on each other's lower floor, upper floor, opposite buildings. At the same time, the physical structure of the neighborhood is also conducive to their coming across each other. There is a street that passes through the middle of the neighborhood. Minibuses and buses pass through this street. For instance, as working in a shop on that road, Hüseyin expresses that many of the refugees who came there were getting out of the vehicles on that road and he frequently encountered them coming as a group of people, as one or two families, from the shop he was working in (Hüseyin, personal communication, January 12, 2020). If they come as a group of people, they get the attention of the people located in the houses and shop owners on that road during the time the vehicles came and left them there. It can be either living in the same building, in the same street, or seeing Syrians' coming to the neighborhood as a group of people, locals' individual contacts with the Syrians started from 2013, the year it is reported the Syrians began to come to the neighborhood. At that point, it is necessary to underline that Yarımburgaz-Der was not yet established during this period, on an individual base, the contact between the interviewees and the Syrians had already started. Based on their personal encounters, initial solidarity practices started to emerge. To explain exactly what kind of solidarity practices they established at that time and to discuss how space might play a role in the construction of different modalities of solidarity practices, I find it necessary to elaborate on two striking experiences Tezcan and Emel had.

The first acquaintance of Emel, who has been residing in the neighborhood for 25 years, with the Syrians immigrating to the neighborhood coincided with the end of 2013 when a Syrian family moved into the apartment downstairs in the building where she lives. For about five years they were neighbors. As she reports, when they came, they couldn't bring anything with them because they fled the war. It

is the empathy she developed which constitutes the driving force for her when she would like to be helpful to that family. She states that,

I put myself in their shoes. It is not clear what will happen to a person the day after tomorrow. Something you never expected may come up, and you will be exiled, too. Would they want it to be like this? (Emel, personal communication, January 30, 2020) (see Appendix B, 52)

Hence, she started to provide in-kind aid, composed mainly of clothes and food, to that family through using her own resources and the resources coming from her personal network, from relatives and friends.

Furthermore, she volunteered to wash her neighbor's laundry in her washing machine for nearly three months, because they did not have one and the housemaker was washing them by hand. As Emel also states, she observed that the Syrian mother was having difficulties in completing the domestic work, because they were a crowded family and she had a lot to do. In order to ease her burden, Emel offered her to do the laundry in her own machine. Three months later, on the occasion of one of her friends who bought a new washing machine and was willing to give away the old one, Emel's husband brought that second-hand machine to her neighbors. As Emel states, her husband went and took the machine with his car and brought it to the neighbors downstairs. To put it differently, Emel with her husband using their own networks helped their neighbors to have a washing machine.

From the position she holds as a housemaker and a mother, within time, Emel formulated several ways to provide support to the Syrian family. At that point, physical proximity also played another role since they were residing in the same building and because of the relations she established with them she knew about their life conditions.

When I asked about the language barrier stemming from their speaking different languages and how they manage to communicate, she told me that her

husband was making translation between her and her neighbors. Emel's Syrian neighbors are a Kurdish family and her husband is also Kurdish. On the other hand, Emel is a Turkish woman and cannot speak Kurdish. Hence, the communication with them was eased by her husband thanks to Kurdish being a common language between these two families. In addition, when her husband was not available around the house, Emel also states that they were sometimes able to communicate with body language.

In addition to her acts of solidarity by providing in-kind aid and by trying to lessen the domestic work burden of the Syrian mother residing downstairs, Emel also offered her neighbors to supply potable water to them. She has a domestic water purifier system in her home. Since İstanbul's water mains is not suitable for drinking, most people living in the city prefer to buy drinking water from outside or use a water purifier system in their homes. The Syrian family residing downstairs did not have a purifier system in their homes, so they were buying potable water from the grocery. So, as a part of her solidarity efforts, Emel offered them to take the portable water from her home, instead of buying it from the grocery. Furthermore, she mentions a particular interaction related to the language issue between herself and the daughter of the family downstairs, when she was coming to take water as follows,

They had a daughter. Her name was Sakine [13 years old]. She would always come to get the water. While waiting for the water to fill, she would sit next to me at the table, take the spoon and she would say, for example, "we call it kevcik [in Kurdish]" and she would ask what is it called in Turkish? I would say it is "kaşık" [in Turkish] my girl Sakine. She would memorize it until she got the water. She gradually improved her Turkish. Our agreement was like this. My spouse used to say, "My lady is Turkish, she doesn't speak Kurdish. Yours is Kurdish, does not speak Turkish. Teach her Kurdish, she will teach them Turkish." Both they and their daughter learned Turkish, but I could not learn Kurdish (laughter). (Emel, personal communication, January 30, 2020) (see Appendix B, 53)

Her husband has wished for years that Emel would learn Kurdish, but she could not learn it. With the occasion of the Kurdish family from Syria moving in downstairs, he suggested that they teach Kurdish to his wife and that she helps them to learn Turkish. While Sakine was waiting for the water jerrycan to be filled, she, at the same time, was practicing Turkish with Emel. In that sense, though Emel could not improve her Kurdish skills, her contact with the Syrian family has turned into the creation of a space that contributed to Sakine's language acquisition.

In addition to Emel's above-discussed experience, I would like to mention the interaction of Tezcan with another Syrian family who migrated to the neighborhood, in order to elaborate on what kind of practices they come up with as part of their solidarity acts and also to discuss what kind of possibilities sharing the same living space might open in terms of easing the hardship Syrians face. The solidarity practices of Tezcan show certain parallelism with Emel's. On the other hand, I find it valuable to underline that interactions and relations of each are contingent upon the particularities of their own encounters.

The first personal encounter of Tezcan, who has been residing in the neighborhood for 26 years, with the Syrians who moved to the neighborhood is reported to be in the spring of 2014. She explains how they met as follows,

One morning I was on the balcony, looking out, it was spring. I saw two taxis coming. They left a group on the pavement and left. I waited on the balcony for an hour. I waited, waited, looked, no one came. All the children were sitting on the pavement. (Tezcan, personal communication, January 17, 2020) (see Appendix B, 54)

Then she lists the names and ages of all of the children which she still remembers. They were eight children with four adults, in total 12 people, gotten out of two taxis, and started to wait on the sidewalk. Her house is on the street that passes through the middle of the neighborhood through which the main public transportations pass. That

played a role in her encountering the group waiting on the road. About her first reaction when she saw them from the balcony of her home, she continues as follows:

That little boy really haunts me. I will never forget him. “I am hungry, I am hungry,” he said to his mother in Kurdish. His mother took out a cream biscuit and gave it to him. I was so upset that I cried on the balcony. I could not stand it, I went down. I went to them and said who are you? Where are you coming from? Where are you going? I saw they spoke Kurdish. They do not speak Turkish at all. They know Arabic. I said I was Kurdish too. They said that “We came from Urfa. We came from Suruç. We fled from Syria. We walked around there [Suruç] for two months. We came to the bus terminal [in İstanbul], two taxis came, they said they would take us to a place where there were lots of empty houses. There were jobs, there were empty houses. They brought us and left us here. They took 500 dollars from us.” They had taken 500 dollars for the road between the bus terminal to here. I was so upset. I did not inform my spouse. I did not think if they would kill me or they would do something to me, there was no one at home. I brought them to my home. They took a shower and I did their laundry. I prepared breakfast for them. It was noon and I called my spouse. I called him and explained the situation. I said two families came from Syria and I took them home without ever asking you. He said you did well, do whatever it takes, I will come around one o’clock. I went out and informed the neighbors. We have relatives here, I informed them. They came too. We went looking for a house for them. We found a house on the same day ... I called the neighbors. Some gave them pillows, some carpets, some cover, some mattresses, some duvets, some armchairs, some tubes, pots, and pans, and we furnished a house for them until evening. For two families. I gave them a bed and kitchen stuff. We equipped their houses, they stayed here for two years. (Tezcan, personal communication, January 17, 2020) (see Appendix B, 55)

Even though it was the first time she encountered these people, she had a willingness to do something about them waiting with their children on the sidewalk for an hour. On the one hand, it can be claimed that coming from the same ethnicity might have played a role in shaping her first attitude in inviting them to her house without hesitation, but on the other hand, Kurdish being a common language among them played a role in facilitating easier communication. Additionally, as understood from the statements of Tezcan, seeing the children getting hungry while sitting on the sidewalk disturbed and upset her and that played a part in her decision to leave the house and go to them. In either way, though she was not familiar with those people,

rather than ignoring them waiting in the street, she felt responsible for contacting them and then hosting them in her house, while in the meantime trying to find a solution for their predicament. In order to take a swift action, Tezcan benefited from her network composed of relatives and neighbors and managed to find a rental house and several domestic utensils for the Syrian group in the same day she met them. They stayed in touch after the families were settled into the apartment found by Tezcan's efforts.

In time, she established close relations with one of the families, the family who has six children, with whom she got acquainted that day. In addition to finding a house, she also involved in finding a job for their children. She took them to a textile mill in which daughters of her brother-in-law and sister-in-law were working and asked the owner to recruit them. During the interview, she also mentioned about one of the instances in which she and her husband dealt with medical treatments when one of the family members broke his foot. They took him to the doctor with their car and took care of him during the treatment process.

As Tezcan states, the Syrian family lived in Turkey for five years, two years in Yarımburgaz, three years in Kanarya, which is a neighborhood next to Yarımburgaz, and then they immigrated to Germany. Though they went to another country, they are still in contact and make video calls with each other regularly. During the interview, she showed me the photographs of the family, particularly from the wedding of their children. They opened a grocery and one of their children got married there.

When I explicitly asked her about why she involved with all these efforts, she points out the hardships of being a stranger. She has a common ethnic background with the Syrian families she encountered that day, yet she neither referred to the

shared identity or language, rather she referred to the shared experience of being a stranger who newly arrived in the neighborhood by stating that,

I felt so sad for them. They were strangers. It's not just them, I mean, when a stranger comes here, I help them so much. I myself was a stranger, too. I came here, I suffered a lot. I had no language, I did not know Turkish. I also suffered. That's why I help strangers a lot. (Tezcan, personal communication, January 17, 2020) (see Appendix B, 56)

Then, she tells about her own experience when she moved to İstanbul 28 years ago through stating that,

I did not speak Turkish; I did not know any Turkish word. They were all Thracians where I was sitting... the children were younger than... God bless our neighbors; they were very nice. Although I did not speak Turkish, they were reaching out a lot, taking care of my children. At that time there was no water at home, there were no roads, there was no laundry machine. We were 11-12 people staying at home... I was going to get water, sometimes I was waiting in the queue for 2 hours... I was leaving the children with my neighbors ... I had no relatives here. I had no one I knew. I was leaving children with them and going to get the water. (Tezcan, personal communication, January 17, 2020) (see Appendix B, 57)

She is Kurdish and as she states she did not know Turkish when she first came to İstanbul and she had domestic responsibilities to take care of all on her own. She, at the same time, suffered the difficulties of being a stranger. However, the support her neighbors gave her via looking after her children when she had to go outside to bring water to the home, would be very helpful for her at those times in relieving her burdens. Then, she gives instances about her practice of helping the families who reside in the neighborhood, if she hears about it, having hard times and in a difficult situation, even though she is not familiar with them. For instance, she mentions about a Moldovan family who moved to Yarımburgaz through stating that,

It was the time we were in our previous house. A Moldovan family came here, they had a child. They, too, immigrated and came here and had nothing, just like them [the Syrian families]. Similarly, we gave them mattress, quilt, pots, and pans. They were Christians, for example. His wife spoke little Turkish. We were going to each other. (Tezcan, personal communication, January 17, 2020) (see Appendix B, 58)

For her, it does not matter whether she has a common ethnic background, or she previously knew that family or not, she tries to provide support either personally or through communicating with her neighbors in requesting their help, thanks to the network she has there. In that sense, living in the same neighborhood contributes to facilitating to provide support even to people she did not know before.

As discussed, in the period prior to the establishment of the association, briefly before 2015, the first contacts with Syrians had already begun. Most of the members of the association who witnessed the severe living conditions of Syrians felt responsible to do something about the hardships of those Syrian families, but on an individual level. With the establishment of the association, on the one hand, they felt the responsibility to do something collectively about the difficulties faced by the Syrians; on the other, it is explicitly stated that they wanted to take action against possible tensions and polarization between the Syrians and the local people in the neighborhood. While framing solidarity practices as part of neighborly relations, Tekin, one of the youths taking initiative in the association, touches upon other issues playing a role in shaping their attitudes towards the Syrians living in their neighborhood as follows,

We did this as a part of neighborly relations. But this alone is not enough. Those coming from Syria are workers. Inhabitants from Turkey here are concerned about losing their homes, the Syrians have lost their homes and come here. They have a common destiny in terms of their class positions. There happened quarrels in other neighborhoods, we minimized it here. In the end, the civil war is a probable issue in Turkey. A bigger one may take place here. To prevent this, we can only establish our founding ideas about the future with today's solidarity. (Tekin, personal communication, December 9, 2018) (see Appendix B, 59)

While mentioning “We did this as a part of neighborly relations. But this alone is not enough”, he indeed implies that showing compassion and being helpful to the people who are your neighbors is important but not enough. He has a class-based

perspective and makes an analogy between the economic and social circumstances of the Syrians living there and the local residents through highlighting the danger of displacement and dispossession, which the Syrians have already been faced with and the locals there are under threat of. He continues through addressing violence against the Syrians in various neighborhoods in İstanbul and other locations in Turkey. However, as he states, for Yarımburgaz-Der, being able to prevent any possible tension or conflict in their neighborhood is important. Then through mentioning the increased social and political polarization in Turkey, he tells about his imagination related both with the present and the future. According to him, Turkey is already a polarized society and there is a certain internal tension among its citizens and Syrians as newcomers might trigger another inter-group tension in society; he believes that the only way to prevent it is to be in solidarity with each other, as people sharing similar economic and social circumstances, instead of conflict.

5.5 The arrival of the Syrian refugees and changing role of Yarımburgaz-Der

As of 2015, it can be said that the presence of Syrians has become quite visible in the neighborhood. Based on my conversations with the Syrian informants, they moved to the neighborhood starting from 2013, and more intensely in 2014 and 2015. And till 2016, it is stated that the mobility of the Syrians was quite high. The year 2016 also coincides with the EU-Turkey deal coming into force. Before that, more Syrians were searching for ways to go to Europe through crossing the borders unofficially, which a certain number succeeded in doing. Another commonly stated issue in the interviews is that the current number of Syrians in the neighborhood is lower than the past, which actually coincided with the period before 2016, the EU-Turkey deal. As

of 2019, the number of Syrians in the neighborhood is 3,370, as already stated in the initial parts of this chapter. The official population of the neighborhood is 9,926 as of 2019. Comparing them, the most up-to-date numbers of Syrians seems to be one-third of the local population, which might be claimed to be quite high. Considering the interviewees' statements about the previous density of the Syrian population in the neighborhood, which indeed was higher than today together with the local population, which has not changed much in the last decade, concerns of the association about any possible social tension due to the presence of the Syrians there, as expressed by Tekin in his statement above, become more meaningful. Hence, in addition to individual contacts of the members of the association with the Syrians, they initiate more systematic efforts in order to avoid polarization or hostility and enable a peaceful coexistence in the long-run in Yarımburgaz.

Though the association is founded against urban transformation, among their purposes there is also to protect their living space, as seen in their attitudes towards the drug abuse issue; they also have a common stance, as already discussed above considering their refusal to act in collaboration with private construction companies. In this respect, as a part of their worldview, they took a particular stand on the presence of Syrians in their neighborhood and decided to engage in efforts to act in solidarity with them.

The association took the presence of Syrians in their neighborhoods into their agenda soon after the establishment in 2015 and started to do more systematic work related to it. Hence, their initial individual attempts have been turned into engaging in civic solidarity practices with the refugees in a more collective way. It is the youths who generally take responsibility in that respect in the association. Among the activities of the association, are providing in-kind aid, organizing workshops for

children, Turkish courses, football tournaments, trips to cinema or museums in İstanbul, organizing meals for fast-breaking or Ashura, etc. Within most of these activities, both Syrians and local community have been engaged. In addition to them, in line with needs assessment, the association also supported the Syrians in helping them to apply for temporary identity documents, registration of Syrian children to the school, playing an intermediary role for those who cannot find a rental house or a job. Fighting against the prejudices of the local community against refugees, mediating between locals and Syrians in times of conflict between them, or talking with the employers in the neighborhood for the unpaid work of the children are also among their areas of involvement pertaining to the Syrians in the neighborhood.

