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War, Migration, and Class

Kemal Vural Tarlan

Introduction

The mass migratory wave that has flowed from the Middle East to neighboring countries and thence to the heart of Europe requires us to take a new look at the “phenomenon of migration.” Although theories of migration once considered valid are renewed every several decades, the causal relationships regarding the phenomenon of migration have become much more complex with this most recent wave. Migration became a mass phenomenon all around the world as a result of armed conflicts in the 1990s, which forced millions to relocate and formed a new peak in the history of migration. Having started during the time when the countries of the center developed on the basis of the exploitation of those in the periphery, migratory movements in the twentieth century were mostly due to differences between countries, the periodic crises of capitalism, income differentials, and world wars. These movements were held at a level that was kept under control by the core countries, and they were at times even encouraged. Migrant labor was frequently used particularly in the labor markets of these countries in the wake of World War II in order to resuscitate the economy.

The new wave of migration centered in the Middle East was triggered by the “people’s rebellions,” dubbed by some the “Arab Spring.” However, one needs to go back in time to analyze the causes thereof. With the process of “globalization” that started in the 1990s, neoliberal capitalism spread across the planet to reach the farthest and the deepest points possible, also capturing the most strategic and profitable industries of the periphery. Without analyzing the last three decades of those countries that experienced these

popular rebellions, it is very difficult to assess the migratory movements of the recent years, for, in contrast to its promises, neoliberalism brought widespread poverty to the local communities.

This new system, which saw sharpened income inequality, increased monopolization of the means of production, and property changing hands, led to ruptures in the social and economic structures in Syria, the subject of this chapter, and other Middle Eastern countries. On the one hand a new bourgeoisie was coming into being, centered in the Gulf countries, aligned and integrated with global capital; on the other hand, however, a young and educated but unemployed middle class, one that dreamed of entering the global labor market and used digital technology and social networks and media, was on the rise. This middle class in the Middle Eastern countries, which recently filled the Arab street, on the basis of the spread of new communication technologies, the internet, and social media, established links with the sectors of the Western world that had themselves gone on the streets, as in Syndagma and Puerta del Sol and flowed into its own squares (Tahrir Square in Cairo, the Pearl roundabout in Bahrain, Taksim Square in Istanbul). Those who formed the vanguard and experienced the greatest damage were the youth, in particular young women. Within the last decade before the rebellions, approximately 30 percent of the young population had been pushed outside the regular work force. Unemployment was very high among college graduates. It was particularly high among graduate women (Hanieh 2015: 133–35). From the point of view of the governments that ruled the Middle East and the elites clustered around them, neoliberalism, apart from brief interludes in which they experienced difficulties of adaptation, signified the construction of a system of privatization, wage cuts, tax increases, cuts in social expenditures, and skyrocketing food prices.

On the other hand, from the point of view of the bourgeoisie, a market was created where capital saw all barriers in its way removed. Just how fragile this newly created system was became obvious under the impact of the global crisis of 2008. The Gulf countries, with their economies greatly dependent on oil and other hydrocarbons, experienced disruption as a result of the fall in price of these products, and the crisis spread to peripheral countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria, dependent on the Gulf states. In these countries, with economies based on industries that work on the basis of unregistered labor, such as agriculture and textiles, the labor market was encouraged toward flexibility as well as increasing the share of the unregistered industries. The growth of unregistered industries is one of the most important indicators of structurally growing poverty. The crisis resulted in large masses of people, dispossessed, unemployed, and becoming helpless with each passing day, emerging on the streets and bringing down, one by one, the authoritarian regimes that ruled the Middle East for decades and the dictators that led them.

When we come to the present, this is what we see in the Middle Eastern countries: although the Gulf states, which we can define as the core countries, and their ruling classes are still holding on, they have not come out of the quagmire of economic crisis. In those that are regarded as the peripheral countries, on the other hand, the new despots that have replaced the regimes ousted by the rebellions are divided and socially fragmented as a result of economic crisis and the deepening of domestic conflicts. In the cases of Yemen, Syria, and Libya, the countries in question find themselves divided, and the conflicts have evolved into civil wars.

These conflicts and civil wars have resulted in severe disruptions for the peoples of these countries, leading to the greatest migratory movements within a century, both domestically and abroad. In the countries that experience conflicts, close to half the population abandoned their homesteads and moved abroad. In the decade of the 2000s, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and Syria joined the migration wave from the South to the North. Today, millions of emigrants, who leave these countries, cross seas, and make it to the Northern Hemisphere, are fighting to open up a niche for themselves to cling to in the labor markets of the countries they have reached. When considered from the point of view of the labor movement, it can be seen that migration is the consequence of globalization and the neoliberal economy. The root cause of the migratory movements triggered by globalization is the migration of impoverished, dispossessed, excluded human beings with the hope of a new beginning in life (Delgado 2013).

If we survey the last century of migration literature, we see that theories of migration have become ever more complex and have taken up the sociocultural context as well as taken up those factors that move labor such as wage differentials that set labor in motion (Toksöz 2004 :10–44). However, in its general lines, there is an increase in the direction of migratory movements resulting from the uneven geographic distribution of capital and labor flows toward the unlimited demand for labor created by the domination of capitalism and the markets. Also, there is mobility from the traditional sectors to the better-paid jobs in the modern sectors, where the expected net gain is the highest. The factors that provide momentum to migration set cheap labor in motion for capital. Whether voluntary or forced upon the immigrants, these factors have made labor migration a significant part of the capitalist world economy. During this period, as the land, raw materials, and labor in the peripheral countries have come under the control of world markets, large masses of people have become dispossessed and forced to migrate in order to survive.

For instance, in opposition to liberal theories of migration, Delgado Wise says that the fundamental reason for migration in our day and age is the impact of globalization and neoliberal policies. He then lists the sources of forced migration under four headings:

1. Violence, conflict, and disaster
2. Human trafficking
3. Layoffs, exclusion, and unemployment
4. Overqualification or over competence and lack of opportunities (Delgado 2013)

In short, theories of migration were developed from varying ideological perspectives and have evolved in such a manner as to cover very complex situations, with each trying to explain a different aspect of the phenomenon. As I pointed out initially, the process of emigration from Syria that started with the people's rebellion will have to be explained in terms of causality under a new perspective. This chapter will take up this process in terms of "labor migration."

