THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS IN THE SYRIAN INTEGRATION PROCESSES IN TURKEY

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Abstract

This study examines the potential impact of religious organisations and networks on refugee integration processes. It focuses on the experiences of Muslim Syrian refugees in Turkey to address the questions of how pre-war religious networks and institutions evolve during forced migration and what types of functions they carry out in the refugees' integration in Turkey. The study adopts the integration theory of Alastair Ager and Alison Strang (2008) as an analytical framework. Drawing from ethnographic research -combining in-depth interviews with document analysis-the study proposes three findings. First, Syrian religious communities seek to institutionalise and maintain their networks during their international migration process. Second, religious institutions and networks serve as a sanctuary for refugees. By participating in religious organisations and networks, refugees have accumulated their socio-cultural capital and gained advantages in accessing aid and public services. The feeling of belonging provides them partial psychological comfort and coping opportunity against the trauma of war and migration and a means for attributing meaning to the hardships they experience. Third, while religious education is the primary function of these institutions and networks, they also serve as social bridges and linkage points between the host community and refugees. Finally, the study provides some findings of the limitations of networks, including the risk of emergence of parallel lives, social closure, and marginalisation. The findings contribute to the growing scholarship on refugee integration in the immediate host countries as well as migration and religion nexus.

Keywords: International migration, Syrian refugees, integration, religious institutions and religious networks

Introduction

The experience of living together, which is conceptualised as integration in the sociology of migration, is a crucial issue for both host communities and refugees. Integration can be defined as the building of cohesion between hosts and refugees, in social, economic, legal, political and cultural dimensions and the recognition of rights and responsibilities by both communities (Castles et al., 2002;Favell, 2001; Penninx, 2003; 2005). Integration emerges in different forms and scales, and several actors and factors drive it. Social groups, institutions and networks can involve in both the migration and integration process (Castles and Miller, 2008; Massey et al., 2014; Palloni et al. 2001).

Against this background, It is important to examine the potential role of Syrians' religious organisations and networks (SRONs) in the integration process of both communities in Turkey. The Presidency of Migration Management (PMM, 2022) estimates that nearly 3.8 million syrian refugees are living in Turkey and all have been officially granted temporary protection.   An integration process of such a large refugee community is a vital issue for Turkish policy circles and migration bureaucracy. Moreover, migration scholarship has paid growing attention to the integration topic by overwhelmingly discussing the covering the issues around social cohesion, gender, health, employment, education, children protection (Barın, 2015; Emin, 2016; Erdoğan, 2017; İçduygu and Şimşek, 2016; Kaya, 2017). However, the existing studies have not addressed the the role of SRONs in the integration processes that necessitates in-depth case study. This article aims to fill this gap with an emphasis on Şanlıurfa province for at least three reasons. First, the number of Syrians registered in Şanlıurfa are around 429,771, consisting of the twenty percent of the province's total population. Second, the province is located at the Turkey-Syria border resulting in the first arrival hub for many Syrians. The close kinship ties and trade relations

have existed across border towns for decades. Third, the city is known as a religiously conservative city and the religious networks are part and parcel of the city's fabric, thereby attracting conservative section of syrians who might recieve support from religious networks in the integration process. The citknown religiously conservative city that attracts conservative Syrians, and religious ties mightplay a role in the integration process.

The scope of this article is limited to Syrian Muslims, although the study recognises the heterogeneity of religious groups existing in the displaced Syrian community. The study adopts a qualitative methodology, which enables better reflection on the perspectives and agency of Syrian refugees. The study provides important insights into the social characteristics of Syrian refugees, lifestyles, and socio-cultural values concerning SRO-N.

Theoretical framework: International migration, integration and religion

Although there is not yet an agreed definition, theory and model of integration, it can be generally understood as a two- ways of cohesion process involving both migrants and host communities. The process leads to the transformations in the values, norms, and behaviours of two communities expected to manage competition, reduce tensions and create a safety net for communities and individuals with competing interests (Castles et al., 2002; Park and Burgess, 2017; Park, 2018). The integration has at least three main dimensions, including legal-political, socio-economic, and cultural and religious rights (Penninx, 2003; 2005).