From the beginning of the process, Yarımburgaz-Der has prioritized the Syrian children living in the neighborhood, where child labor is a common phenomenon. Most of the Syrian children in Yarımburgaz are working in the informal sector and more than 50% of the workers in the textile mills located in the neighborhood are composed of Syrian children (Hüseyin, personal communication, January 12, 2020). While some of the children work as day laborers, some of them are full time workers. They work six days a week, working 11 hours in total a day on weekdays, and working till one p.m. on Saturdays, earning around 300- 400 Turkish lira a week. Under such circumstances, most of them have stayed outside the educational system. Hence, young members of the association carrying certain sensibilities about class inequalities initiated some efforts to create a space in the association through which they can provide support to the children who are in a disadvantaged position.

Intending to establish solidarity relations with the Syrian children, the younger members of the association started to organize Turkish language courses

and established an initiation called Altınşehir Child's Workshop (Altınşehir Çocuk Atölyesi). For a while later, through the end of 2015, they made a call for support to volunteers via their networks, i.e., the Union of the Neighborhoods and their social media accounts. They organized a meeting in the association in which the inhabitants and volunteers from the outside came together to discuss what to do further and as of December 2015, they made a modification within the place of the association and through a playground for children they created a kid-friendly place.

Since Altınşehir Child's Workshop is an important pillar of their endeavor relating to their act of solidarity with Syrians, I will discuss it under a separate heading below. Besides various workshops organized for children under the section 5.6 below, there are other involvement areas of the association, for instance, organizing in-kind distribution campaigns, and social activities such as preparing meals for fast-breaking or Ashura, mediating between the locals and refugees in times of any conflict, and helping Syrians to apply for identity documents. Now I would like to elaborate on these activities of the association considering the Syrians in their neighborhood.

Particularly between 2015 and 2017, the younger members of the association organized in-kind aid campaigns to be delivered to the Syrians in the neighborhood. Thanks to the network they established, either through their own personal networks e.g., friends, relatives, etc. or through the Unions of Neighborhood that has relationships with several civic solidarity groups such as 'Refugees, we are, Neighbors' Solidarity Network, the association organized aid campaigns. Similar to Ok-Der, the association in Yarımburgaz is also a member of the Unions of Neighborhood and they brought the presence of Syrians in their localities into the agenda of the Union. Therefore, thanks to the Union, several groups of volunteers all

around İstanbul started to get in contact with Yarımburgaz-Der in order to provide support.

There were also other groups or individual volunteers with their own efforts getting in contact with the association, since either via their personal channels or via the social media, they had heard Yarımburgaz-Der was in efforts to be in solidarity with the Syrians living in their neighborhood. Spartakistanbul and student groups from various universities in İstanbul were among them. Together with the volunteers, the association started to get involved in regular in-kind aid distribution, consisting of supply of provisions, clothes, coal, heating stoves, baby's nappies, and infant formula. One of the volunteers who got in contact with Yarımburgaz-Der via her own efforts and has a wide personal network which facilitated to create resources for in-kind aid, Pervin, underlines that "In 2015, people had needs to sustain their lives"⁷⁹ (Pervin, personal communication, July 2, 2020), so they prioritized in-kind assistance. Similarly, Tekin describes this period as "red", in other words, alarming, as follows,

...no pillow at home, no mattress to sleep on. Look, I am not saying a bed, there is no mattress! At that time, I know very well that the children were all sick. Their kidneys got cold because they did not have a bed to sleep on. It is real. I remember many children with white faces who were constantly taken to the hospital in the neighborhood. It was red back then. (Tekin, personal communication, March 1, 2020) (see Appendix B, 60)

Through in-kind aid distribution, the association, as a civic solidarity group, were involved in providing humanitarian aid or emergency relief for self-settled Syrian refugees living in the neighborhood. At that point, it is also important to underline that Yarımburgaz-Der prioritizes working with the funds they raised via volunteers and within their own community.

⁷⁹ Translated from: "2015'te insanların hayatlarını idame ettirmek üzerine ihtiyaçları vardı."

Throughout the period between 2015 and 2017, incoming goods were delivered according to the needs priorities of the families. This period was also one of the rare instances in which the local women in the association actively participated. They effectively engaged in the needs assessment process, for instance in reaching and visiting Syrian families, since they had established certain networks within the neighborhood. In other words, women's positions may differ from men's in the sense that they are mostly at home while the men are going to work. So, they might be the ones who mostly develop neighborly relations among each other, as seen in the experiences of Emel and Tezcan above. They had already gotten acquainted with Syrian families and via their networks, they managed to get in contact with many others there. In expressing that they had already established relations with the Syrian families there, Hüseyin, who is a craftsman in Yarımburgaz, gives the details about their efforts to reach more families and make needs assessment as follows,

Many of them were people we knew. In fact, we did the following for a while; We separated the neighborhood region by region. We distributed our volunteers to the areas. To be exact, one person would be assigned to an area, and that person would check people. We were going and having one-on-one meetings with people ... We were recording the number of children in the family, their age, gender, and monthly income. (Hüseyin, personal communication, January 12, 2020) (see Appendix B, 61)

For a certain period, there were volunteer inhabitants who walked the streets to identify in which houses a Syrian family resides and what the urgency of their needs was. At that stage, women from the association actively engaged in the needs assessment activities voluntarily, since they already had their own networks in the neighborhood.

For in-kind assistance, they started to keep a list, a recording list. Based on their records, it is stated that they reached around 3,000 Syrians in distributing in-

kind assistance. While the goods such as coal and heating stoves were delivered on a seasonal basis, in the winters, goods such as supply of provisions, clothes, baby's nappies, and infant formula were delivered more regularly, on a monthly basis. Having a recording system reflects their desire to be fair in distributing the aid. Rather than to manifest how many people they distributed aid to, their main drive in keeping records was to prevent inequity. They prioritized delivering the goods according to the urgency of need.

Similar to the situation in Ok-Der, it can be said that the place of the association sometimes was turned into a storehouse and other times, especially at the weekends via the workshops, turned into a play area or school for the children. On one occasion, the place was even turned into a dental clinic. In February 2017, with the contribution of 'Refugees, we are, Neighbors' Solidarity Network, a dental health screening was held within the association for children, composed of both locals and Syrians. Health screenings of more than 50 children were carried out by a volunteer dentist and volunteers undertook the follow-up process of the medical treatment.⁸⁰ While the place of the association might be used as a dental clinic, sometimes it might also be turned into a kitchen. For instance, by favor of the network of one of the members of the association, 540 kilograms of tomato paste was donated to the association and in September 2016, with the participation of inhabitants, locals and Syrians, volunteers of the association and children, tomato paste was allotted into 240 jars in the association to be delivered to families in need.

It is underlined that the distribution of goods was their way of communication in the earlier period of interaction between Syrians and the association. In admitting

⁸⁰ Please see <https://multeciyimhemserim.org/2017/02/21/disimi-seviyorum-etkinligi-yarimburgazda-dis-sagligi-taramasi/>

that relationships have emerged from the distribution of in-kind assistance, Tekin takes attention to the issue as follows,

But it was a dangerous way of communication... For a while, the association worked as a charity organization. A lot of help was coming. This had positive and negative sides. It was positive to be supportive. The negative side of providing help was that it lowers their self-esteem and is beneath their dignity. Drawing a needy image was distressing for the person who receives aid. In order to overcome this, we were saying while distributing clothes that 'please do not hesitate, our friends sent them for us.' And if we ourselves have any need, we too were taking clothes from the delivery and they saw it, hence felt comfortable. (Tekin, personal communication, December 9, 2018) (see Appendix B, 62)

To be perceived as a charity organization is what the association does not wish. It is clear that they have a sensibility not to establish an asymmetric relation. In principle, they value establishing an equal relationship with the Syrians.

I find it important to underline another dimension of the in-kind assistance process in which some of the Syrian inhabitants actively participated. Some Syrians residing in the neighborhood would like to take responsibility in giving support to the members of the association in their efforts during the process of distribution of goods. Furthermore, they played a role also in the needs assessment process. This situation also, to a certain extent, contributed to organizing the delivery of the goods in a more participatory way. Some of the Syrians got involved in the process by making translation between the locals and the Syrians and also via their physical labor in helping the goods to be delivered to homes.

Similar to the situation in Ok-Der, there emerged certain obstacles due to language differences for Yarımburgaz-Der. Thus, some Syrians who have already learned Turkish or who know Kurdish volunteered to mediate the communication between locals and refugees. However, at that point, claiming that Yarımburgaz-Der has an advantage over the ones in Ok-Der would not be wrong, because there are Kurdish speakers among the locals and Kurdish speaking Syrians are the majority in

Yarımburgaz. Most of the Syrians located in the neighborhood are coming from Afrin and Aleppo, cities in Syria known to have a dense Kurdish population. Therefore, Kurdish being a common language among the locals and the Syrians has served to be an advantage in facilitating their communication, as already mentioned during the discussion above about the experiences of Tezcan and Emel. Furthermore, Hüseyin, whose mother tongue is Kurdish, states that,

My native language is Kurdish. I learned Turkish afterward. It [knowing Kurdish] helped a lot. So, although the accent was different, we mostly understood each other. Of course, when I learned that accent difference later, it became even easier. But we were having difficulties in translating, especially with Arab families. We were communicating in Kurdish with Syrian Kurdish families [translator friends] and they were translating it into Arabic. (Hüseyin, personal communication, January 12, 2020) (see Appendix B, 63)

While some of the association members know Kurdish, some do not. It is similar for the volunteers. None of the volunteers coming from outside to Yarımburgaz know Arabic, while some know Kurdish, but the number of these volunteers were very low. In that sense, they have overcome the language barrier with the help of Syrians making translation between the locals and the Syrians.

As seen in the experiences of the local inhabitants, discussed via the statements of Emel, Tezcan, and Hüseyin, the fact that Kurdish is the common language considerably ease the communication among the Syrian Kurdish refugees and Kurdish residents from Turkey, however to what extent does Kurdishness play here a constitutive role in forming solidaristic relations? Ascriptive-identity-based solidarity practices, though uneven, through Kurdishness were formed to a certain extent within some localities, for instance in several neighborhoods of İstanbul and İzmir, which were generally grounded upon shared identity and “common fate” in determining solidaristic attitudes of internally displaced Kurdish communities as local residents towards the Kurdish Syrians living in their localities (Kılıçaslan,

2016; Keçi & Gökarıksel, 2020; Saraçoğlu & Belanger, 2018). However, in Yarımburgaz, established solidaristic relations did not appear to be mainly based on sharing the same ethnic background or same fate stemming from being forcibly displaced within the statements of the Kurdish locals. It is undeniable that Kurdish as the common language facilitated the communication between them in Yarımburgaz, yet I have not encountered with any explicit reference to the shared identity or common fate. For instance, as discussed above, although Kurdishness might have played a role for Tezcan to invite the Syrian families composed of 12 people without a hesitation to her home when she first encountered with them on the street, she indeed referred to the shared experience of being a stranger in explaining her efforts to help them. Furthermore, as will be presented below in detail, locals' desire to avoid politically and socially polarized atmosphere common in Turkey within their own localities and attributed common class positions of Syrians and locals living in Yarımburgaz are the main reference points of the members of Yarımburgaz-Der in forming solidaristic relations with the Syrians. Additionally, their solidaristic relations are not limited to the Kurdish Syrians, rather, there are also Syrian Arabs and Turkmen among the refugees who received support from the association.

On the other hand, as shown via the researches of Kılıçaslan (2016), Keçi and Gökarıksel (2020), and Saraçoğlu and Belanger (2018), formed solidarity practices of locals with the refugees might not be straightforward and the notion of inclusiveness might change over time. The relation between the locals and refugees might contain certain tensions and contestations due to certain political, social and/or economic dynamics either at the local or national level. Based on the field research Kılıçaslan (2019) conducted in Kanarya and Bayramtepe neighborhoods in İstanbul, she states that political activities as being the main determinants of the interaction

between the internally displaced Kurdish communities and Syrian Kurdish refugees together with the precarious positions of Syrian refugees have transformed the relations of these two groups from solidarity to exploitation and discrimination (Kılıçaslan, 2016, p. 79).

Additionally, Saraçoğlu and Belanger (2018), via their research conducted in “Işıkkent Ayakkabıcılar Sitesi” in İzmir, discuss how “the longstanding anxieties about the ‘loss of space of representation’ and the ‘loss of space/place’ are constructive of the anti-Syrian sentiments among certain sections of society” (p. 47). Referring to the relation between Kurdish people from Turkey and Syrian Kurdish refugees, they argue that approaches of Kurdish workers in Işıkkent towards Syrians oscillate between solidaristic/empathic attitudes and “ressentiment” stemming mainly from two factors (Saraçoğlu & Belanger, 2018, p. 61). While sharing the same fate reinforced their solidaristic attitudes in the initial periods, they started to direct their anger at Syrians relating with the decrease in real wages, ease of layoffs and decrease in their bargaining power against bosses due to the intensive employment of Syrian refugees in the sector (Saraçoğlu & Belanger, 2018, p. 61).

Contrary to the other localities discussed above, I did not observe a disjunction point or contestation between the locals, the members of Yarımburgaz-Der, and Syrians as time passed. Each of these localities has its own dynamics based on their particularities. For instance, political activities do not constitute a determinant role in the interactions between the locals and refugees in the case of Yarımburgaz or scapegoating of refugees is not a common practice there. To illustrate, during the interview, while talking about the increase in house rents with the arrival of Syrians in the neighborhood, Emel kept the homeowners, not the Syrians, as the responsible for this situation (Emel, personal communication, January

30, 2020). Moreover, whereas Kılıçaslan (2016) and Keği and Gökarıksel (2020) encountered during their field researches that local communities identify the Syrians living in their neighborhoods as “guests”, the members of Yarımburgaz-Der articulate Syrians as their neighbors. In other words, it can be said that they establish a more horizontal relationship with Syrians rather than an asymmetrical relationship that defines Syrians as guests.

Additionally, the space created via the distribution of in-kind aid in Yarımburgaz also paved the way for the establishment of closer relations between the people from the association, as locals, and the people who migrated to the neighborhood from Syria. As stated by Tekin, on the one hand, acting as a charity organization, referring to the association’s in-kind assistance in the initial periods, was a dangerous way of establishing relationship between the locals and the Syrians since the nature of such giving-receiving positions embedded in itself a kind of asymmetric relation, but on the other hand, the relationships which emerged from the distribution of in-kind aid have contributed to the establishment of friendships later on between the people from the association and the Syrians (Tekin, personal communication, December 9, 2018).

In the refugee integration literature, in-kind assistance is generally approached as obstructing the resilience-building process of the refugees since it makes refugees depend more on outside support in the long run rather than empowering them (Özçürümez et al., 2020, p. 13). Although this is correct to a certain extent, in the case of Yarımburgaz, it proves the contrary since the continuation of human contact at the local level enabled the in-kind aid distribution process to create a space in which inter-group relations are established.

To put it differently, in-kind aid distribution period has contributed to the development of social bridges between the locals from the association and the Syrians. For example, Tarık, a 26-year-old Syrian who moved to Yarımburgaz in 2013 from Afrin and resided in Yarımburgaz for six years, actively participated in the activities of the association during the in-kind aid distribution and workshops organized for the children. He narrates about the relationships they developed with Tekin and Hüseyin from the association as follows,

I have known Tekin for six years. I have known him since the first time I came to Yarımburgaz. We hung out together a lot, we had a great time together. He came to my wedding. I visited them when he went to perform military service. Hüseyin, too. We did not meet before, but now we do; we are acquaintances. I met him there too, we spent a lot of time together. (Tarık, personal communication, January 18, 2020) (see Appendix B, 64)

Referring to the time he spent in the association, he continues in stating that although he was a stranger in the neighborhood when he first moved to there, now in Yarımburgaz he is known as Syrian Tarık, then he states,

I was a stranger when I first came, but they accepted me, they trusted me. I was helping them as a translator. We were distributing coal in winter, for example. There were too many poor people there. Sometimes I was walking around with Tekin, meeting his friends. (Tarık, personal communication, January 18, 2020) (see Appendix B, 65)

Due to his participation in the activities Yarımburgaz-Der organized, he got contact both with Syrians and also locals who he did not previously know. Though previously he felt like a stranger, he started to get acquainted with the people around and the place in time, which can be claimed to decrease for him the feelings of isolation. Although he later moved from Yarımburgaz to Bayramtepe, a neighborhood next to Yarımburgaz, and has been living there for more than a year, his relations with the people from the association continues.

