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# SURVIVING THROUGH TACTICS: THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TURKEY

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The uprising in Syria, initially starting in March 2011 as democratic protests against the regime and later transforming into a continuous war due to the intervention of neighboring countries and global powers, has killed hundreds of thousands of people and caused more than half a million injuries. As the war has become a massive humanitarian crisis with millions of people driven from their homes, Syria's neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq have faced an unprecedentedly large influx of asylum seekers. Almost half of the asylum seekers who arrived in Turkey are concentrated in border cities such as Gaziantep, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Mardin, Hatay and Kahramanmaraş. Syrian asylum seekers who sought refuge in Turkey were settled in two ways: the first group were settled in refugee camps (temporary shelters), where they first lived in tents or container-cities established by the Turkish state. The second group settled either in cities bordering their homeland or on the peripheries of large metropolises. Some asylum seekers from the latter group determined their settlement country/city according to their existing family and kinship ties. It is important

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<sup>1</sup> This study is an updated and revised version of another article, written in Turkish and originally published in *The Journal of International Social Research* 9, no. 42 (2016): 1077-1087.

to emphasize that those who could use their existing kinship networks and fellow-township ties have established support and solidarity mechanisms in order to cope with some of the problems they face in Turkey.

According to the statistics provided by Turkey's Directorate General for Migration Management established under the Ministry of Interior, the number of asylum seekers in Turkey reached 3,670,717 by May 19, 2021. While 56,447 are settled in temporary shelters, 3,614,270 people live outside refugee camps. Migration Management's figures indicate that the number of Syrian asylum seekers who live in the city of Gaziantep, both in and outside the temporary shelters, is 449,184, and the number of those who live in the city of Kilis is 105,653.<sup>2</sup> Migration Management's city-specific data does not have separate figures for those who live in "temporary shelters" and those who live "outside the temporary shelters." Rather, it only shows the total number of asylum seekers settled in each city. Of course, these numbers consist only of "registered" asylum seekers. If we were to add the number of unregistered asylum seekers to these figures, it could be safely assumed that the number of asylum seekers living in Gaziantep and Kilis provinces would be much more than the number given by Migration Management. Our field research has shown that many asylum seekers are unregistered (undocumented) and thus, the official numbers do not reflect the full extent of the reality of current asylum trends. It can be argued that the official statistics tend to underestimate the number of asylum seekers, taking into consideration only the registered ones.

Population estimates for asylum seekers vary—and usually differ from the official numbers—for two important and related reasons: asylum seekers' border-crossing practices and their unwillingness to be registered by the official authorities of the city they settle in. Only a small minority of asylum seekers cross the border with a valid passport and thus, only a small percentage of the entire population of asylum seekers registers with the official authorities in order to receive an identity card. According to their own testimonies, asylum seekers do not want to have

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<sup>2</sup> "Geçici Koruma," Turkey Ministry of Interior Directorate General for Migration Management, accessed May 25, 2021, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>.

any record of the fact that they formally left Syria—a country where they believe Bashar al-Assad will never step down from his position. Some asylum seekers avoid any official record of both leaving Syria and being in Turkey. When we look at the statements of some participants, the fear caused by the Syrian secret service “Muhaberat” has a significant effect on whether or not asylum seekers register officially in Turkey. Thus, they often resort to illegal border-crossing practices and try to remain unregistered and undocumented.

There are many reports about asylum seekers published by various institutions in Gaziantep. However, these works rarely examine the sociology of everyday life. It is crucial that we conduct more sociological research about the daily life practices of asylum seekers in order to understand how they survive, what kinds of strategies they develop to survive, and how they navigate the legal system. Such research is also needed in order to examine asylum seekers’ means of making a living, their relationships with fellow Syrian citizens as well with Turkish locals, the level of their Turkish language skills, their access to education, and their kinship ties and social networks.

This article aims to fill this gap in the literature by exploring Syrian asylum seekers’ everyday life experiences and mundane coping and survival mechanisms through the critical lenses provided by de Certeau, Foucault and Bourdieu and their concepts of “field,” “strategy,” and “tactic.” Syrian refugees who came to Turkey had to adapt to the culture and social environment of a different country and have developed tactics to adapt to the difficulties they faced. People living in Turkey have also responded with different strategies toward asylum seekers as the Turkish locals are affected socioeconomically by this migration. A new group arriving to settle into a new community may not be welcome at the required level and may face ostracism. In other words, the immigration experience for refugees frequently involves material poverty as the most common element of the downward spiral of ostracism.<sup>3</sup> Syrian

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<sup>3</sup> Fikret Adaman and Çağlar Keyder, “Turkey’de Büyük Kentlerin Gecekondu ve Çöküntü Mahallelerinde Yaşanan Yoksulluk ve Sosyal Dışlanma. Avrupa Komisyonu, Sosyal Dışlanma ile Mücadelede Mahalli Topluluk Eylem Programı 2002–2006 [Poverty and Social Ostracism Experienced in Slum Areas and Collapsed Quarters in Big Cities in Turkey],” European Commission Local Community Action Program in Struggling with Social Ostracism 2002–2006,

refugees have difficulties in social life and work life, they have no social security, they must change their style of clothing, they experience the challenges of a different language, and it has been observed that the number of people working from home has increased.

These are the common problems facing Syrian migrants. The main goal of this article is to examine what kinds of challenges and difficulties Syrian asylum seekers face upon arriving in the cities of Gaziantep and Kilis, and what kinds of coping mechanisms they develop in order to solve their problems. In order to realize this research goal, the article asks: The arrival of an unprecedented number of asylum seekers in such a short period of time causes what kind of strategies to be developed among the residents and what kind of tactics for the refugees? What do asylum seekers do in order to adapt to these unfamiliar cities where they live as foreigners? What are the survival tactics adapted by asylum seekers? With specific regards to Gaziantep, what are the factors that hinder the processes of adaptation and acculturation of Syrian asylum seekers? What are the widely held local opinions, both positive and negative, about Syrian asylum seekers? How do these opinions interact with the “strategy” of the dominant culture? Do these opinions trigger conflict escalation, or do they result in harmony? Whether the “imagination” created around the asylum seekers finally continue to become a reality or became a practice defeated by reality? Building on these questions and drawing on the sociological theories of everyday life, this study aims to explore the life experiences and survival tactics of Syrian asylum seekers who settled in Gaziantep and Kilis provinces.