In the writing of this chapter, the field observations I made in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey, in the context of the work I have carried out with Syrian refugees and my readings geared toward understanding the process of the people's rebellions in the Middle East and the attitude of workers within this process, have proven essential. The chapter covers the interviews I carried out and the observations I made in the last eight years with workers employed in workshops and factories in the production zones within the provincial borders of, first and foremost, Gaziantep but also Şanlıurfa, Kilis, and Adana, as well as with seasonal agricultural laborers working in the plains of Çukurova (Cilicia), Amik, and Harran, again within the frontiers of the same provinces. In Lebanon, the observations I made and the discussions I had during my visits to the rural regions in the north of the country, in particular Tripoli and the Bekaa Valley, and in Beirut, and the observations and talks I had in Jordan and the fieldwork in northern and western Jordan and in Amman made this chapter possible.

Labor Migration

Migrant labor has always been kept on the side as a subservient source of reserve labor convenient for employers with a view to keeping labor costs low, meeting the shortcomings of the labor supply, attaining flexibility, and disposing of cheap labor. As long as they could be controlled and their presence kept within certain limits, migrants were put to use by the capitalists as a mechanism to pressure their own working class and the labor market at large.

Since World War II, the capitalists have planned migratory processes meticulously, holding each component process under control. In the immediate aftermath of the war, a migratory wave of 15 million souls was

experienced in Europe as a result of the changes in the borders. This was in fact a reorganization of the labor force that had suffered immense losses during the war. Then came the period that extended until the mid-1970s, during which capital grew rapidly, solved the labor shortage by using “contract labor,” and rapidly enriched itself. Germany, France, and the United Kingdom at first met their labor shortage from Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Spain. Growth that exceeded 5 percent then made them turn to workers from countries like Turkey and Yugoslavia. Later the admission of workers was stopped, but rather than the present workers returning, they welcomed the arrival of their families, and a new period set in. Under the impact of the second oil shock in the 1980s, controlled labor migration came to an end. Those who came later were classified as asylum seekers, refugees, and undocumented migrants. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the speedy collapse of the Eastern Bloc countries, hundreds of thousands of people penetrated core Europe, and asylum seekers from Turkey, the Middle East, and other peripheral countries followed suit.

During this period, the major causes of migration from the periphery to the core were cited as the scarcity of jobs, escape from poverty, and the search for a better life. But especially in peripheral countries, economies were driven to crisis, and military coups were staged to manage the process. Şevket Pamuk and Roger Owen predicted that the process of economic change in the Middle East at the end of the twentieth century would inevitably upset the social order and that in certain situations there would arise strong popular opposition to government policies. They pointed to two aspects with respect to the future of the region: ongoing wars that never cease haunting many Middle Eastern countries and the imbalance between resources and population (Pamuk and Owen 2002).

As in other peripheral countries, migration acted as a safety valve in the Middle East as well in the absorption of regional unemployment. With the two oil shocks that occurred before the 1980s having led to Europe shutting the doors to immigrants, there was an attempt at finding a solution to the labor surplus through meeting the need for labor in the oil-rich Gulf countries (Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, etc.). More than 70 percent of the migrant workers in the Gulf were Egyptians, Yemenis, Palestinians, Jordanians, Lebanese, and Syrians (Hanieh 2015: 313–14). In this sense, within the last three decades, migration was transformed into an instrument to balance out labor supply and demand on the overall scale of the region, but this was not sustainable. Migrant workers that had been working primarily in construction and agriculture had turned to other industries as their industries began to shrink and, with incoming families, the need for new migrant labor declined. New jobs were not forthcoming for the younger generation that came in as a result of rapid population growth. On the other hand, the Gulf bourgeoisie

had promulgated new legislation to prevent the inflow of migrant labor: for instance, children who were not citizens were not permitted to enroll in the state school system. The gulf countries thus established a heavy system of exploitation that imposed lines of discrimination between citizens and non-citizens. The immigrant could only enter the country with the visa provided by the agencies and was compelled to pay a part of their revenue to these intermediaries for years on end. Under this system, dubbed *kafalah*, each worker had to hand over their passport to their employer. Despite all these hardships, the remittances sent home by the immigrant worker exceeded foreign capital inflows for many countries.

Immigrant workers lived under an integral system of exploitation combining poverty, cheap labor, long working days, and deprivation of basic human rights. This system was in fact the same in all Middle Eastern countries: the population was dispossessed, large masses of the people were impoverished, and a powerful system of exploitation was established as the shackles of feudal exploitation were consolidated by modern methods of production. Low employment, in particular among the youth and women, increased the rate of unemployment among graduates.

Although mass struggles against this system emerged, led by the youth and strongly supported by women, the arrest and exile of political activists, dotted by violence on the scale of massacres, quashed these struggles. On the other hand, the collapse of the bipolar world swiftly changed the political balance of forces in the region. The period of conflict opened up by the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq deepened ethnic, religious, and sectarian fault lines and created social polarization after the occupation of Iraq. As a result of rapid population growth, poverty, the monopolization of the economy by a small minority thanks to despotic regimes, inept administration, and other problems of the capitalist system in the Middle East, the Arab youth started to flow into the squares.

Gilbert Achcar, in his quest to shed light on the social, economic, and historical background of the “Arab Revolt” in his book *The People Want*, sums up the social situation that confronts the population in three words: “poverty, inequality, and insecurity” (Amar and Prashad 2014). In tracing the *Lineages of Revolt*, Adam Hanieh says that it is impossible to isolate a single factor such as authoritarianism, poverty, food prices, unemployment, etc.; there are many different factors at play in these revolts, and these factors are directly linked to the path of development of capitalism in the region. Underlining the extreme problems created by capitalist development within the last few decades, the author points out that whereas the dispossession of masses mired in poverty was advancing rapidly, a very small section of the population controlled the key moments of accumulation, served its own interests, and sustained close relations with international capital (Hanieh 2015: 313–14).