Furthermore, during the interview, by comparing it with an event he experienced in Bayramtepe, Tarık shared another experience he had in Yarımburgaz.

One of his Syrian friends was looking for a rental house in Bayramtepe and since Tarik is good at speaking Turkish, and since his friend knows only Arabic, he requested from Tarik to call the phone number noted in the external window of a rental house in order to speak to the landowner. However, when he called the number, here are the details about their dialogue,

He said, “Are you a foreigner?” “Yes,” I said. He said, “Sorry bro, we don’t give it to a stranger.” I said, “We are foreigners, but we are not bad foreigners.” He said, “We don’t give our houses to foreigners.” I insisted, I even went to meet him, we met, but he still did not give us the house. (Tarik, personal communication, January 18, 2020) (see Appendix B, 66)

Then he compares this experience with his experience in Yarımburgaz by stating that “There were no such things in Yarımburgaz, for example ... Because we all knew each other there”⁸¹ (Tarik, personal communication, January 18, 2020). As seen from his statement, he sees himself becoming a part of the already established relations in Yarımburgaz on the neighborhood level. Via the network he developed thanks to the association, he tells about how, on one occasion, he helped another Syrian friend to find a rental house there:

I have a friend who is Arab, that is, he does not know Kurdish or anything. Halit, the landlord was someone I knew. I went to him and said that there were people who came from Syria, they were so poor and looking for a house. “Tarik, I do not know them. It doesn’t work, so I cannot give my house,” he said. “Don’t you worry,” I said, “I am bringing them to you.” “Ok Tarik, if you are the guarantor, let’s give it to them.” They are still living in that house now. The other day, Halit said, “Tarik, you brought this man, he has not paid the rent and the water bill for two months.” I said okay, I would talk to them. I talked to them, I asked Asad what happened. His name is Asad. I asked him why didn’t he pay his rent? He said, “We could not earn enough money; we are having troubles and my son is at the hospital.” I said okay. I went and talked to Halit. Since Asad does not speak Turkish, I spoke on behalf of him. I said to Halit that, “He is in trouble and cannot work. His son is also sick.” Then he stated, “It’s okay Tarik, if that’s the case.” And added that “He should pay the water bill, but I will not ask for the rent.” My friend is still in that house now. (Tarik, personal communication, January 18, 2020) (see Appendix B, 67)

⁸¹ Translated from: “Yarımburgaz’da öyle şeyler yoktu mesela... Çünkü hepimiz orada birbirimizi tanıyorduk.”

As understood from his narrations above, he did not suffer from a sense of strangeness in Yarımburgaz, which closely related to the relationships he established there thanks to the association. However, in Bayramtepe the landowner he contacted refused to give them the rental house in claiming that “you are a stranger,” despite his efforts to meet the landowner face to face in order to gain his trust.

Pertaining to in-kind aid distribution, it is crucial to underscore that the solidarity network established in delivering aid to Syrian inhabitants had been enhanced also to families in need from Turkey, similar to the situation in Ok-Der. Families from Turkey who are in tight circumstances were also added to the recording list of the association. In one of our informal conversations, Tekin once states that “I know the Syrians carrying coal on their backs to the families from Turkey.” Due to their involvement within the activities of the association in aid distribution, there were Syrians among the people who carry the incoming goods to the families in need. In other words, they were also Syrians themselves helping families from Turkey who live in poverty. In that sense, I argue that, in some instances, the solidarity network became interwoven, rather than unidirectional. And via such a practice, existing borders between the local and the newcomer were removed.

Furthermore, delivering in-kind aid to the families from Turkey is articulated also as a deliberate attempt of the association. In order to avoid reactionary attitudes of the locals, in other words, to avoid constituting an impediment to social acceptance of Syrians among locals, it is argued that the association developed a strategy through delivering in-kind aid also to the families who are in need from Turkey (Tekin, personal communication, March 1, 2020).

The distribution of in-kind aid was most intensely organized in 2016 and 2017, however, it started to decrease by 2018. In this respect, though it depends on completely different dynamics than in the cases discussed by Kılıçaslan (2016), Keçi and Gökarıksel (2020), and Saraçoğlu and Belanger (2018), we encounter with the fragility and temporality of solidarity network, to a certain extent, in Yarımburgaz, too. The non-continuation of regular activities there is generally attributed to the disagreement of Yarımburgaz-Der with the volunteers from outside. Unlike the case of Okmeydanı in which volunteers entered into a disagreement among themselves, in the case of Yarımburgaz, it was the association entered into disagreement with the outside volunteers. Following this process, regular in-kind aid distributions were terminated. Moreover, in order to have a greater understanding of the disagreement of the association with the volunteers, it would be necessary to make interview with more volunteers. Similar to Okmeydanı, the situation in Yarımburgaz brings into question the sustainability of informal solidarity network.

Apart from that, an internal conflict was also raised among the members of the association. During the time when the activities were dense, some of the older members of the association started to raise objections against the activities the younger members organizing into which Syrians in the neighborhood are incorporated. Having its roots in anti-Syrian sentiments, some members were annoyed with the issues of the association's being turned sometimes into a storehouse or organizing Ashura/picnic days in the association with the Syrians, and they developed a skeptical approach about the activities carried out there. It could be questioning either the sources of in-kind contributions of the volunteers or the presence of children around the association, some members behaved in a reactionary way. At the same time, they displayed an anti-Syrian attitude, claiming that the state

is already looking after them. In Tekin's own words, "There were some who objected with a CHP mindset saying things like, don't you have a job? Or doesn't the state take care of them already?"⁸² (Tekin, personal communication, March 1, 2020). While framing such members as having a CHP mentality, Tekin makes a reference to the political polarization having its roots in preexisting cleavages based on party affiliation which also play a role in shaping some locals' responses to the Syrians living there. "The government's policies are criticized by the opposition, especially the main opposition party [the CHP], regardless of their content and simply because they are policies offered by the government" (Paker, 2019, p. 18). For some, their anti-Syrian attitudes are fed by their opposition to the incumbent AKP government, which is the ruling party in Turkey since 2002. As also stated in the article of Sert and Daniş (2020), the attitudes towards Syrians have been highly influenced by the "political attitudes" and "related mainly to political orientations" (p. 8). Related with the political context in Turkey, there are those who feel antipathy especially to the commonly utilized Islamic ansar-muhajir metaphor of the ruling party relating to the acceptance of Syrians in Turkey, and hence have formed negative attitudes towards the Syrians. In a similar way, this issue, to a certain extent, has its repercussion in the particular locality of Yarımburgaz and, as a result, within the association, an internal cleavage had emerged between those who take objection to the activities that prioritize Syrians living in the neighborhood and value acting in solidarity with them, hence developing inclusionary attitudes towards refugees.

In addition to that, Hüseyin mentions their efforts in challenging the people in the association who developed an anti-Syrian approach, and he states that there are

⁸² Translated from: "Sizin işiniz gücünüz yok mu? Devlet bunlara zaten bakıyor tarzında daha böyle CHP kafasıyla muhalefet edenler oldu."

those whose minds they managed to change, while there are those who stick to what they already thought. He states that,

Some of those who are not convinced are actually people who object to everything. Whatever personality they have, they object to whatever you do. Whatever you say, there is an objection; you put sugar in your tea, they object to it; you cross your legs, they object to it. (Hüseyin, personal communication, January 12, 2020) (see Appendix B, 68)

It is also stated that these people were already among the members who did not invest much time and energy in the association and did not even pay their dues regularly; those with whom no compromise could be achieved over this issue, began to move away from the association over time (Tekin, personal communication, March 1, 2020).

In addition to tackling the objections raised internally by some of the members, the association undertakes the task of minimizing the agonistic behaviors of some locals against Syrians in Yarımburgaz. As discussed earlier, as a neighborhood association, the members prioritize minimizing any possible conflict which would lead to polarization in their living space. To deal with the reactions from the local community against the Syrians, Yarımburgaz-Der uses their domain of influence there. During my field research, two instances were reported in which some of the inhabitants showed offensive behavior towards Syrians. About the first one, it is stated that,

There were a few lumpen, who tried to provoke a quarrel, but we told them, “If you have a fighting capacity, there are drug dealers, real estate agents in pursuit of rent. Go and fight against them. Why are you fighting with the Syrians?” We even did not refrain from using violence against these lumpen. (Tekin, personal communication, December 9, 2018) (see Appendix B, 69)

The first incident Tekin mentions actually happened to Tarık. While walking down the street, a group of people hissed at him, and then one of them pulled a knife on

him. Then people on the street intervened in the situation and the youth from the association went and talked to the people who were bullying.

While for the first incident the youths in the association took an aggressive measure, for the other incident, with the collaboration of older people in the association, they pursued a constructive problem-solving approach. There occurred a fight between Syrian and local youth in the neighborhood. Though they did not previously know the parties involved in that conflict, the members of the association via their network in the neighborhood got in contact with the parents of these youths and invited them to speak about the incident together. In this case, they played a conciliatory role between the parties. Based on my informal conversation with the Syrian youth involved in this fight, the fighting youths later became friends and now they are working in the same place, in one of the textile mills there. As seen from these instances, the association tries to prevent major conflicts by using their domain of power in the neighborhood.

Other issues the association spent efforts together with the volunteers are related to the difficulties Syrians face in obtaining temporary identity documents. It was 2016, but there were Syrians who still had not been issued an identity document despite their efforts. At that time, instead of directly applying to the DGMM, they also had to make an appointment with the police headquarters to apply for the identity document. However, it is commonly stated by Syrian interviewees in Yarımburgaz that appointments were given two or three months later and when they went to the police headquarters on the day of the appointment, they could not make an application due to the intensity of workload there or the system malfunctions, so they were instructed to make yet another appointment, but they encountered the same problem again and again. This situation, consequently, constituted a barrier for them

to receive basic services which are subject to the condition of being registered. In short, although officially they had the right to go and make their registration applications by making an appointment, the *de facto* situation was different because they could not actually complete the necessary steps, which served as a constraint for them to benefit from public services.

For instance, Azize mentions her experience: “It was very difficult to register. We made two appointments, we were going there, but there were so many people that they were rejecting and telling us to come back again” (Azize, personal communication, February 16, 2020). Tarık, too, has the same experience,

I even argued once with the police at the door. The appointment time was passing, they were not giving us a proper appointment, they were saying that the system had stopped working and we should come another time. After these, we were making an appointment again. (Tarık, personal communication, January 18, 2020) (see Appendix B, 70)

Seyran is another person faced with the same situation; she states that,

We went, tried but couldn't do it. They were giving an appointment for a distant date; they were giving an appointment for two or three months later. Remzi had acquaintances at the police station, he made an appointment for us, we went together and handled it. (Seyran, personal communication, February 23, 2020) (see Appendix B, 71)

She mentions about Remzi who was the volunteer of the association and through his network he arranged appointments for them and accompanied them there. With the involvement of the association in 2016, they could manage to complete the necessary steps and obtain their identity documents.

The TP identity document provides Syrians the right to stay in Turkey and access to basic rights and services. However, since some of them could not obtain the document, they were deprived of various services, especially in the areas of healthcare and education. Relating to the period before having an identity document, for instance, Seyran states that “I was pregnant, but the hospitals wouldn't accept

me”⁸³ (Seyran, personal communication, February 23, 2020). Similarly, some children could not be enrolled in a school since they did not have a TP identity document. As of 2016⁸⁴, with the involvement of the association into the process, they obtained identity documents and then enrolled in the neighborhood school. In the process following the enrollment of children in school, stationery assistance, composed of basic supplies for the school such as pencils, notebooks, crayons, school bags, etc., has been started to be provided to them by the association every year in the fall semester and this practice continues.

5.6 The case of empowering refugee children through formal and non-formal channels

As discussed in the previous section, young members of the association have paid special attention to organize activities for children living in the neighborhood. In order to make the venue in the association convenient for activities which were planned to be conducted for children, as of December 2015, a playground was built within the association. Playing field equipment was composed of indoor playground mats, play fence, and kid toys, which were brought through the contribution of volunteers from the outside. Thereafter, through naming it Altınşehir Child’s Workshop, they started to organize social activities and workshops, i.e., painting, play dough, movie screening, photograph, cooking, football and box training, organizing artistic and cultural trips to theaters or museums in İstanbul. It is necessary to underline that the activities were participated by not only Syrians but also local inhabitants. In short, thanks to the workshops, Syrian and local children

⁸³ Translated from: “Hamileydim ama hastaneler kabul etmiyorlardı.”

⁸⁴ To give an insight, I would like to indicate the enrolment rate of Syrian children in Turkey in the 2015-2016 education period: The percentage of children in the education system in this period was 37%, which means more than 500,000 children were out of school (MoNE, 2020).

were coming together under a structured environment created by the facilitators. Similar to the situation in Ok-Der, the workshops were organized with the contribution of volunteers, especially university students. In the initial period, these activities were organized on a regular base on the weekends which lasts more than two years and though currently, the frequency of the activities is diminished, social activities are still being organized there.

The activities carried out have a positive impact on children's socialization process. They contributed to Syrian children to interact with each other and with local children in the neighborhood. As children who experience war and migration trauma, it can be said that these activities had a positive impact on children's mood. During the interview, through referring to the Syrian children in general, Tarık underlines that "When we first came to the neighborhood, our children were not playing outside. Turkish children were teasing them"⁸⁵ (Tarık, personal communication, January 18, 2020). Then, he gives his younger brother as an example and states that,

He got used to the environment thanks to the workshops. Then we could not keep him inside. For example, I was coming from work at seven o'clock, but it was nine p.m., he was still playing on the street. He was playing with Turkish children. (Tarık, personal communication, January 18, 2020) (see Appendix B, 72)

The organized workshops have contributed to the creation of a space for children in which they can engage with other children and feel more comfortable in the neighborhood.

Moreover, Azize, who came to Turkey in 2014 and moved to Yarımburgaz four years ago, in 2016, mentions about her and her son psychosocial situation when

⁸⁵ Translated from: "Mahalleye ilk geldiğimizde bizim çocuklar dışarıda oynamıyorlardı. Türk çocuklar sataşıyorlardı onlara."

they first moved to Yarımburgaz and the impact of the activities organized in the association on them as follows,

When I arrived, I did not know anyone, I stayed here like a stranger, I got to know this place in time. We got acquainted with the association. I was bored because I was sitting at home, I was taking the children there. They were playing with other kids. I was meeting other women. I did not know anyone. I was going there to pass the time. When I first arrived, I did not like the neighborhood that much because I had no one here. When we stayed at home, there were problems with the children, we could not talk very much, we were just sitting in the house, the children were not going out. My older child was four years old then, but he was not talking like normal children ... He fell from the first floor earlier, we thought if it caused a problem. We took him to the hospital, but they said there was nothing. They said his interaction with other children is incomplete, that is why he could not speak. At first, he was afraid and ashamed. I was going to the association mostly for him. (Azize, personal communication, February 16, 2020) (see Appendix B, 73)

Due to her feelings of strangeness, they were spending all the time at home together with her children. This process also had a detrimental effect on her child's verbal skills due to the lack of socialization. The environment in which the child was being raised was missing the stimuli necessary for the development of verbal skills. As advised by the doctors in the hospital, the child needed to interact with other children. Therefore, after Azize got acquainted with the association, she started to take her children to the activities organized there which has been good for both her and her child. The activities created a socialization area in which her child was getting to interact with other children. Regarding the improvement in the child's verbal skills, she even makes a joke about the current situation of his son in stating that "now he talks so much, we can't silence him (laughter)"⁸⁶ (Azize, personal communication, February 16, 2020).

As also seen in Azize's above statement, while she did not know anybody in the neighborhood, after she met with the association, she started to get acquainted

⁸⁶ Translated from: "Şimdi o kadar konuşuyor ki susturamıyoruz."

with other women, including locals and Syrians, in the neighborhood. Prior to their migration, they were familiar with neither other local inhabitants nor any other Syrian families, except their relatives, if any, located there. Similar to Azize, there are other Syrians who stated that due to their attendance to the activities of the association, either during the in-kind aid distribution process or during the time they spent in the association while their children were participating in workshops, they became acquainted with other residents, including locals and Syrians. On the other hand, although they also met with the local people there, some of them stated that they mostly established closer relationships with other Syrians. For instance, Davut stated that “We didn’t know each other, for instance, Tark and I. We met thanks to the association. I had neighbors, but we did not know or visit each other. When we would go to the association, for example, we found out that we both live on the same street, then we got acquainted with each other there” (Davut, personal conversation, February 23, 2020). In that sense, Yarımburgaz-Der has played a role in Syrians establishing bonds amongst themselves. It can be claimed that the for Syrians, space opened due to the activities of the association, contributing to the establishment of new friendships.