In the integration scholarship, Alastair Ager and Alison Strang (2008) offered one of the prominent theoretical frameworks Their comprehensive model proposes elements central to 'successful' integration that include achievement and access across the sectors of employment, education,

housing, and health; social bridges, social bonds and social links; language and cultural knowledge, safety and stability; and rights and stability. The Ager and Strang's theory also provides a promising framework to examine the relationship between religion and social networks as it has an exclusive focus on 'social' in the integration process. However, the theory has not discerned religion as a component of integration. The theory proposes that social bonds are constructed not only with family and co-ethnic but also with co-religious. Social bridges are built with other communities, while social links refer to ties with the structures of the state (Ager and Strang, 2008).The category of social bonds encompasses the participation in religious collectives and associations as well as the perceptions about the freely practising religious worship and rituals. Concerning social bridges, encounters in worship sites are listed among the examples of shared activities between refugee and host communities. Lastly, under the safety category, the issue of reporting the violence, abuse or even the threat perception is noted as a 'successful' integration criteria.

This article also engages with current theoretical discussions about the religion-migration relationship. Some relevant findings can be briefly mapped as follows. Empirical studies underline at least three functions of religion for international migrants. It takes a central role in migrants' lives as the place of 1) refuge/sanctuary, 2) respectability, and 3) resource seeking (Hirschman, 2004). During migration, religion helps migrants feel spirituality, make gives meanings against the losses, reduces their stress level, provide access to social support, and engage with what is valued as the Holy (Hollenbach, 2014, p.6).

Moreover, religion provides minority communities, and individuals support, social protection, moral codes, self-esteem and positive self-perception that work as effective compensation tools (Dumont, 2003). It might either facilitate or impede engaging with the host communities.

The religious beliefs and practices of migrants transform under the conditions and dynamics of the host country (Bader, 2015, p.109). The lack of engagement or limited encounters may lead to social segregation that may take the form of "parallel lives" (Cantle, 2008). The content of engagements among communities may shape the religious practices (Garha and Domingo, 2019). Religiosity, intersected with the ethnic origin of migrants, influences migration decisions and the selection of destination in the first place (Fernando, 2020); later on, it may also catalyse integration (Borup and Ahlin, 2011). Existing literature draws from the experiences of migrants settled in Western countries, particularly the religious experiences and social networks of migrant workers and refugees. There is still a need for empirical studies addressing non-Western countries' experiences to understand the migration-religion nexus better. Social network theory is a promising analytical lens to capture the nuances of this nexus in various geographic sites.

Informal social networks are micro-structures developed by migrants to cope with the challenges of displacement and settlement. Informal networks include community bonds and reciprocal social and economic relations (Castles and Miller, 2008, p.37). Religious organisations of migrants may emerge as informal collectives or networks and formal entities such as associations or foundations regulated by the host country's law and regulations. They may organise faith groups, support them and turn them into a source of impact (Furbey et al., 2006). During international migration, they may continue these functions; additionally, they support migrants in coping with trauma and losses and contribute to their integration (Leman, 1999; Dumont, 2003; Hirschman, 2004; Hollenbach, 2014).

Although Turkey is used to be the country of migration, the number of studies addressing the religious experiences of migrant communities is limited (Danış, 2010; Erkan, 2016). Some studies have recently discussed

some facets of religion in the Syrian refugees' experience in Turkey. It is found that co-religiosity around Islam is one reason for selecting Turkey as Syrians' migration and settlement destination. Also, common religion appeared to boost the aid delivery of locals to Syrians and a variable mediating the potential prejudices and xenophobia towards Syrians (Erkan, 2016; Erdoğan, 2017; Kaya, 2017; Nawyn, 2019). A prominent study about Syrian refugees carried out in Gaziantep found that the common religion of refugees and host communities act as a mediating factor in the social tensions or incidences; it helps to convince host community to accept the presence of the refugees (Erkan, 2016). Another study addressing the faith-based organisations in Şanlıurfa provides evidence for the potential, but still limited, mediator role of having a common faith. The study illustrates how religious community leaders and local institutions (e.g. municipalities, associations, and governorates) reduce tensions by using religious discourses accepted as reference points by conflicting parties (Şahin Mencütek, 2020). Empirical studies provide some insights into how SRONs serve as "trusted sanctuaries" and "home beyond home" for migrants. At the same time, they act as educational sites where they learn how to communicate with host communities and how to integrate (Kaya, 2015, p.157). Despite some initial insights, there is not yet a comprehensive empirical study which examines the potential functions of transnational religious networks in the integration processes of Syrian refugees in Turkey. This article aims to fill this gap. An emphasis on religious networks in the border provinces would be better contribute to the literature.