“The People Want the Fall of the Regime” (*Eş-şaab yurid iskat'en-nizam*)

The self-immolation of a street peddler, a college graduate, on 17 December 2010 became the signal flare of the popular uprisings of the Arab Spring. The violent repression against these uprisings and the period of conflict that accompanied them resulted in a profound disillusionment among Middle Eastern populations. Whatever term we use, whether “spring” or “uprising” or “revolution,” what happened was an electrifying display of force on the part of the oppressed classes against despotic regimes from one end of the Arab-speaking geography to the other, from the Maghreb to the Mashriq. Having started in 2010, the uprisings were gradually replaced by violence and chaos. It was an excruciatingly painful process for the rebelling masses (Kassir 2011).

Ever since the beginning of the popular rebellions, the entire region has been drawn into spiraling violence. A large section of the population of those countries, in the belief that peace was never going to be restored, stuffed their hopes for the future and their minimal necessities in their backpacks and started to migrate toward “new lands” where they could lead a humane existence. It seems that the “profound sense of misfortune” that Samir Kassir says has penetrated every pore of the Arab soul will be transported to all corners of the world in those backpacks (Kassir 2011).

The predicament of the refugee as both rootless and rooted is characterized by Iain Chambers as “striking roots into rootlessness” (Chambers 2005). Becoming a refugee opens deep wounds in the soul and body of these people who can never go back to what they regard as their home. They march for days on end through barbed wire and minefields, facing weapons, crossing rivers and seas, and, somehow surviving, traversing borders as they look for asylum in other countries. These “new lands” will perhaps never become the destination of their dreams, but they will never be able to return to where they came from. Everything that they have left behind rapidly vanishes from their memory and disappears. Youssef, who has two university degrees and now labors as an unskilled worker, said, “However much I try to hold on to the past in my mind, souvenirs become hazier by the day.” When I asked him why, this was his answer:

We receive news every day, news of deaths, news of our homes being arsoned, news of the streets where I was born and grew up being destroyed. Seeing photos of the souk of Aleppo, so colorful, so full of people, filling me with such wonders when I was a child now fall into ruin, witnessing the destruction of our past and our cultural heritage gives me great pain. Perhaps it's best to forget the past.

A Syrian teacher who was working as a seasonal migrant worker in the Amik plain showed me the key hung around his neck and said:

There is no longer any door that this key can open. They bombed down my house to inexistence. I have visited the site and seen the rubble with my own eyes. But I will carry this key around my neck until the day I die, for I feel the warmth of my house in the cold of this iron key.

The Labor Market in Countries Neighboring Syria and Syrian Refugees

According to UN data, the number of Syrian refugees registered in countries neighboring Syria is as follows: Turkey: 3,576,396; Lebanon: 916,113; Jordan: 654,692; Iraq: 245,810; and Egypt: 129,426, the whole totaling 5,558,123 (UNHCR n.d.). In other words, since 2011, a considerable number of immigrant workers have been added to the labor market of the countries neighboring Syria. How did this affect the labor market of these countries? When we look at their economies, we see that the effect of the 2008 crisis is still continuing, that the economies in question are to a great degree dependent on inflows of foreign capital, that both unemployment and unregistered employment practices are quite high. So how are the labor markets of these countries reacting to the hundreds of thousands of newcomers? Research conducted on this question shows that the rate of unemployment as a ratio to the active population of the host countries is still high but declining; hence, the newcomers have become a part of the labor markets (Errighi and Griesse 2016; İçduygu and Diker, 2017: 12–35). The same studies also show that the Syrian refugees who have sought asylum in these countries work for low wages in the unregistered sectors of the economy. Immigrant laborers have become the basic element of the market for unskilled labor and accept work under terrible conditions. Unregistered employment practices have also flourished. The refugees who have become part of the labor market in their country of asylum are mostly concentrated in agriculture (seasonal migrant labor), construction, textiles and knitting, plastics and footwear, and the service industries, and they are employed as unregistered labor (Errighi and Griesse, 2016).

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 662,010 Syrian refugees have been registered in Jordan (UNHCR 2019). It is common knowledge that since no registration has been practiced since 2015, this does not reflect the real figure, which has reached 1.364 million. The Zaatari Refugee Camp has turned into a city with a population of 80,000. The work done shows that 360,000 registered Syrians of working age are now living in Jordan. If you add those that have not been registered, this figure doubles. We see that a great majority of these refugees are active on the labor market (Mercy Corps 2019).

In the agricultural fields of Irbid, Jarash, Mafraq, Al Zaqra, and the Jordan Valley, the Syrians form a considerable part of the workforce. The in-

ternational organizations and the NGOs who work with refugees support the employment of Syrian refugees in the Jordanian labor market with the projects and programs that they conduct (ILO 2018). In 2019, the number of Syrian refugees with work permits in Jordan exceeded 138,000 (UNHCR 2019). This corresponds to approximately 45 percent of the three-hundred-thousand-strong registered workforce of Syrians in the country. These permits are valid in construction, first and foremost, and agriculture, textiles, and the services. They are not accorded to more technical staff such as healthcare workers, educationalists, or engineers.⁷

Since the 1970s, Jordan has hosted an abundance of immigrant labor in low-wage jobs. This is particularly a result of the inflow of Palestinians into the country, who have been forced to abandon their homes as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Egyptian workers comprise the other significant immigrant labor demographic. Workers from Southeast Asia and China started to flow in on the basis of the *kafalah* system before 2011, and with the Syrian crisis that started that year, Syrians became the new immigrant workers of the labor market. In 2016, the Jordanian government and the European Union signed the Jordanian Compact in order to ameliorate the life standards of both the Syrian refugees hosted by Jordan and the vulnerable host communities. This compact, signed to strengthen the cooperation between Jordan and the European Union, covered the period of 2016–18 and contained provisions aimed at facilitating the temporary stay of Syrians in the country, to improve the life standards of both Syrians and vulnerable host communities, and to increase the socioeconomic expectations and resilience of Jordan (European Commission 2016).