Preceding the association’s efforts to enroll the children in public school, Syrian children were supported through informal channels, for instance via Turkish language courses. In December 2015, the first Turkish courses for Syrian children were initiated in the association and continued on a regular basis until 2018. Even though the number of children who are out of the education system has diminished in time, in which the association played a role, many of the Syrian children are still working in the textile mills located in the neighborhood. Hence, child labor is still a common phenomenon in Yarımburgaz.

In the period around 2015, most of the Syrian children in the neighborhood were not going to school; instead they were working. Furthermore, as already stated above, in the initial period, there were children who did not have a TP identity card yet, which also served as a constraint for those who wished to register in a public school. Therefore, the association decided to open a space in which children who were excluded from the education system could attend and learn how to read and write in Turkish. Twice a week, on Sundays and Wednesdays, Turkish courses started being organized at the association. With the years passing, most of the children had been able to learn Turkish outside the home, for instance in the workplace or in the street, though they could not learn reading and writing.

It is reported by the members of the association that till today around 100 children attended these courses and all of the Syrian families I have interviewed in Yarımburgaz report that they had sent their school-aged children to the courses organized there. Although not all of them learned how to effectively read and write in Turkish, many children have learned it there. For example, Zozan, a Syrian woman who came to Turkey in 2015 and since then resides in Yarımburgaz, underlines that Şoreş, her son, had already known how to read and write in Turkish when he enrolled in school in 2016, since “Şoreş learned how to read and write in the association”⁸⁷ (Zozan, personal communication, February 1, 2020). Şoreş was eight years old when they came to Turkey and one year later, in 2016, together with his younger sister who was seven years old at that time, through the efforts of the association, they obtained identity documents and enrolled in the neighborhood school. Zozan has four other children, three of whom are school-aged. However, her older children, who are now 16 and 18 years old, have never gone to school in

⁸⁷ Translated from: “Şoreş dernekte öğrendi okuma yazmayı.”

Turkey because they support the household by working. On the other hand, they also attended the Turkish courses in the association. As Zozan states, although they did not fully learn to read and write in Turkish, they acquired basic reading skills there. Furthermore, during the interview, she also mentions that despite their and the association's efforts they could not obtain an identity document for Heja, her daughter who is now 12 years old, so she has stayed out of the education system till today. The reason behind it is explained by Zozan as such,

When children are born in Syria, they register them in a book. An identity document is issued after the age of 14. When the war broke out in Syria, Şirin was not registered in the book. So, there was no record of her. Here, when we went to get an ID card, they did not register her because she had no name in the book. (Zozan, personal communication, February 1, 2020) (see Appendix B, 74)

For that issue, they contacted one of the NGOs operating in the refugee field six months ago in order to solve the problem. Until the day I made an interview with Zozan this problem was still not resolved. However, she states that the neighborhood school has agreed to enroll the child as a guest student in the coming semester.

Pertaining to the language courses, I would like to mention about a challenge the association faced in 2017. The government closed many NGOs under the state of emergency declared after the July 15, 2016 coup attempt and restricted all kinds of educational activities of NGOs serving refugees, including language courses (Nimer, 2019, p. 13). As part of the government's centralization attempts during this period, with the decision of MoNE, all non-formal educational activities in NGOs are subject to permission by the authorities (Biehl, 2019, p. 17). Since 2016, in Turkey, there has been a closure of "spaces for democratic participation" and "rule of law has eroded and peaceful opposition was subdued through the closure of more than 1,500 civil society organizations", additionally there has been "the purging of thousands of academics and civil society representatives, the suppression of free media, and

arrests of dissidents” (Paker, 2019, p. 6). In a similar pattern, there is an “[i]ncreased state intervention and control” related with the migration governance in Turkey (Sert & Daniş, 2020, p. 11), and within such a pattern, the government follows a selective approach in giving permission to NGOs. Only those who do not attempt to challenge governmental policies are given permission. On the other hand, though organizing any educational activity for Syrians has been forbidden for NGOs and subjected to government permission, Yarımburgaz-Der has insisted on continuing their teaching activities through finding alternative ways; they started to organize courses in a different place where they would be less visible. During the interview I conducted in 2018, it was stated that “there is a lot of police pressure on us here... Eyes are on us. We don’t want to be visible here, therefore we have been going to Bako-Der⁸⁸ for our language courses”⁸⁹ (Tekin, personal communication, December 9, 2018).

Referring to the actions of the association against contractors and real estate agents when they made a foray into their meetings and also the disturbing attitudes of some neighbors due to Syrians participating in the association’s activities, it is stated that they were under police surveillance, especially in 2017. So, they did not want to get troubled because of language courses and started to organize language courses in the Bayramtepe Conservation and Solidarity Association’s (Bako-Der) places. Through bypassing the legal restrictions of the state on educational activities of NGOs, Yarımburgaz-Der continued their activities in 2017 in Bako-Der which was thought to be less visible. While they organized language courses for a while in Bako-Der, as of the second part of 2018, the courses have started to be held at the

⁸⁸ It was another neighborhood association established against urban transformation in Bayramtepe, a nearby location, fifteen minutes away from Yarımburgaz, and it was also a member of the Union of Neighborhoods. Yarımburgaz-Der and Bako-Der were acting in solidarity with each other. On the other hand, its activities were terminated, and the association was closed as of 2019.

⁸⁹ Translated from: “Üzerimizde polis baskısı çok var... Gözler üzerimizde. Burada görünmek istemiyoruz, bu nedenle dil kurslarımız için Bako-Der’e gidiyoruz.”

association again. As I have observed, currently there are 5-6 children regularly attending the courses.

Concerning the child labor issue in Yarımburgaz, the interviewee there also brings criticism against the NGOs operating in the refugee field. It is stated that the surrounding locations of the Lake of Küçükçekmece are where İstanbul's textile industry is located, and it is widespread here that Syrian children are working informally. The interviewee states:

Many NGOs know this very well, but they do not take this issue seriously into their agenda. They may put pressure on the state and the employers. But they at the same time know very well that, if they press the state as NGOs, the state does not give them work permits, so they do not take any measure to solve this issue... We do not say that we can overcome this problem as an association, but we are also aware of this situation. (Tekin, personal communication, December 9, 2018) (see Appendix B, 75)

It is admitted that though they alone cannot solve this issue, within the influence of their domain in the neighborhood, they try to intervene in this situation through taking protectionist measures for working children, for instance in cases when an employer does not pay the salary of a Syrian child working there, they visit and force the employer to pay it. On the other hand, although their aim in speaking with the employer to pay the wage the child owed is to protect the child, their involvement in the issue might lead to unintended consequences. For example, the employer, later on, might resort to violence against the child. In that sense, it is stated that they prefer to use a persuasive language to prevent such a situation (Tekin, personal communication, March 1, 2020). When they visit the workplace of the child, through introducing themselves as working in an association established in the neighborhood, they remind the employer, in a strategic and diplomatic way, that he employs children in his workplace and he has legal obligations. In short, they remind the employer about the legal sanctions he might face since he employs children

informally and request from him to pay the salary. At the same time, leaning on their institutional identity, as seen in the below statement, they imply that they will continue to follow this situation as an association.

Although the employer greeted us endearingly, he was uncomfortable. For example, we were telling the working children there, if something happens, let us know, and we also made the employer to hear it while leaving. “Ahmet, we're here, if anything happens, call us, okay?” We were squeezing his cheek and leaving. The employer would see that the boy was not alone, then his money was paid. (Tekin, personal communication, March 1, 2020) (see Appendix B, 76)

The association attempts to ameliorate the effects on Syrian children who are employed informally by their own means, through supporting their language acquisition or through speaking to their employers if he does not pay a child's salary. In respect to such practices, living in the same place is turned into an advantage.

Besides establishing a playground for children within the association for indoor activities, they also have involved in other place-making practices outside the association through the occasion of football training. As stated previously, due to the zoning problem, the construction in the neighborhood is not intense and there are still many vacant lands in the neighborhood. Benefiting from such a physical structure of the place, the members had a chance to organize activities outside the association in the neighborhood. The young members from the association pioneered to organize trainings, lasted for approximately six months in 2018, within a vacant land in the neighborhood. Tarık was the facilitator of this workshop series in which Syrian and Turkish children between the ages of 8-16 participated. To create a football field for their activities, they were collectively involved in landscaping one of the vacant lands located in the neighborhood. They painted the boundaries of the field and cleared the stones from the land in order to play football comfortably. In addition to that, together with the children, they made wooden benches and polished them, to be

served as a seating area, for the people who come to watch football matches there. In that sense, rather than being passive agents, Syrians at the same time have acted as constitutive agents. Such collective place-making practices can be also claimed to contribute to the feeling of belonging and an erosion of feeling like a stranger for Syrian children. Additionally, through the channel of football training and matches, a new space has been opened up in reinforcing the interaction between the locals and Syrian youths. Hence, creation of such a mixed environment, within which locals and refugees interact, are especially crucial to fostering living together practices.

All in all, the period in which the association, together with the volunteers, as a civic initiative, engaged in efforts to mitigate the drawbacks of reception context in a more systematic way corresponds to 2016 and 2017. Regarding the initial period and the period after that, Tekin benefits from an analogy in describing the former as red and the current period as yellow.

It was red before, now yellow. But the transition from red to yellow is for Syrians to find a home, find jobs, learn how to properly benefit from public services and aid. These made the situation yellow. Yet, yellow is not the ultimate solution, it still includes child labor, abuse, a lot of hostility, not getting salaries. Yes, it is yellow, so people still get on buses and go to Greece. But the red was the struggle for survival. The struggle for outlasting the night. (Tekin, personal communication, March 1, 2020) (see Appendix B, 77)

In light of the activities conducted, either via the space they invent, for instance for working children or through Turkish language course, or via their involvement in the issue as discussed pertaining to identity document or children's enrollments to the school, it can be said that throughout the process, the association, together with the contributions of volunteers, has played a crucial role in easing the hardships Syrians face. Furthermore, through the creation of several environments in which locals and refugees come together, they also have contributed to the establishment of meaningful interaction between them. On the other hand, their

influence on the lives of Syrians has been partially due to structural constraints related to the immigration policy regime of Turkey. As stated by Tekin, despite positive developments, most of them would still like to move to the Europe since their life condition in Turkey is still precarious.

To conclude, in this chapter, I mainly argued that the process towards constructing inclusive spaces for Syrians was shaped within neighborhood's own dynamics. The members of the association are in a struggle for determining their own terms of engagement with and participation in the place they live in, which, later on, gave shape their approach towards the Syrians who moved to the neighborhood. In that sense, in order to understand how come Yarımburgaz-Der was able to develop an inclusive space considering Syrians, it is necessary to deliberate on the urban transformation history, socio-economic fabric, and socio-spatial characteristics of Yarımburgaz. These factors allowed the association to have a much more space-based orientation towards the Syrian refugees, which indeed paved the way for contributing to their incorporation process.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I sought an answer to the question of while a large part of the society has taken a reactionary attitude against Syrians in Turkey, why do these neighborhood associations engage in solidarity practices with Syrian refugees living in their neighborhood? Related to this, I addressed further questions: Why do they take Syrian refugees into their agenda, even though they were established for quite a different reason, that is struggling against the urban transformation process in their localities? What kind of frames do they employ in grounding their solidaristic attitudes towards the refugees? And do their activities at the local level have a potential to contribute to Syrians' incorporation process? In order to answer these questions, I firstly attempted to understand the reason behind the establishment of these associations. Then, I analyzed their driving force in taking Syrians into their agenda. Lastly, I elaborated on their activities considering Syrians living in their neighborhood and their living together practices.

While a policy regime-oriented frame (Soysal, 1994; Sainsbury, 2006) is prominent in the discussion of refugee integration, which puts an emphasis on the formal channels sanctioned by the state, the socio-interactional frame has not been paid much attention (Özçürümez et al., 2020) which takes the social interaction between the host and refugee communities into account. Acknowledging the importance of macro-level factors such as rights and entitlements of Syrians in Turkey related with the domains of the labor market, education, housing, citizenship, etc., which play a decisive role in determining refugees' opportunities in the receiving country, in this thesis, I prioritized giving weight to local factors, which is

also a constitutive part of reception context, having an impact on the nature of social interactions between the host communities and refugees, and daily encounters of both groups at the neighborhood level. Evaluating refugee incorporation merely via macro-level indicators falls short of providing a sufficient ground, because it does not take societal level into account, though incorporation has a strong social dimension. In addition to that, there is also a gap between the formal rights and accessibility of these rights in practice. Thus, with this qualitative research, I proposed a meso-level analysis that concentrates on neighborhood level dimensions of incorporation through also considering the effects of Turkey's immigration policy regime and reception context.

I found it worthwhile to delve into the activities of the neighborhood associations in Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz, which I define as grassroots organizations. They contribute to refugee's incorporation process from below which is effective in the sense that they foster the formation of meaningful contacts growing out of daily encounters in the shared place that refugees and host communities inhabit. In addition to that, I incorporated socio-spatial dynamics into the discussion considering refugee incorporation. In that sense, to understand better what actually accounts for the exceptionalism in the cases of Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz in establishing solidaristic relations with the Syrians while a significant part of the society is taking an exclusionary stance against refugees, it is crucial to deliberate on the history of each neighborhood, their urban transformation processes, and socio-economic characteristics. By this way, with this thesis, I attempted to contribute to the refugee incorporation literature.

In this study, first of all, I focused on what kind of organizations Ok-Der and Yarımburgaz-Der are by elaborating on their attitudes, standpoints and perceptions

against the urban transformation issue, since their main drive in establishing an association is to struggle against the urban transformation pressure their neighborhood is under. As Logan and Rabrenovic (1990) and Miraftab (2009) point out, on what issues grassroots organizations are formed, their aims, their history, and the time and the context in which they emerged should be carefully analyzed in order to understand what kind of organizations they are. This issue gains importance as it shapes the kind of attitude they maintain considering the subject matter at hand. For instance, while they are defending their living space against state intervention, let's say struggling for right to the city, they might at the same time establish a closed community which does not take right to difference into account considering possible diversity in their neighborhood. Thus, such a situation might reinforce an attitude in which they perceive outside groups as a threat. On the other hand, as in the cases of these neighborhood associations, their type of engagement with and participation in their living space might have an impact on their decision to act in solidarity with the newcomers, that is Syrian refugees discussed in this study. That is why I attempted to analyze what kind of associations they are by concentrating on the context in which they emerged, and the objectives they have.

Before concentrating on their standpoints against the related urban transformation process in their localities, it was necessary to discuss the transformation process there, therefore I also presented the details about the transformation processes in each neighborhood. Investigating the general features of the transformation process there together with these associations' standpoints against it served for me also to understand why and how they took a solidaristic stance towards Syrians in the subsequent periods.

The neighborhood units I concentrated on are spaces in which generally low-income or poor families are residing, and the relevant two neighborhood associations were established by inhabitants of these neighborhoods as a part of their struggle against the urban transformation pressure dictated by the central and local government and also operationalized by private contractors or companies in their localities. They oppose the top-down model of urban transformation, hence wish to participate within the decision-making processes on the issue of planning of their neighborhoods. For that purpose, they also sought wider collaborations with other organizations, such as the Union of Neighborhoods. Via the Union, they engage in multiscale attempts to defend their living spaces. They utilize a rights-based discourse and their main aim is to claim their entitlement to the city and to urban livelihood. They insist on their right to contest and establish their own terms of engagement with, and participation in, the place they live. In that sense, these neighborhood associations try to construct an area of struggle for active citizenship. Briefly, benefiting from Dikeç's (2005) conceptualization of space, I defined the spaces upon which they organize their activities as becoming political in the sense that they are addressing wrongs imposed by the urban transformation process and are seeking equality.

When it comes to the Syrian refugees living in their neighborhoods, socio-spatial characteristics of the neighborhoods gain importance. These neighborhood associations' stance against the urban transformation pressure gives them a distinctive feature which also reveals itself in their attitudes towards the refugees. In that sense, I paid close attention to discussing why they decided to take the presence of Syrians into their agenda.