### Methodology

The data in this article was obtained from our different research trips to Gaziantep and Kilis between January and March 2015. We greatly benefited from the theory of everyday life when we analyzed our findings on Syrian asylum seekers’ life experiences, particularly from de Certeau’s concepts of “tactic” and “strategy.” The main aim of this

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accessed June 13, 2021, [https://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/social\\_inclusion/docs/2006/study\\_turkey\\_tr.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/2006/study_turkey_tr.pdf).

study is to qualitatively inquire and analyze the coping mechanisms and survival tactics adapted by Syrian asylum seekers. During our research trips, we conducted 115 face-to-face in-depth interviews with Syrian asylum seekers and locals from Gaziantep and Kilis.<sup>4</sup> Our in-depth interviewing technique relied on a semi-structured interview form. Our interviews with 115 participants took a total of 4,170 minutes. That is, the average duration of each call was 36.2 minutes. In addition to the interviews, we also conducted participant observation and analyzed various documents throughout our research. In this study, we utilized four basic sources for collecting data. These were: interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual materials. At times, our research also benefited from new sources that cannot be categorized by this traditional quadruple categorization of data sources. For instance, in addition to our face-to-face in-depth interviews, we corresponded and communicated with some of our interlocutors through the WhatsApp application and social media platforms. Thus, we also utilized “online data collection.”<sup>5</sup> We also developed and maintained friendships with our interlocutors on social media even after our field research, of course, with their consent.

During our interviews with Syrian participants, instead of directly asking what kinds of tactics they use to survive, we asked them from where, why, how, and through which channels they came to Turkey; what kinds of hardships they face here and how they cope; how they earn their living; what kinds of problems they have with official authorities and how they solve these problems; and what the relationships with their neighbors and with the local residents of Gaziantep and Kilis are like. During our interviews with the locals, we asked them what they do; what they think about Syrian asylum seekers; what kinds of changes they notice upon the arrival of Syrian asylum seekers; whether they observe any problems in regard to Syrian asylum seekers and if they had any suggestions for solving these problems. In addition to these pre-determined questions, we also asked other, spontaneous research-

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<sup>4</sup> The list of interviewees is on file with the journal.

<sup>5</sup> John W. Creswell, *Nitel Araştırma Yöntemleri: Beş Yaklaşımına Göre Nitel Araştırma ve Araştırma Deseni*, transl. and ed. Mesut Bütün and Selçuk B. Demir (Ankara: Siyasal Kitabevi, 2015), 159.

related questions based on the context of the participants' responses and to the extent that our interview form permitted.

This study was conducted by three researchers. Our research team's proficiency in Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish and English enabled us to overcome the "language barrier" with Syrian interlocutors. Since Syrians who took refuge in Turkey have Arabic, Turkmen, and Kurdish ethnic origins, we conducted our interviews in one of those three languages, plus English (Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish) based on our interlocutors' mother tongues and/or which language they felt comfortable speaking. Our interlocutors' choice of interviewing language also made visible the differences among them based on their class, ethnicity, and level of sexual consciousness. For instance, educated middle-class Syrians chose to be interviewed in "*Fasih* Arabic" (classical Arabic), while those who came from lower class backgrounds preferred to be interviewed in "*Ammi* Arabic." On the other hand, upper-class and high-income class Syrians, as well as Syrian LGBTI individuals chose to carry out their interviews in English. The latter group's wish to eventually migrate to Europe and the cultural capital they possess that allows them to speak a foreign language comfortably, influenced their decision to choose English as the interview language. The asylum seekers with Turkmen and Kurdish origins, on the other hand, preferred to be interviewed in their native languages, regardless of their cultural capital and/or class backgrounds.

### Asylum Seekers' Tactics against Locals' Strategies

If we were to use the theory of everyday life in our inquiry about how asylum seekers face new and unfamiliar territory in their daily lives and how they cope with the difficulties caused by this new life, Bourdieu's concept of "field" and de Certeau's concepts of "tactic" and "strategy" would be useful. According to Bourdieu, those who enter any given field earlier than others accumulate greater capital, since they have a greater capacity to grasp 'the rules of the game' or the conventions of the social situations they inhabit. Thus, they become the

dominant groups in the field.<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu argues that dominant groups in any given field have conservative reflexes, as they fight to protect and maintain their status in relation to the dominant values and social norms that define the field. For such dominant groups, the current state of the world is the way it ought to be.<sup>7</sup> Those who are newcomers develop novel strategies to overturn the established positions of dominant groups who came before them, and to challenge the doxa that enables such dominant groups to mobilize and reproduce their capital. On the other hand, those who seek to continue their own influence and power within the field employ a conservative strategy. Since capital is not fixed, a possible change within the field can cause dominant groups to lose their power to define, distribute and reproduce different forms of capital. Therefore, the status quo should be maintained.

New entrants to the field, on the other hand, pursue strategies of succession that are the attempts to gain access to dominant positions. Succession strategies show us how new entrants, who have entered the field in an unorthodox manner, may soon surrender to the charm of the dominant field and become complicit with the dominant orthodox discourse, consciously or unconsciously, in order to gain their own dominant positions. As Sabuktay points out, de Certeau pays attention to what is left unexplored in Foucault's theory of power. De Certeau is not interested in examining how Foucault's "microphysics of power" operates through subtle disciplining procedures. That is to say, he does not aim to analyze the production of power. Rather, he focuses on its "consumption," and in so doing, he analyzes a network of "anti-discipline."<sup>8</sup> De Certeau defines everyday life as a continuous composition of strategies and tactics that "nourish" within these strategies:

I call a "strategy" the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an "environment." A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis

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<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, transl. Richard Nice (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 166.

<sup>8</sup> Ayşegül Sabuktay, "Kızılay'da Gündelik Hayat ve Yöntem," *Mülkiye Dergisi* 32, no. 261 (2008): 47-48.

for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, “clienteles,” “targets,” or “objects” of research). Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model.<sup>9</sup>

While Lefebvre explains the notion of everydayness as a multitude of ordinary social causes that repeat themselves constantly, for Harootunian everyday life is shared experiences of global capitalism that transcend cultural geographies and which gives rise to similar living conditions and lifestyles in different societies.<sup>10</sup> The sociology of everyday life also carefully examines the notion of strategy, which Foucault locates at the heart of power relations. Foucault defines strategies as the mechanisms brought into play in power relations and sees them as necessary and permanent conditions for a relationship of power to exist. For him, there are two forms of strategies: the strategy of struggle and the strategy of confrontation.<sup>11</sup> While power relations employ strategies of struggle, confrontation strategies are used by social agents and they often reach their limits with the victory of one of the two adversaries. What Foucault calls a strategy of struggle is indeed defined by Bourdieu as a domination strategy. Bourdieu argues that the dominant agents use domination strategy, consciously or unconsciously, as they reproduce and legitimate the social field that is an arena of conflict. Indeed, Bourdieu reminds us that sociologists should never abandon the task of exposing the workings of the social structures of domination.<sup>12</sup> For him, strategy is a specific product of practical reason, playing a crucial role in every social game. The good player in any given game is the one “who does at every moment what the game requires. That presupposes a permanent capacity for invention, indispensable if one is to adapt to indefinitely varied and never completely identical situations. This is not ensured by mechanical obedience to the explicit, codified rule (when it

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<sup>9</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>10</sup> A. Çağlar Deniz, *Öğrenci İşi: Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Gündelik Hayatı: İstanbul Örneği* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014), 42.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982), 793.