In Jordan it can be observed that the increasing number of Syrian refugee workers, particularly in the construction industry, increase unemployment and, concomitantly, competition between workers for existing jobs; as a result of this, Jordanian workers are pushed out of the labor market. For instance, the rate of unemployment, at around 13 percent in 2011, rose to 19 percent in 2019 (CEIC Data 2019). Youth, in particular, have difficulty entering the job market. In the same period of 2011–19, the ratio of Jordanian workers employed in the construction industry started to decrease, whereas the employment of Syrians was on the rise. Outside of construction, a high number of Syrians are also employed in the retail and wholesale trades. The rate of unemployment for Jordanian workers in these industries has reached 18 percent. This whole situation results in a loss of opportunities for Jordanian workers (Stave and Hillesund 2015; ILO 2015). There are enormous problems regarding the employment of women. The ratio of women among those Syrian workers having received a work permit is only around 5 percent. Reports published show that working age for refugee children goes down below twelve, even pushing them into hazardous industries (ILO 2019).

For many years Lebanon was the country to host the highest number of displaced persons per capita. Palestinians and Syrians make up close to half the population of the country. The number of Syrian refugees in the country is 926,712. From 6 May 2015 on, the UNHCR suspended any new registration work upon the instruction of the Lebanese government. Accordingly, those waiting to be registered are not included in this figure (UNHCR 2019). According to some observers, this figure has now exceeded 1.6 million as a result of the influx of new refugees since then. Around 25 percent of the country's total population is made up of Syrian refugees. This share goes up to 37 percent in the Bekaa region. Syrian refugees are at the bottom of the ladder with respect to the relationship between working hours and wages. Northern Lebanon and the Bekaa are regions where Syrians work in the agricultural sector at a high level. These were in fact regions where Syrian seasonal migrant laborers worked in agriculture during part of the year even before 2011. The share of children working particularly in agriculture is quite high, and these are the regions at the forefront for the use of immigrant women's labor.

The last decade has been a period of grave problems for the Lebanese economy. The political situation in the country has progressively deepened these problems. Highly dependent on the central Gulf economies, Lebanon experienced considerable division as a result of the Syrian crisis. Hezbollah, the significant Shia political movement of Lebanon, stood by the Syrian regime and even opted to fight alongside it. This led the Gulf countries supporting the opposition groups inside Syria to cut their economic assistance and investment in Lebanon. Notwithstanding Lebanon's effort to make up for this through international aid and support, the gradual decline in this assistance is putting the country in a greater quandary by the day. The country, home to conflicts for decades and wielding a weak economy to begin with, is hosting over one and a half million refugees. The life standards of both the local people and the refugees are in constant decline. Approximately 59 percent of the refugees declare they are unemployed (David et al. 2019). Those who do have a job usually work in industries such as cleaning, construction, and agriculture in which employment takes the form of unskilled day labor; they work longer hours than the Lebanese workers and get paid less. The Lebanese labor market is increasingly characterized by the spread of women's and child labor. Women are paid approximately 40 percent less than men. The level of unregistered work is estimated by the World Bank to be 50 percent (UNHCR 2020; David et al. 2019). Child labor has spread like wildfire (UNHCR 2018). Street peddling, small agricultural enterprises, and family firms are the most common venues for the employment of child labor. The worsening of socioeconomic conditions generates school absenteeism. Studies show that 8 percent of children between the ages of ten and fourteen are employed and that an overwhelming majority of these are

absent from school on a permanent basis. Moreover, 60 percent of refugee children of the same age group do not attend school. This will leave them vulnerable to labor exploitation in future. Half the children in this age group are looking for a job. The ratio of children who work is much higher among those who have lost their parents in the war. Parents make their children work so that they can further support the family financially (Cali et al. 2015).

The greatest sphere of employment for Syrian children in the countries they have sought asylum in is seasonal agricultural labor. A great majority of the seasonal laborers that work in the Çukurova (Cilicia), Amik, and Harran plains in Turkey currently consist of Syrians refugees. Girls and women in particular find a place in informal jobs in the agricultural sector. The same is also true for the agricultural regions of Lebanon such as Tripoli and Bekaa and the Jordan Valley and the agricultural areas of northern Jordan.

Syrian Participation in the Labor Market in Turkey

On the basis of UN data, according to unofficial figures, as of 31 July 2019, close to 4 million Syrians, 3,639,248 of those registered, are now living in Turkey, both inside and outside of camps. Refugee workers will in all probability have an impact on the labor market in Turkey for a long time. Due to lack of sufficient data, research conducted in this area has shortcomings regarding the adaptation of refugees to the labor market in Turkey (Akgündüz, van der Berg, and Hassink 2015). In the studies that have been carried out, it has been determined that the pace of wage increase for workers from Turkey experienced a fall and that the domestic worker has suffered a loss due to this (Del Carpio, Wagner, and Christoph 2015).

Because of the attitude of the Turkish government to keep its Syria policy and the refugee question away from the public gaze, the analysis and research regarding the impact of refugees from other countries on the labor market do not provide us with detailed data. Our field experience over the last eight years provides ample evidence. In effect, research carried out in other countries reflects the current situation of the labor market in Turkey. For it must be admitted that refugees who flee violence and oppression are potential members of the labor force in the host countries. In Turkey, with its approximately four million refugees, the increasing downward pressure on wages due to the increase in the labor supply led to a fall in wages and a sense of fear of economic insecurity in the minds of Turkish citizens. The Syrian refugees are blamed as the source of many problems, such as rent hikes, unemployment, lower wages, long workdays, etc., in particular in cities close to the Syrian border. However, the real crux of the matter with respect to the relation between migration and labor is the fact that it has the power to render labor less powerful relative to its original situation (Öner

and Öner 2012: 90). With migration, thanks to the surplus population, capital is able to establish a control regime over labor through which it can hire whenever it wishes from this surplus labor pool and fire whenever it fits its needs. It is a familiar fact that Turkish capitalists express their understanding on the issue by saying at every opportunity, “These people will form the labor market for unskilled labor force in Turkey in the future, and this should make us happy.” I witnessed a conversation between two employers within the first year of the arrival of Syrian refugees in Turkey. One of them said: “May Allah bless Assad! So good to have these Syrians over. Our workers did not even agree to work for 1,000 Turkish Lira, but now there are plenty of people who are ready to work for 500 or 600.”

