

Border Contestations, Syrian Refugees and Violence in the Southeastern Margins of Turkey

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Abstract: Although the tensions and conflicts between the local population and the refugees at the border regions do erupt at times, they are by no means the immediate consequences of the encounters among locals and refugees. Rather, they are mediated by the ways in which the emergency and societal responses to the ›refugee crisis‹ are politically deployed and discursively narrated. Drawing on Walters' distinction between three historically different trajectories of territorial borders, namely ›geopolitical borders,‹ ›national borders,‹ and ›biopolitical borders,‹ this paper argues that the emergency and societal responses to the Syrian refugees at the Syrian-Turkish border express the trajectory of Turkish-Syrian border as a geopolitical and national border. Focusing on the contestations among Turkish citizens, Syrian refugees and local authorities in the context of refugee reception in the border city of Gaziantep, the paper demonstrates that ›geopolitical‹ and ›national‹ borders in southeastern Turkey should not be conceived of as being firmly in place. Rather, they are quickly upended by nationalist violence and transborder ethnic ties, compelling state authorities to seek stability and assimilation among the border populations.

Keywords: Syrian refugees, Turkish-Syrian border, geopolitical border, national border, border and migration control, local conflicts

In the context of emergencies, borderlands are very often the first regions to turn into temporary sanctuaries for fleeing refugees. Borderlands therefore allow researchers to instantly observe early states of emergency and societal responses as well as the conflicts erupting from the discourses, ideologies, and practices underlying these responses. Although the eruption of tensions and conflicts between the local population and the refugees at the border regions do occur at times, these tensions are by no means the immediate consequences of the encounters among locals and refugees. Rather, they are mediated by the ways in which the emergency and societal responses to the ›refugee crisis‹ are politically deployed and discursively narrated. As such, exploring these tensions and conflicts informs us about the nature of nation-state borders and political anxieties of the state revolving around them. Such anxieties about borders often address the questions of migration, citizenship, and belonging. To observe these tensions, this paper focuses on the Turkish-Syrian border and the reception of

Syrian refugees fleeing conflict and violence by the Turkish society. It explores how the reactions among the local population at the border have been shaped and turned into struggles over the definition and meaning of society — over the question who belongs and who does not.

There is an increasing scholarly emphasis laid on the concept of »biopolitical power« (Foucault, 1998 [1976]) in analyses of the border and migration regimes in the European context in recent years.¹ William Walters (2002), for instance, is among the pioneering scholars who have drawn attention to the recent deployment of the border as a site of »biopolitical management.« His study of border controls within the framework of the European Union calls for a genealogical analysis as a methodology to »denaturalize« territorial borders and highlight their historicity and changing functionality. Walters' analysis reveals the contingency of the configuration of sovereignty, territory, and population associated with the modern state (ibid.: 576).

Walters distinguishes between three more or less historically different trajectories underlying territorial borders: »geopolitical borders,« »national borders,« and »biopolitical borders« (Walters 2002). According to him, the geopolitical border, prevalent in the 17th and 18th century of European colonialism, implies the state's interest in gaining total control over its territory with borders clearly defined at its limits. Thus, the demarcation of borders expresses states' desire to achieve power, peace, and security. The »national border« has a homogenizing and standardizing role. It demarcates a population and turns it into a »nation.« In an enclosed political territory, the national border has the function of providing national unity, by removing ethnic enclaves or assimilating them into the nation. Lastly, the biopolitical border — as the main characteristic of the contemporary border — brings to the fore the filtering function of border controls. Walters views it as an instrument of »biopower« in a Foucauldian sense, the biopolitical border being the site for the regulation of a national and transnational population. The biopolitical border is to be understood as an assortment of old and new technologies to produce a population as a knowable and governable entity (ibid.: 573).