Provinces located at the Turkey-Syria border have historically rooted transnational ties, as discussed in a few studies (Pinto, 2006; 2010; Aras 2018). Religious networks, particularly Sufi orders, have been actively present on this borderline. For example, Pinto's prominent research examines the close transnational religious orders (or tariqah) extending from Kurdish Kadiri orders in Aleppo to Syrian Jazhra and Kurdish Naksibendi lodges.

He shows how these transnational Sufi Kurdish religious orders are also institutionalised beyond the national state borders (Pinto, 2006; 2010). The research of Pinto shows that belonging to a Sufi order and Seyhk provides its members with some privileges in the public sphere, turning into a source of socio-economic capital. It also proposes that organisations and networks of religious orders build some ties with Aleppo's urban sites and Afrin's rural areas that contribute to carrying our mediating functions of these orders. Another prominent ethnographic research on this topic is by Ramazan Aras, who shows how religious networks maintain Islamic and local living styles in the border towns and actively grow despite the pressure of political regimes in education and settlement. One of these surviving networks is Khaznavi order/school, with transnational links extending to Syria and Turkey (Aras, 2018). Khaznavi used to be the largest Sufi tariqah in Syria. As mentioned above, Şanlıurfa is a potential site to trace such religious orders. The case is representative because some Sufi leaders in Şanlıurfa have familial roots in Syria or have continuing links with Sufi orders across the border. Hence, it is expected that their experience concerning forced displacement from Syria and integration attempts in Turkey is worthwhile to zoom on it as attempted in this research.

Methodology

The study relies on the content analysis technique, a qualitative research methodology. This study used a semi-structured interview guide which was prepared with reference to ten integration themes identified by Ager and Strang (2008). The knowledge about local context is used to specific questions regarding the potential of SRONs. As interviews are conducted at the sites of SRONs, such as the classes of lectures, houses, or dormitories, the author had also undertaken participatory observation about usage places, visitors, and interactions. Additionally, the document and media analysis collected information about activities, relations and incidences that

might not be addressed in interviews. Media analysis covers local and national media outlets for 2020-21, emphasising SRONs' involvement in integration dimensions described by Ager and Strang (2008). The media analysis is also used to verify data collected in interviews. Field research was carried out between February and July 2021. University's Ethics Boards granted ethical approval with the decision. (2019/68)

Snowball technique was used to collect the data that was mainly collected from leaders, managers and members of religious networks to explore their perceptions and meaning-making about integration. The interview sample is 43, consisting of 36 Syrians closely affiliated with 6 formal (associations) and 20 informal religious organisations and seven local key informants.[1] The sample can be considered representative of the Şanlıurfa site. The present study conducted sixteen interviews with six formal and twenty interviews with informal organisations by using snowball technique to access to these organisations. Out of 36 interviewees with Syrians, twenty-eight were men and eight were women. The less participation of women is due to the masculine structure of religious institutions. Additionally, I conducted seven interviews with local religious organisations and individuals that have close affiliation with Syrian religious networks. The interview sample is representative with regards to variations in organisation types (formal/informal; refugee-led/locals led), interviewees' roles in organisations (leader, manager, member) and their composition (age, gender, occupation, education level).

The collected data were analysed by using qualitative methodology,

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1- It should be noted that formal Syrian institutions often take the form of associations registered with the Şanlıurfa Province Civil Society Relations Department. In contrast, informal organisations are not registered, known as *madrasa, dargah* (lodge) or Quranic courses. According to the 2020 official records of Şanlıurfa Province Civil Society Relations, there are seven registered formal associations formed by Syrians in the city. However, it is estimated that the number of such religious organisations and network is higher than the official records; there are dozens of informal organisations. At least 25 Syrian origin *madrasas* that focus on religious education are present in the city (Kaya, 2018; Şahin Mencütek, 2020).

particularly the content analysis techniques. After transcribing interview material and cleaning the data drawn from digital media, all dataset is coded and then categorised using Ager ve Strang's themes (2008). While analysing the data, I paid specific attention to the representation of different views. The data is utilised to reflect on in which ways SRONs involve in integration processes in the given sectors and issue areas. These include sectors of education, health, housing, employment. The areas include second language acquisation, socialisation increasing the quality of life within the Turkish community and finally, building social ties. These would be elaborated further below.

