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Emerging Transnational Practices and Capabilities of Syrian Refugees in Turkey

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Abstract

Transnational activities of refugees in the Global North have been long studied, while those of the Global South, which host the majority of displaced people, have not yet received adequate scholarly attention. Drawing from refugee studies, transnationalism and diaspora studies, the article focuses on the emerging transnational practices and capabilities of displaced Syrians in Turkey. Relying on qualitative data drawn from interviews in Şanlıurfa – a border province in south-eastern Turkey that hosts half a million Syrians - the paper demonstrates the variations in the types and intensity of Syrians' transnational activities and capabilities. It describes the low level of individual engagement of Syrians in terms of communicating with relatives and paying short visits to the hometowns as well as the intentional disassociation of young refugees from homeland politics. At the level of Syrian grassroots organisations, there have been mixed engagement initiatives emerging out of sustained cross-border processes. Syrians with higher economic capital and secured legal status have formed some economic, political, and cultural institutional channels, focusing more on empowerment and solidarity in the receiving country than on plans for advancement in the country of origin. Institutional attempts are not mature enough and can be classified as transnational capabilities, rather than actual activities that allow for applying pressure on the host and home governments. This situation can be attributed to the lack of political and economic security in the receiving country as well as no prospects for the stability in the country of origin. The study also concerns questions about the conceptual debates on the issue of refugee diaspora. Whilst there are clear signs of diaspora formation of the Syrian refugee communities, perhaps it is still premature to term Syrians in Turkey as refugee diaspora.

Keywords: Transnationalism; refugee diaspora; Syrian refugees; Turkey; transnational capabilities.

Introduction

Syrian refugees are in the process of integration into the social, legal and economic life in their new countries of residence, having partially consolidated themselves in the receiving countries. Thus, they resemble being a refugee diaspora (Van Hear, 2009). Some maintain their former ties with the country of origin (CoO), i.e. Syria. This paper is aimed at addressing the main research question: How do Syrians in Turkey maintain connections with the CoO? The sub-questions are: What are the main political, socio-cultural, and economic mechanisms for launching transnational activities and sustaining transnational capabilities? Given the military conflict in Syria is continuing as of

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2019, how are the war conditions shaping their transnational practices? As the Syrians have not been granted refugee status in Turkey, with the majority of them under temporary protection², how has this situation of temporality and legal precarity impacted on the transnational activities?

The data for tackling these questions were collected from a representative province called Sanlıurfa, which is located on the Turkey-Syria border. Hosting almost half a million Syrians, similar to Istanbul, Gaziantep and Hatay, empirical data from there have provided evidence for in-depth analysis of the dynamics of Syrians' transnational ties. In this province, two rounds of fieldwork were carried out in July-August 2018 and March 2019. The first round was conducted with Syrian individuals (n=24), using a snowball sampling technique that explicitly involved taking care to include people from diverse demographic and legal backgrounds. The interviewees were asked about their life stories back in Syria and in Turkey since their forced migration. Drawing on the stories, further questions were posed to understand the experiences regarding border crossings, reception in Turkey as well as transnational ties, such as connections with friends and relatives, following up on news on Syria, visiting hometowns, sending money, planning about returning and projections about the future. This round also covered interviews with the Turkish stakeholders involved with the governance of refugees (n=34). As to the second round, purposeful interviews were conducted with Syrian community leaders as well as formal and informal grassroots organisations gain a greater understanding of transnationalism in relation to the social, economic and political spheres. This sample included three community-opinion leaders, a director of a philanthropic association, heads of two political associations, a director of a businessman association, the head a of religious course, directors of three solidarity associations for teachers, dentists, professional development, two businesspersons, a magazine editor and a political activist (n=18, See Annex 2). During the interviews, they were asked about their life in Syria and Turkey, their organisational efforts targeting Syria, the limitations and opportunities they encountered in their activities as well as their future plans. The researcher also participated in social events, such as exhibitions held by Syrian community organisations. Whilst the sample cannot be considered as entirely representative, it still provides important insights about the wide range of transnational practices and concerns. The collected interview data were coded through a thematic analysis approach, for which NVivo software was utilised. Coding processes was conducted by reviewing all the data and paying attention to the context in which respondents shared their stories about their ongoing ties with CoO. Themes were created to address the research question specified in this study. The reports published by research institutions and online news addressing transnational activities of refugees have been used to complement and to triangulate the data.