In the case of Ok-Der, two dimensions came to the fore which played a role in their decision to take the presence of Syrians in their neighborhood into their agenda; the first one is the pragmatic dimension, while the second one is the humanitarian dimension. Firstly, the members of the association value inhabitants' being tight-knit in order to better defend their neighborhood against transformation, therefore they do not want polarization within their locality. With the arrival of the Syrians into the neighborhood, they were concerned with possible tensions between the locals and the newcomers, who they did not know at that time. To prevent the danger of rising polarization in the neighborhood, they decided to engage in efforts to establish *komşuluk hukuku* with the Syrians, which came to mean for them knowing each other and having a sense of security in their neighborhood. At that point, the mission behind the establishment of the association has played a role here. As I discussed, Ok-Der's involvement with the issue of the low quality of education in the neighborhood school, in addition to their main cause, which is struggling against urban transformation and seeking to solve their property problem, they have a mission to intervene in the problems of the neighborhood in general. Similarly, by the members, their concerns about the possible polarization in the neighborhood due to the presence of Syrians and the lack of familiarity with each other were presented as a security issue for them, hence they saw the refugee problem as a problem of the neighborhood, their common problem. Rather than taking an exclusionary stand, which they are in principle opposed to, they decided to intervene in the refugee issue in the neighborhood through creating alternative channels such as establishing *komşuluk hukuku* with them.

In addition to that, they also attach importance to *komşuluk hukuku* as opposed to the rising social and political polarization in Turkey. In that sense, they

prioritize protecting their locality from the impacts of polarization that is on the rise in society. Related with this, I claim that while they are struggling for their right to the city, they at the same time have a perspective that values right to difference in arguing against the polarization atmosphere in Turkey.

Secondly, as explicitly stated by the members of Ok-Der, the issue also has a humanitarian dimension for them. After their first encounters with the Syrians, they witnessed their adverse living conditions, so they felt responsible to do something about the hardships Syrians were experiencing. At that point, in this research, I underlined that the already-established solidarity networks within Ok-Der actually formed a basis for inclusion of Syrians into these solidaristic relations. Based on the socio-economic characteristics of the neighborhood, where mostly low-income families live, the members of Ok-Der were already trying to revive neighborly relations through establishing solidarity relations between the inhabitants for the purpose of tackling the drawbacks of poverty. It was the time when they organized the hanging clothes and barter of toys campaigns as a part of their solidarity practices among themselves that they became acquainted with the Syrians living in the neighborhood.

In the case of Yarımburgaz-Der, I presented, too, the main drives behind the decision to take the presence of Syrians into their agenda. Contrary to Ok-Der, the members of Yarımburgaz-Der became acquainted with the Syrians living in their neighborhood long before the establishment of the association, relating to the high instances of becoming direct neighbors with the Syrians. Unlike Okmeydanı, Yarımburgaz neighborhood has a low density of settlement and the proportion of Syrians in the neighborhood is much higher than that of Okmeydanı. This might be the reason behind the high frequency of established direct contact with the refugees

in Yarımburgaz independent from the agency of the association. Before the establishment of the association, the members had already started to act in solidarity with the Syrians they got acquaintance with, for instance through the medium of residing in the same building. However, their solidaristic attempts, which are actually framed by as a part of neighborly relations, remained at an individual level and mostly stemmed from their feelings of empathy and compassion. After the establishment of Yarımburgaz-Der, they decided to involve in collective endeavor considering Syrians through underlining the structural inequalities in the society, that Syrians in Turkey are seen as becoming a part of now, and they started to organize in-kind aid campaigns in the initial periods for the Syrians.

The members of Yarımburgaz-Der who have taken active roles in refugee issue in the neighborhood back their attitudes towards Syrians through drawing an emphasis on the similarity between locals' and refugees' class positions and the danger of being displaced. For them, Syrians had been in the position to be forcibly displaced from their country due to the war there and now they are working in the informal sector in Turkey. In a similar way, the locals there, as expressed by the younger members, are also living in poverty and facing the threat of being displaced due to the urban transformation process. Through highlighting the similarity of socio-economic conditions of the Syrians and the locals, they prioritize establishing solidarity relations with the Syrians. In that sense, they have a class-based perspective in defending their act of solidarity with the refugees living in the neighborhood.

Another driving force for them to take the presence of Syrians into the agenda of the association is related with the kind of relationship they aim to form with the place they live in. To provide a general picture, I presented their attitudes

towards the drug abuse problem in the neighborhood. They did not want their neighborhoods to be associated with drug abuse, so they became involved in several efforts to protect the youths and children from drug abuse, which is seen as a common problem in the neighborhood. Similar to that, they did not want Yarımburgaz to be associated with a place where societal conflict is widespread due to the presence of Syrians there. They were concerned with the spread of the tension occurring in the other localities of İstanbul to their own neighborhood due to the presence of Syrians. Similar to Ok-Der, the members of Yarımburgaz-Der did not wish any polarization in their living space. As a neighborhood under the pressure of transformation, they believe in the necessity of preventing any possible tension or conflict in their neighborhood, otherwise this would provide a ground for the governmental bodies to intervene more easily in the neighborhood.

When I focused on the factors paving the way for these neighborhood associations to decide to take the presence of Syrians into their agenda, several aspects became prominent. The issue is multi-layered and there are co-constituted factors at hand. Socio-spatial characteristics of these neighborhoods are crucial. Inhabitants of these neighborhoods suffer from difficulties in legalizing their settlements/properties, which has its roots in the history of these neighborhoods. The urban transformation pressure added another dimension to their housing issues which led to the emergence of the neighborhood association. Stemming from the context of the urban transformation processes and highly related with their socio-economic backgrounds, they put a great weight on the establishment of solidarity practices between themselves. As they frame it frequently, in order to survive and better defend their neighborhood, they need to be tight-knit and to act in solidarity. It is actually the cumulative effect of various factors such as their urban transformation

history, the stance they took against it, and their general practices in addressing the problems of the neighborhood, which have played a distinctive role in shaping their attitudes towards Syrians. Thus, with this research, I found all these factors as worthwhile to be elaborated on, since each played an important role in these associations' creation of inclusive spaces for Syrians living in their neighborhoods.

After I analyzed the context in which they decided to take the presence of Syrians into their agenda, I elaborated on the efforts they initiated which contribute to the incorporation process of Syrians they are in contact with. Considering the social aspect of refugee incorporation, based on the integration framework of Ager and Strang (2004, 2008), I concentrated on the differentiated forms of social relationships and networks, categorized under the social connections theme as social bridges (inter-group), social bonds (intra-group) and social links (with the formal institutions), which are listed by them among the indicators of incorporation. While Ager and Strang (2004) identify ten domains as indicators of integration, rather than proposing a causal chain, they argue that there are complex interlinkages of domains affecting one another (p. 5). With this study, I explored such multi-dimensional interactions between the domains. In the scope of this field research, I identified that social bridges formed via the activities of the associations paved the way for also strengthening the social bonds and links of the refugees. In a similar way, thanks to the associations' endeavor considering the Syrians living in their neighborhoods, constructed social bridges were reinforced, in some instances, language acquisition, categorized by Ager and Strang (2004) under facilitator theme, of refugees or has played a role in fostering achievements for the refugees in the realms of education, housing and employment, categorized by Ager and Strang (2004) under the means and markers theme of indicators of integration.

Considering their solidarity practices, I analyzed in detail both associations' activities such as organizing in-kind aid campaigns, workshops for children, and Turkish language courses. In addition to that, they also engaged in registering refugee children to the public schools and accompanying them in case of needs when Syrians were trying to receive public services, for instance from the hospitals or immigration authorities. While organizing their activities, they also received volunteer support from the outside. Activists who intended to act in solidarity with Syrians also voluntarily worked within the associations' activities. Volunteers' human capital and networks enabled them to organize workshops on a regular basis for the children and also contributed to the creation of solidarity funds which served as a financial resource for their activities.

Lasting one year and a half on average, they engaged in in-kind aid distributions on a regular basis, consisting of clothes, supply of provisions, heating stoves, coal, baby's nappies, etc. For instance, while heating stoves and coal were distributed on a yearly basis, supply of provisions was distributed on a monthly basis. The process of in-kind aid distribution became the moment that social bridges between the locals and Syrians started to be constructed. Although in-kind assistance is generally approached as impeding the resilience-building process of refugees through making them dependent on outside supports in the long run rather than empowering them (Özçürümez et al., 2020, p. 13), in the cases of these neighborhood associations, I argue that the in-kind aid distribution process paved the way for the establishment of inter-group relations. I related such a development with the inter-group contact formed at the local level which later on would lead to the establishment of social bridges.

Furthermore, considering the establishment of closer relations between the locals and Syrians, in the case of Yarımburgaz-Der, I discussed particularly that relating with the social fabric of the neighborhood, Kurdish language being the common language has served as another factor in easing the communication between the Kurdish residents from Turkey and Kurdish Syrian refugees, hence, contribute to fostering social bridges.

Thanks to the social bridge they established, they also contributed to the education realm both via formal and informal channels. Although Syrian children have been granted the right to receive education in public schools in Turkey as of 2014, they face serious problems in accessing this right. It can be either due to the fact that they need to work in order to contribute to the household income because of precarious life conditions, and so do not participate in the education system, or school principals might play an obstructive role through arbitrarily refusing their registration to the school. In that sense, there was an inconsistency between the laws and its execution in practice. Within such a context, Ok-Der and Yarımburgaz-Der engaged in efforts to enroll Syrian children into the neighborhood school. Related with this, I also discussed the course of the process in which they endeavored to overcome the procedural challenges hindering children's enrollment into the public schools. While in the case of Okmeydanı it was the school principals posing a challenge for children to enroll into the school, in the case of Yarımburgaz there were the child labor issue and the lack of TP identity documents posing obstacles to enroll into the public school. To overcome such a problem, the members of Ok-Der got in contact with the school principals, with whom they already had relations via the parent-teacher union there and managed to register the children at the school. Similarly, Yarımburgaz-Der also engaged in efforts to tackle these problems and

came up with two solutions. They accompanied the families in their visit to the immigration authorities to apply for ID cards. Through this way, the enrollment of children in school was facilitated. They also created an alternative channel for the working children, who were not able to register into a school, through organizing Turkish language courses in the association. Even though the government has imposed restrictions to non-formal education activities of NGOs, particularly their language courses after 2016, they insisted on organizing Turkish courses through finding alternative ways to do it beyond the state's control.

Furthermore, in this thesis, I also analyzed how they managed to contribute to the establishment of social links of the Syrians with the governmental institutions in Turkey. For instance, in their efforts to obtain identity cards, the members of Yarımburgaz-Der accompanied Syrians during their visits to immigration authorities since Syrians were facing challenges in obtaining identity cards around 2015 and 2016 in İstanbul. The government has subjected access to public services to the condition of being registered with immigration authorities. Yarımburgaz-Der's support to obtain identity cards has made a significant contribution for Syrians in opening the paths of accessing public services. Through this way, they, at the same time, reinforced the construction of social links of Syrians with the institutions such as immigration authorities, schools and hospitals.

In the case of Okmeydanı, the association played a role in Syrians to establish a relationship with the neighborhood school, for instance, they reinforced the participation of a Syrian mother within the body of parent-teacher union in the school. Furthermore, there were also instances of accompanying Syrians while they were going to hospitals especially in the initial periods, since they were not familiar

with the healthcare system in Turkey, which was related with a lack of knowledge and language barriers.

In addition to social bridges and links, the space created via the activities of the associations, Syrians gained a chance to strengthen their social bonds through establishing friendships with the other Syrians living in their neighborhood, which gave them a sense of security and relief. Almost all of the women I interviewed stated that they were not familiar with anybody when they first came to the neighborhoods. They felt a sense of strangeness since they neither familiar with the space nor did they have any friend there, so they preferred not to go outside much. Owing to the space created with the activities of the association, they became acquainted with other Syrian women. For instance, in the case of Yarımburgaz, the Syrian women interviewees stated that during the activities of the association, for instance when they brought their children to the workshops organized in the association, to the organized trips in İstanbul or to the picnics, they came up with other people and started to socialize and form friendships with them. In a similar way, in the case of Okmeydanı, owing to their participation within the in-kind aid distribution process or thanks to the initiation of WWRK, they started to form close relationships with each other. In that sense, I argued that by means of the activities organized by the associations, a socialization space was created for the Syrian women. Additionally, this process led to the establishment of intra-group solidarity relations. In that sense, I claimed that, although neither Ok-Der nor Yarımburgaz-Der was deliberately aimed at it, they contributed to the building of community resilience, thanks to the space they created through their activities.

Furthermore, on the one hand, the associations were engaging in the formal channels; on the other hand, informal channels were created. In order to ground my

arguments related with formal and informal channels, I benefited from Miraftab's (2009) conceptualization of invited and invented spaces of citizenship and Holston's (1999) differentiation of formal and substantive rights. Despite the laws and regulations in effect until today relating to Syrians, there is still a gap between formal and substantive rights of Syrians. Syrians are entitled to benefit from, for instance, enrolling in public schools, obtaining work permit or applying for citizenship; however, in practice, there are tremendous challenges they face in accessing these rights. By addressing the challenges Syrians encounter, the neighborhood associations focused on in this thesis have the potentiality to act along with both invited spaces, sanctioned by the state through the laws and regulations for Syrians, and invented spaces, creation of alternative channels via informal means. The associations do not only utilize the invited spaces that are opened through formal channels by the state, they also invent new spaces, that are informal, in order to tackle the flaws in the institutional configurations that govern the immigrant's incorporation process. In that respect, in Miraftabian terms, they are "transgressive" and "imaginative" (2009, p. 32) in embracing formal and informal spaces of practices and they have a potential to transgress national boundaries by establishing solidarity between local and refugee communities. To sum up, their activities are transgressive and imaginative in the sense that they have transgressed formal channels through inventing alternative mechanisms; they have transgressed merely the ascriptive-identity-based solidarity practices; and they have transgressed national boundaries in providing support for refugees.

Contrary to the ascriptive-identity-based solidarity approach of the government that relies mainly on religious affiliation, and prevailing host-guest framing practices, Ok-Der and Yarımburgaz-Der utilize an alternative framing

schema which they called *komşuluk* in grounding their solidaristic attitudes towards Syrians. With such a framing practice, the host-guest dividing line between locals and refugees is also annihilated. Living in the same space has provided a base for the associations to establish solidaristic relations with the refugees, because they frame their attitudes as being a part of neighborly relations. Furthermore, within the scope of the activities of these two associations, sharing the same locality has also facilitated the dissolution of the divide, to a certain extent, between refugee/local or non-citizen/citizen. For instance, in the cases of both Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz, Syrians also participated in the distribution of in-kind aid to inhabitants. There were not only Syrians but also families from Turkey who were delivered aid in this process. There were Syrians themselves who delivered the aid to families from Turkey. In this regard, the division between locals and refugees dissipated in Yarımburgaz. Living in the same place brought other advantages. The associations are located within the neighborhoods and the members are also composed of local residents. The location of the associations is within walking distance for the inhabitants, hence they can easily access them without using any transportation. For instance, Syrian women in Okmeydanı stated that they could not work if WWRK were not in the neighborhood. They expressed that they need to do the domestic chores and also take care of the kids and if their work place is out of the neighborhood their spouses would not let them work. WWRK's location in the neighborhood makes it easier for them. While they can take children from school and take care of them, they can go from morning to noon and work in WWRK.

Beside analyzing their contribution to the incorporation process of Syrians, I have also discussed the limits of refugee incorporation. Both of the associations engaged with in-kind aid distributions and organized social activities for the Syrian

children in a systematic way, however in time they terminated all regular activities related with the fragility and temporality of informal solidarity networks.

Pertaining to the limits of refugee incorporation in the case of Okmeydanı, I have discussed how the language barrier is still carrying weight in preventing the establishment of closer relations between the locals and refugees. In addition to that, despite the emergence of a separate body that is WWRK, the neighborhood association there still has a central role. In that sense, it is necessary to contemplate more how much initiative women want to take and what kind of positioning the association attributes itself.

