

# (Transit-)Migration. Strategies within and beyond Fortress Europe.<sup>1</sup>

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As I walked through the streets of downtown Istanbul, I saw a young man with a child sitting on the curb, begging for money. In the proximity of the big shopping street İstiklal Caddesi as well as in other parts of Beyoğlu, I noticed more people doing the same. As I could read on self-made signs positioned on front of them, many of them were refugees. Often, children and other family members were begging for money<sup>2</sup>. As refugees told me, some of them slept in the street, in parks or in abandoned buildings. After the outburst of the Syrian civil war, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey reached to 1.7 Million in April 2015<sup>3</sup> – one year before, the NGO Mazlum Der had already registered around 300.000 Syrian refugees in Istanbul<sup>4</sup>.

For a long time, there has been no guaranteed refugee-status in Turkey for people coming from non-European countries due to the so-called “geographical limitation”<sup>5</sup>. In April 2013, a new “law on foreigners and international protection”<sup>6</sup> was passed by Turkey’s Grand National Assembly with the geographical limitation remaining in effect. Nevertheless, there are many people in Turkey who, having fled (civil) war or searching for a better life, are awaiting resettlement. Others transit the country in search for a way into the European Union.

Migrants in Turkey who want to apply for asylum have to register at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ (UNHCR) office in Ankara or – since 2013 – at the Association of Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM)<sup>7</sup>. The registration constitutes the precondition to being resettled into another country. After registration, most migrants are not

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1 This publication was first published in 2015 for the research project "Global City Istanbul", Georg-August-University Göttingen, <http://www.kaee.uni-goettingen.de/mapping-istanbul/> (last accessed August 2015).

2 For more information see Sauter, Dieter: "Syrische Flüchtlinge in der Türkei – Betteln, Teller waschen, Müll sammeln“, in: WOZ 49 (2014). <https://www.woz.ch/-5770> (last accessed July 2015).

3 European Commission. Humanitarian Aid for Civil and Protection: "Eco Fact Sheet: Syria Crisis", April 2015, [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/syria_en.pdf) (last accessed July 2015).

4 Kirişçi, Kemal: Syrian refugees and Turkey’s challenges: Going beyond hospitality, Washington/D.C.: Brookings Institution 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2014/05/12-turkey-syrian-refugees-kirisci/syrian-refugees-and-turkeys-challenges-may-14-2014.pdf> (last accessed July 2015).

5 Kaya, Ibrahim: "Reform in the Turkish Asylum Law: Adopting the EU *acquis*?", CARIM Research Reports (2009) 16, European University Institute, Robert Schuhmann Centre for Advances Studies, pp. 2 - 4, [http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/11849/CARIM\\_RR\\_2009\\_16.pdf?sequence=2](http://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/11849/CARIM_RR_2009_16.pdf?sequence=2) (last accessed July 2015).

6 The whole law is accessible via the Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration Management: Law No. 6458 on 2013 on Foreigners and International Protection, April, 4 2013, available at: [http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/eng\\_minikanun\\_5\\_son.pdf](http://www.goc.gov.tr/files/files/eng_minikanun_5_son.pdf) (last accessed July 2015).

7 Ibid, p. 9.

allowed to work. The state decides where they are permitted to live; often, it is in small satellite cities. As few migrants want to stay there, there is a constant flow towards the bigger cities. Syrians were seen as 'guests' until 2014<sup>8</sup>, not as 'refugees' according to Turkish law. They cannot register at the UNHCR for resettlement. Until today, their status is unclear and seen as temporary<sup>9</sup>.

From time to time, protests against refugees in Istanbul arose. A bigger protest took place in August 2014, when around 300 Turkish citizens clashed with the police and windows were broken in the suburb of İkitelli, Küçükçekmece<sup>10</sup>. This was not the first agitation against Syrian refugees in Turkey. In July 2014, similar incidents took place in the cities of Kahramanmaraş, Adana and Gaziantep. In Antalya, the Governor's office asked more than 1.500 Syrian refugees to leave the city. The office justified the issued notifications with accusations of "social and economic tension" as well as damaging the tourism industry<sup>11</sup>. Hüseyin Avni Mutlu, mayor of Istanbul, came up with the idea of deporting the begging refugees back to camps in south of the country<sup>12</sup>. There, the situation is problematic for many refugees. As I was told by people that had visited or lived in these camps themselves, one can find the inhabitants of whole villages that fled from war together in a camp.

