

The Emergence of the Enterprising Refugee Discourse and Differential Inclusion in Turkey's Changing Migration Politics

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Abstract: Tracing the reactions to the high numbers of enterprises established by Syrian refugees in Turkey, this paper claims that there is an emerging discourse of (differential) inclusion, which does not depict Syrian refugees as victims and guests, but rather as enterprising subjectivities. In order to do this, it first introduces a critical theoretical discussion on the ambivalent figure of the migrant entrepreneur. Adapting the approach of autonomy of migration, the emerging discourse on the enterprising refugee is discussed in relation to historical references to the experiences and struggles of former migrants and their recuperation in a neoliberal framework. This paper then presents the initial forms of inclusion of this figure into information and expert systems. Finally, it argues that recent changes in migration politics with a focus on the ›economic potential‹ is institutionalizing this form of differential inclusion.

Keywords: migrant entrepreneur, differential inclusion, autonomy of migration, migration politics in Turkey, Syrian refugees

»After the Soviet Union collapsed, many people came with cash money from countries of poverty to Turkey. They brought products, which they had bought in Laleli and Aksaray in their suitcases to their countries and sold there. During this time, we did not prevent this trade. Even to let it flourish further, we eased the custom regulations and tried to regulate this trade at least partially. Now many of them have become important entrepreneurs in Russia. And the small business owners in Turkey who sold them products became exporters. So, I see this process happening also for Syrians. I think we should open the ways for Syrian entrepreneurs.« (Kürsat Tüzmen, former finance minister interpreting the increasing numbers of Syrian entrepreneurs, in Doğan 2015)¹

1 | Translated by author.

Since 2011, Syrian refugees have established more than six thousand enterprises in Turkey and their investment has reached over three hundred million dollars (Building Markets 2017). They make up almost half of the firms with foreign capital in 2016, far exceeding Germany, Iraq, Iran, and Azerbaijan.² One in every 40 enterprises established in Turkey is now Syrian, which is more frequent in southeastern cities; one in every six companies in Gaziantep and one in every three companies in Kilis are now established by Syrians (Sak 2015). Besides the official numbers, there are also many informal small enterprises, which are mostly the target of racist attacks (Şimşek 2015; Migrant Solidarity Network/Ankara 2016).³ According to earlier estimations (Ceylan 2015), the total number of Syrian businesses, including informal enterprises or those registered under a Turkish partner,⁴ has exceeded ten thousand and has probably increased in the last two years.

The reactions to these numbers indicate an emerging political discourse that interpellates Syrian refugees as enterprising subjectivities going beyond the dominant political discourse depicting Syrian refugees as victims and guests. This has also been presented as transformation from ›Turkey hosting the Syrians‹ to ›Syrians earning their livelihoods‹ with a new focus on their qualifications, networks, and entrepreneurial tradition (Kaymaz/Kadkoy 2016).

Research in the field of migration studies mostly discuss the relation of migrants to the labor market in Turkey by highlighting their role as a worker and not as an entrepreneur (Akalin 2007; Akpınar 2010; İçduygu 2006; Danis 2016; Lordoğlu 2005; Toksöz/Erdoğdu/Kaşka 2012). The studies mostly focus on migrant workers in the in-

2 | According to the data of The Union of Chambers and Commodity (TOBB), Syrians established 81 firms in 2011, 165 in 2012, 489 in 2013, 1257 in 2014, 1599 in 2015, and 1764 in 2016. Construction and real estate are the first choices, which are followed by restaurant business, consulting services, travel agencies, wholesale, and retail (Aksam 2016).

3 | In the night of the military coup attempt of summer 2016, a group organized through social media attacked the shops of Syrians in the Önder neighborhood in Ankara. They were calling for revenge of a Turkish young man who was allegedly injured in a fight in the neighborhood. They were calling out for Syrian shops to be attacked. Almost 100 shops run by Syrians were attacked and had damages during the whole night whereas none of the Turkish shops got damaged. According to the report of the Migrant Solidarity Network/Ankara, while some neighbors marked houses and shops belonging to Syrians or hung the sign ›this is a Turkish shop, don't throw stones‹ to protect themselves, some other neighbors showed solidarity with Syrian shop owners and tried to protect them from attacks (Migration Solidarity Network/Ankara 2016).