A focus on the transnational practices and capabilities of Syrians in Turkey provides a compelling case for examining newly emerging refugee diaspora formation during an ongoing conflict. The data demonstrate that there have been variations among Syrians' diasporic engagements and emerging transnational capabilities and activities. Some Syrians, mainly young refugees and those without permanent status and economic sources, have disassociated themselves from Syria (economically and politically). They have only kept their ties at the level of hearing news from relatives and listening to the general news about the situation in the CoO. Middle age and older Syrians additionally pay short visits. A limited number, mainly those with capital generated some transnational activities in the political sphere, such as supporting opposition groups,

² Turkey has not granted legal refugee status to displaced Syrians who sought being refugees there, but rather, it granted temporary protection status in 2014 (Cetin et al., 2018). In this article, the term of refugee is used to refer to Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey, as these individuals left their country in the belief that they could not or should not return in the near future.



making publications, and/or lobbying, in the economic sphere, such as continuing cross-border trade and in the socio-cultural sphere such as organising artistic performances, language teaching and religious activities. Gradually, they initiate broader institutional channels to sustain their activities. In general, much of their grassroots activities has been focused on the receiving country (RC), while those oriented towards the CoO are less developed and sophisticated in their activities.

To provide the theoretical framework, first, how the diaspora and transnationalism literature paves the way to explaining the activities of recent refugee communities targeting their CoO is considered. Then, the key concepts are set out, including transnational capabilities, refugee activities and the refugee diaspora. Following this, the empirical findings are presented, with their being divided in two: individual and community levels. To build a link between the theoretical perspective and empirical findings, the last section discusses to what extent does the Syrian case reflect the emerging transnationalism and refugee diaspora concepts. The article concludes with ideas for further research.

Diaspora and Transnationalism when Studying Recent Refugee Communities

One of the key literatures when studying international migration is transnationalism, which basically refers to “any processes transcending national borders” (Bauböck, 2010, p. 311). Migrant transnationalism is used to describe the triangular constellation between migrants, immigrants and the sending state. As Beauchemin and Safi (2019) write, all migrants - internal or international - maintain transborder ties. Also, forced migrants (whether being called refugees or not) establish such ties in connection with the family responsibilities, property claims and/or donations to help conflict impacted areas in the CoO. The ties may take similar or different forms due to forced migration experiences, migrants’ precarious legal status and access to limited resources in the host country (Cortes, 2004).

Literature on transnationalism of forced migrants/refugees has a close dialogue with diaspora scholarship. The concept of diaspora, similar to those transnationalism, refugees and migrants, is vague. Östen Wahlbeck conceptualises it as the “transnational social organisation relating both to the society of origin and the society of settlement” (Wahlbeck, 2002, p.221). He proposes that “the concept of diaspora can be used as an analytical category in studying refugee communities as it can give a more profound understanding of the social reality in which refugees live.” (Ibid.). Nicholas Van Hear further drills down on the concept by using the term refugee diaspora, arguing that “if displacement persists and people consolidate themselves in their territories of refuge, complex relations will develop among these different domains of what we may call the ‘refugee diaspora’: that is, among those at home, those in neighbouring territories, and those spread further afield.” (Van Hear, 2005, 2009).

Within the research strand of refugee diaspora’s transnationalism, certain subthemes have drawn more attention than others, including remitting (Lindley, 2009; Jacobsen et al., 2014), citizenship and identity (Griffiths, 2003; Laguerre, 2016) as well as relations between actors in the CoO and those in the RC (Brun & Van Hear, 2012). One of the major emerging themes of interest concerns the engagement of diasporas in homeland conflict (Baser 2015), conflict resolution, transnational justice and reconciliation (Haider, 2014; Koinova & Karabegović, 2017; Stokke&Wiebelhaus-Brahm, 2019).

While the majority of studies examining refugee diaspora have been focused on the modes of transactions and activities of long-established refugee communities, there is also emerging literature

on new refugee communities, such as Bosnian refugees in the United Kingdom (UK) and the Netherlands as well as Eritrean refugees in the UK and Germany (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Van Hear, 2006, 2009; Wahlbeck, 2002). Transnational activities and diaspora formation have often been discussed over the cases in which refugees were able to secure a permanent legal status in the European countries after the end of conflict, such as for Bosnians, Eritreans and Iraqis (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Baser & Toivanen, 2018).