We met François,<sup>13</sup> a long-term refugee activist from Ruanda, who has been living in Istanbul for many years. As he tried to explain the protests against Syrian refugees, he stated:

"Of course Syrian people are getting such kind of small jobs, then they get small money, and then maybe Turkish people, they will not, you know. Turkish people when they get salary, they need big salary. But Syrians, because they want to survive, they will take all kind of small jobs and then young Turkish people think that Syrians are stealing jobs from them, such kind of things."

## Marginalization and the Church of Hope

François told us about sub-Saharan asylum seekers in Istanbul as well as asylum seekers in general. When I asked if skin color played a role, he referred to the following episode as a typical experience of black people in Istanbul:

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8 Schläfli, Samuel (2016): Interview with Şenay Özden: [http://www.tageswoche.ch/de/2016\\_16/international/716427/](http://www.tageswoche.ch/de/2016_16/international/716427/) (last accessed May 2016).

9 Ibid, p. 14.

10 For more information, see "Turkey protest in Istanbul over Syrian refugees", BBC News August 25, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-28926956> (last accessed July 2015); N.N.: "Tension rises as Turks allegedly beaten up by Syrians", Today's Zaman, August 25, 2014, [http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa\\_Pension-rises-as-turks-allegedly-beaten-up-by-syrians-in-istanbul\\_356714.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa_Pension-rises-as-turks-allegedly-beaten-up-by-syrians-in-istanbul_356714.html) (last accessed July 2015).

11 Baş, Kenan: "Antalya Governor's Office orders Syrian refugees to leave province", Today's Zaman, December 24, 2014, [http://www.todayszaman.com/national\\_antalya-governors-office-orders-syrian-refugees-to-leave-province\\_367929.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/national_antalya-governors-office-orders-syrian-refugees-to-leave-province_367929.html) (last accessed July 2015).

12 Al Jazeera: "Istanbul may place Syrian refugees in camps", July 16, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/07/istanbul-may-force-syrian-refugees-into-camps-20147161740029946.html> (last accessed July 2015).

13 I have changed the name of every interview partner in this article.

"If you go to Osmanbey, or somewhere else, you will find so many Iranians, Syrians, who are working really without working permit, because they are white, Muslims sometimes, no problem. But because black people...oh police when they make, you know, control they will see black people working. What happens? They will arrest them and then they will even fine the employers. And then the employers, to pay the fine, how do you think? They will use the way that they supposed to pay you, they will give to police. And then they will tell you: You see, we give your money to the police because they don't want you to work. So we can work two month, three month, three month and then still ain't getting a new salary. Or they give you half-half. Half-half, the other half is kept in case if the police come to fine them. And then your wage is used to pay the police." <sup>14</sup>

This is not the only mention of 'white Iranians and Syrians' not having so many problems with the police that came to my attention. According to Koray Özdil, sub-Saharan migrants in Istanbul face racial profiling, physical violence, stigmatization and having to live in fear. <sup>15</sup>

When asked about the employment opportunities for recent migrants in Istanbul, François told us that men work mostly at construction sites or in the textile sector while women work as cleaners, babysitters and in textile production as well. He added that as a black man, you can work for merchants and lead customers from African countries to them. Black people in Istanbul try to organize themselves in specific locations, for example churches. With François, we visited a prayer service at one of those churches, "The Winners Divine Chapel". These evangelical churches can be seen as "subaltern (sacred) counterspaces" serving as places of prayer, as transnational meeting points, and business hubs <sup>16</sup>.