<sup>12</sup> Ahmet Zeki Ünal, “Rahatsız Eden Bir Adamın Bilimi, Sosyoloji,” in *Ocak ve Zanaat: Pierre Bourdieu Derlemesi*, ed. Güney Çeğin, Emrah Göker, Alim Arlı and Ümit Tatlıcan (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010), 179.



exists)... [The good player] quite naturally materializes at just the place the ball is about to fall, as if the ball were in command of him—but by that very fact he is in command of the ball.”<sup>13</sup> That is to say, a good player gains legitimacy in the game by pretending that he conforms with the established arrangements of the game, while also furthering his own interests.<sup>14</sup>

While Bourdieu emphasizes the intrinsic relation of strategies to social structures, Foucault locates strategies into a more relational framework. According to Foucault, “every strategy of confrontation dreams of becoming a relationship of power, and every relationship of power leans toward the idea that, if it follows its own line of development and comes up against direct confrontation, it may become the winning strategy.”<sup>15</sup> Having written this, Foucault seems to have imagined a slight equality between power and agent. However, in Michel de Certeau’s writings, everyday life appears to be a less equal arena. In this sense, de Certeau’s theory of everyday is interested in unpacking what is left unexplored by Foucault’s theory of power. Unlike Foucault, he is not interested in examining how the “microphysics of power” operates through subtle disciplining procedures. In other words, he does not aim to analyze the production of power. Rather, he focuses on its “consumption,” and by doing so, he analyzes a network of “anti-discipline.”<sup>16</sup> De Certeau defines the notion of strategy as “the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an ‘environment.’”<sup>17</sup> As de Certeau describes, all of these actions are based on scientific rationality and thus, they are modern. How then do people who live within these strategic relationships act? According to de Certeau, they develop several tactics:

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<sup>13</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> Ali Kaya, “Pierre Bourdieu’nün Pratik Kuramının Kilidi: Alan Kavramı,” in *Ocak ve Zanaat: Pierre Bourdieu Derlemesi*, ed. Güney Çeğin, Emrah Göker, Alim Arlı, and Ümit Tatlıcan (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2010), 403.

<sup>15</sup> Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” 794.

<sup>16</sup> Sabuktay, “Kızılay’da Gündelik Hayat ve Yönetim,” 47–48.

<sup>17</sup> De Certeau, “The Practice of Everyday Life.”

By contrast with a strategy (whose successive shapes introduce a certain play into this formal schema and whose link with a particular historical configuration of rationality should also be clarified), a *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver “within the enemy’s field of vision,” as von Bülow put it, and within enemy territory. It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of “opportunities” and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse. In short, a tactic is an art of the weak.<sup>18</sup>

The use of tactic can manipulate the cracks within a field of strategy and capitalize them to its own benefit. As opposed to the power that presupposes its own proper place or localized institution, tactics are amphibious in character, benefiting from the lack of a properly circumscribed place of their own. They operate within a territory that belongs to and is controlled by the enemy. Thus, a tactic is poaching, it is the “hunter’s cunning,” as de Certeau describes; it is an art of the weak. Such aesthetic acts of the weak have the potential to express themselves at any moment of everyday life. According to de Certeau, tactics are “trickery”; they are the totality of habits, actions and practices that allow people to adapt to new environments without difficulty and to get away with things easily:

Many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character. And so are, more generally, many “ways of operating”: victories of the “weak” over the “strong” (whether the strength

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<sup>18</sup> De Certeau, “The Practice of Everyday Life,” 37.

be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, “hunter’s cunning,” maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike.<sup>19</sup>

The notion of “strategy” in Bourdieu’s theory of “field,” the “strategy of struggle” in Foucault’s theory of power, and finally the notion of “tactic,” which de Certeau defines as the actions of the weak and the subordinated, are indeed the aesthetics of resistance that are developed and employed in everyday life against domination and dominant groups’ strategies. To sum up, “the space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus, it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power.”<sup>20</sup> If we consider this discussion alongside Syrian asylum seekers’ actions, attitudes and habits, it can be argued that “tactic” and “strategy” would be useful concepts from which to examine their everyday lives. Because Syrian asylum seekers, too, play on “a terrain imposed on [them] and organized by the law of a foreign power”—a terrain that belongs to the other. They are labeled as “other” in this unfamiliar terrain where they have to settle as a result of forced migration; they live under dire conditions and try to cope with poverty; and they are subjected to social exclusion and discrimination. These social realities inevitably force Syrian asylum seekers to “play tricks” and “play games” by making use of the cracks left open by the dominant strategies. As our research findings demonstrate, Syrian asylum seekers have to develop tactics at various moments and in various spaces of everyday life, and only through this aesthetic resistance and struggle for existence are they able to survive.

As previously mentioned, tactic is the art of the weak, and because it does not have “a proper spatial or institutionalized location,” it only has to exist within the place of dominant groups’ strategies.<sup>21</sup> Syrian asylum seekers try to adapt different tactics in the place of local residents, and within the confines of locals’ strategies, in order to enact their own strategies. For instance, some Syrian women have started wearing a head-

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<sup>19</sup> De Certeau, “The Practice of Everyday Life.”

<sup>20</sup> De Certeau, “The Practice of Everyday Life,” 37.

<sup>21</sup> De Certeau, “The Practice of Everyday Life.”

scarf in Turkey, although they had not used a veil (*hijab*) in Syria. After a murder in Gaziantep on August 11, 2014, in particular, Syrians had been socially lynched by the local community. Syrian women replaced their Syrian-style veils with Turkish-style veils. Similarly, some Syrian men have stopped wearing *jellabiyas*, traditional loose, lightweight men's garment, in public places. Such alterations in dress codes and styles can be interpreted as tactics developed by Syrian asylum seekers in order to keep a low profile among the locals and thus, to protect themselves from possible harassment. A similar and related tactic can be said to be employed by Syrian small-business owners, who run barbershops and restaurants that target largely Syrian customers, and who have started to put Turkish flags up in their shops. This functional tactic has enabled Syrian asylum seekers to protect themselves and their businesses from the nationalist rage of the locals. Indeed, during the above-mentioned period, the speeches of the Mayor of Gaziantep, Fatma Şahin, which harshly targeted Syrians living in Gaziantep made Syrian asylum seekers feel abandoned, insecure and targeted.<sup>22</sup> According to the findings of our interviews, Syrian refugees had to evacuate their homes and live in fear during this period. In addition, some young Syrian refugees attempted to establish a defense team called "el-Şebab." In the next section, we will analyze several examples that illustrate this aesthetic resistance and explore what kinds of tactics Syrian asylum seekers employ in the "place of the sovereign."