4 | This is a common strategy among refugees who can not get a work permission (Deniz/Ekinci/Hülür 2016).

formal sector; as caregivers in households, textile workers in sweatshops, as seasonal workers on the field. One common element is regarding them as victims; as victims of borders, the capitalist system, of racism, and sexism. Another is their invisibility;⁵ they work in private households, in cellar sweatshops, in the fields far from the urban city center. In other words, the focus has been mostly on how they are being regulated, controlled, exploited, and excluded. However, a focus on the technologies of inclusion and how the knowledge and expert systems are formed to generate or foster self-governing, self-optimized, self-enterprising refugees remain missing.

First, this paper introduces a critical theoretical discussion on migrant entrepreneurship. Following this introduction, the emerging discourse on the enterprising refugee is discussed in relation to historical references to the experiences of former migrants and their recuperation. This paper then presents the initial forms of inclusion of this figure into information and expert systems. Finally, it argues that changing migration politics with a focus on the ›economic potential‹ institutionalizes differential inclusion.

THE MIGRANT ENTREPRENEUR AND DIFFERENTIAL INCLUSION

The migrant entrepreneur, whose emergence coincides with the postfordist transformation, represents a figure in which the migrant status does not refer to a repressive exclusion, but rather to productive inclusion practices. The construction of their ›ethnicity‹ that prevents them from ›integrating‹ turns into an economic resource, a surplus value, which should be activated in the neoliberal market. Their ›entrepreneurial potential‹ is addressed by the neoliberal state via support programs for self-employment in order to activate this potential (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2003: 174–175). Successful role models are introduced and celebrated as desired subjects.

This form of inclusion involves ›various degrees of subordination, rule, discrimination, racism, disenfranchisement, exploitation and segmentation‹ as the concept of differential inclusion helps us acknowledge (Casas-Cortes et. al 2014: 25). Contrary to the assumption that neoliberalism flattens different forms of labor regime and rights, transnational striated spaces have emerged, which combine different forms of

5 | Erder (2016) argues that until the arrival of Syrian refugees, migrants in Turkey remained invisible for the public gaze, finding jobs in the informal economy (ibid.: 124). Of course, the high numbers of Syrian refugees also play a role for the increasing visibility of migrants/refugees in the public.

labor regimes and hierarchized forms of citizenship. These lateral spaces are not only governed through modes of regulatory control, based on autonomy, flexibility, and creativity, but also through ›older‹ ›carceral modes of discipline‹ (Ong 2006).

However, it would be mistaken to analyze this transformation as just a result of neoliberal forces. Rather, it takes place in an immanent field of tension between inclusion and exclusion. The struggles of migration involving lines of flight, everyday practices, and self-organization also belong to this field and transform it. The approach of autonomy of migration offers a method that brings these struggles into the foreground keeping the tension between the flight from exploitation and oppression and its recuperation (Bojadžijev/Liebelt 2014: 341). Challenging the classical theories of migration, it discusses migration as a constitutive force that can not be reduced to economy and politics (Papadopolous/Stephenson/Tsianos 2008), but moves transversal to these (Tsianos/Karakayali 2012: 20). The figure of the enterprising migrant that fosters new relations, manages to transform urban space, and is at the same time becoming integrated in the neoliberal framework through technologies of subjectivity, finds itself in this field of tension. There are two reasons why this approach would be fruitful to discuss this figure. First, it reveals the ambivalent character of the migrant entrepreneur who resists and challenges neoliberalism, but at the same time reproduces and pluralizes it from below.⁶ Second, it provides an alternative understanding of history which is necessary to unfold the role of struggles of migration in the formation of ›selective, hierarchical and spatially and temporarily heterogeneous nature of migration management characterized by differential inclusion‹ (Bojadžijev/Mezzadra 2015).