## 'Re-Unification' in Aksaray

As I was further reflecting on the situation of Syrian refugees in Istanbul, I wanted to see Ismail again, whom I had first gotten in touch with on May, 1 2014 in Edirne. We had met in one of the city's hotels in the evening after the big 1 May demonstration that had taken place in the city center. During our first conversation, Ismail told me that he had already tried to reach both Greece and Bulgaria with his family a couple of times. In Greece, the border police pushed them back <sup>17</sup>. The family could not enter Bulgaria because the Border Police was in position on Turkish territory, blocking the way. For many years, Ismail had been a wholesale trader in Germany. During that time, he had a visa for Germany, where he often moved from place to place. He escaped the war in Syria and got stuck in Turkey after he and

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14 Talk with François on the May 25, 2014.

15 For further information about sub-Saharan migrants in Istanbul see the study of Özdil, Koray: "To get a paper, to get a job"–The Quite Struggles of African Foreigners in Istanbul, Turkey" (2008), Master's Th., Central European University Budapest, Dept. of Sociology and Cultural Anthropology, Online: [http://www.etd.ceu.hu/2008/ozdil\\_koray.pdf](http://www.etd.ceu.hu/2008/ozdil_koray.pdf) (last accessed July 2015).

16 Heck, Gerda: "Worshipping at the Golden Age Hotel: Transnational Networks, Economy, Religion, and Migration of the Congolese in Istanbul", in: Becker, Jochen/Klingan, Katrin/Lanz, Stephan/Wildner, Kathrin (eds.): Global prayers: contemporary manifestations of the religious in the city, Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers 2014, pp. 274-289.

17 More information about Push-Backs from Greece to Turkey can be found in the report by the human rights organization Pro Asyl: "Pushed back. systematic human rights violations against refugees in the aegean sea and at the greek-turkish land border", November 7, 2013, [http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/l\\_EU\\_Fluechtlingspolitik/proasyl\\_pushed\\_back\\_24.01.14\\_a4.pdf](http://www.proasyl.de/fileadmin/fm-dam/l_EU_Fluechtlingspolitik/proasyl_pushed_back_24.01.14_a4.pdf) (last accessed July 2015).

his family had had to leave Egypt, where they had lived for a while. In a near-perfect German, he told me:

“What really bothers me is that I was in Germany and I know Europe very well and I cannot enter. Why, because I have a family. With a family, it is hard to enter. If I would have been alone, I would have made it a long time ago. And I don't need help, I go alone. [...] But because of my family, I cannot. I have to, somehow, watch out for my family. I have my children in a Syrian school in Istanbul and I wait until the school is finished and then I will travel on to Germany, if I can.”<sup>18</sup>

But as Ismail failed to cross the border a third time, the family did not see any chance in Edirne and decided to go back to Istanbul. I met Ismail once more in Aksaray<sup>19</sup> in the end of May 2014. He told me on the phone that we would meet each other at the underground station next to a parked police car. He was accompanied by his son. We hugged and looked for a coffee bar. After a little while, he started telling us how he had been doing since we last met. He spoke about how hard life was for the family in the Global City and that he was constantly running out of money. Ismail applied for the Humanitarian Admission Program (HAP)<sup>20</sup> in Germany like thousands of Syrian refugees. He did not know about the progress of his application. He told me that he planned to send his child to Germany alone because he hoped this strategy would allow the whole family to follow. “I will try it at the border again,” he told me.

Some months later, I chatted with Ismail once more. He told me that he was planning to sell one of his kidneys because the family had no money left. “I am an old man already“, Ismail wrote in a short message. He had had to spend a lot of money due to several hospital stays of his wife and one of his children. Ismail's new ‘idea’, to be quite honest, made me sad and depressed. He sounded more and more depressed himself when I spoke to him through social media. Finally, in the beginning of February 2015, Ismail arrived in Germany with one son. After crossing several EU-countries, they applied for asylum in Germany. They are currently awaiting a decision on their status.