The Ansar-Muhajir Fraternity

When the first group of Syrian refugees arrived on 29 April 2011, the calculation was that they were going to return home in just a few months. An “open door” policy was implemented, which was, incidentally, perhaps the single most correct policy of the Turkish government. The “guests” started to flow to other cities, without any planning at all. The lack of foresight embodied in the judgment that the Baath regime would crumble in the space of a few months implied the strategic shallowness of partisanship toward the Muslim Brothers and those who sided with an Islamist ideology. That is why the camps were referred to the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) and Syrians living within cities to Islamic NGOs, so much so that all information and data regarding the refugees were opened up to these organizations. Islamic NGOs and fraternities formed a “muhajir network” that was very widespread and powerful. All assistance was channeled through this network. Even when municipalities or other public agencies provided the assistance, reference was demanded from the Islamic NGOs. At the Islamic grassroots level, the question was conceived in terms of the “ansar-muhajir relationship.” The intellectuals of the Islamic front theorized the question as the sociological dimension of migration and the Hegira.²

What was being stressed here beyond the claim that Syria is an Alevi state was the idea of a powerful Turkey as Islamic territory. After all, the Islamic element had been in power for approximately a decade, and the territory of Anatolia was being Islamized by this government. The mighty days of the Ottomans were back, and they were the only ones who had the correct words about the Middle East. All the scholars of Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad, historic centers of Islamic civilization, were struck with admiration at the strategic depth of Turkey’s vision and were bracing to kneel before Turkey. In fact, these were simply illusions: below the shallow neo-Ottoman discourse, there was no depth but rather a baseless vanity.

The swamp through which the country was wading was gradually sucking it in.

In practical life, from the point of view of the people and of the bourgeoisie, the situation conformed precisely to the rules of capitalism. The immigrants were exploited to the marrow. Everyone knows who got rich benefitting from the assistance collected for them and how the aid parcels were sold on the market. Here is how the system worked: the immigrant from Syria first had to stop by an association. There he or she was referred to a small enterprise located in the industrial zone. The owner of the enterprise laid off the worker he had been employing for many years and hired his poor co-religionist for half the wages of the earlier worker. He also engaged in another act of beneficence toward the immigrant, sending him or her to a member of the fraternity. This member also committed a charitable act, evicted his previous tenant, and rented his house or apartment to the immigrant for twice the previous lease. This story may be heard as a typical summary of that narrated by thousands of immigrants arriving from Syria. The *ansar-muhajir* nexus has in fact established a powerful system of exploitation within the last eight years.

When we come to the present period, both the government and the political and civil society organizations under its domination have realized that things are not going as they should, that the economic crisis is rapidly deepening, and that the hostility to refugees within the population is growing. Having conducted the affairs relating to migration and asylum in a nontransparent manner for eight years, the government now sees that under the impact of the anti-immigrant populist wave all around the world, and it is now moving away from playing the part of *Ansar* and is instead starting to intimidate the refugees. The Syrian refugees are dispersed all around the country, even the remotest corners, working on farms, in workshops and sweatshops, without job security, as a fresh source of cheap labor.

As of 2019, we know that Syrian refugees are dispersed to almost all cities, working predominantly as cheap labor. Having lived off scavenging from trash dumps, worked on farms and lived from hand to mouth, served in construction as day laborers at the cheapest rates, labored in factories and workshops for twelve or thirteen hours on end before being laid off without even being paid their arrears, these people now stand at the bottom rung of the labor market. In *Çukurova* (Cilicia), in *Amik*, in the greenhouses of the coastal areas, in the red beet weeding and harvest in Central Anatolia, it is the Syrian refugee that does the job. The employer in *Bey pazarı* batters the Kurdish seasonal migrant workers and invites Syrian refugees in their stead (Köse 2016; Güler 2015).

The same situation manifests in the factories and workshops of the cities, which are filled with adolescents or with women workers. The men, who worked any job when they first arrived so that they could pay the rent or put

dinner on the table for their children, are now being replaced by children and women. Children who cannot go to school are placed in jobs with the hope that they will at least learn some craft. In place of the husband who can no longer find a job, the woman becomes the provider of the whole family. The woman who has lost her husband to the war takes all kinds of risks in order to make ends meet and look after her children.

A refugee woman talking about the job-seeking process in the poor neighborhood where she had taken refuge with her children—feeling, with an intuition characteristic of her gender, that it was up to her own will to reach the light through the darkness—said the following:

To men whose door I have to knock on looking for a job as a single woman, I am simply a woman in want. For them “poverty breeds poverty,” whereas I wish to work and get my fair share. I am offering not my body to him but my labor. In return I’m asking for bread for my children. Because if I am to live in dignity, that is the only way.

In the history of labor migration, women have always provided the most vulnerable and the most flexible labor in the least skilled jobs under the worst conditions and received the lowest wages in return. Women are now replacing men, especially in the labor-intensive industries. Immigrant women are very commonly employed in farm labor, seasonal agricultural enterprises, daily labor, and domestic services. The fact that they are women and immigrants and from a different ethnic group and that they belong to the working class magnifies the degree of their exploitation. Thus, a female immigrant worker is at a disadvantage vis-à-vis a native woman worker because she is an immigrant, vis-à-vis a male immigrant worker because she is a woman, and vis-à-vis a skilled immigrant worker because hers is simple labor (Toksöz 2004: 10–44). Working women receive around 40 percent less in wages.