Findings

Basic needs and service sectors: Employment, Sheltering/Housing, Education and Health

Integration starts with access to basic needs and services and the role of SRONs in this regard is noticeable. SRONs contribute, with their limited resources and capacities, to providing job opportunities, health and education facilites to Syrians.. Notably, they serve as referral hubs and cultural mediators. They use their social capital to acilitate some refugees' job search, as noted by an interviewee: "We inform our applicants about how they should make registration to benefit from humanitarian aid, where to visit to seek aid. Particularly we help many refugees in finding shelters and jobs" (Male, 43, Qur'anic course lecturer). Another interviewee stated, "We inform Syrian Religious Scholars Union about the challenges encountered by the Syrian refugee community. The Union lets us know where there are jobs for unemployed Syrians and where there is a source of aid or education. Then we disseminate this knowledge to guide Syrians to benefit from opportunities." (Male, 41, Quranic course lecturer). It is important to note that, besides serving as referral points, religious networks are the source

of employment for some refugees because they establish madrasas, lodges, and courses where there are lower and higher positions to fill in to provide services.

Sheltering/housing is a vital component of integration's spatial and social dimension. SRONs support their community in renting and buying a house by carrying out a facilitator role in the finance and logistics of such activities. A president of Syrian association told that "we guide our community and help them in housing. We pay the first two months rents of Syrian families who visit us here" (Male, 38, President of an association from Aleppo). Similar to formal associations, informal ones also support the community in sheltering. One member of a religious order (brotherhood) reported that "when I had first migrated here, I had not have any belongings, our friends from Şazeli tariqah helped me, they rented a house on behalf of me, bought home appliances for me, and supported me in basic needs." (Male, 48, teacher). In addition to their support in renting houses, SRONs also provide shelters as they have dormitories and communal accommodation places (shared housing units) for lecturers and students of the community. Such sites mainly give to the temporal use of vulnerable groups, like orphans or widows of the community." A woman director provides some insights about such mechanisms:

> Our association mainly deals with families having orphans and widows. Some of them do not have any housing. We allow them to stay in our accommodations for a while; we meet their all needs. During their stay, we search for an appropriate house to rent on behalf of them (woman, 48, teacher).

In education, foundations and madrasas established by Sufi orders provide education and humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees. Besides religious education, they also engage in socio-cultural activities and vocational

training. Their student body consists of both local and Syrian students. The activities' content shares students' composition, including children, youth, and adults. Professionals disseminate religious education, while non-professionals give other pieces of training. At the end of education/training sessions, they organise diploma celebrations with the funding provided by local organisations, as noticed in the media analysis in this research.

Regarding health, no relevant institutions are present in my interview sample. This is partially relevant to the fact that refugees have easy access to health services through public and private institutions that are well established in Turkey. Syrians have free access to health services upon their registration. Nevertheless, SRONs play the role of referral point, as observed in the employment/housing sector. One interviewee noted: "We help Syrians if they need to go Turkish hospitals, we accompany them in their visits, particularly they need such support in the initial days of their arrival into Şanlıurfa." (Male, 42, Quranic course director). The organisations/networks also provide some non-professional psychological rehabilitation support to refugee children and women who have experienced trauma-related stress. One interviewee states that "in the refugee community, many women and children encounter with depression. We help them cope with depression, encourage them to build social connections and provide opportunities for relaxation" (man, 62, scholar/coordinator from Rasulayn). In the support process, such organisations often use religious sources and references from the Quran, the life of the Prophet and Islamic history, as mentioned by one interviewee:

> Often young Syrians come to visit us, but their psychological well-being is not good. We preach them drawing from *ayat* (Quranic verses) and *hadiths*. We believe that the Quran is the source of health. We recommend that they recite *ayat* in the Quran about health and focus on them (Man, 43, Khaznavi Sheikh).