### Depleting the Savings

The literature on migration and asylum has long shown that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers often utilize informal mechanisms, family ties, kinship relations, and social networks in order to solve problems and satisfy their needs during the processes of resettlement to a host country, integration into a new life, and adaptation to the norms

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<sup>22</sup> "Fatma Şahin: Suriyelileri kampa taşıyacağız," *haber7com*, August 15, 2014, <http://www.haber7.com/yerel-yonetimler/haber/1191110-fatma-sahin-suriyelileri-kampa-tasiyacagiz>; "Fatma Şahin: Suriyeliler kurallara uymak zorunda," *haber7com*, August 20, 2014, <http://www.haber7.com/yerel-yonetimler/haber/1192731-fatma-sahin-suriyeliler-kurallara-uyamak-zorunda>.

of the host culture.<sup>23</sup> New immigrants rely on their relationships with relatives, neighbors, and friends who were settled in the host country prior to their arrival. In so doing, they aim to cope with the difficulties of migration as well as reduce the costs of migration. These relationships also play a crucial role in facilitating new immigrants' integration into the host country. On the other hand, for those who do not have any connections and relations in the host country, and who are not familiar with the host country, immigration and settlement in a new country and adapting to a new culture can be extremely challenging.

Syrian asylum seekers use their family relationships and fellow-townsmanship ties during the early phases of their settlement into Turkish cities. On the other hand, we have seen that some Syrians, especially those who could not rely on their family and fellow-townsmanship ties, are indeed those who were already poor or had very little savings in Syria. This group was at the bottom of the social ladder in their settlement cities, and most of the time, they did not even have the means to satisfy their basic needs.<sup>24</sup> Upon their arrival, most of them had to live in parking lots, parks, and empty warehouses until they could find shelter or rent a house. It should be mentioned that some Syrians who settled in Turkish cities had brought all of their savings with them. However, after a while, they depleted their savings and have become poor/workers. They had to move into cheaper places and found employment as factory, agricultural or manual workers. For instance, Ammar, who migrated to Gaziantep from Aleppo one year ago, told us that "he had two hundred workers working under his supervision" in Aleppo. He found himself unemployed shortly after his arrival in

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<sup>23</sup> Sema Erder, *Kentsel Gerilim* (Ankara: Uğur Mumcu Araştırma Vakfı Yayınları, 2002), 43; Patricia Hynes, *The Dispersal and Social Exclusion of Asylum Seeker: Between Liminality and Belonging* (Bristol, UK: The Policy Press, 2011), 155-170.

<sup>24</sup> During the first phase of our research, wastepaper and cardboard collecting was done almost exclusively by Syrian asylum seekers. Since the summer of 2015, the vast majority of those Syrians who used to work as waste-paper collectors were sent to refugee camps. Eventually, on January 15, 2016, the Turkish Ministry of Environment and Urbanization banned wastepaper collecting. According to this ban, businesses would be fined up to 140,000 TL for buying wastepaper from paper collectors. On the other hand, many Syrians still work in heavy, manual jobs such as construction and agriculture.

Gaziantep. He had relied on his savings for a while, and then he had to become a laborer:

In Syria, I was a shift boss in a textile factory. 200 workers were working under my supervision. I was a mechanical engineer. When I came to Turkey, I was unemployed for 5 months. During that time, we sold all of our belongings. I sold even the earrings of my wife and my daughter. I sold all that I had. Everywhere you go in Başpınar [the biggest Organized Industrial Site in Gaziantep] for job-hunting, they tell you “No.” You have to know someone from inside [of that factory] to get hired. If you don’t have any connections, they don’t give you a job (Ammar, 39, from Aleppo, Arab, unemployed).

Those who were forced to flee Syria because of the war eventually depleted all of the savings that they had brought with them and became laborers. Some others, on the other hand, could not bear the consequences of moving in to a poor neighborhood and living a working-class lifestyle, and thus, had to return to Syria. For instance, Abdulmelik, the *imam* of a mosque in Emek district, where Aleppo’s middle and upper-classes choose to live, told us that some wealthy Syrians from his mosque community had to either move in to a poorer neighborhood or return to Syria after they had depleted their savings:

We have Syrians in our religious community. Rent prices in this neighborhood were affordable before. But they rose after Syrians came. When rent prices became really expensive, some Syrians from our mosque community could not afford their rents and moved to other neighborhoods. Some of them even returned to their home country due to the costliness of Gaziantep. Wealthy people are used to living luxury lives; they cannot live in a poor city. They cannot endure it. They said they have their own houses there. They said life in Syria is cheaper (Abdulmelik, 36, local of Gaziantep, Imam).

As these conversations illustrate, survival tactics adapted by Syrians who depleted all of their savings are either contenting themselves with less or leaving for a different place, be it a poorer neighborhood or Syria. These tactics are largely influenced by Syrians’ class habituses. We have observed that some asylum seekers become working-class more easily, because they live in poor neighborhoods and have the support of their relatives and social networks. However, those who live in middle and upper-class neighborhoods often prefer to return to Syria instead of living in a poor neighborhood. In other words, they take the risk of

returning to a warzone, since moving to a poor neighborhood would lower their class habitus.

### More than One Family Member Goes to Work

In order to keep their expenses as low as possible, immigrants and asylum seekers employ various tactics such as finding cheap housing, putting restrictions on food consumption (in other words, malnutrition), and cutting down on education expenses by not sending children to school. They also use other tactics in order to maximize their earnings. Among these tactics the most common is that more than one family member, and especially children, goes to work in order to contribute to the family income. By putting as many family members as possible into the labor force, households try to increase their earnings.<sup>25</sup> This is one of the most common tactics adopted by Syrians in order to survive. For instance, fifty-five-year-old Abdullah from Aleppo earns his living by selling prayer beads and watches. When we asked him how his family affords the rent and their living costs, he told us: “My children work too. One of them is a tailor, and the other one is a plumber. Otherwise we wouldn’t be able to survive.” As this example illustrates, putting more than one family member into the workforce is a survival tactic for Syrian households who try to stay alive and earn their living in the field of a dominant strategy where rent prices are high, living costs are expensive, and cheap labor is pervasive. Ammar and Naser from Aleppo expanded upon this during our interviews:

In my sister’s household, my sister, her husband and her brother-in-law work, so that they can earn their living. I have an acquaintance who has five sons. All of them work and they barely earn a living (Ammar, 39, from Aleppo, Arab, unemployed).

I am from Ebu Asker district in Aleppo. When the uprisings first started, I fled Aleppo and came here. I have been living here for two and a half years. First, I went to Jordan, then I came here. Turkey is better. We pay 650 TL for

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<sup>25</sup> Deniz Yüksek, “Kürtlerin Yerinden Edilmesi ve Sosyal Dışlanma: 1990’lardaki Zorla Göçün Sonuçları,” in *Küreselleşme Çağında Göç: Kavramlar, Tartışmalar*, ed. S. Gülfer İhlamur-Öner and N. Aslı Şirin Öner (İletişim Yayınları: İstanbul, 2012), 233–262.

the rent of our apartment, and 3 500 TL for the rent of our store. We had paid another 30,000 TL for this store as a security deposit. Everyone who works here is family; my brothers and I, six of us, work here (Naser, 35, from Aleppo, Arab, confectioner).