## Foreigner's Guesthouse

Kumkapı is a place that already has a migrant history<sup>21</sup>. Many people that have migrated live and work there. Suitcase or bag sellers as well as many textile shops are very visible in the streetscape. The whole area was full of shopping tourists looking for cheap offers. As one becomes aware of in Kumkapı, not every refugee or migrant has the chance to go to the

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18 Talk with Ismail in Edirne on May 1, 2014.

19 For further information about Aksaray see the multimedia project “Der Zaun“ by Dietmar Telser, Benjamin Stoess and Thorsten Schneiders (December 2014, updated April 2015), <http://www.der-zaun.net/turkei/> (last accessed July 2015).

20 Bundesministerium des Inneren, “Humanitäre Aufnahmeprogramme des Bundes“, December 12, 2014, [http://www.bmi.bund.de/DE/Themen/Migration-Integration/Asyl-Fluechtlingsschutz/Humanitaere-aufnahmeprogramme/humanitaere-aufnahmeprogramme\\_node.html](http://www.bmi.bund.de/DE/Themen/Migration-Integration/Asyl-Fluechtlingsschutz/Humanitaere-aufnahmeprogramme/humanitaere-aufnahmeprogramme_node.html) (last accessed July 2015).

21 See as well the article of Kristen Biehl: “Exploring migration, diversification and urban transformation in contemporary Istanbul – the case of Kumkapı.” (2014). MMG Working Paper 14-11, [http://www.mmg.mpg.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/documents/wp/WP\\_14-11\\_Biehl\\_Exploring\\_migration.pdf](http://www.mmg.mpg.de/fileadmin/user_upload/documents/wp/WP_14-11_Biehl_Exploring_migration.pdf) (last accessed July 2015).

European Union or be resettled. No small number of them decides to stay in Istanbul instead of going back to their country of origin.

The reasons for people not being able cross the borders to the European Union are manifold. In 2013, fences of 10 and 30 kilometers length were erected along the borders to Greece and Bulgaria. In 2014, Push-Back case numbers inclined<sup>22</sup>. Turkey and Bulgaria signed a readmission-agreement on sending migrants back to Turkey<sup>23</sup>, an agreement with the European Union had already been signed in 2012<sup>24</sup>. Additionally, it is much harder to make a living as a refugee or a migrant in many European countries due to the economic crisis.<sup>25</sup> In the context of the European border and migration regime, Turkey and the UNHCR take on major roles as an instruments of migration control externalizing and managing the migration flow to the European Union<sup>26</sup>.

Many migrants in Turkey know about the difficult situation in some European countries. In our talk, François summarized:

“And then there is this factor also with Greece, ah being or having some economical problems also many people they don't want to go. [...] Because they say: Oh, we go to Greece anyway, we fall into the same problem, we don't get work, we don't get money, so its better we stay here in Turkey.”

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22 For information on Push-Backs from Bulgaria to Turkey see the following reports: reports: Amnesty International: "The True Cost of Fortress Europe. Human Rights Violations Against Migrants and Refugees at Europe's Borders" (2014), [http://www.amnesty.eu/content/assets/Reports/EUR\\_050012014\\_Fortress\\_Europe\\_complete\\_web\\_E\\_N.pdf](http://www.amnesty.eu/content/assets/Reports/EUR_050012014_Fortress_Europe_complete_web_E_N.pdf) (last accessed July 2015); Human Rights Watch: "Containment Plan. Bulgaria's Pushbacks and Detention of Syrian and Other Asylum Seekers and Migrants" (2014), [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/bulgaria0414\\_ForUpload\\_0.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/bulgaria0414_ForUpload_0.pdf) (last accessed July 2015); Hristova, Tsvetelina/Apostolova, Raia/Deneva, Neda/Fiedler, Mathias: "Trapped in Europes Quagmire: The Situation of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Bulgaria", Bordermonitoring.eu (2014), <http://bulgaria.bordermonitoring.eu/files/2014/07/Hristova-et.al-Trapped-in-Europes-Quagmire.pdf> (last accessed July 2015).