SRONs also provide awareness-raising seminars on child development,

gynaecological diseases, personal hygiene, breast cancer, and early marriages if they have human capital such as health personnel among their fellows (Man, 37, Director of foundation).

Language courses, socialisation and quality of life

One of the critical components of integration is language. Refugees who are able to speak the host country's language can have better access to public services, and employment and build more social ties with the host communities. This is also the case for the Syrian community in Turkey, who mainly speak Arabic and Kurdish. Some have looked to learn Turkish from their arrivals.

SRONs also get involved in the language learning/teaching in the host country. They do it both by professional teachers and volunteers. In the officially registered associations, Professional teachers holding official certificates offer language courses and the same task is ofen carried out by volunteers in non-registered religious organisation due to inadequate funding.

One lecturer in a Quranic course explained why they emphasise language learning in the following words:

> We mainly motivate newcomer students to learn Turkish, and we provide language courses to enable dialogue among children. When Syrians learn Turkish, they would be able to build good communication with children in their neighbourhoods; hence potential tensions will be eliminated (Woman, 48, Quranic course lecturer).

During the provision of religious education, some lecturers give instructions and organise activities both in Turkish and Arabic to contribute to language acquisition. Since these multilingual methods have been implemented by professionals lacking pedagogical training, the outcomes are not very promising but rather cause some learning difficulties among students. Besides their intended contributions to language learning, the courses also look to preserve the identity of Syrians, as noted by one Syrian lecturer:

> We used to provide Turkish services initially but noticed their Arabic skills weaken as they/we prioritise Turkish. Our emphasis is now on teaching Arabic languages to Syrian students and preventing the loss of Arabic over time (male, 43, Quranic course lecturer).

Acculturation - having knowledge about/or familiarisation with the host country's culture- is also crucial for the integration of refugees and facilitating social cohesion. SRONs organise activities for making Syrian refugees more familiar with the culture of Şanlıurfa and Turkey. An interviewee provides some insights, particularly about the sensitivities of the host community:

> ..In our lecture, we always remind our Syrian students not to have hookah in public parks and be kind in using public buses. We remind them that "we are guests here, and we should behave like a guest by respecting and adapting the customs and rules of the hosts" (Man, 50, Quranic course lecturer).

SRONs also emphasise the shared history and culture shared by Turkish and Syrian people to build broader socio-cultural links that are believed to contribute to social harmony and cohesion. In the words of an interviewee: "The most important source of commonality between Turks and us is Quran. The force that brings us together is Quran. Besides it, our customs and culture are similar, this is also an important factor" (Woman, 45, Scholar/Quranic course lecturer) .

It is also worthwhile to refer belonging, safety and social stability as factors promoting the desire for integration and engagement with host communities. Syrian migrants feel safe and secure when they experience peace and well-being in their new settlment. Some pious Syrians seem to be motivated by

the city's conservative outlook and in the transnational religious/tariqah sphere of influence extending from Syria.The words of One Nakhshibendi sheikh, a Syrian refugee, illustrate how these transnational networks also intersect with historical, familial, kinship and religious ties in the Şanlıurfa region.

No doubt that besides all the positive experiences, there are also some cases of perceived or real discrimination incidences targeting Syrian refugees. Nevertheless, most interviewees talked about the signs of social cohesion among host and refugee communities, but pointed out the existence of some structural issues. For example, one interviewee reported: "Şanlıurfa is doing quite well in social cohesion. I do not observe violence, discrimination, and racism. The most important problems are unemployment and poverty." (Woman, 51, Quranic course lecturer).

Social Contacts: Bonds, Bridges and Links

Ager ve Strang (2008)'s theory on integration introduces three types of social engagements formed by refugees: social bonds, social bridges, and social links. Social bonds refer to ties that emerge in family, co-ethnics, co-nationals, co-religions, etc. Social bridges refer to the connections that refugees form with other groups. Social links refers to their engagements with state structures.

Research in Şanlıurfa illustrates that religion appears as one of the strongest bonds for the Syrian refugee community, as mentioned by interviewees: "The tie linking our students is Quran, in other words, our common religion. Religion brings us together. We do not othering anyone. We have both Sufi and Naksibendi lecturers" (Male, 30, Quranic course lecturer).