A few studies have investigated the transnational activities of refugee groups in South-South migration settings, such as Burmese diasporic groups dispersed throughout Asia (Egreteau, 2012), Sudanese refugees in Egypt (Jacobsen et al., 2014) and Liberian refugees in Ghana (Omata, 2011). The authors of these three studies probed how diasporas make connections with their CoO and in what ways they influence the social, economic and political change there. Their findings underline the importance of historical context and the interconnection of sets of factors relating to the RC and CoO. These cases also make it clear that there are within and between group variations. The findings of these studies are acknowledged here; however, this study differs from theirs as it deals with a newly emerging diasporic group, which is not fully able to contribute change in the CoO, because of ongoing armed conflict. Nevertheless, this newly emerging diasporic group is expected to forge transnational connections, being influenced by the context and it is anticipated that it will demonstrate variations.

Theoretically, a discussion on whether a transnational frame provides a lens for explaining the transactions and activities of new refugee communities in the non-European settings, are still nascent. The emphasis on transit-turned-host countries of Global South -such as Turkey, Lebanon, Pakistan and Iran -enables to the assessment of the impact of several mechanisms that have not been fully addressed in the mainstream transnationalism studies. The first mechanism is the possible border effect as the refugee receiving country and CoO are neighbours. Accordingly, the spill-over of the conflict is high and the host states have stakes in the ongoing war that may encourage them to adopt restrictive measures or flexible transnational ties in line with their strategic interests (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2019). Second is the large size of the refugee communities in the countries that can register in millions. Naturally, it is to be expected that the size of the refugee community results in intense transnational activities that are critical to both countries. The third mechanism is that these countries often do not grant refugee status to the forced migrants, which puts the refugees in a precarious position, impeding their investment in transnational ties. In sum, insight into these three underestimated factors and their impact mechanisms will enrich the existing scholarship.

For examining these mechanisms influencing transnational activities and the capacities of newly emerging refugee diasporas, Turkey can be considered an exemplary case as a neighbouring country of Syria. There have been historical, social and economic ties among the people living across the border. The size of the Syrian population in Turkey is substantial, with the numbers under temporary protection (refugees) standing at 3,651,635. 99,643 have a residence permit and 55,000 became naturalised as Turkish citizens between 2011 and 2019, making the total number of Syrians in the country 3.8 million (DGMM, 2019; Goc Idaresi, 2019; T24, 2018). Turkey has become involved in the Syrian war in accordance with its own geostrategic and security interests (Sahin Mencutek, 2019). The case is also worthy of study as Syrian refugees represent a refugee group in which conflicts in their country are still continuing and mass return is not likely to be a reality in the near future, which gives it a distinct character when compared to other refugee scenarios.



Transnational Activities and Capabilities

For systematic analysis of migrant transnationalism, scholars tend to focus on certain levels (individual, associational), domains (economic, political, socio-cultural) and the means of transnational activities. With some modifications, Reinhard Schunck's (2011) comprehensive categorisation can be taken as a starting point. He defines two main economic transnational activities at the individual level: transnational entrepreneur and transfer of money to family/friends in the country of origin (remitting). Six political transnational activities include: 1) keeping in touch with politics; 2) reading newspapers; 3) membership of a political party; 4) giving money to a political party; 5) political campaigning and attending rallies; as well as 6) voting. Two more should be added into the list when the emphasis is on refugees' ties to the CoO in a conflict situation: giving support to or being recruited by fighting parties; and giving money to those parties. Another domain, social-cultural activities is more diverse, covering such as: 1) membership of hometown civic associations, 2) active in a charity organisation, 3) giving money to community/charity project, 4) traveling to attend public festivities, 5) local sports club with links to the CoO, 6) making at least one trip to the CoO since migration, 7) visits or frequent contact with family and friends; as well as 8) plans to move back. The organising funeral arrangements can be added to this list.