This paper delivers a discourse analysis on the emergence of the figure of the entrepreneur refugee. In order to do this, it traces reactions to statistics on enterprises established by Syrian refugees in Turkey, which, as this paper claims, has generated a dispositif of differential inclusion. The analysis contextualizes this newly forming inclusion discourse by relating it to the politics and history of migration in Turkey.

6 | Gago (2015) discusses this ambivalent character of migrant economies in Latin America; among other activities, of marginalized groups that used to be considered insignificant and unwanted and then started to become integrated in capitalist valorization.

THE EMERGING DISCOURSE ON THE ENTERPRISING REFUGEE

Although Syrian small-medium enterprises (SMEs) emerging in the urban economies have already gained visibility, Syrian refugee entrepreneurs first received attention in terms of economic contribution after Turkey's Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) announced with their statistics that they became the largest group of foreign entrepreneurs registered in 2014. In the following year, the statistics on Syrian export rates, which reached the lowest state due to war and ongoing crisis between Turkey and Syria, surprisingly showed an increase. Gaziantep also replaced Istanbul in terms of highest export rating city (Koru/Kadkoy 2017:121).⁷ This has mostly been explained by the increase of Syrian entrepreneurs in the southeastern region who »bring with them the know-how and familiarity of their home market« (ibid.).

Güven Sak, founding director of TEPAV-The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey, a TOBB affiliated think tank interpreting the surprising statistics on the Syrian refugee entrepreneurship, draws a parallel to the history of internal migration:

»The relationship of Turkey with Syrian immigrants is like its relation with the rural-to-urban migrants. Turkey has always said that those who migrate from rural areas to cities disrupt the cities. It always considered them a disturbance term. It said they broke the laws. It supposedly managed the rural-to-urban migration with urban development amnesties. Rather than adjusting its regulations according to real life, it sort of sought to adjust real life to its own regulations. It failed. But Turkey experienced rapid growth thanks to rural-to-urban migrants. We have come to this point by relocating millions from the country to urban centers.« (Sak 2015)

Whereas the early comers climbed the social ladder, they did this at the expense (the exploitation) of the newcomers; the migrants are »taking turns in poverty« in these informal economies as a study suggests (Isik/Pinarcioglu 2001). On the other hand, the presence of informal economy provided economic survival for irregular migrants in the absence of integration policies. Daniş (2005) gives the example of

7 | »Before the war, Istanbul was the export leader to Syria, with 616 million dollars in 2011. Now, it is Gaziantep with 426 million dollars in 2016. Hatay exports 214 million dollars.« (ibid.).

Afghan migrants creating informal employment opportunities in the leather trade for the newcomers who cannot access the regular labor market. She argues that this has been »a source of possibility and in an odd sense protection to international migrants« (ibid.: 88). Informal economy, which emerged in the process of urbanization and economic survival activities of internal migrants, is reproduced with the transnational networks of newcomers, creating precarization and exploitation but at the same time protection from and resistance to these.

Kürsat Tüzmen, former finance minister, who developed the ›Trading with neighbors‹ strategy of the Justice and Development Party governments in 2002 and 2007, welcomes the rising numbers of Syrian entrepreneurs and export rates (Doğan 2015). He explains that the ›trade with neighbors‹ strategy was initiated by the trade of people from the southeastern region with their relatives in Aleppo, Humus, and Damascus, and adds that the Syrian refugees who are coming to Turkey also have relatives left in Syria. Reinforcing the mythos of Lebanon and Syria as merchant nations, he racializes their trade tradition: »They have trade in their genes« (ibid.). He gives the example of the ›successful‹ ›shuttle trade‹ in the 1990s in Laleli (a district in Istanbul) and regards it as role model.