As our interlocutors' answers show, the tactic of putting more than one family member into the work force can take different forms: family members can become partners in the same workplace, or they can become laborers in different workplaces. In either case, Syrian households often have no other choice but to adopt this "survival tactic" in order to earn their living. Most of the time all family members whose ages allow them to enter the workforce find jobs in order to contribute to the household income and pay for rent and food. Given that asylum seekers' monthly incomes, whether they are workers or street vendors, are very low, one family member's income often fails to satisfy the household needs such as rent and living costs. Thus, for many households it is inevitable that more than one family member goes to work. It is in this context that children are also pushed into the workforce, often roaming the streets selling tissues or polishing shoes. The rising "child labor" among Syrian asylum seekers has become visible, as more Syrian children are forced to quit school and enter the workforce at very early ages in order to provide for their families. "Having sick or old fathers, having parents who cannot find employment, and having bad relationships with their families (or leaving their families)" are some of the reasons that push children into the workforce.<sup>26</sup> Many Syrian children whose fathers passed away as a result of the war, or who are still fighting in Syria, have to start working in Turkey. For instance, we met Mohammed, a nine-year-old Syrian boy, in the Yeditepe neighborhood near the University of Gaziantep. As we bought tissues from him, we also had a chance to listen to his story. Mohammed told us that he had to start selling tissues on the streets because he had to provide for his family after his father had died in the war. This need to make money has forced a vast majority of Syrian children and youth in Turkey to quit school. This need for money also forces many Syrian women to enter the labor

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<sup>26</sup> Yüксеker, "Kürtlerin Yerinden Edilmesi ve Sosyal Dışlanma," 253.



force and tolerate a variety of unbearable situations in order to earn a living. Ammar explained this as follows:

Syrian women cannot work, they cannot even go shopping. As soon as a Syrian woman starts to work, she is subjected to harassment by Turks. But they don't harass Turkish women who work in the same workplace. I don't know why they think Syrian women are cheap. I would like to find a job for my sister. I would like her to support our family. But her co-workers start harassing her immediately, on the first or second day of work. When they see a Syrian woman on the streets or at work, they think that she does not have anyone and they start harassing her. Isn't it a pity that my sister had to quit her job on the second day of work when she understood that her employer was looking at her with anger or in a lascivious way (Ammar, 39, from Aleppo, Arab, unemployed).

Bourdieu's field theory reminds us that those who are newcomers to the field develop various new tactics to challenge the established doxa, while those who have dominant positions in the field employ conservative strategies in order to continue holding onto influence and power. The latter group wish to protect the status quo of the field.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, it could be argued that the tactics adopted by Syrian asylum seekers in Gaziantep and Kilis provinces in order to challenge and overturn the doxa are unlikely to work, and that most of the time the locals win using conservative strategies. These conservative strategies employed by locals may range from the exploitation of labor to sexual harassment. Worse still, these stories of labor and sexual exploitation may also be used by locals to spread gossip about Syrian asylum seekers and to target and criminalize them.

### Street Hawking: A Placeless Tactic

The majority of the Syrian asylum seekers in the Gaziantep and Kilis districts work informally. They work in irregular and temporary jobs, are unregistered, often underpaid, and without social security. Since they do not have social security, it could be argued that Syrians are excluded not only from formal jobs but also from the labor market. A

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<sup>27</sup> Kaya, *Pierre Bourdieu'nün Pratik Kuramının Kilidi*, 401.

small minority of Syrians run their own business such as small stores (phone shops, *shwarmal/doner* shops, restaurants, grocery stores) or small-size manufacturing shops (textile ateliers). Others who enter the workforce as laborers often work in factories, restaurants and cafes (as waiters and dishwashers), or on the streets (selling tissues and cigarettes, polishing shoes, collecting waste paper and cardboard and so on). Syrians often prefer street hawking so that they do not have to pay rent on a store. Street hawkers usually polish shoes and sell cigarettes, tissues, “smuggled tea,” Syrian bread, vegetables and fruits. Among the products they sell, street hawkers bring cigarettes and “smuggled tea” from Syria via their social networks. It could be appropriate to interpret such practices of street hawking as a survival tactic adapted by Syrians in a city where the locals’ strategies are dominant. The fact that rent prices are very high and unaffordable for low-income households makes street hawking a preferable job for Syrian asylum seekers. On the other hand, street hawking also has a strong potential to maneuver in the field of dominant strategies and to make use of the cracks left open by power.

It is this very ability to maneuver, as well as the knowledge of everyday life coming from the streets that enables street hawkers to make use of the cracks left open by strategy. In this sense, street hawkers always watch for opportunities for tactics, and this can make room for its existence with relative ease.

During one of our research trips to Gaziantep, we met a Syrian street hawker who was selling tea, Syrian bread, sugar and basic food items on sidewalks in the Gazikent neighborhood. His street hawking was indeed a “tactic” that he developed in order to earn his living and to survive in a place where dominant strategies and their laws rendered street hawking illegal. Syrian street seller Nadir speaks in Turkish, which he learned in one year:

My family is composed of my wife, three children, my mother, father and myself. My daughter is two years old, my oldest child is 6. I had a brother as well but he died a year ago. Some of them went to Aleppo, to Höllük. Höllük is a big place. A mixed society, there are Arabs, Turkmens, Kurds, Gırbats. I was a shoemaker. I am here for one year. Goods come from Syria. We bring goods in small amounts to avoid having problems. My customers are mixed, there are Turkish and Syrian customers both. Turks are not much. They were

few in the beginning but after they saw the goods they started to buy. We earn average 500-600 lira monthly. I live in a rented house. 400 lira. There is also electricity and water fees. It is very difficult. I do not pay AE fee for this location [*Authors' note: His stand is in front of a big market at İnönü street*]. They allowed me to stay here. (Nadir, 38, Arab from Aleppo, Street seller)

It is not uncommon to see street hawkers in many neighborhoods of Gaziantep. They display the items they sell on sidewalks or on street stands. Street hawkers roam the city all day, leaking into the capillaries of everyday life. By making use of legal loopholes, they open vents for themselves to breathe in the city where the strategy of power is steady. Unlike the power that presupposes a steady, stable and “striated” space, which does not leave room for maneuvering, street hawkers exist in “smooth” spaces—because they are on the streets, they are “nomadic.”<sup>28</sup>

Street hawking could be described as a way of earning a living that asylum seekers practice when they need to, especially when they are not able to find any other job:

I sell cigarettes on this sidewalk now. But two months ago, three of us from my family were working. Tailor, plumber, construction worker. Each of us were earning 200 or 250 TL per week. They've been sitting at home for two months now; but thank God, we are happy. All of us were working in construction sites from morning to night, but our money has been honestly earned. Now I am working. (Nezir, 55, from Aleppo, Arab, cigarette seller)

Nine-year-old Mohammed also told us that he contributes to his family income by selling tissues, adding that two of his brothers also work. He emphasized that this is how his family could afford their rent and food expenses. Mohammed has only been in Gaziantep for one year, but he speaks Turkish fluently. It would not be wrong to argue that this was a direct result of the time he has spent on the streets as a street hawker. As we mentioned before, street hawkers accumulate the knowledge of everyday life very quickly and thus, they learn the local language more easily than other immigrants.