The categorisation above does not necessarily cover the transnational activities of grassroots organisations of refugees. Drawing from empirical cases, the following list can be created. Means of operating in the economic field include: 1) transnational entrepreneurs' bilateral economic ties with the CoO; 2) establishment of ethnic based economic or professional solidarity associations; 3) lobbying of the host country authorities; 4) investment for the reconstruction of towns or cities in the CoO; and 5) knowledge and experience transfers (remitting). The means engaging in the political field include: 1) establishment of associations and forums in the receiving country to support a certain party/group in the CoO; 2) publishing and broadcasting the language of the CoO to raise awareness about its politics; 3) organising rallies and; 4) involvement in peacebuilding activities, constitution making and truth commissions. The socio-cultural activities include: 1) organising celebrations of festivals on the pertinent days of the CoO; 2) organising language courses of that of the CoO; and 3) organising reading circles, religious activities, and art courses. This list can be extended further, nevertheless, it is adequate as a starting point.

The emphasis on emerging refugee communities' activities, rather than those of migrant or established diaspora, necessitates consideration of activities beyond those listed above. Opportunity structures cannot fully allow refugees to launch the abovementioned transnational activities. As Al-Ali et al. argued, in addition to transnational activities, there are transnational capabilities that "encompass the willingness and ability of migrant groups to engage in activities that transcend national borders" (2001, p.581). Capabilities are prerequisites for refugees to engage in transnational activities. The emphasis on them is critical for gaining an understanding of the transnationalism of recent refugee groups. Moreover, such capabilities are important for refugees' involvement into the post-conflict reconstruction of the CoO. Against this background, the following sections address how Syrians have been exercising such practices and capabilities in Turkey.

Individual level transnational activities of Syrian refugees

In Sanliurfa, Turkey, socio-cultural transnational activities of Syrians with a CoO focus are more observable than those relating to economic and political aspects. The main activity type is to maintain frequent social contacts with relatives and friends who have remained in Syria. Of the 24

Syrians interviewed in the province, seven had close relatives (defined as parents, siblings) living back there. Five interviewees had close relatives who had fled to Germany from Turkey, with one have two sons there. Almost all the interviewed Syrians reported that they often connected with close and distant relatives in Syria and those dispersed to other countries via mobile phones and social media. When the refugees were asked about the existence of such connections in the form of emotional ties with the home country, in particular, themes about missing home, unhappiness and nostalgia were mentioned with the aspiration of moving back to the CoO, whilst some considered their Syrian nationality came first. The words of one woman Syrian refugee who lived in a village illustrate these themes.

All my relatives remained in Kobani. I came here with my husband and kids. My mother and father are there. We talk to them by phone. We get news about them, but we have not seen each other in the last four years, since we fled here. I cannot travel to visit them during festive time. We cannot return, we do not have a house over there (I-Micro 11).

An important way of maintaining ties is to travel to or vacationing in the CoO. The Turkish government allows Syrians to visit Syria for total three months during two Muslim religious festive/vacation (*bayram*) times, if they apply in advance to the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management to get a travel permission document. Despite the complaints of Turkish locals and opposition parties about such travel to Syria, Turkish government has not insisted that visiting their country could lead to them losing their temporary protection status, even if they have a permit. It considers allowing travel is a means of showing religious empathy and encouragement for voluntary return in the long run (Sahin Mencutek, 2019). Around ten thousand Syrians take advantage of the opportunity for short visits, not only to enjoy celebrations, but also, to look after their properties and to visit relatives. Among the sample, five had visited Syria for various reasons. An old woman explained her short visiting experience in the following words:

I visited Syria three years ago, crossing the Akçakale border gate for the festive time, I stayed there for 1.5 months. I went to ask for money from my brother and on returning, I observed that no life remained in Syria, I was scared, our house had collapsed, destroyed, furniture of non-destroyed houses was stolen. We do not have anything anymore (I-Micro 10).

A limited number of those who had visited Syria had returned their hometowns, if they found conditions bearable; however, the majority returned back Turkey. In total, as of February 2019, the Turkish Ministry of Interior announced that 311,968 Syrians had returned their country, particularly to the Northern regions where the Turkish military has held control since 2016 (DHA, 2019). The Syrian government and/or armed opposition forces, depending on the location give a hard time to Syrians' visiting to the country (I-Micro 6). A man whose sons migrated to Germany explained his experience:

In order to sell my properties, I visited Syria when opposition groups were controlling Raqqa. Forces there asked where are my sons; I got scared for my sons. I quit everything, did not wait to sell, and returned back Turkey. I have never tried again, because of the fear that they may conscript my sons (I-Micro 7).