23 Cf. "EU-Turkey readmission agreement benefits Bulgaria", BNR. Radio Bulgaria May 3, 2014, <http://bnr.bg/en/post/100338784/eu-turkey-readmission-agreement-benefits-bulgaria> (last accessed July 2015).

24 Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network: "An EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement – Undermining the rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers?", p. 2, [http://www.aedh.eu/plugins/fckeditor/userfiles/file/Actualités%20des%20institutions%20européennes/En\\_TurkeyReadmis\\_Pb\\_web.pdf](http://www.aedh.eu/plugins/fckeditor/userfiles/file/Actualités%20des%20institutions%20européennes/En_TurkeyReadmis_Pb_web.pdf) (last accessed July 2015).

25 For further information, see Gerda Heck's interesting article on the integration of sub-Saharan migrants in Istanbul: "Ankommen, ohne bleiben zu wollen. Zu Lebensbedingungen und Alltagsstrategien kongolesischer Migrant\_innen in der Türkei", in: Heimeshoff, Lisa-Marie et.al. (eds.): Grenzregime II – Migration – Kontrolle – Wissen. Transnationale Perspektiven, Berlin: Assoziation A 2014; p. 98-111.

26 Ratfisch, Philipp/Scheel, Stephan: „Die Rolle des UNHCR bei der Externalisierung des EU-Migrationsregimes“, in: Hess, Sabine/ Kasperek, Bernd (eds.): Grenzregime – Diskurse, Praktiken, Institutionen in Europa, Berlin: Assoziation A 2010, p. 89-110, here p. 96.

Currently, there are 16 “Removal Centers” in Turkey<sup>27</sup>. We wanted to visit the Kumkapi Detention Center and find out to what extent the so called “refugee crisis” is affecting this institution. After a while, we found the building officially called “Foreigners Guesthouse” (Yabancılar Misafirhanesi). People could be seen standing at the windows. Walking to the front of the jail, we asked police officers whether we could talk to somebody inside the police station.

After our letter of accreditation had been examined, we were led to the head of the Detention Center who referred us to one female and one male police officer. With them, we talked a lot about the daily routines in the building. According these two young officers, the building was constantly crowded. 400 people were inside the group cells with about 30 people coming and going every day. This fact illustrates Istanbul’s position at the intersection of and its function as a hub of different migration routes. A psychologist we spoke to at the center told us that due to the pressure from the European Union, he himself as well as female colleagues were installed in the Detention Center. When discussing “Turkey’s gatekeeper function“ for Europe, we were told that Turkey probably has no interest in being the ‘good gatekeeper’ anymore. Many of the refugees and migrant workers in the jail facing deportation were coming from eastern or former Soviet countries.

## Hoping for Resettlement

A reception center for unaccompanied minors is located in Kadıköy. We went there with a young volunteer student also active in the Don Kişot squat. At the center, he held language classes. With one of the young refugees, an Afghani named Sirius, we held a longer conversation. Having already lived in the house in Kadıköy for several years, he recently received the admission for resettlement to the United States. He seemed to be a little bit nervous while probably also glad about the chance to begin a new life. He was told that he would get an UNHCR plastic bag in order for the responsible people to recognize him at the airport.

Sirius told us that he lived in the accommodation with about 120 children and teenagers and that not everybody would find a place for resettlement. As an unaccompanied minor, you are allowed to live in the facility, but as you turn 18, you immediately have to leave the building. He told us that when this occurs, the young adults very often become homeless because they cannot afford the rent for housing. He said that life is very difficult without a working permit or other kinds of help. Many people have to ask their relatives in other countries to provide money for them. If that does not work out, people are without a home, again<sup>28</sup>.

Resettlement is not easy to achieve in Turkey. During my stay in Turkey, a hunger strike of dozens of Afghans took place in Ankara: They were protesting in front of the UNHCR in order to attain working permits (for Turkey), resettlement and non-discrimination of Afghan refugees. Some of them decided to sew up their mouths<sup>29</sup>.