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<sup>28</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, transl. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

## The Latin Alphabet and the Turkish Flag: The Unbearable Pragmatism of Being

Syrians who own their own stores and restaurants either use Latin letters in their signboards or put Turkish flags on their windows, so they can integrate themselves into the city and run their businesses. Some of these businesses are designed to target the needs of Syrian customers. For instance, most of the restaurants serve Syrian cuisine such as Syrian bread, Syrian-style *shwarma/doner* and *hummus*. After a district municipality banned all shop signs written in Arabic, Syrian shop owners started to use the Latin alphabet in signboards and changed the names of their shops.<sup>29</sup> For example, we visited a restaurant right across Yeşilsu Park in Gaziantep to conduct observational research. Looking at the restaurant's appearance and the price of the coffee we drank, we came to understand that the restaurant targets middle-income-class customers. There was a big Turkish flag in the window. We thought that they used this flag to attract Turkish customers. When we later asked the waiter, he explained that they put the flag up on Turkish Republic Day on October 29 last year, and have not taken it down since. Then we noticed that the owner of the restaurant and his employees were talking amongst themselves, irritated by us. We have met such irritation on many occasions during our field research. It is possible to say that the irritation may be due to refugees having a fear of "combat," commonly known as Syria's official intelligence service, and that as refugees they have a minority identity. When we finished our coffee, we told them in Arabic that we are researchers in order to ease their irritation and that "we are carrying out research on how Syrians cope with the difficulties faced in their daily lives." We provided this explanation simply to tell them that our purpose in this research is not political, and they have no reason to be upset. We showed our identity cards to the owner of the restaurant and left. We showed them our identity cards so they would understand who we are.

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<sup>29</sup> "Gaziantep'te Arapça Levhalar Kaldırıldı," *Gaziantep27.net*, August 29, 2014, <http://www.sanalbasin.com/gaziantep-te-arapca-tebalalar-kaldirildi-6269319/>.

Many Syrian asylum seekers place Turkish flags, which is one of the most valued symbols in the country, in their shops or homes in order to attract Turkish customers as well as to make room for themselves in the market.<sup>30</sup> By doing so, they develop a “tactic” described by de Certeau as “victories of the ‘weak’ over the ‘strong,’ clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things.” During our research, we observed several examples of this tactic. For instance, in Kilis, our local guide Metin, who introduced us to the field and informed us about different neighborhoods, took us to a barbershop run by a Syrian asylum seeker. We saw yet another Turkish flag in the window of this barbershop. These examples show us that Syrians use the flag of the dominant society as a survival tactic. Indeed, in these examples mentioned above, the Turkish flag serves as a “lightning conductor” against lynching and social exclusion.

### Clothing, Appearance, and Tactic

Syrian asylum seekers’ style of dress is an indicator of the Syrian identity they want to display in public spaces. The issue of clothing points us to a particular vulnerability: clothing style appears to be something that some asylum seekers can abandon easily, while for some it is an impossibility. This vulnerability is largely influenced by time, gender, and age. For instance, young Syrian men never give up their slicked-back long hairstyles, while young Syrian women more easily abandon their one-color Syrian-style veils that they use without undercap bonnets.

I know my hairstyle expresses my Syrian identity. Turks do not slick their hair back with gel. This is our taste. And even if I change my hairstyle, they would immediately understand from my accent that I am Syrian (Emced, 22, from Aleppo, Arab, salesman).

In most of our interviews, we were told that Syrian women abandon their Syrian-style clothes and veils and start to dress like local women

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<sup>30</sup> “Antepte Suriyeli Mülteciler Saldırı Olmasını Diye Türk Bayrağı Asıyor,” *Evrensel*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/383682/antepte-suriyeli-multeciler-saldiri-olmasin-diye-turk-bayragi-asiyor>.

in the Gaziantep-Kilis district. We also had a chance to observe and confirm that this particular change in women's clothing and veiling styles is used as a tactic to hide their Syrian identity. It could be argued that women employ this tactic in order to protect themselves from the discontent with Syrian asylum seekers that is simmering among the local population, which might even result in violent attacks and assaults on the street. In other words, by hiding their Syrian identity, which is perceived by locals as "secondary," and which provokes the social exclusion and marginalization of asylum seekers, Syrian women protect themselves from possible verbal and physical assaults.

It should be mentioned here that some Syrian women embrace Turkish styles of dress and veiling their hair not to protect themselves from violence, but to evade inspection by the financial police. As we have mentioned, most of the businesses run by Syrians target Syrian customers. However, there are also some Syrians who plan to stay in Turkey permanently, and accordingly, start businesses designed to attract Turkish customers. Maya works in a restaurant that serves largely Turkish customers. When we asked her why she uses a Turkish-style veil, although she is Syrian, she said:

Because Syrians are not given work permits. We are not allowed to work. Sometimes the Department of Finance comes for economic inspection. We dress and veil like Turkish women so that the inspectors will not notice that we are Syrian. Because we too have to work. (Maya, 23, from Aleppo, Turkoman, waitress)

As Maya's answer demonstrates, Syrians are forced to hide their "Syrian" image to protect themselves not only from the local population but also from state bureaucracy. Hundreds of thousands of people who are allowed to live in urban centers are not recognized as refugees, so they are not given the necessary permits and the means to earn a living. Based on the interviews we had conducted before the one we conducted with Maya, we had come to think that Syrian women wear their headscarves in the Turkish style in order to hide their disadvantaged identity and prevent verbal or physical assault. However, upon our interview with Maya, we felt the urge to revise our opinion. Thus, we came to the conclusion that Syrian women sometimes alter the way

they wear their headscarves and embrace Turkish-style veiling in order to find employment. In this sense, it could be argued that a symbol that belongs to an excluded and unaccepted identity is abandoned, altered, or revised in favor of the dominant identity.

The tactic of assimilating clothing-styles into the dominant identity is adapted not only by Syrian women, but also by Syrian men. We have found that in particular elderly male adults have stopped wearing “jellabiyas,” which is a traditional Arabic men’s garment. For instance, Abdulmelik, the *imam* of a mosque in Emek district, told us that many Syrian men from his mosque community abandoned their jellabiyas:

Syrian men too. After this incident happened, they have started to dress [modern] like local men. Syrian men changed their clothes. I used to see a lot of them in the mosque and outside, wearing jellabiyas. They don’t wear it anymore. (Abdulmelik, 36, from Antep, imam)

In conclusion, Syrians living in Gaziantep and Kilis embrace local clothing and veiling styles as a tactic that enables them to protect themselves in public spaces as well as assimilate into the dominant cultural norms. They perform these clothing and veiling practices to hide their Syrian identity. That is to say, they abstain from using cultural symbols that would express their identity. If we were to use de Certeau’s words, Syrians’ clothing and veiling preferences best illustrate “clever tricks of the ‘weak’ within the order established by the ‘strong,’ an art of putting one over on the adversary on his own turf, hunter’s tricks, maneuverable, polymorph mobilities (...) These practices present, in fact, a curious analogy, and a sort of immemorial link, to the simulations, tricks, and disguises that certain fishes or plants execute with extraordinary virtuosity in order to survive.”<sup>31</sup> In this sense, it would not be wrong to argue that the tactics of “adapting to the dominant culture” developed by Syrians are simulations, tricks, and disguises—they are the “art of the weak.”