The one situation that requires transnational visits, which is also itself a socio-cultural activity is the conduct of funerals. One interviewee noted that adopting the funeral customs of Syrians in Turkey is quite difficult as they lived in smaller houses, where visits of their friends and the associated crowd at such times was not welcomed by Turkish local neighbours (I-Micro 15). It was also the case that the families, at least the closest members, such as sons and daughters, tried to visit Syria for funerals of their parents or other close kin. Such visits necessitated private travel permits for a week issued by the authorities in the border provinces (I-Micro 16).

In terms of political transnational activities, the most common one, is the following the home country news. Five out of the 24 interviewees reported that they regularly kept up to date with Syrian news through TV and the internet, mainly from Arabic sources. The security and surveillance in Syria impeded getting first-hand news during telephone calls (I-Micro 2). Two Syrian immigrant entrepreneurs, who had arrived Turkey as migrants and then became naturalised, established a large telecommunication company providing cheap internet, satellite and telephone services for Syrians (I-micro 3,4). This also shows how transnational activities in a certain field (socio-cultural) open a space for other sets of activities, such as economic and political transnationalism.

Not all Syrians in Turkey are interested in news about Syria, which can be called intentional disassociation from homeland politics. One interviewee, who was under temporary protection, explained the reason as follows:

In the beginning, I was following the news. We were expecting that Assad would be ousted in six months and we would return to our homes. But it did not happen. Assad will remain in the power. Nothing changed thus, I gave up following up news about Syria (I-Micro 1).

Similarly, another interviewee told me that, “I just follow the big story, we gave up following, we could not see any developments” (I-Micro 2). However, the Syrian civic actors, who used to be politically active in Syria continue to watch the news closely.

Syrians also have become involved in transnational economic activities. The remittances sent by them to their families inside Syria is vital for the survival of the latter. According to World Bank Data in 2015, the neighbouring countries of Syria, including Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey sent 76 per cent of the total remittances to Syria. Remittances from Turkey constituted about 14 per cent (Aron 2015), but there are no exact annual figures about these being published by the Turkish authorities. Interviewees were not eager to talk about remitting and often deflected the conversation to complain that Turkey was a very expensive country to live in. The reluctance to talk about them could relate to the concern that disclosing such information could jeopardise their right to get social assistance. However, I was told that many sent money to their close relatives, such as their parents, at irregular intervals, often in times of need (I-Meso 19). The remitting is very challenging due to the lack of an operational banking system in the CoO. To fill the gap, some unregistered money transfer agents, known as *hawaladars*, and jewellery stores have been established by Syrians that operate across Turkey to make remittance and debt transfers inside Syria (Dean, 2015, p.11). Whilst I was told that these agencies are very much trusted by Syrians and locals doing businesses, it is clear that there is high risk and less guarantee through the use of such informal agencies (I-Meso 21).

Another type of transnational economic activity is the establishment of business ties with the CoO. Obviously, forced migrants with economic capital are generally more welcome in Turkey than those without it. Some businesspersons and investors do not need to apply for refugee status due to having valid passports and are eligible for residency of Turkey. Turkey has been an attractive

destination for those who had previous export-import relations with Turkish border cities and industrial ones. Since 2011, Syrians have established over 7,000 formal businesses in Turkey and they employ nine individuals on average, mainly in sectors, such as manufacturing, retail, and construction (Building Markets, 2018). In addition to the industrial cities, such as Istanbul and Bursa, Syrians have also made investments in border provinces, particularly in Gaziantep, Hatay, and Şanlıurfa. More than 250 companies have been established by Syrians in addition to 100 small-medium size businesses in Şanlıurfa (Benek et al., 2018; I-Meso 19). While their first priority is to sustain and flourish their businesses, they also look for maintaining relations with Syria. They export to Syria using Turkey as a transit or source country. They use their pre-war links to conduct business and to deal with the security risks relating to the war (I-Meso 12). As the evidence has indicated, socio-cultural, political and economic transnational activities of Syrian refugees have been greatly varied in terms of form and the intensity. The situation in the grassroots organisations also show variations, as is discussed below.