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27 Grange, Mariette/ Flynn, Michael: "Immigration Detention in Turkey", Global Detention Project April 2014, [http://www.globaldetentionproject.org/fileadmin/docs/Turkey\\_report.pdf](http://www.globaldetentionproject.org/fileadmin/docs/Turkey_report.pdf) (last accessed July 2015).

28 For more information on the situation of young refugees in Turkey, see Trimikliniotis, Nicos/Parsanoglou, Dimitris/Tsianos, Vassilis: "Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City", New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillian 2014.

Like François mentioned to us:

“Because I can say that UNHCR system is overcrowded. Now I am talking about refugees and asylum seekers. The system in UNHCR is crazy. I think that they don't process the files very quickly. So you see people staying and waiting. You go to UNHCR, you apply. You have your free interview. And to hear from them, you have to wait maybe from six month to one year and then when you are like you get accepted and then you have then to wait for an embassy or a country that will host you. That will take another six [months] or one year again. So, you will see that the length of awaiting here will take from one sometimes to four to five years.”

Later, it turned out that François himself had already been in Turkey waiting for his resettlement to another country for many years:

“Ya, so we have so many cases also who, ah you know, ten years, ya. Over ten years.”

## A Place for Saying Goodbye

I met up with Jawad and Jasir at the “Sea of Marmara” in a suburb called Küçükçekmece – a place where „many Kurdish people live “, as I was later told by my interview partners.

In the past, Jawad had been a lawyer in Syria. I knew Jawad from earlier research<sup>30</sup> I conducted for Bordermonitoring Bulgaria<sup>31</sup>. A friend gave me Jawad's number and when I called, he told me his story. At the end of 2013, he had already tried to get into Europe via Bulgaria. He made it, but he had to stay in Lyubimets Detention Center for three months and several more months in the so called “Transitcenter“ in Pastrogor. At that point, the camp was completely overcrowded and the State Agency for Refugees (SAR) was unable to tell him whether he would be accepted as a refugee or not. After a few months, he could not endure the wait any longer and he decided to go back to Syria.

“I went to Syria and stayed in Syria about 4 month. I can't stay in Syria, everything is bad in Syria, too. Therefore, now I am in Turkey.”<sup>32</sup>

While having tea, Jawad told me that he was prepared to take a boat across the Aegean Sea to Greece. He said that he does not see any other way to go to Europe. During our conversation, Jawad's mother called him on the phone and told him to take care of himself. After the call, Jasir assured me that his mother had forbidden him to take the route via boat. Instead, he hoped for a false passport enabling him to travel by plane, although this option would cost him a lot more money.

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29 For further information on the strike in Ankara, see Speri, Alice: “Afghan Asylum Seekers in Turkey Are Sewing Their Lips Together in Protest”, Vice News May 9, 2014, <https://news.vice.com/article/afghan-asylum-seekers-in-turkey-are-sewing-their-lips-together-in-protest> (last accessed July 2015).

30 The following chapter includes field notes from May 29, 2014 as well as notes taken during my participation in the research project Bordermonitoring Bulgaria.

31 For further information see the project's blog: <http://bulgaria.bordermonitoring.eu> (last accessed July 2015).

32 Recorded phone call (April 2014).

At the end of the afternoon, Jawad and Jasir accompanied me to a bus station nearby. Jawad and I hugged and I was close to tears when we separated and the bus drove away. I really cannot name the feeling I had, but if I try, it can only be described as a mixture of misery and anger. Some weeks later, Jawad contacted me from Sweden. He lives now in Växjö.