Additionally, considering the conditions of Syrians in Yarımburgaz, in the initial periods of their arrival to the neighborhood, there were an emergency situation for Syrians since most of them were deprived of means of livelihood, they did not know Turkish language, and they did not have the necessary knowledge about how to properly benefit from the public services granted to them. In the meantime, whereas they attained important achievements in various domains such as finding jobs, improving their Turkish, registering into the education system, getting to know how to benefit from for instance healthcare services or how to apply for aid from the local governments, there are still important challenges they face due to the issues relating with their being exploited in the informal sector, the widespread practice of child labor, or general hostility in the society towards them. Although Yarımburgaz-Der made important contributions to the incorporation process of Syrians there, there are still large-scale structural constraints impeding a coherent incorporation process for them.

I would like to present the limitations of my thesis together with my suggestions for further research. I conducted my field research between November

2018 and March 2020. On the other hand, with this study, I concentrated on the activities organized by the associations within the period between 2015 and 2020. While I had the chance to make participatory observation in the field for nearly a year and a half, I relied on the information obtained via the interviews and also the social media accounts of the associations for the rest of the period dating back to 2015. In order to better understand the implications of refugee incorporation and the nature of the interaction between the locals and refugees, there is a need for longitudinal ethnographic studies.

Finally, this thesis also pushes us to rethink what the modalities of refugee integration, how socio-spatial dynamics and social history of the neighborhoods are crucial in understanding these processes. The two neighborhoods that are studied here, Okmeydanı and Yarımburgaz are both low income spaces, receiving migrants over decades, with remnants of working-class solidarity. Additionally, the insecurity of the property regime coupled with various urban transformation pressures in both neighborhoods have already induced significant solidarity building practices that resembled the makings of “insurgent citizenship”. This experience, I argued throughout the thesis, translated into more inclusive social and economic practices and attitudes towards the Syrian refugees as they were the most recent newcomers into the neighborhood.

APPENDIX A

ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

T.C.
BOĞAZIÇI ÜNİVERSİTESİ
Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Yüksek Lisans ve Doktora Tezleri Etik İnceleme Komisyonu

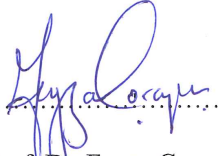
Sayı: 2020-04

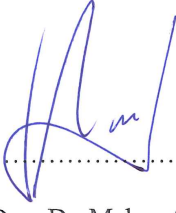
11 Aralık 2019


Gülbeyaz Sert
Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler

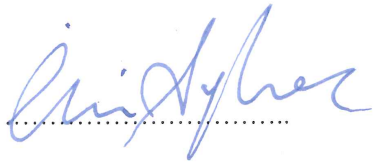
Sayın Araştırmacı,

"Yasal Düzenlemelerin Ötesinde İcat Edilmiş Alanlar: Mahalle Derneklerinin Birlikte Yaşama Pratikleri" başlıklı projeniz ile ilgili olarak yaptığımız SBB-EAK 2019/68 sayılı başvuru komisyonumuz tarafından 11 Aralık 2019 tarihli toplantıda incelenmiş ve uygun bulunmuştur.


Prof. Dr. Feyza Çorapçı


Doç. Dr. Mehmet Yiğit Gürdal


Doç. Dr. Ebru Kaya


Dr. Öğr. Üyesi İnci Ayhan

APPENDIX B

TURKISH EXCERPTS USED IN THIS STUDY

(1) “Çalışmak için, ulaşım yakın. Tersane sanayi vardı. Haliç ve Kasımpaşa’da tersane, Kağıthane tarafında sanayii iş olanakları sağlıyordu. Karaköy’de esnaflar yoğunmuş, orada da işe başlayanlar olmuş ilk geldiklerinde.”

(2) “Ben geldiğimde gecekondular yapımı devam ediyordu. Hatta bizim evimizin sağı solu bomboştu. Biz top oynuyorduk... Zaman içerisinde gecekondular çoğalmaya başladı... O süreç 1980’li yıllara kadar devam etti yine devletin gözetim ve denetimi altında, bilgisi dahilinde bu gecekondular yaygınlaştı 80’li yıllara kadar... 1984 yılında Özal’ın çıkarmış olduğu bir yasa var, 2981 sayılı yasa. O yasa gecekondular sahiplerine af anlamına geliyordu. İnsanlar gittiler yasa gereği 2000 liralık makbuz karşılığında tapu tahsis belgesi aldılar. Bu tahsis belgesi imar planları çıktığında oralar size devredilecektir satılacaktır diye... Gülay Atığ döneminde ne hikmetse bir talandır başladı. Müteahhitler geldiler, gecekonduları yıktılar, üzerine kibrit kutusu gibi binalar diktiler. İmar yok, filan yok. Proje yok, hiçbir şey yok. Geldiler yaptılar... Bu çok katlılaşma 90’lı yıllardan itibaren başlıyor. Sarıgül’ün üçüncü dönemine kadar devam etti ve o süreçte 90’lı yıllardan itibaren diğer bir göç dalgası geldi Güneydoğu Bölgesi’ndeki Kürtlerin batıya sürgün edilmesi ile.”

(3) “Mahallemizdeki sorunlarla ilgili bir şeyler yapmak bizim işimiz. Biz ahalinin nasıl bir mekânda yaşamak istediğini soruyoruz, diğerleri diyor ki biz burayı yıkmak istiyoruz... Mülksüzleşmemizi istiyorlar. Seni mülksüzleştirince, senin yasal anlamda savunacak hakkın yok. Sana sonra diyecek ki güle güle... Bu büyük bir

tehlike. Seni mülksüzleştirmesinin amacı ne? Dönüşümü daha rahat yapmak ve cebini doldurmak... Bütün belediyelerin ve mevcut siyasi partilerin hepsinin içerisinde müteahhit lobisi ağırlıklıdır. Kamu hizmeti dışında bütün müteahhitlik işlerini yapıyorlar.”

(4) “O projenin hayata geçmesi buradan sürgün yapılacağı anlamına geliyor. Çünkü çok büyük bir alan, 100-110 bin kişiyi içine alan bir alan burası. Bu kadar kişinin yaşamış olduğu coğrafyayı tarla olarak düşünüyorlar, bomboş arazi olarak görüyorlar, yani sizin mülkiyet hakkınızı falan hiçe sayıyorlar hazırlanan projede. Bu kadar insan nereye yerleştirilecek? Kimin ne kadar hakkı hukuku var? Bunların hiçbirisi belli değil. Sizi alacak belki götürecek Kayaşehir’e ya da başka yerlerde sosyal konutlara. Üstelik borçlandırarak bu insanları kovacak. Önceki Beyoğlu belediye başkanı Ahmet Misbah Demircan hazırlamış olduğu projeye “biz burayı Şanzelize haline getireceğiz” dedi. Şanzelize neresi? Bugün dünyanın en meşhur ve en pahalı yeri. Ya Şanzelize’de 2000 lira emekli maaşıyla geçinen insanlar oturabilir mi veya geçimini sağlayabilir mi? Ahmet Misbah Demircan bu projeyi Fransa’da Cannes şehrinde Dünya Emlak Piyasasına pazarlamaya kalktı bu şekilde. Yanında onlarca müteahhit ile beraber gitti, Cannes da bu projeyi kentsel dönüşüm projesini pazarlamaya kalktı.”

(5) “Bizim gibi yoksul mahallelerde iyi bir eğitim almak ya da iyi öğretmenin olması zor, ... öğretmenler bu kadar fakir bir mahallede bulunan bir okulu çalışmak için pek tercih etmiyor. Mesela 2014 yılında okulumuza öğretmen gelmiyordu... Ya da sağlıklı bir okul yönetimi de yoktu. Çocuklar mahallenin siyasal dokusundan kaynaklı sanki kamplaşmış gibiydi. Sınıflarda belirli sloganlar duyuyorsun küçük

küçük çocuklardan. Ama bir bakıyorsun, bunların hiçbirini aslında topluma katmak entegre etmek konusunda çok çaba da harcayan kimse yok.”

(6) “Nasıl ki mahallelinin mülkiyet meselesine müdahale ediyorsak ya da belediyeye ne yapması gerektiğini hatırlatıyorsak, dedik bizim o zaman okul meselesine de müdahale etmemiz gerek.”

(7) “Gecekonduların yapıldığı dönemde insanlar birbirleriyle dayanıştıyordu ve parası olmadığında gidip yan komşusundan borç istiyordu. İşte bir pazara gittiğinde çocuğunu yan komşuya teslim ettiği yaşantıyı tekrar canlandırmak istedik. Çünkü bu apartmanlaşma ile birlikte bu ilişkiler de yozlaşmaya başladı. Kimse kimseye selam vermemeye başladı. Mahalleye taşınan insanları tanınmamaya. Eskiden biz kapılarımızı kilitlemeden sokakta dolaşırdık, bakkala giderdik. Geri gelirdik, kapılarda otururduk. Yani anahtar üstündeydi, yani sen bile açıp kapıyı gelirdin.”

(8) “Bildiğimiz tek şey kendi yaşam alanlarımızı korumanın tek yolu komşuluk hukuk ile birbirimize kenetlenmekten geçer. Bunda ne kadar oranda başarı sağlarsak, burada daha iyi şartlarda yaşama şansımız olur. Bunu ne kadar beceremesek, Fikirtepe gibi dağıtırlar bizim mahalleyi. Neden? Yoksul insanların birbirine kenetlenmeden başka seçeneği yok... ihtiyacımız var dayanışmaya çünkü ancak dayanışma ile ayakta kalabiliyoruz.”

(9) “Elbiseleri koyduğumuzda aslında bizim de Suriyelilerle yolumuz kesişti ... Basından görüyorduk sadece. Suriye’den gelen mültecilerle ilgili o dönem bir şey

bilmiyorduk. Basından öğrendiğimiz kadarıyla, devlet destekliyor, devlet onlara her şeyi veriyor diye biliyorduk.”

(10) “Sizin ihtiyacınız mı var? Evet, ihtiyacımız var dedi. Geldi biraz sohbet ettik. Aslında devletin hiçbir destek vermediğini duyunca başta biz inanmadık. Peki o zaman biz gelip sizi ziyaret edebilir miyiz dedik. Tabii dedi çok seviniriz. Bir gittik ki ev beton, hiçbir şey yok. Herkes mi böyle? Herkes böyle. Olur mu dedik ya, nasıl olur? Bu kadar mı olur? Tabii ki ilk gelenlere, maalesef bu mahallenin de çıkarıcı insanları en kötü yerleri çok pahalıya vermiş olduğunu görünce insanlığımızdan utandık. O zaman dernekteki arkadaşların hepsini toplantıya çağırdık. Ya dedik bu mahallede böyle bir şey varmış. Biz bu derneği kurarken dayanışalım dedik kendimiz için; ama bizden daha kötülerini var, sonra kendimizi bıraktık.”

(11) “Zordu ilk geldiğimizde, çok zordu. Mesela benim evimde hiçbir şey yoktu yeni gelmişim. Eşim yeni bir döşek almıştı, yerde yatıyorduk. Bir battaniye aldı, bir bana bir kızıma. Küçük bir televizyon vardı, altında masa yoktu. Çok zordu yani ilk geldiğimizde”

(12) “İlk tuttuğumuz ev çok rutubetliydi ... Biz yerde yatıyorduk. Hiçbir şeyimiz yoktu ... Ne halım vardı ne belgem. Yastık yok, hiçbir şey yok. Elbiseleri katlayıp katlayıp başımızın altına yastık yapıyorduk. Orada her şeyimiz vardı, onları bırakıp buraya gelmek zorunda kaldık. Buraya geldiğimizde hiçbir şeyimiz yoktu, çok zordu çok.”

(13) “Ben ikinci kızıma hamileydim. Bir arkadaşım dedi burada kıyafet bir şeyler var. İstedğin zaman git al ihtiyacın varsa. Ben de geldim buraya. Taylan abi ile tanıştım. Hamileyim, yani çocuk kıyafetin varsa gelirse ya da mesela ne olursa numaramı verdim. Dedim bir şeyler gelirse beni ara. Sonra beşik gelmişti. Beni aradılar gel beşiğı al diye... Hamileydim, bir de benden hastaneler sevk istediler. O aralarda sevk istiyorlardı. Taylan abi ve Leyla ablayla görüştüm. Hastaneler beni kabul etmek için sevk kâğıdı istiyorlar. Onun için de gidip geldik hastaneye birlikte.”

(14) “O gün emekli maaşı mesela bir kere almıştık. Denk geldi. Hiç yiyecek kahvaltıları yoktu, bardakları yoktu, perde yoktu. Biz gidene kadar yanındaki komşular koltuk vermişti, halı vermişlerdi. Biz de o gün 50 lira katkı olsun dedik hani çocuklar bir şeyler yiyebilirler, gittik alışveriş yaptık götürdük.”

(15) “Bir aileye gittiğimizde kar yağıyordu. İhtiyaç sahibi bir aileye bir gittik ki evde soba yok. İki tane engelli çocukları var. Baktık eee biz de sonuçta emekli maaşlarıyla geçiniyoruz yani, çok zengin insanlar değiliz ki. Hatta biz de belki bir başka birine göre fakir insanlarız yani. Ya eve geldik cepte beş kuruş para yok. Eve geldik, Leyla eve gitti. Ben eve gittiğim. Ya ulan vicdanım rahatsız oldu yani. Aradım Leyla’yı. Dedim kalk gidelim nalbura, kredi kartıyla alayım. Ben rahat edemeyeceğim. Gittik soba aldık, kömür aldık götürdük aileye bıraktık.”

(16) “Biliyor musun, Suriye’den ilk geldiğimizde çok zorluk çektim. Benim gördüğüm çektiğim şeyi kimse çekmesin, kimse görmesin istiyordum. İstiyordum yardım edeyim onlara, evlerine gidiyorduk ne lazım diye, neler eksik. Onlara yardım etmek istiyordum. Mesela bir gün yeni gelen birinin evine gittik, bir ailenin yanına.

Hiçbir şeyleri yoktu. Yani bir tane evdelerdi, yerin altındaydı, durumları baya kötüydü. Baktık neleri eksik. Sonradan da onlara kiralık ev bulduk. O kötü evden onları çıkardık. Bir sürü şey yaptık, çünkü bundan keyif alıyordum. Yardım etmeyi istiyordum.”

(17) “Ben mesela her gün inerdim derneğe. Taylan abi üç 3:30- 4:00 gelirdi. Hemen derneğe girip açardı. Biz de onlarla gelirdik. Bütün insanlar biliyorlardı dörtten mesela altıya kadar açık. Geliyorlardı, biz de burada bulunuyorduk... En çok da ikinci el kıyafet gelirdi. Sen bilmiyorsun eski halini. Büyük masalar vardı demirden. Onların üstü hepsi kıyafetle dolardı. Kıyafet, ayakkabı kırtasiye malzemeleri gelirdi, çanta dağıtılırdı. Etkinlik olurdu çocuklar için. Etkinlik mesela Cumartesi, Pazar olurdu. Çoğunlukla kolilerin içine koyup dernekteki boş yerlere itilirdi eşyalar.”

(18) “Sokak sokak gezdiğimizizi hatırlarım. Buraya kadar ıslandığımı hatırlarım. Sokak temsilcilerimiz vardı, sokak sokak, ev ev gezip kimin evinde soba var, kimin yok, kimin kömüre ihtiyacı var kimin yok. Ok-Der’le beraber hepsini tespit edip dağıttığımızı bilirim.”

(19) “Çok zordu. Zaten evden çıkamıyordum. Evde, bilmiyorum, korkuyordum. Dil bilmiyorum. Kimseyi bilmiyorum burada tanımiyorum yani. Bana zor geldi, çok zor geldi. Ama onları tanıdıktan sonra her gün dışarı çıkıyordum ... O dönem bana çok zor geldi ilk geldiğimde. Sonra evden çıktım dışarı, iyi oldu.”

(20) “Mesela okulda, şimdi değil öncesinden bahsediyorum, Suriyeli öğrencilerden rahatsız oluyorlardı, Türk olanlar Suriyelilerle konuşmuyordu, birbirleriyle

geçinmiyorlardı. Onları dövüyorlardı, niye okula geliyorlar diyorlardı. Ama oraya geldiklerinde müzik, resim yapıyorlardı onlarla, keyif alıyordu çocuklar. Moralleri daha iyi oluyordu.”

(21) “Atölyelerin benim kızıma da oldukça faydası oldu. Kızım çok içe kapanıktı; çünkü savaşı yaşamış bir kızdı. Konuşmuyordu, arkadaş edinmiyordu. Hep bir köşede oturuyordu. Daha sonra konuşmaya başladı, arkadaş edinmeye, oyunlara katılmaya başladı. Evde de içe kapanıktı. Evde de artık benimle konuşmaya başladı. Çok etkisini gördüm ben kızımda oranın.”