The number of refugees who are living in Turkey as of July 2019 exceeds 3.6 million, and those between the ages of eighteen and sixty number 1.8 million. If one adds children between ten and eighteen, this figure rises to 2.5 million. The research conducted shows that, leaving aside child labor, the number of Syrian workers who have become part of the labor market as of 2019 exceeds 1.2 million and the overall Syrian refugee labor force surpasses the mark of 1.6 million (Çoban 2018). In a country like Turkey, where unregistered employment stands at 34.4 percent, it might easily be guessed that with the entry of Syrian refugees as cheap labor into the market, unregistered unemployment has grown even further (TÜİK 2019).

According to some studies, the share of Syrian farm workers in the field of agricultural production, first and foremost in the plains of Cilicia (Çukurova), Amik, and Harran, is nearing 80 percent. Kurdish workers, who became seasonal farm workers after their villages were evacuated and

they were forced to migrate mostly to cities in the western part of the country, have now been replaced by immigrant workers from Syria and other countries (Development Workshop 2016). In the past, families who worked as seasonal farm laborers would move to their places of employment in the spring, work there for a certain period, and then return home to the city after the harvest was done. Today, because the Syrian families who do the farm work have no homes to go back to and because the money they make is hardly enough to make ends meet, these families lead a nomadic existence. Many families move around during the sowing period, regular maintenance, and harvest. For this reason, within the last five years, seasonal farm labor has been transformed and is no longer seasonal but performed year-round. This state of things implies that, particularly for families, children's access to education becomes impossible. Although there are no official data regarding the number of Syrian child workers, there are claims that child labor is the most common recourse for fighting economic problems for Syrian families living in Turkey (Hayata Destek 2016). In many textile, knitting, and plastics workshops in many provinces, the number of Syrian refugee workers has surpassed the number of workers from Turkey. In labor-intensive workshops, starting with cities such as Istanbul, Denizli, Bursa, and Gaziantep, the unregistered employment of refugee workers is very common.

In provinces such as Gaziantep that are close to the Middle Eastern market, the footwear industry has undergone a period of revival thanks greatly to refugee labor. Because of its proximity to Syria, Gaziantep has become an industrial city that supplies the domestic market of Syria in essential industries such as textiles, knitting, footwear, and food to a considerable level. The number of small and medium-sized enterprises set up by Syrian entrepreneurs is increasing rapidly.

The construction industry, another sphere of employment, has also grown rapidly in the last two decades, thanks to the incentives provided by the AKP government, and has survived the last seven years by relying on refugee labor. The crisis that has gripped the Turkish economy for the last three years (and the construction industry is seen by some as one of the sources of the crisis) has manifested its effects on this sphere of activity as well. Despite the support provided by the government in the form of interest rate cuts in housing and other measures, the industry has been shrinking rapidly. It may be predicted that the construction industry, relying to a significant level on migrant labor, will become a source of increasing unemployment. According to the latest data, the rate of unemployment in Turkey has approached 13 percent (Anadolu Ajansı 2019). This figure does not cover the unemployed among the 3.6 million refugees.

According to UNICEF, it is held that while approximately 650,000 Syrian and other refugee children are registered at schools in Turkey, an

estimated 400,000 Syrian children remain outside of the school system (UNICEF 2019). It has been determined that the foremost obstructions in children's access to education is the language barrier and socioeconomic problems. Human Rights Watch identifies three fundamental obstacles that Syrian children living outside of camps face in accessing the school system, namely language, peer bullying, and economic hardship. This is what the report has to say on the issue—we paraphrase:

Economic hardships: families cannot meet expenses such as transportation, pedagogic material, and, when it is a question of educational centers, school fees. Child labor is a very common phenomenon within the Syrian refugee population, whom Turkey refuses to supply with work permits lest this has adverse impact on its own population of unemployed. Parents who are thus refused labor market security cannot hence receive a fair income that would be the counterpart of their labor and remain beholden to the income brought into the household by the children. (Human Rights Watch 2015)

Syrian children are employed in knitting workshops, textile factories, dried fruit factories, footwear production workshops, as mechanics in garages, on farms and in agricultural enterprises, and on the streets as vendors of tissue, bottled water, or dates (Lordoğlu and Aslan 2018).

The New Poor, the Recasting of the Middle Class

The work permits given out in Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey do not permit the exercise of their profession by middle-class graduate Syrians. This presents a great obstacle to professional continuity for graduate Syrians. It may be observed that most middle-class Syrians who live in these three countries leave them, move to countries such as Germany, and become part of the labor market there as skilled workers.

Because educated middle-class Syrians that have sought asylum in Turkey do not have work permits, and because there is no legislation that provides them with the opportunity to practice their profession, they face great difficulties in finding jobs in their own area of specialization. Medical doctors, academics, lawyers, engineers, and other educated professionals in their mold who finished university in Syria survive under great hardships. It is very common to meet many professionals with that kind of background in workshops, sweatshops, or farms. They work twelve or thirteen hours a day and yet make a meager 1,500 to 2,000 liras per month. Because they have never before worked as manual laborers, they are hard pressed to sustain themselves under such conditions because they are not familiar with kind of labor process inherent in unskilled work, and in many cases they are laid off without their arrears being paid them because their employer is not content with the work they are doing.

The Syrian refugee community living in Turkey is of course divided into classes and strata within itself. There is a capitalist section of the community that has transferred its business to Turkey, as well as a new middle class, supporting the opposition inside Syria, that has started up in Turkey factories and workshops with the goal of exporting goods to Syria. This sector shares the rent created by the war by taking their stand within the opposition forces. This new stratum of entrepreneurs has a large share in the rise in enterprises belonging to Syrians in provinces such as Gaziantep, Urfa, Mersin, and Antakya.

Another sector is a younger generation that has become politicized with the civil war, some of whom have grown up in Turkey. A great majority are versed in a foreign language, work for international donor organizations, communicate with the new activist generation around the world, and share the same network as their own generation in the Middle East. Even if they set out on the road to Europe, they are bracing to become the new middle class of the Syrian diaspora. The number of young Syrians who somehow make it to the United States, Canada, or European countries by using these networks in order to continue their studies in those countries is increasing by the day.