Nevertheless, the border is not a homogeneous unit and there can be many borderlands along a geopolitical frontier with particular and distinct »border cultures«

1 | For a reference to EU borders as biopolitical borders within the context of recent refugee migration to Europe after summer 2015, see Vaughan-Williams 2015. Recently, a few references have appeared regarding the notion of biopolitical governance in the analysis of Turkish migration and borders in general; see, for instance, Toğral-Koca 2014; Topak 2014; Fine 2013; Kaşlı/Parla 2009; Biehl 2015.

(Donnan/Wilson 1999). The borderlands, with multiple actors and straddling ties across the border, affect the display of state power. Against the backdrop of recent social dynamics along the Syrian-Turkish border, I will problematize whether this conceptual framework — focusing on the biopolitical border as the main trajectory of borders today — could be embraced in the analysis of Turkish migration and border control. Following Walters' distinction, I suggest to regard the emergency and societal responses to the Syrian refugees rather as expressions of geopolitical and national trajectories of the Turkish-Syrian border that are distinguished from his conception of a biopolitical border. Walters defines ›the border‹ as a larger heterogeneous assemblage of discursive and nondiscursive practices (Walters 2002). In the scope of this paper, I refer to the everyday practices of urban dwellers at the Turkish-Syrian border as well as activities of local political actors and humanitarian NGOs. From the vantage point of the border, the reception of refugees in Turkey will be conceived as a complex issue, calling for an examination of the ongoing debates about Syrian refugees. While the debates appear to be dominated by biopolitical reasoning deploying knowledge and resources to regulate and manage the refugee population, a closer look will bring the geopolitical sentiments and national belongings beneath these debates to the surface. These sentiments indicate that the Turkish border and reception policies concerning Syrian refugees are highly influenced by the delicate issue of ›national unity‹ and the long-lasting fractions and conflicts about the Kurdish question.

To support my discussion, I focus on the contestations among Turkish citizens, Syrian refugees, and local authorities in the context of refugee reception in the border city of Gaziantep. Through these contestations, the locals draw boundaries between ›deserving‹ and ›undeserving‹ refugees, while they also seek to challenge the state in an attempt to redefine the society and its members. These contestations also demonstrate that ›geopolitical‹ and ›national‹ borders in southeastern Turkey should not be conceived of as being firmly in place. Rather, they are quickly upended by nationalist violence and transborder ethnic ties, compelling state authorities to seek stability and assimilation among the border populations.

With its geographical proximity to Aleppo, Gaziantep ranks fourth among Turkish cities in terms of the population of Syrian refugees. In a city of nearly two million people, the General Directory of Migration Management estimated the number of Syrian refugees to be 329,670, including camp refugees, in March 2017 (Basın İlan Kurumu 2017). This means that the total amount of Syrian refugees presently makes up 16.7% of the city's inhabitants. The primary data of my research stems from a month-long fieldwork including semi-structured interviews with both Turkish locals and Syrian refugees. I conducted them during the summer of 2016 in the old city

center and the city's slum areas, which are populated by an old migrant community of mixed ethnic and religious backgrounds with differing neighborhood identities. Working-class Syrians reside in these neighborhoods, thanks to the affordable housing and shops as well as its proximity to industrial workplaces.

I illustrate the contestations among the urban dwellers of Gaziantep by presenting two cases that followed each other in a short time span in late summer 2014: first, the widespread anti-Syrian sentiments and hostility — particularly dominating the slum areas — and second, the affection and grassroots humanitarianism, fostered by cross-border solidarity with refugees from the Syrian town of Kobanê. It was in this setting that the events, which tainted the city slums with violence and that demonstrated the level of contestations, took place. In the former, the hostility towards the Syrians momentarily culminated in widespread attacks against them. In the latter case, the bitterness among Kurdish citizens about the apparent alignment of the AKP government with the Islamic State attacking Kobanê, a small border town with a strategic location in the north of Syria bridging the Kurdish autonomous zones, unleashed violent confrontations between Kurdish protestors and the Turkish authorities.