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<sup>31</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 40.

## Leisure Time and Relations with Neighbors

In Volume 1 of *Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre ponders the notion of leisure in the context of the everyday. For him, “the relation between them is not a simple one: leisure and the everyday are at one and the same time united and contradictory, and therefore their relation is dialectical.”<sup>32</sup> In the traditional sense, leisure cannot be separated from work. In the lives of peasants, for instance, work is merged with the everyday life of the family and leisure and thus, they have a dialectic relationship. With the advent of bourgeois society, however, these various elements and their meanings and relations have changed. For the modern man, leisure is the opposite of work, as it produces a “break” and offers liberation from the worries, necessities and obligations of everyday life. Modern man expects to find something in leisure that his “work” and his “family” or “private life” do not provide. Thus, a “world of leisure” comes into being “entirely outside of the everyday realm, and so purely artificial that it borders on the ideal.”<sup>33</sup> The working modern man needs a “sharp break” from his work and craves compensation. He looks for this in leisure, which is seen as a passive life, entertainment or distraction. For instance, if a modern man sits in cafes, visits funfairs, watches television, paints, and watches sports or films, this demonstrates his craving for an illusion of escape from the reality of his everyday life—which is indeed alienation. To sum up, “leisure appears as the non-everyday in the everyday.” In modern times, we work to earn our leisure and engage in all the leisure activities mentioned above, and leisure has only one meaning: to escape from work. Lefebvre describes this relation as a “vicious cycle.”<sup>34</sup>

When one thinks about leisure and the everyday in relation to asylum seekers, however, one realizes that these examples of leisure activities that produce a “break” from the reality of everyday life are reserved largely for middle-class or bourgeoisie (or even for “settled” or “local” working-class people). The language barrier, financial difficulties, life

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<sup>32</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume I*, transl. John Moore (London, UK and New York, NY: Verso, 1991), 29.

<sup>33</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume I*, 34.

<sup>34</sup> Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life Volume I*, 40.



struggles and trying to survive in a foreign country do not allow asylum seekers to engage in various “leisure activities.” Quite the contrary, their leisure activities are limited to sitting at home, visiting relatives and neighbors, or going to a nearby public park.

Of course, when we discuss asylum seekers’ relation to leisure, we must specify which asylum seekers we are talking about. For instance, it is hard to argue that those who work as laborers (mostly men) actually have “leisure activity,” since they are forced to work long hours in order to earn a living and endure various problems as a result of their status as asylum seekers. Indeed, most of them work 12 hours a day without any days off. Therefore, if we were to make a generalization about leisure, we must take into consideration women and children asylum seekers who do not work.

Syrians spend their leisure time visiting their relatives, if they have any, or going shopping. Some of them also visit their Syrian neighbors. Most of them, however, mentioned that they do not visit their neighbors mostly due to language barriers. Ammar, for instance, told us that “they spend their leisure time mostly at home” because of language barriers. Yet, he also mentioned another reason for staying at home:

I have been here for one year now. All of my neighbors are Turks. There is no Syrian living here. I don’t know who they [my neighbors] are. I don’t have any neighbor relations with them. Neither my wife nor I go outside. You have to be able to buy, at least, bread if you want to go shopping. We don’t go out because of our financial problems. (Ammar, 39, from Aleppo, Arab, unemployed)

Ammar’s answer demonstrates that they spend most of their leisure time at home due to financial problems. This could be interpreted as a tactic. Given leisure activities’ close relation with consumption, it could be argued that the poor develop this tactic of staying home during their leisure time. On the other hand, many of our interlocutors mentioned that they do not even have leisure time because of their working conditions. Furthermore, almost all the women and children who do not work spend their leisure time at home because of language barriers:

Their children do not really interact with local kids. For example, Syrians sit together in the park. Syrian children play together in one area, local kids from Antep play together in another area. Families too. They sit in groups and

don't interact with others. For instance, women don't have television at home, so they go out and sit in the parks. They literally escape from home, and I understand them. The only place they [Turks and Syrians] are together is the mosque. They pray side by side. Only in mosques do they interact with each other. (Nurettin, 47, Gaziantep, Neighborhood Chief)

When we asked, "How are your relations with your neighbors?" most of our Syrian interlocutors mentioned that they do not have any relations with their neighbors, adding that the language barrier is the first and foremost reason that prevents them from building relations with their neighbors. On the other hand, our research findings have showed us that another important reason why Syrians do not (or cannot) build close relations with their neighbors is pervasive urban myths that produce negative and exclusionary discourses about Syrians. These myths, in fact, are at once the results and the causes of social exclusion, as they produce and circulate negative discourses about Syrians.

During our interviews in Gaziantep and Kilis, the local population often highlighted their lack of trust for Syrians, mentioning that they have developed major "trust issues." "Not feeling safe" or, if we were to describe from a more existential point of view, "not feeling at home" is triggered by the perception that home is occupied by strangers. Furthermore, some of our local interlocutors also emphasized that they see Syrian asylum seekers as "traitors" who abandoned their home country instead of fighting for it. Their use of "traitor" leads to other forms of exclusionary discourses and practices that Syrian asylum seekers face in their everyday lives. At the end of the day, these accusatory and exclusionary discourses adversely affect both impersonal and neighborly relations:

It is a big sin to abandon one's country in the middle of war. This is what the Quran says too. To speak the truth, Syrians earned their country without a war. That's why, they don't fight for it; they escape. These are coward people. They have twenty children in one household anyway. They could say 'I don't care if ten of them would die.' I mean, they won their country without fighting for it; their country is given to them. That's why they don't fight for it now, either. (Fikri, 55, from Kilis, businessman)

One of our interlocutors from Gaziantep explained why they do not want Syrians by using a "home" metaphor: "Imagine you live with

five family members in your home. Would you accept five Syrians to your home? You wouldn't. How would you trust them? That home is your honor!" (Azat, 35, from Gaziantep, tradesman). When we asked him what he meant by "home," he said that he meant his "city," his "country," and his "motherland." "Not feeling at home," as well as the widely shared feeling of "being occupied," induces notions of "foreigner," an "other," and an "enemy," leading to social exclusion. That is to say, locals' fear that their "authentic" culture would be "occupied and defeated" by a foreign culture causes social exclusion of Syrians and sometimes even results in violence. According to the social thought that perceives certain segments of society as "the wild," "the weeds," the uncultivated, that threatens the order of a garden,<sup>35</sup> people that are "foreign" to us are meant to destroy our language, culture, and even our existence.<sup>36</sup> To sum up, neighborly relations between Syrians and local residents are hindered by such prejudices and exclusionary discourses.