(22) “Mülteci sorunu bizim ortak sorunumuzdur, bu mahallenin ortak sorunudur. Dolayısıyla da her sokakta mülteci olduğuna göre, biz bunları yok sayamayız, eğer komşular kendi sokaklarında huzurlu yaşamak istiyorlarsa bunu bir ortak sorun olarak görecekler ve buna dahil olacaklar. Yani, onu yok saymak, onu dışlamak, onu fakir görmek bizim doğru bulduğumuz bir şey değil.”

(23) “Bizim kulağımıza mültecilere karşı böyle davranan, onlara insan dışı davranan komşular gelince, onlara dedik böyle davrananların kentsel dönüşüm davalarına bakmayacağız... Eğer bizim desteğimizi almak istiyorsanız, bu davranışları bırakın dedik. Mesela, kiralarla ilgili biz müdahale ettik. Eğer Suriyelilere evinizi yüksek kiralara veriyorsanız, ... o zaman biz de sizin davanız için dilekçe yazdığımız zaman sizden ücret talep edeceğiz dedik. Normalde her zaman mahkemede davaları takip eder veya ihtiyaç halinde ev sahipleri için ücretsiz olarak dilekçe yazarız, çünkü gönüllü çalışıyoruz... Ama biri ülkesinden kaçmış buraya sığınmış yeni sakinlerden

yararlanacağım ve üstüne çullanacağım derse, üzgünüz ama, biz de o ev sahibine çullanmasını biliyoruz.”

(24) “Çocukları okula yazamıyorlardı. Biz ne oluyor dedik. Gittiğimizde aslında hiçbir engelin olmadığını, onları okula alabileceklerini öğrendik ve 76 tane çocuk yazıldı burada o dönem okula.”

(25) “Milli Eğitim, illa Halk Eğitim’e gelebilirler diyordu. Biz de paraları yok bu insanların, Halk Eğitime gidemezler. Bakın biz geldik, biz getirdik. En sonunda okulda bir toplantı yaptık. 100 tane mülteci gitti o okula, derterini anlattılar. Kurslar için yazıldılar.”

(26) “Suriyelilerle sorun yaşıyordu. Okul aile birliğinde Suriyeli olsun istedik biz dernek olarak ... Nergis katıldı. Toplantılara gidip geliyordu. Bir sorun yaşanırsa Suriyelilerle ilgili o ilgileniyordu.”

(27) “Her gün okula gidip sabahtan saat ikiye kadar beraber kalıyordum. Okul aile birliğinden müdür odasına gidecek evrakları getirip götürüyordum. Çocuklar bir sorun olsa benimle konuşuyorlardı. Okulu daha rahat anlayabilmeleri için Suriyeli çocukların sorunları varsa sabahtan öğlene kadar bekliyordum.”

(28) “Biz bu insanlara işte durmadan erzak götürüyoruz. Çocukları okula kaydediyoruz. Kırtasiye yardımı yapılıyor, kıyafet yardımı yapılıyor vs. Bir gün öyle bir şey oldu ki bir toplantıda aralarından biri; siz hep durmadan bize bir şey

veriyorsunuz. Peki biz ne yapabiliriz diye sordu. Orada da peki siz ne yapabilirsiniz de dönüşü olay. Siz ne yapabilirsiniz de mutfak oluşumunun başlamasına dönüşü.”

(29) “Mutfak ilk kurulduğunda turşular, reçeller ile başladık. Evlerde yapıyorduk gruplar şeklinde. Gruplar reçelleri alıp getiriyorlardı derneğe. Hazırlıyorduk, gönüllüler gelip alıp kafelere dağıtıyorlar, satıyorlardı.”

(30) “İzmir’den 10 lira gönderen insan da vardı Amerika’dan 250 dolar yollayan bir tane kilise de vardı. Benim İspanya’da yaşayan bir arkadaşın bunun için çalıştığı okulda bir kermes yaptı. Onlar 400 dolar yolladı. Gerçekten Türkiye’nin dünyanın dört bir yanından insanlar o mutfağın bir yıllık kirasını topladılar.”

(31) “Boyasını yaptık, badanasını yaptık, elektriğini yaptık, elimizden ne geliyorsa onu yaptık. Yani geldik gittik taşıdık bir sürü şey. Maddi katkımız olmadı çok, ufak tefek harcamalarımız oldu tabii. Gittik korniş aldık, perde aldık falan. Bunlar da bizim cebimizden şeyler. Boyasını mesela ben yaptım. Elektrik işini gene bir arkadaşımız yaptı. Maliyeti düşürmek için ona yardım ettik mecburen.”

(32) “İlk zamanlar zaten çocuklar daha da küçüktü, okula gitmiyordu birçoğu. Aramızdan bir kadını görevlendiriyorduk sen çocuklarla ilgilen diye. Çocukların mutfak alanına geçmesi yasaktı. Yani sonuçta biz orada yemek pişiriyoruz. Çocuklarımız elimizin altında falan, olmuyordu. Çocuklarla ilgileniyordu. Onlara kahvaltı hazırlıyordu. Onlara yemek yedirir, onları oynatırdı. Biz geri kalan kadınlar çalışırdık. Şimdi çocuklar büyüdü artık. Kimisi okula gidiyor, o yüzden gelmiyorlar.”

(33) “Çocukları okula giden kadınlar var aramızda, eşleri öğlen yemeğine eve gelen var ... Bize o dönem dediler ki bir bina komple alacağız, mutfak bölümü yapacağız orada. Bir bölümünü mutfak, bir bölümünü dikiş, bir bölümünü başka bir şey.

Kadınlar gelip gitsinler. Nerede? 4. Levent’de. Yani biz gidemeyiz ki.

Okmeydanı’nda bir yerde yapın tamam okay ... Kadınlar her gün buradan otobüse binecek 4. Levent’e gidecekler ... bizim çocuklarımız var, bizim eşimiz var öğlen yemeğine gelen ... biz oraya her gün gidemeyiz ki ... olamadı yani. Buradan oraya gitmesi zordu. Servis lazımdı mesela o da yoktu.”

(34) “Hiçbiri razı değildi. Adamlar niye gidiyorsunuz diyorlardı mutfağa. Ben evli değilim ama mesela erkek kardeşlerim niye mutfağa gidiyorsun diyordu. Kadınların kocaları da çocuklarınızı evlerinizi ihmal ediyorsunuz mutfağa giderek diyordu.”

(35) “Mutfağı açtığımız zaman zordu, her mutfağa gittiğimde iki günde bir tartışıyordum eşimle, bana neden çocukları ihmal ettin diyordu. Sonra yavaş yavaş yavaş yavaş alıştı. Baktı hani evimi de idare edebiliyorum, mutfağı da idare edebiliyorum. Şimdi benimle şakalaşıyor, toplantıların yok mu Nergis diyor. Bir şey oldu mu hani başkan seçildin mi falan diyor.”

(36) “Biz Suriye’de çalışamıyorduk, çıkıp girmiyorduk; ama şimdi bu siparişlerimiz olmasa bile özlüyoruz birbirimizi. Arkadaşlarımızı özlüyoruz. İşte bazen gelip kahvaltı yapıyoruz burada beraber. İkinci evimiz olarak görüyorum burayı. Mutfak bizim hayatımıza çok şey kattı. Her şey para değil. Hem öğreniyoruz hem geziyoruz, dünyayı görüyoruz hem toplantılara katılıyoruz. Onlar bizi gelip görüyorlar. Biz gidiyoruz. Bizim için yeni bir şey yani.”

(37) “Bizden haberdarlar, biliyoruz burada sırtımızın yere gelmeyeceğini. Bir sorunumuz olsa gidip anlatıyoruz, bize yardımcı oluyorlar. Biz korkuyorduk hani bizi kovarlar, komşular olsun, ters bir şey yaparlar bize bağırırlar, korkuyorduk hani çünkü bizim burada hiçbir hakkımız yok. Korkuyorduk yani, dernekten sonra korkmuyoruz artık, yani biliyoruz insanlar var bize yardım edecekler.”

(38) “Birazcık alıştık, öğrendik burayı. Artık dışarıya çıkıyoruz. Mahalleyi tanıyoruz. Eskiden zordu, şimdi de zorlu ama eskiden daha zordu. Önceden kimseyi tanımıyorduk, çıkmıyorduk. Şimdi eskiden daha iyi. Daha iyi çünkü biraz dil biliyoruz. Dışarı çıkar olduk. Mahallemizi tanıyoruz. Biz ilk geldiğimizde buralı değildik, buralı olduk. O zamanlar ailemizden uzak kalmıştık, şu anda biraz daha buralı olduk.”

(39) “Bir tane Suriyeli komşum var. Kızını yerde yatırıyor, yeni doğmuş kızını. Taylan abiye dedim ona bir beşik lazım. Arkadaşlarını topladı. Herkes ne kattıysa gidip bir beşik aldılar, dernektekilerle getirdiler ona.”

(40) “Mutfakta çocuklara atölyeler yapmak çok zor oluyordu. Mutfaktı çünkü orası, olmuyordu. Hafta sonu gidip açmak zorundaydık gönüllere. Çocuklar geliyordu tuvalette mendiller, af edersin sıcıp bırakıp gidiyorlardı. E tamam biz temizliyorduk ama ne kadar temizleyebilirsin? Mutfak alanına geçmeyeceksiniz diyorduk; tamam diyorlardı. Bir bakıyordum iki-üç tane çocuk gitmiş mutfak alanında kaşıkla çatalla bıçakla oynuyor. Yani olmaz; mutfakla atölye bir arada gitmiyordu. En sonunda mecbur kaldık yani iptal etmeye. Çünkü alan çok kısıtlıydı.”

(41) “Maalesef bizim imarımız yok, vermiyorlar bize, amaçları nedir biz bilmiyoruz. Yani 26 senedir biz buradayız, bugün imar çıkacak yarın çıkacak. Evimi görüyorsun. Bir kat tuğla bırakmadılar üst üste koyalım, bir çivi bile çaktırmıyorlar.”

(42) “Binaların neredeyse hepsi kaçak. Tapulu arsaların üstüne inşaa edilmişler. Arsaların tapusu var ama binaların ruhsatı yok. İmarlı 10 yapı ya var ya yok. İmar izni var aslında 2008’den beri ama emsal düşük. Mahalledeki emsal oranı 0.60 ve 0.90.”

(43) “İmar olmadığı için altyapı yapılmıyor, ulaşım sıkıntı. Lise yok, PTT şubesi yok, vardı nüfus olmayınca iş yapmıyordu kapandı. Sağlık ocağı harabe halinde bakım yapılmıyor. 2004’ten önce asfalt yoktu. Sağlık ocağı 2004’te açıldı. Mahallenin altyapı ihtiyacının %50’si yok. 2007’de 15 bin imza topladık altyapı hizmetleri gelsin diye. O dönem de muhtardım. %50’si yapıldı, %50’si kaldı... Belediye varoş kesimi umursamıyor. Atakent mahallesinde bir sıkıntı olduğunda aynı gün yapılır. 15 gündür kaldırım bozulmuş burada, gelip yapmıyorlar. Çocuk parkı yaptırmak istiyoruz belediyeye ama yaptıramıyoruz. Çünkü burada hazine arazisi yok. Aşağıdaki deredeki parka otomatik duba istedik, oraya araçlar giriyor çünkü. Beş sene oldu, duba yapılmadı hala.”

(44) “Kentsel dönüşüm iki türlü yapılabilir. Ya bir yer dönüşüm alanı ilan ediliyor ve yeni bir imar planı çıkartılıyor ya da açıktan dönüşüm alanı ilan etmeden mevcut imar planları öyle şekilde düzenleniyor ki mahallenin mevcut dokusunu dikkate alınmadan orası bir şekilde dönüşüme tabii tutuluyor.”

(45) “Yarımburgaz örneğinde olduğu gibi, orayı aslında dönüşüm alanı ilan etmiyorsun da plana villa koyuyorsun iki katlı. Planda ortalama parseller var, 600 metrekaredir. 0.30 taban oturumu, 0.60 toplam inşaat alanı diye şey vermiş. Mahallede 600 metrekare olan parseller de azdır. Bu ne demek 600 metrekarede 180 metrekare temel atacaksın, üstüne de ancak bir kat çıkacaksın, hadi bir de dubleks yaparsan bir tane de terasın olacak. Oradan çıkarsa çıkarsa villa çıkar. Başka bir şey çıkmaz. Dolayısıyla aslında Yarımburgaz’ı dönüşüm alanı ilan etmesen bile yapılan bu planla sen dönüşeceksin kardeşim demiş oluyorsun.”

(46) “Üç- dört kişi bir araya geldi mi beraber çalıştığı zaman bir yere gelinebilir ama bir insan tek kişi olduğu zaman hiçbir şey yapamaz. Yani bir elin nesi var iki elin sesi... Diyelim belediye başkanı yanına gidelim. 10 kişinin gitmesi ayrı, 150 kişinin gitmesi ayrı. Bir derneğe üye olsak bir araya gelsek çağrıldığı zaman 150-200 kişi beraber gitsek, belediye başkanı diyecek ki burada bir sorun var. Bu millet beni sıkıştırarak; ama 10 kişi gitse belediye başkanı yanına bile almaz kapıdan içeri giremezsin.”

(47) “Şimdi bu konuştuğumuz dernekler Yarımburgaz’da kentsel dönüşümle ilgili iki ayrı politikayı savunan dernekler. Adına konuştuğum dernek, yerinde dönüşümü savunuyor. Komşuluk ilişkilerinin bozulmamasını, önceliğin kamu hizmetleri, gençlerin, kadınların ve mültecilerin, sokak hayvanlarının bunların burada bir mesele olduğunu söylüyor ve buraya inşaat şirketlerini sokmanın cinayet olacağını, İstanbul’daki diğer örneklerin bunu gösterdiğini, millete taahhüt edilen şeylerin verilmediğini, böyle büyük paraların, kredilerin, büyük inşaat şirketlerinin buraya ekonomik olarak da, sosyo-kültürel olarak da - buradaki ilişkileri de göz önüne

olarak - bir artı getirmeyeceğini savunuyor. Diğer dernek de burada bir projenin olması gerektiğini, bu haliyle buradan bir şey olmadığını, şartlara uygun evlerde yaşamadığımızı, evlerin depreme dayanıklı olmadığını, buna benzer şeylerle mahallelinin de güvenini kazanarak onların vasıtasıyla buraya gelecek bir iki tane şirketin ayakçılığını yapıyor.”

(48) “Onların şirketlerle çalıştığını fark ettik. Onlar mahalleyi şey ettirmek için onlara şirin görünüp, diğerine yandaş olup, işte birisi de Torunlarla çalışıyor, Aziz Yeniay eski belediye başkanı. Şimdi Torunlar’a müdür olmuş. Onların ilişkilerini fark ettik. Biz onları bıraktık. Baktık beraber hareket ederken burada bir şeye he deseler bile bir bakıyorsun belediyeye gidip başka bir şey yapıyorlar... Hem belediyeye şirin görünüp hem şirkete şirin görünüp. Hatta birini getirtip konuşturdular salonda. Ben TOKİ’den bir ev aldım dedi, bu işin adamıyım, her türlü anlarım bu işten. Ben TOKİ’den bir ev aldım bilmem kaç senesinde 200 liraya. Şimdi işte bir milyon ediyor. Yani bizi sanki ona teşvik ediyor. Biz de dedik ki bak profesör müsün sen bilim adamı mısın her neysen de bize TOKİ’yi öyle şirin anlatma. Biz TOKİ’nin ne yaptığını biliyoruz. Biz nasıl daha kolay bir mücadele veririz sen onu bize göster, varsa söyle, yoksa da konuşma bari sus diye herkes tepki yaptı. Çıkardık onu, lüks arabasına bindi gitti.”

(49) “Biz dedik emsali yükseltin, bir de şirketlere değil imarı halka verin, halk kazansın. O da yok diyordu, bireysel olarak imar vermeyeceğiz size. Bireysel olarak olmuyor veremeyiz. Ben de veremem bakan da yapmaz ama size bir şirket getirelim önerdiğimiz şirket size ne verirse razı olun. Ondan sonra biz hemen başlayalım. Yoksa siz 20 sene beklersiniz dedi.”