Transnational activities and capabilities of Syrian grassroot organisations

The migration of Syrians to Turkey led to the establishment of many formal and informal grassroots organisations established by the former. The majority of them focus on empowering Syrians in Turkey. Whilst there are no absolute numbers about such organisations due to the lack of registration, experts from Şanlıurfa estimate that there are around 100-150 civic Syrian organisations (I-Meso 20). Many do not apply for association status, because the majority of their Syrian founders lack passports and residency permits, thus preferring to remain unregistered (Kaya, 2015, p. 267). The founders of civic organisations are often educated Syrians having political, economic and social capital. Their main service areas include philanthropy, solidarity, education, and vocational training (Kaya, 2015, p.269). In the last few years, due to the increasing needs and funding conditionalities, newly established organisations have been focusing on employment, integration and protection related activities. Compared to those targeting Turkish authorities to improve conditions of refugees in the RC, the number of associations focused on transnational activities targeting the CoO is very limited.

Some Syrian grassroot organisations aim at maintaining Syrian identity and solidarity through cultural activities. An editor of a magazine published by Syrians in Arabic noted that:

We see the preservation of Syrian identity critical for the future of Syria. However, we are concerned about the fact that identity related differences based on ethnicity, religion, and sect became more polarised during the war. The identity of being Syrian should be reinforced for the unity in the future. To this end, we organise panels, write articles and make presentations (I-Meso 13).

Economic transnational activities of Syrians, such as businessmen associations, are also observable. They first seek to cooperate with the provincial state actors in order to cope with bureaucratic hurdles to grow their businesses. Also, they have plans to transfer their activities into the Syria and to model structures there in the future, but these plans are contingent upon the security conditions. Meanwhile, they invest in human capital and know-how, such as training Syrian students in Turkey in specific areas like finance. A director of the businessmen association told me that:



We will wait until that the conditions in Syria become safe and secure, then we start to invest there. If Turkey ensures security in north-west Syria, we can transfer our investments to this region (I-Meso 6)

A Syrian organisation, focusing on the employment of Syrians in Turkey, also had plans for know-how transfer in the post-war period. Its interviewed director responded to my question about their plans as follows:

We have thousands of Syrian people who registered with us seeking jobs. We have an army of workers. We will reconstruct Syria. We can call upon more than ten thousand workers to come; thousands of engineers, doctors, teachers. We are ready to establish projects and reconstruct Syria (I-Meso 7).

In the political sphere, the shifts of power in the ongoing conflict are often reflected in the host country context. Turkey's participation in the Syrian war, mainly in terms of supporting anti-Assad forces, has opened up spaces for transnational activities of anti-Assad forces while pro-Assad forces did not organized in Turkey at all. The prominent example was the creation of the Syrian Interim Government in Turkey, an example of a government in exile that has a presence in Gaziantep, Istanbul and Ankara. Its aim is to "represent the Syrian opposition on the ground in Syria and, prima facie, among the entire Syrian diaspora in Turkey and the world" (Mannix & Antara, 2018, p. 22). Due to the resilience of Assad's forces in Syria, such organizations lost their power, while the majority of those interviewed noted that they had gradually lost hope regarding regime change. Many pro-opposition organisations narrowed down their activities as it lost its power and Turkey decreased its direct support. Nevertheless, in the summer of 2018, a few organisation representatives interviewed in Sanlurfa said that they were seeking mobilisation of support for opposition groups in Syria (I-Meso 9, 10). Some others have been publishing magazines and setting up social media platforms to make their voices heard. They have also been putting out press releases, in particular, condemning attacks on civilians in Syria by pro-Assad forces (I-Meso 17). However, some Syrian groups have protested against the activities of opposition groups, with the claim that they do not represent their views. Such protest events were participated in by a small number of Syrians, mere dozens, remaining as a low profile event that is only shared by local web sites (Duma, 2015; Gosteri, 2015). Not only those interviewed political activists and organisations, but also news in Turkish media, show that there is a high level of support for Turkey's policies in Syria, including military intervention in the Northwest (Gobeklitepehaber, 2018). Nevertheless, compared to socio-cultural and economic activities, the political activities have been emerging much more slowly and directly influenced by the host country's political priorities.

Grassroots organisations look for recognition, but they are aware of their lack of capacity and licence from intervening states to get involve in Syria's peacebuilding, as the following statement shows.

Politically, our types of actors are able to act, if the active states in Syria takes an initiative. We should be realist. We activists cannot do anything, if we are not supported by influential states in Syria. Thus, states should launch initiatives to include us in the process (I-meso 13).