## The Solidarity Project Mutfak

In the district of Tarlabaşı, one may find the Mutfak<sup>33</sup> (kitchen), a meeting space where one can partake in cooking for the poor of the neighborhood or organize counsel, language courses or other support for migrants and asylum seekers. It was founded by people close to the Migrant Solidarity Group (*Göçmen Dayanışma Ağı*) Istanbul. Due to the gentrification process in that area which has been taking place for the last few years<sup>34</sup>, more people able to pay higher rents are entering the housing market. The area has two faces with run-down houses, drug sellers and prostitution on the one hand and, on the other hand, renovated or newly built houses, nice and clean people to be seen in the street as well as on the signs adorning the construction sites. For people with no or low income who used to live there before, the situation is getting more and more difficult. It seems that a social space – like the Mutfak – is really needed in this area to support marginalized people and people in precarious situations. The solidarity kitchen tries to bring together different people from various backgrounds. It is well known in the quarter of Tarlabaşı and visited not exclusively by refugees and asylum seekers.

Outside, I met with Hassan, a Syrian refugee I later brought in touch with people from the Mutfak. I knew him from a hotel in Edirne where he had told me that he and his friends had almost drowned while trying to cross the Evros on a boat. The group of 5 young men lost the boat in the water. Afterwards, they tried to survive in the middle of the Evros on a little island consisting of trash and wood onto which they could luckily save themselves until they were rescued by a fisherman. Many people have drowned trying to cross the Evros River. In 2010, for example, the UNHCR reported three people drowning in May and 16 people drowning in June<sup>35</sup>.

Hassan concluded his and his comrades' situation as follows:

“We thought that we will arrive fast, but things were turning against us.”<sup>36</sup>

Finally, they were rescued by a man with a little boat that brought them to the Turkish Border Police. With a friend, he was taken to Edirne Detention Center. Afterwards, the police decided to take them to Istanbul in a bus convoy along with many other refugees, but Hassan and his friend Ahmed managed to escape from the bus.

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33 For video impressions, visit the Mutfak's website <http://dayanismamutfagi.blogspot.de> (last accessed July 2015).

34 Bourque, Yessica: “Poor but Proud Istanbul Neighborhood Faces Gentrification”, The New York Times July 4, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/05/world/middleeast/05iht-m05-turkey-tarlabasi.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/05/world/middleeast/05iht-m05-turkey-tarlabasi.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) (last accessed July 2015).

35 Cf. the press release: “Sixteen people drowned attempting to cross the Evros River border between Turkey and Greece”, UNHCR, July 1, 2010, <http://www.unhcr.org/4c2c8eb09.html> (last accessed July 2015).

36 Interview with Hassan on May 2, 2014.



“They brought us with these buses. They said, yeah that actually you will have to be back to Istanbul. And actually when we arrived here, the signal. You know my friend, he is my friend, he just pushed the the the, you know, there’s a button there in this bus. He pushed the button and the doors opened and we start to run out.”

Later, Hassan told me the reason why he and his friend wanted to escape:

“Actually we don’t want to go back to Istanbul, because you know, we don’t have anything to do even in Istanbul.”

Although their escape was successful, a few days later, Hassan and Ahmed decided to go back to Istanbul because they were not able to make it to Europe.

Refugees using the boat and trying to cross the sea or a huge and dangerous river must be seen as a consequence of operations undertaken in cooperation with the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEX). These “joint operations” of border guards from different European countries take place at the border between Greece and Turkey<sup>37</sup> as well as the border between Bulgaria and Turkey. In both cases, the governments decided to install fences. In Bulgaria, a big part of the Integrated Border Surveillance System (IBSS), financed by the EU, is almost complete. Therefore it is, for the most part, not possible to cross the border on land. People escaping war try to cross over the European borders nevertheless. Several weeks after my visit in Istanbul, FRONTEX reported that the poll of detected Syrian refugees trying to cross from Turkey to Bulgaria or Greece had increased again<sup>38</sup>. In August 2014, the Bulgarian police detained 63 refugees in a boat in the Black Sea and in the beginning of November 2014, a boat with refugees sank in the Black Sea near the Bosphorus<sup>39</sup>. At least 24 people died<sup>40</sup>.

When I met Hassan in Istanbul at the end of May 2014, he had already been working illegally in a bar to earn some money. But again, things changed to the worse for him. He told me that he had been working the whole month of May without getting paid. Hassan recounted that, when asking the owner of the bar about his pay, the owner asked him whether he was “for or against Assad”. Hassan immediately answered the question with: “Of course I am against Assad”, whereupon the owner replied: “Then I cannot pay you.”