The Laleli shuttle trade provides an interesting case and can be discussed as an early form of migrant entrepreneurship in Turkey. In a period of liberalization of trade and finance starting in the 1980s, three different migrant groups »who have been marginalized from formal wage employment and entrepreneurship« met in the district Laleli and transformed this space into a transnational market space, fostering new relations and networks (Yükseker 2004: 53). Laleli district has come to be known as ›little Russia‹ in Istanbul or been called »Tower of Babel,« in which actually different groups of migrants live and work (Danis 2005). The most visible migrant group were (mostly) women from the former Soviet Union, who were circular migrants performing shuttle trade. Together with the Turks from Bulgaria who had migrated to Turkey, and the displacement of Kurds from Eastern Turkey, who later became small shop owners, they created an informal transnational business district as »the new vibrant picture of Turkey's famous entrepreneurial spirit« (Eder/Öz 2008).⁸

The emergence of this transnational community marks Turkey's transformation from a country of emigration to immigration which can also be traced by money; rev-

8 | Bulgarian Turks had the advantage of speaking Slavic language and were experienced in informal trade, whereas the Kurds coming from border cities had the experience of informal border trade. Also, the shuttle traders from Russia were already experienced before the collapse of the Soviet Union to create informal trade networks in order to get the rare consumption goods. Laleli has created a transnational community (Eder/Öz 2008).

enue from the ›suitcase trade‹ proved to be higher than the total income of remittances starting from the mid-1990s on.⁹ Due to Syrian refugees, the circular character of the Laleli phenomenon as a transnational market space has settled and even proliferated, diffusing to other districts, and overcoming the monopoly of Istanbul as a global city. These developments have steered the attention towards small and medium sized cities in the southeastern region.

These historical references to experiences of internal migrants and the transnational space of Laleli show how the figure of the enterprising migrant is actually not solely designed by neoliberal forces, but that it rather emerged in the process of transformation of social structures through the struggles of migration. Demonstrating that the spaces of migrant economies are historically contested is important in two ways to understand the emerging discourse on the enterprising refugee. First, it reveals the struggles of migrants behind the new forms of inclusion promoting Syrian refugee entrepreneurs, celebrating their self-organized economic activities. Second, it unfolds the process of extraction¹⁰ of these migrant economies which were initially either unwanted, unrecognized, or ignored and that are now becoming included in capitalist valorization. Both examples of discourses referring to migrant economies acknowledge their economic contribution and call for regulations and support programs. The interpellation of these economic survival strategies in the political discourses aims to turn them into a potential resource of refugees which can be activated in a neoliberal framework.

9 | Although it started to decrease in the late 2000s because of the restriction of the flexible visa regime and as part of the policy measures against irregular migration (Icduygu 2009: 24), it may have increased again due to Syrian refugees.

10 | Extraction started to be discussed recently as more than an economic activity. Entering the language of critical theory; the meaning of extraction is expanded to understand the new forms of exploitation in contemporary finance capitalism which functions through extracting value from social cooperation (Sassen 2014; Mezzadra/Neilson 2017; Gago 2015).

THE NEOLIBERAL ENGINEERING OF THE ENTERPRISING REFUGEE

The Think 20 (T20)¹¹ proposals of Turkey in the policy area of ›forced migration‹ presented by TEPAV introduce the economic potential of enterprising refugees and how this should be activated (TEPAV 2017):

»When refugee entrepreneurs are displaced, they do not always have the opportunity to transfer their capital from one country to another. However, refugee entrepreneurs bring with them their web of relations, a culture of doing business and sector-specific expertise. As such, refugee entrepreneurship has the potential to facilitate private sector development, not only through employment generation, but also through the diversification of existing production and trade capabilities.« (ibid.)

According to this proposal, refugee entrepreneurs could be supported by G20 countries in two ways: One is to launch startup visa programs for refugees; the other one is the mobilization of the private sector and multinational companies for the establishment of Made by Refugee Zones. These could then bring procurement contracts for the SMEs of refugees (or refugee partnered SMEs) in the refugee hosting countries. For Turkey, it would be a ›Made in Turkey by Syrians‹-program by creating a unique certificate of origin, securing bulk orders from large retailers such as Ikea and Walmart (Sak 2016). The special economic zones have been criticized as new forms and spaces of exploitation with ›exceptional‹ labor contracts and rights, governed by overlapping forms of regulatory and disciplinary controls (Ong 2006). Although there is no concrete project of Made by Refugee Zones in Turkey initiated by G20 countries yet, the proposal of supporting refugee entrepreneurs is happening through the mediation of international organizations and NGOS.