ANTI-SYRIAN HOSTILITY

The anti-Syrian hostility in Gaziantep can be best attested by the riots that broke out on the night of August 11, 2014, after the alleged murder of a Turkish landlord by his Syrian tenant. The events sparked or unleashed hatred against Syrians among the Turkish locals. Youth mobs attempted to lynch Syrians and vandalized their shops and cars. Even Syrian homes were looted by unknown assailants (see MAZLUMDER 2015 for a detailed account of the attacks). The tumultuous situation lasting several days caused the enraged youth carrying Turkish flags to terrorize the Syrians on the street, and many of the wounded ended up in hospitals. Although the police forces eventually got the riot under control on the third day, sporadic attacks still continued in the aftermath, and, according to the interview accounts, the Syrians, threatened by mass violence, were compelled to shut themselves in their homes in the following weeks.

Accounts gathered in the interviews reflect how the Turkish locals developed anti-Syrian hostility when Syrians were conceived as crossing moral lines. For instance, a Syrian refugee sitting on the lawn to enjoy an urban park, launching a small business to compete with Turkish locals, occupying the waiting line in public hospitals or the pavement space of narrow alleys in slum areas were interpreted by some (Turkish) interviewees as Syrian transgression of Turkish hospitality. The following account of

a *mukhtar*² in the Karayılan-Türkmenler area is illustrative. In this part of the city, Syrians' housing was brutally attacked and small shops run by Syrian refugees in the neighborhood alleys are barely left, except for a few grocery stores and tailor shops.

The *mukhtar* introduced himself as the man who guided the police forces when the locals rioted against the Syrians and the latter were evicted from the shops they had rented. Apparently, the hot summer nights did not allow the tenants, mostly male bachelors, to take shelter in the shop, and they needed to open the pull-down shutters. According to the *mukhtar*, the Syrians started to sit on the pavement during the nights and smoked water-pipe tobacco, for the locals a symbol for how different the Syrian culture allegedly is. The slum dwellers normally have a habit of sitting on the pavement day and night, since the slums often lack green spaces and parks. According to the *mukhtar*, the Syrian tenants sneaked into the midst of slum dwellers by gradually and mischievously occupying more space on the sidewalks, a space that was apparently not designated for Syrians.

For the *mukhtar*, the Syrians disturbed the order and acted immorally by slipping into the common space of the alley. Since I recognized a common (racist) cliché about Syrians, I tried to provoke him by asking whether the Syrian culture did not include any element that the locals could appropriate. He repudiated by saying: »The Syrians do not have anything nice that we [the Turkish people] can borrow.« Similar to the *mukhtar*'s account, many interviewees draw on the negative stereotypes and images of Arab identity historically produced by Turkish nationalism. The rise of »nationalist consciousness« at the Turkish-Syrian border dates back to the early nineteenth century and was reinforced by the mutual rise of Turkish and Arab nationalist waves during the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire (Watenpaugh 2005). World War I and the Entente Powers demarcating an Arab nation-state in the Ottoman Syria and Iraq under their own auspices further helped to anchor the perception of Arabs among the local community, which has indoctrinated by the way history has been written during wartime and early Republican period.³ The city of Gaziantep, involved in the War of Independence against the occupation of Entente Powers between 1919 and 1921, is named after the exalted status of »veterans« (*gazi* in Turkish). The wartime history still resonates today in the popularized accounts and urban iconography glorifying the »heroic« resistance against the would-be enemy.

2 | A *mukhtar* is an elected head of a village or neighborhood.

3 | Çiçek (2012) brilliantly demonstrates, for instance, how the trope of »Arab treason during the World War I« is effectively reproduced during the early Republican period in the Turkish schoolbooks as part of nation-building process.