From Camps to Day Labor Markets: The Reshaping of Labor Markets

Syrian immigrant workers will continue, for the present and the future, to be the unskilled and cheap labor force of the Turkish labor market and, in particular, of its unregistered segment. Even today, you can see “intermediaries” lingering before the gates of the camps, run by AFAD, in order to fill lorry dumpers or tractor trailers with thousands of refugees and take them away for daily jobs. Even factory owners have started to meet the daily labor needs of their factories by sending out intermediaries to day labor markets. You can witness the unemployed refugees who fill the day labor markets of border provinces, such as Gaziantep, Urfa, and Kilis, competing between themselves for jobs that pay twenty or twenty-five Turkish liras a day. You can also come across scavengers preying on garbage bins, children working in decrepit workshops, and cleaning ladies who work on a daily basis.

The Ünalı region, which was the weaving and textiles production center of Gaziantep in the late Ottoman period, has now been transformed into a production zone consisting of hundreds of unregistered workshops where tens of thousands of Syrians work. A large part of the active workshops in this zone are subcontractors to which large textile firms outsource part of their production. Syrian employers oversee unregistered production ac-

tivities in hundreds of workshops. Small enterprises that are active in textiles and knitting and rely mostly (to the level of 80 percent) on migrant labor have collectively turned into a special industrial zone. By the 1970s the Ünalı region had become the center for the production of tapestry. Then it became a gigantic working-class neighborhood where Kurdish migrants who were forcibly evacuated from villages came and settled. The Kurdish workers that filled the workshops and the streets of Ünalı in those years have now been replaced by Syrian workers. And the street vendors that used to sell local wraps filled with chickpeas have now been replaced by vendors of hummus and falafel. During noon recess you can hear Arabic rather than Kurdish on the streets. Not much has changed, though, in the subterranean mazes, where workers toil for twelve to fourteen hours a day. Piece work is the rule, wage payments are weekly, and it is children who cling to the lowest rung of the labor hierarchy. And in the surrounding neighborhoods, Syrian refugees coexist with the other indigent populations of the city (Gültekin 2019).

Another area in the center of the city is the historical zone of tanning yards. This zone has now turned into another unregistered workplace center. Nizip Avenue and the surrounding streets are predominantly filled with workshops, and the labor force flows in from the neighboring Karşıyaka area. Although filled with plastics and footwear workshops, the area, situated at the base of the historic Antep fortress, seems abandoned during the day in its deafening silence, only to come alive at sunset when thousands of migrant workers and children step out of the underground world where they toil the whole day and start walking toward Karşıyaka.

Syria and the Syrian refugees will be one of the major items on the agenda for Turkey in the years to come. Long-term plans and policies are needed in order to solve the problems accumulating by the day. How can the official participation of the Syrian workers be accomplished in the labor market of the host countries? This is easier to do as long as the international interest and assistance is sustained. It is important to maximize the coordination of the international community and the host countries now. One has to start somewhere in order to achieve all this. That somewhere is the determination of the legal status of the Syrian refugees.

Exclusion from the Labor Market and Future Threats

The high rate of unemployment among Syrian refugees also poses a serious threat for the future of the labor market of the host countries. In Turkey, within the scope of the Social Adjustment Assistance Program (SUY), established thanks to the support of international organizations, a sum of 120

Turkish liras is handed out to over 1.5 million Syrians each month through the Kızılay (Turkish Red Crescent) card system (Turkish Red Crescent Directory of Migration Services 2019). This is an important contribution to the finances of the refugees, who work for low wages in unregistered industries. Although the assistance and the support delays the entry of a part of the refugee population into the formal labor market for the moment, when this financial support starts to wind down, the situation will change, and a higher number of refugees will enter the labor market. The prolongation of the conflict in Syria is an indicator of the fact that in the future even more Syrians will seek asylum in neighboring countries. In recent days, news has spread that the more than 250,000 people who have amassed in the region as a result of the aggravation of the conflict in the Idlib area are bracing to seek asylum in Turkey. It seems that countries neighboring Syria will not be able to prevent the influx of Syrians despite the walls that have been erected and other security measures. Short of a secure system within the country itself through which refugees can build their future in tranquility, people will flee the country no matter what. They will become part of the labor market in the countries they go to as a source of cheap labor.

The fact that Syrian refugees are willing to work for low wages and under more difficult and adverse conditions is the source of a decline in work environments and labor market standards, the spread of the informal market, an increase in the tendency toward unregistered work, and a disregard for conformity with labor standards. Deterioration of work standards implies more difficult enforcement of the minimum wage and of compliance with labor legislation (ILO 2015). For instance, in interviews done with citizens of Turkey who work as farmhands in agricultural regions, I was informed that wages changed very little during the last four years. A Kurdish worker cultivating peppers in the Amik plain said, “When the Syrian workers arrived six years ago, there was a great wage differential between them and us, our wages being almost twice as high as theirs. In the last three or four years, the daily wages of the workers from Turkey have almost totally stagnated, but that of the Syrians has increased so as to nearly equal ours. The employers used this opportunity really well. It is true that wages are now equalized, but at our cost.”

In interviews with workers in the knitting industry in the Ünalı region of Gaziantep, they also pointed out that the wage differentials between refugee workers and those native to Turkey were recently reduced significantly but that this worked to the disadvantage of the workers from Turkey. Said one: “When they first came, the Syrian skilled workers received almost half of what our skilled workers received. Same for the semiskilled. The workers in package dyeing, apprentices, errand boys, etc., almost worked for nothing. Over the years, our weekly pay increased very little while they gradually

raised theirs, and very rightly so because they could not have subsisted on those wages.”