I went to a bar with a friend of Hassan’s who used to be a Stuart for Saudi Airlines. The friend told me he lost his work permit for Saudi Arabia with the start of the Syrian crisis.

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37 For more information, see Booth, Katherine et al.: FRONTEX. Between Greece and Turkey: “At the border of denial”, FIDH/Migreurop/EMHRN May 2014, [https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapport\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/rapport_en_web.pdf) (last accessed July 2015).

38 FRONTEX: FRAN Quarterly. Quarter 3, July-September 2014, Warsaw 2015, p. 23, [http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk\\_Analysis/Fran\\_Q3\\_2014.pdf](http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Fran_Q3_2014.pdf) (last accessed July 2015).

39 Leviev-Sawyer, Clive: (2014): “Bulgaria Detains 63 Refugees on Boat in Black Sea”, Independent Balkan News Agency, August 18, 2014, <http://www.balkan.eu.com/bulgaria-detains-63-refugees-boat-black-sea/> (last accessed July 2015).

40 Cf. “Migrant boat traversed entire Bosphorus without being detected before disaster”, Hurriyet Daily News, November 4, 2014, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/migrant-boat-traversed-entire-bosphorus-without-being-detected-before-disaster.aspx?pageID=238&nID=73866&NewsCatID=341> (last accessed July 2015).

Hassan described his own life as a life of crazy ups and downs. He and his friend still thought about going to Europe. After some weeks, Hassan decided to move to Bursa and, after that, to a little town in the mountains in order to work there.

## Conclusion

All in all, it seems like Syrian refugees in Turkey, alike other migrants and refugees, have to be highly flexible <sup>41</sup>. As stated in an Amnesty International report published in 2014, refugees in Istanbul and other parts of the country have to work for low wages <sup>42</sup>. In Istanbul, not one of the Syrian refugees I met had stayed in the same place for more than 3 months. They were constantly moving in search for a way to earn a living. At times, it was very difficult to use the contacts I had received from people helping me with my research because the person had already moved outside of Turkey, or at least outside of Istanbul. Others returned to Istanbul to find work or a possibility to somehow get into Europe.

As construction sites in Istanbul are booming, a lot of cheap labor is needed. Many areas are gentrified and changed, often due to the fact that people are working for such low wages. In the construction projects of big companies or the textile sector, the exploitation of the 'human capital' is not likely to end anytime soon. Syrian Refugees are working in clothing factories, the farming sector or restaurants, often illegally <sup>43</sup>. A lot of poor Turkish people already work for cheap wages and, of course, the refugees and migrants – having nothing left to give except the 'commodity' of their manpower.

The Global City Istanbul is pulsing and it seems that it will tremendously extend its capitalistic economical reach. One can say that even with the statutory minimum wage guaranteed by the state, there is a highly unregulated labor market supported by an enormous 'reserve army of labor' <sup>44</sup> fueled by poor people trying to maintain their existence. Those who are neither needed nor wanted are pushed back by society's racism and classism or – eventually – leave the city or the country voluntarily.

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41 For working opportunities of Syrian refugees, see the study of Kirişçi, Kemal: "Syrian refugees and Turkey's challenges: Going beyond hospitality", Washington/D.C.: Brookings Institution 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2014/05/12-turkey-syrian-refugees-kirisci/syrian-refugees-and-turkeys-challenges-may-14-2014.pdf> (last accessed July 2015).

42 Amnesty International: "Struggling to survive: Refugees from Syria in Turkey" (2014), p. 25-27, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR44/017/2014/en/> (last accessed July 2015).

43 Özden Şenay: "Syrian Refugees in Turkey," MPC Research Report May 2013, <http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/MPC-RR-2013-05.pdf> (last accessed July 2015).

44 This Marxian concept was first articulated in Marx, Karl: A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, German Zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Berlin: Franz Duncker 1859.