The programs to support the entrepreneurship of refugees already started right after the ›Regulation on Work Permits of Foreigners under Temporary Protection‹ (15 January 2016), initiated by international organizations, NGOs, and NPOs. In summer 2016, ILO-Turkey together with the Syrian Friendship Association organized a workshop under the title »Labour Market Problems Faced by Syrian Workers, Employers and Entrepreneurs and Suggestions for Solution« (ILO 2016a). The increase in numbers of enterprises with Syrian partners was drawn attention to in the opening speech of the director of ILO Ankara. He emphasized that the »facilitation of investments

11 | Think 20 consists of global think tanks and high level experts analyzing the ongoing G20 discussions and presents their conclusions as policy options to G20 working groups.

and business initiatives by Syrians will contribute to the employment, foreign trade, and economic growth« (ibid.). ILO also offered entrepreneurship trainings, besides vocational, technical, and skills development, to Syrian refugees through their project »Improving Livelihoods and Decent Work Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities« (ILO 2016b). IOM launched a program in early 2017, distributing professional toolkits to 300 Syrian refugees selected for the initial pilot project who are starting up small businesses in Turkey (IOM 2017). They also provided entrepreneurship trainings for Syrian refugee students in Gaziantep in cooperation with innocampus (Innocampus 2015). İmece is another project organized by UNHCR and Habitat, which is an NGO in the field of sustainable development, for Syrian entrepreneurs or entrepreneur candidates (80%) who »want[s] to contribute to the growth of Turkey with their skills and economic resources for a common future« and for Turkish entrepreneurs (20%) (İmece 2016). A non-profit organization with close ties to the leading private sector called the Young Guru Academy and that aims at raising ›leaders with social responsibilities,‹ organized the project ›Not for Syrians, We work with Syrians.‹ As a result of field research conducted by young Syrian YGA volunteers who were mentored by leading figures from the private sector, including a scientist and a writer, *WeTalk* technology is being developed which translates written and oral messages from Turkish to Arabic (Milliyet 2017). There are also research projects gathering information on refugee enterprises for the purpose of policy recommendations (İncesulu 2017). A recent research project by an NPO suggests that Syrian refugees spur entrepreneurship and job creation in Turkey (Building Markets 2017). The success stories are circulated in the media and in conferences. Promoting refugee entrepreneurship takes the neoliberal discourse on the upward mobility of migrant entrepreneurs a step further: precarity, which would describe the situation of many Syrian refugees in Turkey, turns into a resource that has to be channeled economically. Honig (2001) argues that the guideline (or slogan) ›if they can do it, anyone can do it‹ underlining this form of promotion and reveals the fact that it not only functions as a way to govern migrants, but also the whole society. The inclusion of the economic survival activities of Syrian refugees in the knowledge and expert systems of the migration regime via the mediation of NGOs constitutes a part of governing refugees to take care for themselves; a mode of governing that holds the potential to expand into the whole society.

CHANGING MIGRATION POLITICS

In addition to the discourse on the enterprising refugee, there is also a parallel discourse emphasizing the skills and qualifications of refugees. Erdoğan's call for naturalization, which he first announced during a fast breaking organization for Syrian refugees in Kilis a few months after the EU-Turkey migration deal, does not cover all Syrian refugees. He deliberately draws attention to highly qualified refugees, such as doctors and architects, with a focus on common values, which explicitly refers to Sunni Syrian refugees (NTV 2016). In the speeches in which he calls for naturalizing Syrian refugees, he underlines the rising costs of humanitarian aid for refugees, which has reached 25 billion dollars and offers citizenship as a solution to this ›cost problem‹ (ibid.). The striking aspect of this argument is that citizenship is offered in order to minimize the state's ›burden,‹ responsibility, and costs of humanitarian aid.