(50) “Bizi yan yana getiren mahalle sorunları oldu. Müşterekler var siyaset yapmamakla ilgili. Buna 10 toplantıdan yedisinde uyuluyor, üç tanesinde uyulmuyor. Zaten o toplantı da ya bitmiyor ya da müştereklerin dışına çıkıp memleketle ilgili tartışmalar çıkınca toplantıyı durduruyoruz.”

(51) “Parklarda bonzaici dolu. Onlara herkes rastlıyor, ama bunu biz emniyete söylediğimizde, bu ne olacak dediğimizde şöyle bir cevap aldık; içmek sanki yasak değil, bonzai eroin içmeye bir şey yapamıyorlar, götürsek de bırakıyoruz diyorlar. Sadece kilo ile taşıyıp ticaretini yapsalar, öyle yakalanırsa öyle bir şey yapabiliriz diyorlar.”

(52) “Onların yerine kendimi de koydum. Hani yarın öbür gün insanın ne olacağı belli değil. Hiç ummadığım bir şey çıkar kaşına, sen de sürgün olursun yerinden. Mesela onlar ister miydi ki böyle olsun?”

(53) “Bir tane kızları vardı. İsmi Sakine’ydi. Devamlı o gelirdi suyu almaya. Suyun dolmasını beklerken teyze derdi mesela masada yanıma otururdu, oradan kaşığı alırdı, biz buna ‘kevcik’ deriz, Türkçe ne deniyor diye sorardı. Derdim kaşık kızım Sakine kaşık. Mesela onu, o sular dolana kadar ezberlerdi. O gide gele gide gele epey geliştirdi Türkçesini. Hani anlaşılmamız da şöyleydi. Eşim derdi ki onlara dedi ki hani dedi benim hanım dedi Türk, Kürtçe bilmez. Seninki de dedi Kürt, Türkçe bilmiyor. Dedi siz benim hanıma Kürtçe öğretin, benim hanım da dedi onlara Türkçe öğretsin. Hem kendileri hem kızları öğrendi Türkçeyi; ama ben Kürtçeyi öğrenemedim.”

(54) “Bir sabah kalktım balkonda oturuyordum, böyle dışarıya bakıyordum, ilkbahardı. Baktım iki tane taksi geldi. Bir grubu koydular kaldırımın üstüne bıraktılar gittiler. Bir saat boyunca balkonda bekledim onları. Bekledim bekledim baktım ne gelen var ne giden. Çocukların hepsi kaldırımın üstünde oturuyordu.”

(55) “O küçük çocuğu hiç aklımdan çıkmıyor gerçekten. Hiç unutmam onu. Açım, açım dedi annesine, Kürtçe. Annesi de bir tane kaymaklı bisküvi çıkarttı verdi eline. Ben o kadar üzüldüm ki, ağladım balkonda. Dayanamadım indim aşağı. Gittim ya dedim siz kimsiniz? Nereden geliyorsunuz? Nereye gidiyorsunuz? Baktım Kürtçe konuştular. Türkçe hiç bilmiyorlar. Arapça biliyorlardı. Dedim ben de Kürdüm. Dedi vallahi biz Urfa’dan geldik dedi. Suruç’tan geldik. Suriye’den kaçtık iki ay orada dolaştık dedi, geldik otogara iki tane taksi geldi, biz sizi bir yere götürürüz. Orada boş evler çok var. İş de var, boş evler de var dediler. Bizi getirdi buraya bıraktı gitti. 500 dolar aldı bizden. 500 dolar almıştı onlardan otogardan buraya getirene kadar. Ben o kadar üzüldüm ki. Hiç eşime de haber vermedim. Hani demedim ya beni öldürürler ya bir şey yaparlar bana, kimse yok evde. Aldım eve getirdim. Duş aldılar üstlerini başlarını yıkadım. Kahvaltı hazırladım onlara. Saat 12 oldu eşimi aradım. Eşimi aradım adama ya böyle böyle dedim. İki aile Suriyeli geldi dedim hiç sana sormadan eve aldım dedim. Çok üzüldüm hani sana haber vermedim. İyi yapmışsın dedi ne gerekiyorsa yap dedi ben geleceğim dedi saat bir gibi geleceğim. Ben kalktım konu komşulara haber verdim. Bizim akrabalar var burada onlara haber verdim. Onlar da geldiler yanıma. Biz gittik ev aradık onlara. Ev bulduk, hemen aynı gün... Komşulara telefon açtım. Kimi yastık verdi kimi, halı verdi, kimi örtü verdi, kimi döşek verdi, kimi yorgan verdi, kimi koltuk verdi, kimi tüp verdi, kap kakak

verdi akşama kadar bir ev dizdik onlara. İki aileye. Ben de evden baya yatak falan verdim onlara kapacak. Evlerini dizdik, iki sene burada kaldılar.”

(56) “Çok üzüldüm onlara. Yabancılardı. Sadece onlar değil, yani, yabancı biri geldi mi buraya ben böyle çok yardımcı oluyorum. Ben kendim de yabancıydım. Geldim buraya, ben de çektim çok. Dilim yoktu, Türkçe bilmiyordum. Ben de çektim. Onun için ben yabancıları çok yardım ediyorum.”

(57) “Türkçe bilmiyordum, hiç Türkçe bilmiyordum. Oturduğum yerde hepsi Trakyalılardı... çocuklar ufaktı o zaman... Allah razı olsun bizim komşular çok iyilerdi. Türkçe bilmediğim halde çok el uzatıyorlardı, çocuklarıma bakıyorlardı. O zaman evde su yoktu, yollar yoktu, çamaşır eldeydi... Evde 11-12 kişi kalıyorduk... Ben su almaya gidiyordum, bazen iki saat kuyrukta kalıyordum... Çocukları komşuya bırakıp gidiyordum... Hiç kimsem, akrabam yoktu burada. Tanıdığım hiç kimsem yoktu. Bırakıyordum gidiyordum suyu alıyordum geliyordum.”

(58) “Daha öbür evde olduğumuz zamandı. Moldovalı bir aile buraya geldi, bir tane çocukları vardı. Onlar da göç ettiler, geldiler buraya ve hiçbir şeyleri yoktu aynı bunlar gibi. Yine biz kendimiz onlara yatak, yorgan, kapacak verdik. Mesela onlar Hristiyan’dı. Karısı biraz Türkçe biliyordu. Gidip geliyorduk onlarla.”

(59) “Komşuluk gereği biz bunu yaptık. Ama tek başına bu yetmiyor. Suriye’den gelenler işçiler. Buradaki Türkiyeliler evlerini kaybetmeme derdinde, Suriyeliler ise evlerini kaybetmiş gelmiş. Sınıfsal olarak ortak bir kaderleri var. Diğer mahallelerde kavga dövüş oldu, biz burada bunu minimize ettik. Sonuçta iç savaş sorunu

Türkiye’de de kapıda. Burada daha büyüğü de çıkabilir. Bunu engellemek için geleceğe dair kurucu fikirlerimizi bugünkü dayanışma ile kurabiliriz ancak.”

(60) “...yastık yok evde, yatacak sünger yok. Bak yatak demiyorum, sünger yok. O dönem, çok iyi biliyorum çocukların hepsi hastaydı. Böbreklerini üşütüyordu yatacak yatakları olmadığı için. Gerçek yani. Suratları bembeyaz çok çocuk hatırlıyorum mahallede sürekli hastaneye götürülen. O dönem kırmızıydı.”

(61) “Birçoğu tanıdığımız bildiğimiz kişilerdi. Hatta bir ara şöyle yaptık; mahalleyi bölge bölge ayırmıştık. Gönüllerimizi alanlara dağıttık. Daha doğrusu şöyle; ayrılan bölüm içerisinde ben varım, burası sana ait, burada kişileri sen teyit edeceksin diyorduk. Gidip kişilerle birebir görüşme yapıyorduk... Ailedeki çocuk sayısını yaşlarına cinsiyetlerini aylık gelirlerini kayıt altına alıyorduk.”

(62) “Ama tehlikeli bir iletişim yolu... Bir dönem dernek hayır kurumu gibi çalıştı. Çok yardım malzemesi geliyordu. Bunun olumlu ve olumsuz yanları var. Destek verici olması olumluydu. Yardım dağıtmanın olumsuz tarafı, onların özgüvenlerini gururlarını kırıyor. Muhtaç görüntü çizmeleri yardım alanlar için sıkıntı verici. Bunu aşmak için eşya dağıtırken lütfen çekinmeyin, arkadaşlarımız bunları bizim için yolladı diyorduk. Eğer bizim de ihtiyacımız varsa, biz de oradan kıyafet alıyorduk ve bunu görüyorlardı. Dolayısıyla rahat hissediyorlardı.”

(63) “Benim anadilim Kürtçe. Türkçeyi sonradan öğrendim. Bayağı yardımcı oldu. Yani aksan farklı olmasına rağmen biz büyük oranda anlaşıyorduk. Tabii sonradan o aksan farkını da öğrenince daha da rahat oldu. Ama özellikle Arap ailelerle tercüme

konusunda sıkıntı yaşıyorduk orada da Suriyeli Kürt ailelerle biz Kürtçe irtibata geçiyorduk, onlar da Arapçaya çeviriyorlardı.”

(64) “Tekin’i altı senedir tanıyorum. Yarımburgaz’a ilk geldiğim zamanlardan beri tanıyorum onu. Beraber çok takıldık yani beraber çok iyi zaman geçirdik. Benim düğününe geldi. Hatta ben onlara askere gittiği zaman geçen zamanlarda gittim. Hüseyin’i de öyle. Önceden tanımazdı beni ama artık tanıyor, tanıdık olduk. Onunla da orada tanıştım, beraber çok zaman geçirdik.”

(65) “Yabancıydım ilk geldiğimde ama tanıdılar beni, güvendiler bana. Çünkü ben bayağı evlere girdim. Destek yardım ederken, tercüman olarak yardım ediyordum. Kömür dağıtıyorduk kışın mesela. Çok fazla fakir insan vardı orada. Ya da işte Tekin ile geziyordum çok, arkadaşlarıyla tanışıyordum.”

(66) “Yabancı mısınız dedi. Evet dedim. Kusura bakma kardeşim yabancıya vermiyoruz dedi. Dedim abi yabancıyız ama o kadar da kötü yabancı değiliz yani. Dedi kardeşim vermiyoruz. Israr ettim, yanına gittim tanışmaya, buluştuk ama yine de evi vermedi bize”

(67) “Benim bir arkadaşım vardı Arap, yani Kürtçe falan bilmiyorlardı. Ev sahibi benim tanıdığım biriydi Halit abi. Gittim yanına dedim abi öyle insanlar var Suriye’den gelmişler yoksulluk hiçbir şey yok ev arıyorlar. ‘Tarık ben bunları tanımıyorum. Sıkıntı, yani ben evimi veremem’ dedi. Abi yok abi ben getiriyorum sana dedim. Tamam Tarık sen kefil oluyorsan verelim dedi. Maşallah şimdiye kadar hala oturuyorlar evinde. Geçen gün Halit abi dedi Tarık sen bu adamı getirmişsin iki

aydır kirayı su faturasını vermedi. Tamam abi onlarla görüşeceğim dedim. Onlarla görüştüm dedim Asad abi ne oldu, hayırdır. Adı Asad. Niye kira vermemişsin dedim. Oğlum vallahi biraz işimiz az olmuş dedi biraz sıkıntı yaşıyorum, oğlum da hastanede... Tamam abi dedim. Gidip Halit abi ile konuştum. Türkçe bilmediği için işte gidip ben görüştüm. Halit abi dedim adam sıkıntıya girmiş çalışmıyor. Oğlu da hastaymış dedim. Tamam Tarık dedi, öyleyse bir şey olmaz. Hani dedi su faturasını yatırsın da kira bir şey olmaz, yani bir şey demem dedi. Maşallah adam şimdiye kadar hala o evde.”

(68) “İkna olmayanların bir kısmı aslında her şeye itiraz eden kişiler. Nasıl bir karakter yapısına bürünmüşlerse artık, ne yapsan itiraz ediyor. Ne dersin itiraz; çaya şeker atarsın itiraz eder, ayak ayak üstüne atarsın itiraz eder.”

(69) “Burada kavga çıkarmaya çalışan birkaç lümpen var ama onlara dedik ki; bir kavga kapasiteniz varsa uyuşturucu satıcıları, rant peşinde olan emlakçılar var. Gidin onlarla dövüşün. Niye Suriyelilerle dövüşüyorsunuz? Hatta bu lümpenlere karşı şiddet kullanmaktan da kaçınmadık.”

(70) “Hatta bir keresinde tartıştım polisle kapıda. Randevu saati sarkıyordu, düzgün bir randevu vermiyorlardı bize yani sistem durmuş gidin başka zaman gelin diyorlardı. İşte randevu günü halledemeyince, yeniden randevu alıyorduk.”

(71) “Gittik, uğraştık ama çıkaramadık. Uzak randevu veriyorlardı, İki ay-üç ay sonraya randevu veriyorlardı. Remzi'nin tanıdıkları vardı karakollarda, bize randevu aldı, gittik birlikte çıkardık işte”

(72) “Atölyeler sayesinde ortama alıştı. Sonra onu sokaktan içeri alamaz olduk. Mesela işten geliyordum saat yedide, akşam saat dokuz oluyordu o hala sokakta oynuyordu. Türk çocuklarla oynuyordu.”

(73) “Geldiğim vakit hiç kimseyi tanıımıyordum, burada yabancı gibi kalmıştım, Zamanla tanıdım burayı. Dernekle tanıştık, evde oturduğum için sıkılıyordum, çocukları oraya götürüyordum. Başka çocuklarla oynuyorlardı. Ben başka kadınlarla tanışıyordum. Kimseyi tanıımıyordum. Zaman geçirmek için gidiyordum. İlk geldiğimde o kadar da beğenmemiştim mahalleyi çünkü kimsem yoktu burada. Evde kalınca çocukla sıkıntı oldu konuşamıyorduk yani pek öyle, duruyorduk, sokağa çıkmıyordu çocuklar. Büyük çocuğum o zaman dört yaşındaydı ama konuşmuyordu normal çocuklar gibi... İlk zamanlarda birinci kattan düşmüştü, dedik o mu bir sıkıntı yarattı acaba? Belki ondan olmuştur diye hastaneye götürdük ama hastanede hiçbir şey yok dediler. Çocuklarla karşılaşın karşılaşması eksik dediler, onun için konuşamıyor dediler. İlk başta korkuyordu, utanıyordu. Onun için en fazla derneğe gidiyordum aslında.”

(74) “Suriye’de çocuklar doğduğunda deftere kaydederler. 14 yaşından sonra kimlik çıkartılır. Savaş çıktığında Suriye’de, Şirin deftere yazılmamıştı. Dolayısıyla kaydı yoktu. Burada da kimlik çıkarmaya gittiğimizde defterde ismi olmadığı için kaydetmediler.”

(75) “Birçok STK bunu çok iyi biliyor ancak bu konuyu ciddi bir biçimde gündemlerine almıyorlar. Devleti ve işverenleri sıkıştırabilirler. Ancak aynı zamanda

da gayet iyi biliyorlar ki bir STK olarak devlete baskı yaparlarsa devlet de onlara çalışma izni vermez, dolayısıyla bu sorunu çözmek için adım atmıyorlar... Biz dernek olarak bunları aşabiliriz demiyoruz ama bu konunun da farkındayız.”

(76) “İşveren bizi çok tatlı karşılarsa da aslında rahatsız oluyordu. Mesela o çocuk işçilere diyorduk bir şey olursa bize haber ver, bunu da onlara duyuruyorduk çıkarken. ‘Ahmet biz buradayız bir şey olursa arasın bizi tamam mı?’ diye yanağını sıkıp öyle çıkıyorduk. Adam çocuğun yalnız olmadığını görüyordu, o para ödeniyordu sonra.”

(77) “Önceden kırmızıydı, şimdi sarı. Ama kırmızıdan sarıya geçme dönemi Suriyelilerin ev bulması, Suriyelilerin iş bulması, Suriyelilerin kamu hizmetlerinden ve yardımlardan düzgün bir şekilde yararlanabilmeyi öğrenmesi. Onlar biraz durumu sarı yaptı. Sarının içinde de yine şey var ama; çocuk işçiliği, istismar, aklına gelebilecek bir sürü düşmanlık, maaşları alamama. Yine sarıdır ki millet bu arabalara binip binip Yunanistan’a gidiyor, hani otobüslere. Ama kırmızıda şeydi hayatta kalma mücadelesi. Geceyi nasıl geçireceğim mücadelesi.”

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