A Syrian skilled textile worker for his part said:

I came here from Aleppo in 2013. What else could we have done? War, unemployment, starvation, the children’s education, so we came here. I did the same thing that I’m now doing in Gaziantep, I worked on the machine. In Aleppo we have the requisite skills, I did not learn them here. When we first arrived, we rented a house together with the family of my sister. We were five and they were four, and so we lived nine people in two rooms for two years. My sister’s husband, my son, and myself, the three of us were working and hardly brought in enough to look after the nine of us. We adults received four hundred [liras] per week, that makes eight hundred, and the young boy received seventy-five. We thought at that time that we would go back soon, so we stayed with two families in the same house. But we were not able to go back, and two families together was not possible, so we moved into two houses. I said we already did this job back in Aleppo, so we were skilled workers, but we were not able to make ends meet on those low wages. I changed jobs frequently, and each time my wages increased a bit more, finally to become equal to native workers. Anyway, they no longer wish to work in these jobs. They wish to go to the industrial estates and find a job with social security in large factories. Now, thank God, we’re fine. The children were not able to go to school, so I’m teaching them the job. We get along.

In those countries where unregistered work is common, and employers opt for the cheaper kind of labor, it turns out that the longest employed native workers in the unregistered areas are rapidly replaced by refugee labor. The research conducted shows that the unemployment rate for refugees diminishes over time as they stay in the host country. In other words, their rate of penetration in the labor market increases. Refugees displace workers who work in unregistered areas, in particular the less educated, the women, and the elderly from the labor market. On the other hand, as refugees are increasingly hired in unregistered jobs, the citizens of the host country move up toward registered sectors. Furthermore, it has been determined that upon the entry of refugees in the labor market, women workers withdraw from the market (Suzuki et al. 2019).

Compared to the initial period when refugees arrived in Turkey, wage rates for refugees have now become more balanced, with the rate of wage increase for the host country workers decelerating. The new situation is hence a kind of equilibrium point that creates a disadvantage for workers. This is not universally true, though. In particular, wage raises for seasonal farm work have been very low during the last three or four years, and the wage differential between workers from Turkey and those from Syria has been eroding.

In Turkey, people under temporary protection have been accorded work permits since early 2016. According to a statement of 31 March 2019 made by the Ministry of the Family, Labor and Social Services, of the 96,972 aliens who have been accorded work permits, those from Syria number 31,185. The prohibition on the exercise of some professions—e.g., lawyer, pharmacist, dentist—for aliens is also valid for Syrians.

As the economic crisis has deepened in Turkey, the rise in unemployment increases poverty among the population. In a country where the middle class is rapidly crumbling, the population is increasingly impoverished; the competition between toilers is increasing, and a system is coming into being in which the Syrian poor are being pushed to the very bottom of the social hierarchy. Indigent Syrians, who have now become dispersed over all the provinces of Turkey, are now taking refuge in the poor working-class neighborhoods of the cities. These neighborhoods are becoming zones where the laborers are competing among themselves and hostility toward refugees and hate speech are becoming common occurrences.

In a country where the economic crisis is politically polarized and deepening by the day, opposition to Syrian refugees has become widespread among the Turkish population. Pumped by the media and social media, hostility toward immigrants can also be observed among workers at workplaces. At a time when unemployment is on the rise due to the economic crisis, refugees are held responsible for the problem. The right-wing populist wave that has gripped the world in recent years bases itself on hostility to immigration. In Turkey as well, political groups and parties compete with each other in order to ride this populist wave. As in previous elections, and also in recent elections, populist politicians frequently used hostility toward Syrian refugees as a theme on the streets as well as on social media simply to attract votes from the electorate.

In Jordan, approximately one-half of the refugees have reported that they have reduced the quantity and quality of the food consumed by the household, and they have also reported skipping meals. In Lebanon only 7 percent of refugees subsist at an acceptable level of food security. In Turkey, a report prepared by the association *Hayata Destek* (Support to Life) in Istanbul states that 12 percent of the refugee population cannot feed itself at a sufficient level and is under the threat of starvation. The same report points out that various strategies for coping with this situation have been developed, the most common being, with a share of 89 percent, turning to food products that are cheaper and less preferred. Also, 59 percent of families reduce the number of meals consumed every day, 58 percent resort to borrowing food from others, 29 percent reduce the serving size of dishes, 14 percent reduce the food intake of adults so as to be able to feed babies and children, 6 percent send family members elsewhere to eat, and 3 percent limit the amount of food women consume (Kaya and Kıracı, 2016).

Conclusion

One of the facts that has persisted throughout the centuries of experience with migration and stands out is that international migration is managed in such a way as to serve the interests of the core countries. In the last decade, we have seen that this fact has remained the same as Syrian refugees have forced the gates of Europe. Western countries started to spend billions of euros for border security while limiting the number of refugees to be admitted in line with their own needs; bribing, so to speak, peripheral countries like Turkey for the rest to stay there simply confirms this proposition. It seems that from now on Syrian refugees will be used as pawns against the Western countries. The recent steps taken in this direction seem to indicate that “days of servitude” await the Syrians. Rather than keeping the refugees away by paying out and making concessions, the international community should be preparing the conditions that create an environment in which Syrians and their children can lead a secure existence in dignity in their new countries before their hopes for the future wither away completely.

Kemal Vural Tarlan is a researcher and documentary photographer. Since 2000 he has been conducting visual sociology and anthropology research among Roma communities living in the Middle East. He lives in Gaziantep and is the general coordinator of Kırkayak Kültür and the head of the Center for Migration and Cultural Studies for the Middle East. He has been conducting cultural and anthropological research on the Gypsy communities living in the Middle East. He is visiting lecturer at Gaziantep University Communication Faculty.

Notes

This chapter was translated from Turkish by Sungur Savran.

1. 138,000 Syrian refugees obtained work permits. See Turnbull (2019).
2. *Hegira* as a term signifies “migration from non-Muslim territories to the land of Islam.” Although it is impossible to know the extent to which this network reached out to Syrian refugees, it will without doubt require a new chapter in the study of the labor market, labor migration, the theory of migration networks, and the sociology of migration. See Tatlıhoğlu (2013: 124).

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