In contrast to the initial open door policy, to the pro-refugee political discourse of the government, and the call for naturalization, there is no sufficient plan, regulation, or legal framework to facilitate participation of Syrian refugees — especially regarding the labor market, education, health services, or housing. This issue has been labeled as pseudo integration (Icduygu/Millet 2016) and criticized by pointing out the emerging securitization and preventive measures (Toğral Koca 2016) of ›generosity‹-based politics (Özden 2016).

However, due to the de facto participation of Syrian refugees and pressure from the EU, the government has started to take certain legal steps. In January 2016, after five years of the arrival of Syrian refugees, the Regulation on Work Permits for Foreigners under Temporary Protection has been passed.¹² There are certain conditions to apply for a work permit: One should be registered for the status ›under temporary protection‹ for more than six months, apply for a position that is in the city where the applicant is registered, not be paid less than minimum wage, and one should not surpass ten percent of the number of Turkish citizen employees. The seasonal work-

12 | According to the statistics of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, 14,063 work permits for Syrians have been granted in 2016, which is three times more than the previous year, but still makes only approximately 0.5 of the Syrian population in Turkey (The statistics are acquired by using the Statistical Management Information System of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security). In spite of the newly introduced work permit, the majority of the Syrian refugees are working in the informal sector. According to estimations as of 2015, at least 300,000 Syrians work in Turkey — which makes ten percent of the Syrian refugees in Turkey (Erdogan/Ünver 2015: 45) and one third of the working Syrians are paid less than minimum wage without the social benefits (Pinar/Siverekli/Demir 2015: 25).

ers in agriculture and stockbreeding are exempted from the work permit. In addition to this, and to attract highly qualified migrants, an International Labour Force Law was passed in July 2016. Here, the guidelines of international labor politics are introduced: the education level, occupational experience of the applicant, contribution to science and technology, the impact of the planned activity or investment in Turkey to the economy and employment, and the capital share is to be evaluated if the applicant is a foreign company partner.

These changes in migration politics demonstrates the institutionalization of differential inclusion creating »different degrees of precarity, vulnerability and freedom by granting and closing access to resources and rights according to economic, individualizing, and racist rationales« (Casas Cortes et al. 2014: 25). The figure of the refugee entrepreneur, unfolded in the history of struggles of migration and captured in knowledge and expert systems of the migration regime — as this paper claims — plays an ambivalent role in the discursive formation of differential inclusion; on the one hand by creating spaces of resistance and protection opening a way for inclusion and, on the other hand, by creating new forms of exploitation and precarity that go along with further stratification and hierarchization.

CONCLUSION

The changing migration politics in Turkey show that the right to access the labor market, which used to be very difficult, is proliferating, though fragmented in a form of differential inclusion. Temporary work permits for Syrian refugees who are under temporary protection, exemptions to seasonal workers among them, a selective policy for highly qualified people and entrepreneurs are introduced according to the needs of labor management. As I discussed it with the emergence of the discourse on the enterprising refugee, there are also struggles of migration behind this form of differential inclusion. However, new neoliberal forms of knowledge and expert systems capturing these experiences to generate self-governing, self-optimized, self-enterprising refugees are emerging through the mediation of international organizations, NGOs, and NPOs. Whereas the Syrian refugee entrepreneurs (and the ones with qualifications) are being celebrated/welcomed in the emerging discourse and selectively included in the neoliberal framework, the cheap labor of refugees remains rather silent in this developing dispositif.

In spite of the formation of striated spaces with the dispositif of the refugee entrepreneur, there are also emerging smooth spaces, such as »Kadın Kadına Mülteci Mutfağı.« Women refugees cook home-made marmalade and sell it with the solidar-

ity of supporters (Besler 2017). They not only make a living without a boss, but also make connections with other women and create transnational solidarity networks. Further research could explore whether this form of refugee enterprise that generates solidarity instead of exclusion and exploitation remains marginal or whether there are more fractions to the neoliberal migration politics.

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