Furthermore, it should be remembered that the arrival of Syrian refugees triggered discontent among the locals as early as they started to cross the border. This happened despite the strong kinship and trade bonds revived by the economic and political convergence between Turkey and Syria in the past decade and until the reversal in the relationship of the two governments due to the war in Syria and the Turkish government's aim to topple Assad. Rumors about the alleged unreliability, lewd demeanor and misbehavior of the Syrian refugees widely circulated the border regions (Şenoğuz 2014). Özden (2013), for instance, stated in her 2013 report on the situation of Syrian refugees in the border city of Hatay that the talk among the locals could verge on hate speech when they spoke about their cultural differences with the ›peasant,‹ ›non-urban,‹ and ›uneducated‹ Syrians (ibid.: 10).

In the neighborhoods I visited, the stigmatization of Syrian refugees embodying stereotypes associated with Arabic identity could be particularly observed among my Turkmen interviewees. As they put it, the ethnic Turkmen used to suffer from discrimination in Syria because of their ›non-Arab‹ background, while, after their immigration to Gaziantep, they were harassed by their Turkish neighbors because they were perceived as ›Arab.‹ »We have become Arab here [after we came to Gaziantep],« a Turkmen woman asserted. Still, the linguistic affinity between the Syrian Turkmen and Turkish locals has helped the former to elude the sporadic attacks on the street. Several Turkmen interviewees told me that they could prevent being attacked during those tumultuous days because they could respond in Turkish to the local youth who intercepted them on their way to their home or work and pretend to be Turkish natives.

The emergency responses to the anti-Syrian riot reinforced ›national‹ boundaries between locals and refugees. For example, the mayor of Gaziantep, Fatma Şahin, announced preparations under the roof of governorship to replace Arabic signs with Turkish ones (Posta 2014). The authorities announced to the public that Syrian housing characterized by unhealthy conditions would be evicted. The mayor promised an immediate solution to the problem by saying: »Our priority is our *own* citizens« (Milliyet 2014; emphasis added by HPS).⁴ According to the local press, the authorities identified 7,800 Syrians living in the conflict-ridden areas (Gaziantep Güneş 2014). The police forces detained Syrian families living on the ground floors of unplastered and cheaply built apartments, in ruined factory and housing buildings, makeshift tents

4 | However, the MAZLUMDER report states that while about 7,000 Syrians had to move within the city, 3,250 of them were resettled in the camps. During these tumultuous days, the mayor announced that the İslahiye tent camp in Gaziantep near the Syrian border would be enlarged to a capacity of 25,000 (see MAZLUMDER 2015).

in the parks, or on the street collecting garbage and relocated them to refugee camps. According to the locals, some families who refused to live in the camps were compelled to leave the city or return to Syria (Zete 2014; MAZLUMDER 2015). As a remedy to anti-Syrian hostility, the authorities initiated the replacement of Arabic signs by Turkish ones in Syrian shops as well as the replacement of Syrian license plates by Turkish car licenses, while still marking the owner as Syrian by only issuing temporary license plates (Hürriyet 2015).

The emergency measures also point to the ease of local authorities in co-opting the anti-Syrian rioters, who undid the state practices of control and law enforcement, by containing the Syrian refugees and not the attackers. That governmental measures result in the incrimination of violence victims rather than the lynching mobs is far from rarely seen in Turkish history. The Turkish scholar Zeynep Gambetti (2013) asserts in a discussion about the legitimate use of violence passed on to society from the state's monopoly, that the extralegal violence committed by lynch-attempting mobs — as they attack dissenters or would-be enemies of the state — points to the limits of state sovereignty. Such attacks open the path to negotiations on the definition of legitimate violence, while the assailants can move on with impunity. To her, legitimate violence turns the mob into an »officer-citizen« challenging the law enforcement officials and replacing them in their function as officers (ibid.: 130). She argues that this means the pluralization of sites of regulation, which are — following Das/Poole (2004) — construed as lying outside, or prior to, the state, but do not necessarily undermine state power. In light of Gambetti's argument, I assert that the rioters assume the authority to set limits to and impose spatial control over the refugees. Hence, the co-opting of emergency measures serves to incriminate Syrian refugees as ›troublemakers‹ in the slum areas.