Definitely, Syrians abroad have the capabilities to contribute to constitution writing, voting, referendums, democratisation attempts and accumulating social remittances, such as ideas, values and cultural artefacts. However, despite Syria's obvious brain-drain as a consequence of the

enormous refugee flight abroad, by and large, there is a belief that Syrian government will not include refugees in the post-war reconstruction.

Discussion and Conclusion

There are at least three theoretical lessons that can be learned from the case under scrutiny. First, the economic, political and socio-cultural transnational activities operate on different scales, according to the stage of migration and the capital of the migrants. Individuals have engaged more intensely and rapidly in transnational socio-cultural activities than economic and political ones, with the latter having been subject to a slow flourishing process. At the organisational-associational level, socio-cultural activities emerged first, then economic activities became manifest. Some activity types also intersect, such as remitting or funerals, that have both socio-cultural and economic dimensions. The socio-cultural and economic transnational activities resemble the nuanced form of “enforced transnationalism”, as proposed by Ali-Ali et al. (2001, p. 596-7). In this case, it is not forced by above (from the CoO), but rather, from below.

The political activities emerged at a lesser intensity and late due to the ongoing armed conflict in the CoO and the sensitivities of the host country. Moreover, common transnational political activities have hardly been initiated due to the deep fragmentations among the Syrian refugee community along ethnic lines (Arab, Kurdish, Turkoman), religious lines (Sunni, Alevites, non-Muslims), political lines (pro-Assad, anti-Assad, pro-Kurdish movement, pro-Turkey intervention, other political divisions within Syrian opposition). Despite a growing emphasis on solidarity and unity being called for by some Syrian associations, there has not, as yet, been a common ground established to initiate CoO centric political activities. Nor have there been campaigns seeking transnational justice or digital platforms as been set up in liberal host state contexts (Stokke & Wiebelhaus, 2019; Tenove, 2019). While there are many factors dividing them in the CoO politics, the one thing that united them was problems in the RC, such as access to education, employment and legal services. Hence, they have been more easily united and building solidarity for addressing these issues, rather than transnational activities targeting the CoO.

The second theoretical finding, is that the lack of political and economic security within the country of refuge hinders the confidence needed to create and venture into transnational domains by refugees with limited capital at the stage of their mobility. The individual level accounts confirm the findings of Ali-Ali et al. (2001) that, “as long as refugees are not certain about their legal status, that is, their right to reside permanently in the country of refuge, they will tend to avoid anything that might jeopardize their status.” (Ali-Ali et al., 2001). The temporary protection causes legal precarity and risk, so they try to act carefully in order not to draw negative attention towards their situation. Also, those Syrians who applied for Turkish citizenship slowed down their transnational practices so as not risk losing out in their naturalisation process. Among the groups, those recently granted Turkish citizenship were generally more proactive in pursuing transnational activities.

The third theoretical finding is that structures and the political developments in the host and home country shape refugees’ shifting strategies and practices. Turkey, as a host state, encourages transnationalism, to some extent, by opening some channels, such as allowing short term visits and encouraging continuation of business ties. Syrian businesspersons appear as the more transnational and mobile group acting in parallel to the neoliberal economic policies of Turkey. Nevertheless, Turkey retains its control with the claim of sovereignty. The ongoing conflict in Syria is the main reason for limitations over efforts to engage with transnational activities. The Syrian government has not shown any eagerness in relation to this.



As posed in the beginning, the study has also concerned questions about the conceptual debates around refugee diaspora (s). Whilst there are clear signs of diasporisation of the Syria refugee group, as observed in their associational activities, I hold a conceptual reservation. As Sökefeld rightly argued, “the formation of diaspora is not a ‘natural’ consequence of migration but that specific processes of mobilization have to take place for a diaspora to emerge.” (2006, p. 265) Syrians in Turkey rarely engage in specific communal mobilisation processes. It is perhaps still premature to term Syrians in Turkey a diaspora group. There are ambiguous perceptions among Syrians themselves, too. One informant said that “I do not see myself as diaspora. My loyalty with Syria remains at the emotional level” (I-Meso 15). Another informant also said that he did not consider himself as diaspora, because “if peace and security are provided and conditions ameliorate in Syria, I will return. Right now, I am just trying to survive” (I-Meso 16). As seen in these statements, ideas around temporality in Turkey and possibility of return have an impact on ideas around considering themselves as diaspora. Syrians who have acquired Turkish citizenship are more likely to identify themselves as diaspora. A Syrian businessperson noted that, “I consider myself as diaspora; our relations with Syria will remain only at the level of business ties” (I-Meso 12). A dentist whose citizenship application being processed noted that “I have two home countries: both Syria and Turkey. When I get Turkish citizenship, I will activate double citizenship” (I-Meso 4).