Some Syrians, however attend Turkish language courses in order to overcome language barriers. For instance, Adem, who lives in Gaziantep (28, from Aleppo, Arab, English language instructor), told us that both he and his wife attend a Turkish language course run by the municipality's Youth Center nearby their home. Seventeen-year-old Rami, who lives in Gaziantep neighborhood (from Aleppo, Arab, unemployed), on the other hand, explained that he tried to attend hairdressing courses at the Hoşgör GASMEK Center, as he wishes to become a women's hairdresser. Rami was surprised when he was told that the course is designed only for female participants. Upon the advice of a Turkish acquaintance who helps Rami and his family with translation, Rami registered for the Turkish language course held by the same center. Eighteen-year-old Fettah (18, from Azez, Arab, worker) mentioned that he has both Turkish and Syrian friends with whom he plays billiards during his leisure time. It could be extrapolated from these examples that young Syrians, in comparison with middle-aged and older Syrian asylum seekers, are more capable of making friendships with Turks.

<sup>35</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 57.

<sup>36</sup> Yusuf Ekinci, "Misafirlik Dediğin Üç Gün Olur": Suriyeli Sığınmacılar ve Sosyal Dışlanma," *Birikim dergisi*, no. 311 (2015): 48-54.

## Conclusion

Our research findings demonstrate that Syrians develop various tactics in order to manage everyday life in a city where they live as foreigners. We argue that what de Certeau defines as tactics adopted by the “weak” in a place where the strategy is dominant are employed by Syrians in every realm of their everyday lives. Indeed, this could be seen as a natural reflex to “survive,” to exist, because Syrians are well aware that the only way to survive amidst extreme poverty (life struggles), exclusion (being the unwelcomed “others” of society), and non-recognition by the existing laws (not having permission to work) is to play their own game within the field of the dominant group. Therefore, Syrian asylum seekers adapt and make use of these tactics as a “grip” on the streets, at home, in their neighborly relations, in hospitals, on buses and so on in order to survive.

The Syrian refugees who fled the war in their own country and migrated to Turkey discussed many of their issues with us, which we then examined. It has been determined that Syrian immigrants residing in cities have experienced problems being accepted, especially because they prefer the big cities, they are permanently in the position of being temporary guests.<sup>37</sup> According to another study, their economic anxiety, expectations before migration, the subject of religion, and the attitude of the locals toward them showed that Syrian immigrants have been psychologically and sociologically affected.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, the uncertainty of how long they will stay in the country affects cultural harmony. On the other hand, immigrants migrating from Syria to Turkey are causing problems with social acceptance and the number of immigrants is increasing, causing these problems to increase.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Sinem Yıldırım, Emel İslamoğlu and Cemal İyem, “Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Toplumsal Kabul ve Uyum Sürecine İlişkin Bir Araştırma,” in *V. International Balkan and Near Eastern Social Sciences Congress 23-24 September 2017* (Kırklareli: 2017), 35, 107-126.

<sup>38</sup> Ayşe Şafak-Ayvazoğlu, Filiz Kunuroğlu and Kutlay Yağmur, “Psychological and Socio-Cultural Adaptation of Syrian Refugees in Turkey,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, no. 80 (2021), 99-111, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.11.003>.

<sup>39</sup> Mim Sertaç Tümtaş, “Toplumsal Dışlanmadan Vatandaşlık Tartışmalarına Suriyeli Kent Mültecileri,” *Akdeniz İ.L.B.F. Dergisi*, no. 37 (2018), 26-47.

In terms of studies on education, the majority of Syrian children are not going to school, which is a problem in terms of social harmony. In speaking with ten Syrian women who benefited from programs held by the Konya Metropolitan Municipality, we learned that the training was beneficial and helped them learn Turkish and better adapt. However, they said that they still cannot improve upon their neighborly relations because the indigenous people continue to have their biases.<sup>40</sup> According to another study, the findings from talks with teachers found that children migrating from Syria had a “language barrier,” “cultural problems” and “discipline problems” in school. The “language barrier” is the main problem.<sup>41</sup> Another issue with Syrian immigrants is the problems that arise when they start a business. Many of the businesses of Syrian refugees contributing to production and commerce are unregulated, leading to unfair competition in the industry. At the same time, it is estimated that it threatens the security of the locals, and the number of child workers is increasing.<sup>42</sup> According to another study, unemployment is rapidly increasing in Syrian immigrant populations, and an effect on the labor market has been observed.<sup>43</sup> The use of Arabic letters on signage by Syrian immigrants who open businesses in Turkey creates tensions and reactions on the part of locals. The low paid jobs and exploitation they meet in their daily lives and work are part of the problems faced by immigrants.<sup>44</sup>

In this article, we have explored the basic tactics adapted by Syrians in order to survive: assimilating their traditional clothing and veiling styles into the dominant culture; putting up Turkish flags (the most valued symbol of the dominant identity) on their businesses and homes;

<sup>40</sup> Özlem Duğan and Salih Gürbüz, “Suriyeli Sığınmacıların Sosyal Entegrasyonuna Yönelik Bir Araştırma,” *Turkish Studies* 13, no. 26 (2018), 529–546.

<sup>41</sup> Pelin Taskin and Ozge Erdemli, “Education for Syrian Refugees: Problems Faced by Teachers in Turkey,” *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, no. 75 (2018), 155–178.

<sup>42</sup> Salih Öztürk and Selen Çoltu, “Suriyeli Mültecilerin Türkiye Ekonomisine Etkileri,” *Balkan Journal of Social Sciences* 7, no. 13 (2018), 188–198.

<sup>43</sup> Oğuz Esen and Ayla Oğuş-Binatlı, “The Impact of Syrian Refugees on the Turkish Economy: Regional Labour Market Effects,” *Social Sciences* 6, no. 4 (2017), 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci6040129>.

<sup>44</sup> İhsan Çetin, “Suriyeli Mültecilerin İşgücüne Katılımları ve Entegrasyon: Adana-Mersin Örneği,” *Gaziantep University Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 15 (2016), 1001–1016, <https://doi.org/10.21547/jss.265320>.

finding “under the table” informal jobs even in the absence of work permits; spending time on the streets, learning Turkish and gaining an instinctive familiarity with everyday life (street hawkers); making use of the cracks in public spaces left open by power; working under inhumane conditions without social security in order to adapt to the existing labor market; putting more than one family member into the workforce in order to save money for housing and living expenses; and attending Turkish language courses. As this study has tried to show, the more time Syrians have spent within the dominant field, the more they have gained familiarity with everyday life. Thus, although displacement made them feel “like a fish out of water,” so to speak, Syrian asylum seekers have nevertheless learned how to play their own game and establish alternative ways of survival in the territory of the dominant.

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