GRASSROOTS HUMANITARIANISM FOR KOBANÊ REFUGEES

An offensive launched by the so-called ›Islamic State‹ (IS) against the town of Kobanê in north Syria in September 2014 caused a high number of refugees fleeing to the Turkish border crossing in Suruç, a district of Şanlıurfa bordering Syria. The town of Kobanê is largely populated by the Kurdish Syrians and is a stronghold of the Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*, PYD). PYD claims an ideological affiliation with the political platform of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of PKK, and the town is a strategic location for the territorial unification of the three Kurdish cantons in the north of Syria. Therefore, the IS offensive against the small town, threatening atrocity and slaughter, was regarded by Kurdish political circles in

Turkey and elsewhere as a threat to the Kurdish existence in the region. It was reminiscent of the recent massacre against the Yazidi community by the IS in the Iraqi city of Shingal in early August 2014.

When the fleeing Kobanê refugees rushed to the border crossing, the border authorities did not initially allow them to enter (Tait/Al-Qasem 2014). The Kurdish political actors compelled the Turkish government to yield control at the border when the Kobanê crisis erupted and to accept the refugees.⁵ They also undertook diplomatic attempts to prevent the Turkish government from backing the IS militants and to open Turkey's border to the delivery of arms sent by Masoud Barzani, the President of Kurdistan Region of Iraq, to the Kurdish militia forces fighting in Kobanê. The Kurdish actors expected that the ongoing peace negotiations between the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state might raise the prospects for a solution in the case of Kobanê. Nevertheless, these attempts proved futile and the intensified assault of IS in Kobanê led to street protests and violent clashes between Kurdish protestors and law enforcement in the southeastern part of Turkey as well as in major cities in western Turkey.⁶

The reluctance of the Turkish government to open the borders to the refugees, following President Erdoğan's notorious speech in a refugee camp of Gaziantep about the fall of Kobanê (Saul 2014), helped the genesis of grassroots humanitarianism. As a result, a grassroots humanitarianism, which entailed the charity activities of Kurdish as well as Turkish leftist political actors as well as the locals who sympathized with them, together with resistance efforts against the IS siege by Kurdish militia in Kobanê, highlighted the cross-border affection among the Kurdish people. Here, a mental map of Kurdistan was drawn, including the Syrian *Rojava* — in Kurdish, this word means ›the West‹ and it is a metonym standing for West Kurdistan. Taking advantage of the geographical proximity, the Kurdish political actors were able to

5 | According to my interviewees, the clashes with Turkish law enforcement resumed at the border when the Kurdish opposition decided to march to the border in order to cross to the other side and join the local militia in Kobanê, or help refugees and wounded fighters enter. Additionally, the pro-Kurdish Democratic Regions Party (Demokratik Bölgele Partisi, DBP) organized its regional forces to set up vigils in the border villages day and night in order to stop IS fighters from sneaking onto the Turkish side and from going behind the Kurdish fighters in Kobanê, who were stranded in the town, wedged against the closed Turkish border in the north, and besieged by IS all around.

6 | During October 5–6, 2014, a large-scale protest and associated violence resulted in more than 40 deaths, including five civilians being killed in the city of Gaziantep (Amnesty International 2015).

mobilize a local solidarity campaign in Gaziantep and recruit party members to join the opposition at the Kobanê border.

Amnesty International (2015) reported the total number of Kobanê refugees entering across the Turkish border in the aftermath of the IS attack to be 200,000. Kurdish political actors accused the Turkish government of hampering their humanitarian efforts to provide assistance to Kobanê.⁷ According to a former HDP head in Gaziantep, only one-fourth of Kobanê refugees were provided resettlement and aid by the national authorities in the border camps, while the rest were taken care by the HDP-run Suruç municipality, Kurdish associations and local families. According to a crisis response report by a Syrian NGO, the tension between the Kurdish humanitarian actors and state actors providing aid to Kobanê refugees was quite clear, so that the international NGOs had to choose between them in order to cooperate extensively and deliver aid (Bihar Relief Organisation 2014).