Whilst it is clearly problematic to use the identification of refugee diaspora for all Syrians in Turkey, there are seeds of emerging refugee diaspora and consolidation of their transnational ties and capabilities in relation to the CoO. The scope and usages of terms are evolving and changing. Nevertheless, the diaspora concept and transnationalism towards the home country carry a strong ideational and emotional dimension that needs to be explored in further studies. Overall, this case study provides little basis for wider generalisations about transnational activities and capabilities of refugees as well as about conceptual debates on refugee diaspora. To allow for such generalisation, the inquiry could be extended to other Syrian refugee hosting countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Germany and Sweden. A research on multiple sites of transnationalism(s) created by Syrians may allow to gain greater understanding of both transnational activities and diaspora formation.

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Individual Level Interviews List

#	Gender	Age	Education	Profession	legal status
I Micro 1	male	middle-age		worker for printed house	temporary protection
I Micro 2	male	young	university	engineers	waiting for citizenship
I Micro 3	male	young	university	business men	citizenship
I Micro 4	male	young	university	business men	citizenship
I Micro 5	female	middle age	university	school teacher	temporary protection
I Micro 6	male	middle-age	high-school	photographer	temporary protection
I Micro 7	male	old	primary school	trade	citizenship
I Micro 8	female	young	university student		temporary protection
I Micro 9	male	middleage	high school	activists-writer	temporary protection
I Micro 10	female	old	no education	selling small items to villagers	temporary protection
I Micro 11	female	middleage	no education	house wife	temporary protection
I Micro 12	female	young	high school	house wife	temporary protection
I Micro 13	male	young	university	lawyer	citizenship
I Micro 14	female	young	attending to university	student	temporary protection
I Micro 15	female	middle age	university-high school	teacher	temporary protection
I Micro 16	male	middle age	primary school		temporary protection
I Micro 17	male	middle age	university-high school	working temporarily as teacher	citizenship
I Micro 18	male	middle age	university	dentist	waiting for citizenship
I Micro 19	male	middle age	university	unv.teacher	citizenship
I Micro 20	male	middle age	no education		temporary protection
I Micro 21	female	young	attending to university	student	temporary protection
I Micro 22	female	young	university	architercture	waiting for citizenship
I Micro 23	female	young	university	teacher	citizenship
I Micro 24	female	middle age	univ.-high school	teacher	temporary protection

Formal and Informal Associational and Community Level Interviews

I #	Civic formal and informal organization	Profession	Activity area
I Meso 1	Director of Religious Course	Imam	religion
I Meso 2	Co-Director of Temporary Education Center	teacher-engineer	education
I Meso 3	Initiator of Syrian Teachers Union in Turkey/Quranic course teacher	teacher-imam	education
I Meso 4	Initiator of Syrian Dentists Association in Turkey/imam	dentist	health
I Meso 5	Former Political activists	writer	politics
I Meso 6			
I Meso 7	President of Syrian Business Association-Urfa Branch	16 July 2018	trade-employment
I Meso 7	President of Association giving employment support to Syrians	businessperson	employment
I Meso 8	President of Humanitarian aid organization	retired judge	humanitarian aid-education
I Meso 9	President of Syrian association	journalist	political-cultural
I Meso 10	President of Political activists bloc	writer-thinker	political
I Meso 11	Artist	collector	cultural
I Meso 12	Syrian businessperson conducting trade with Syria	businessperson	business trade
I Meso 13	Editor of Syrian magazine published in Turkey	writer	political-cultural
I Meso 14	Community Leader	lawyer	
I Meso 15	Community leader	computer engineer	trade-employment
I Meso 16	Media representative of Syrian philanthropic organization	public relations	media-cultural
I Meso 17	Representative of Syrian Writers Union	writer	media-cultural
I Meso 18	Public relation of Syrian telecommunication company making business in Turkey and Syria	public relations	business-trade