Kobanê refugees maintained their kinship ties and sought temporary refuge in Gaziantep, with the old migrants of Suruç (the Kurdish of Turkey) in Gaziantep as the largest migrant group, becoming a pull factor for their relatives from Kobanê. A DBP member estimated that one thousand families from Kobanê had temporarily immigrated to Gaziantep. As he noted, the party commissioned a working group to launch a humanitarian campaign for helping these families, gathering provisions mainly among the ›old‹ Kurdish migrants dwelling in the city. Supervised by DBP, the humanitarian campaign leveraged the Kurdish grassroots, who assumed that the AKP government and its politics of assistance would discriminate against the Syrian refugees on the basis of their ethnicity. Though unable to find corroborating evidence from my interviews with the humanitarian institutions, the aid distribution was questioned not only by the Kurdish citizens of Turkey, but also by the Syrian Kurdish interviewees. Both groups tended to think that the ethnic identity of Syrian refugees had mattered for receiving humanitarian aid either from the governmental or non-governmental organizations, and that the Kurdish Syrians might be discriminated against. Hence, the ethnic identification encouraged the Kurdish locals, themselves old migrants in the slum areas, to open their houses or rent their property for lower prices to Kobanê refugees. The staple goods distributed to the Kurdish refugees from Kobanê were also donated by Kurdish locals.

My interviewees suggest that the AKP stance on the Kobanê siege led to strong resentment among its Kurdish citizens and discredited Erdoğan's commitment to the

7 | A HDP board member in Gaziantep indicates that the Turkish government tried to hinder their assistance to Kobanê refugees by cutting off the electricity of the camps and by attempting to seize the winter tents sent by a Kurdish NGO from the Netherlands.

ongoing peace negotiations with the Kurdish insurgency. The former HDP head, for instance, argued that the Kobanê protests raised awareness amongst the Kurdish dwellers in Gaziantep to a large degree and raised ›Kurdish consciousness‹ with the street protests in the city as well as in the larger southeast area of Turkey in light of the calls of HDP, PKK leader Öcalan and other political organizations linked with the Kurdish insurgency. As the interviewees asserted, the Kobanê protests helped spread Kurdish politicization beyond the urban outskirts of Gaziantep and helped to downplay the class divisions among the Kurdish residents. For the Kurdish political circles, the protests reinstated the city's old status as a hotbed of the Kurdish insurgency, where its former cadres were mobilized. According to the former HDP head, the protestors who took to the street even included the Kurdish constituencies of the ruling party AKP, which signified a cleavage on the assimilation of Kurdish identity by Turkish nation-building.

Although local Kurdish entrepreneurs disapproved of the Kobanê protests as a return to violence at the expense of peace negotiations, the protests brought the selective humanitarianism of the government to the businesspersons' attention, thus, resulting in fostering care to Kobanê refugees among the larger Kurdish community. As a local HDP member in Düztepe area suggested, the campaign to provide help to Kobanê immigrants received a lot of financial aid from the Kurdish tradespeople and shopkeepers in the neighborhoods. I also observed that the Kurdish middle class and industrial entrepreneurs in the more developed areas of the city not only supported the Kobanê refugees but also began to finance the reconstruction of the almost completely destroyed town of Kobanê as well as the Kurdish militia's warfare in Syria. Backed by the optimism of the ongoing peace negotiations between the Kurdish insurgency and the Turkish state at that time, it clearly meant a reversal of the tendency among the local Kurdish bourgeoisie, which used to deny any affiliation or support to Kurdish political actors for their commercial interests.

The role of Kobanê resistance locates Syrian Rojava not only as a strategic point for publicizing the Kurdish model of ›democratic self-government‹ to European eyes. It also serves as a symbol for the Kurdish ›homeland,‹ drawing on a narrative of an epic battle by young ›martyrs.‹ For instance, the humanitarian campaign led by the Kurdish political actors for Kobanê refugees highlights their vulnerability, and prioritizes aid on the basis of ›martyred‹ family members. In their viewpoint, the ›martyrs‹ in the family signify their participation in the Kobanê resistance and indicate their shared consciousness for the Kurdish political struggle. According to interviews and media accounts, many Kobanê refugees have returned to Syria following the call of PYD. Thus, the campaign remained limited to the aid given to the Kobanê refugees until their return in May 2015 and did not cover those who remained in and those who

came back to Gaziantep after returning to Kobanê. Compulsory military service and the economically dire straits in the Kurdish cantons may affect the decision of Syrian Kurds to cross over to Turkish soil. These refugees are viewed among the Kurdish political circles in Gaziantep as ›economic migrants‹ and deemed to be ›undeserving‹ refugees.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I framed the emergency and societal responses related to the incoming Syrian refugees in the border city of Gaziantep with reference to Walters' distinction between different trajectories of territorial borders. Considering his accentuation of the contingent nature of how sovereignty, territory, and population can be associated in the modern state, I suggested to regard the local tensions and conflicts among the Turkish citizens, Syrian refugees, and state authorities in the southeastern borderlands of Turkey in terms of the ›geopolitical‹ and ›national‹ border. In other words, the Turkish state does not embrace a ›biopolitical‹ governance of migration control by producing the Syrian refugees as a knowable and governable population, as much as it invests in retaining its territorial control and national integrity.

As the Turkish state continues to invest in achieving what it sees as ›peace and security‹ which is the definition of state geopolitics according to Walters, and by denying the ›Kurdish question‹ its southeastern borderlands as well as metropolitan cities will be doomed to unrest. Although the peace negotiations between the AKP government and the Kurdish insurgency have failed and the semantic field opened up by the Kobanê resistance no longer helps to mobilize larger segments of Kurdish working-class people and entrepreneurs, the frame of collective action, which emerged with the Kobanê protests, will remain a dormant force in the city. However, it is still possible to observe an increased tendency of anti-Syrian sentiments among the Kurdish grassroots. For instance, an established parallelism among the Kurdish grassroots, between the neo-conservative AKP rule and the IS' self-proclaimed caliphate as well as the IS-led violence in Gaziantep, like the recent suicide attack during a Kurdish street wedding, are likely to increase the worrisome anti-Syrian sentiments in the slum areas that Kurdish political actors should take as a warning. As the border city of Gaziantep, host of the Syrian Interim Government set up by the Syrian National Coalition and an alleged stronghold of the IS financial operations, turns into a black box, one must wonder about the possible compromises between Turkish and various other actors operating in the region. Nobody knows yet whether the emergent actors of the region will trigger new violent clashes and further highlight this zone as

contested frontier of identity. Nobody knows yet whether the ›Syrian spaces,‹ where the refugees might build a community, will emerge or prevail in this border region together with the help of Syrian economic positions or businesses and the international humanitarian sector, despite the careful delineation between the ›deserving‹ and ›undeserving‹ refugees.

In the light of this discussion, I am prompted to suggest a further research agenda that investigates in what ways Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries receiving large numbers of refugees in recent decades differ in terms of governmental technologies and practices from their Western counterparts. Transborder and transregional networks, the pluralization of regulatory authorities in the border zones, local actors, and sophisticated patronage relationships with the central power also characterize modern governance in these countries. The future will show how the relationships between sovereignty, territory, and population will be re-configured in the Middle Eastern context unsettled by conflicts and war, displacement and new formations of trade geographies. Also, this geography may teach us novel methodologies and conceptual framings that help to investigate these configurations.

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