These bonds are institutionalised through both formal organisations and informal collectivities. Some of them are solely established by refugees, while refugees and locals form others. [2] Although the initial aim of their formation is not on religion, many serve in religious education provision. Some of them provide subsidiary services in mediation and 'alternative' justice. One prominent example is the Syrian Scholars Union. The director of Şanlıurfa Branch said:

> As the Syrian Scholars Union, we formed a commission and Family Guidence Unit to tackle problems faced by Syrians related to marriages, divorce, and familial affairs. Syrian community respects Scholars and they comply with their recommendations. Until now, we have received 340 case applications; many of them have been about divorce and within family quarrels. Sometimes, we also observe tensions/fights between Syrians and local people that costs lives. We intervene such incidences to mediate (Man, 44).

Another example of such institutionalisation is an informal entity called Syria Sharia Assembly, established in 2015. Several refugee academics, legal scholars, and community leaders get involved in this Assembly. Like Scholars Union mentioned above, it also focuses on the specific challenges encountered by Syrian refugees, conflict resolution and carries out some activities in the field of integration.

Relation and interaction modes in the religious courses contribute to building social bridges between locals and Syrian refugees, thus bringing in integration inputs. Remarkably, the sites of religious training turn into spaces for interactions and grounds for further engagements, as mentioned by women Quranic lecturer:

> My neighbours from the Turkish community come here to take Quran and Arabic lectures.They also invite us to their own houses to recite Quran together. Sometimes I read the Quran, sometimes,

2-For example, Syria-Turkey Muhacir and Ensar Brotherhood Association is formed with the collaboration of Syrian and local people.

they do it. Between 20 and 50 women join us. In Ramadan, this happens more regularly like everyday due to the well-known ritual of *hatim* (completing the Quran recitation from beginning to end day) (Woman, 45, Quranic course lecturer).

Another dimension of social bonds is those with the state institutions. As mentioned above, some SRONs organise courses or coordinate with the provincial religious directorate (*Müftülük*). Meanwhile, some active CSOs benefit from Arabic lectures there. One lecturer noted: "We provide both the Arabic language and Quranic teaching to the native students. Even some officers from the Migration Directorate came to us to get lectures. We also gave the Arabic courses to the officers from Kızılay. (Woman, 45, lecturer) Besides language lectures, SRONs serve as a cultural mediators. One said

Sometimes, a Syrian person visits us and tells us how 'the administrator unit of neighborhood (*muhtarlık*) did not solve their (paperwork) issues. Then we communicate with *muhtarlık.* Due to the respect for us, *muhtarlık* immediately resolves the problem of this Syrian refugee. In some cases, it happens that half of the family remains in Syria. If we receive an individual request about such matters from our circles, we give a call to our Dear Governor for asking his help. We are thankful as he starts up initiatives in this regard (Male, 44, Khaznevi Seykh).

The Governorate of Şanlıurfa sometimes invites the heads of SRONs for information exchange and consultancy regarding migration and integration issues. Turkish authorities respect and cooperate with Syrian refugees who have social capital thanks to their religious networks. They are taken seriously both inside Turkey and in the regions under Turkey's sphere of influence (Northern Syria), and recieve benefits from their prestige and networks in the religious service provision.[3] Moreover, local CSOs and civic platforms include Syrian organisations and networks in their structures and develop

3-See., https://www.gazeteipekyol.com/gundem/vali_erin_suriye_ile_ilgili_toplanti_yap-ti-h56883.html, Access date: 19 April 2021.

cooperations in various fields. For example, an association called Syrian-Turkey *Muhacir and Ensar* Brotherhood, Syrian CSOs and Humanitarian Aid Federation came together to prepare a joint press release condemning the attacks in Aleppo in 2016.[4] Local newspapers often give information about such joint actions and cooperation examples. As mentioned by several stakeholders during the fieldwork, the formal and informal cooperation modes between local and host communities, the models of solidarity, and the service provisions to Syrians (particularly access to health, education, cash assistance by the central government and the Governorate level[5]) and Turkey's open door policies together constitute the dynamics creating the relative safety and stability in the province.

Even in the periods of growing social tensions among locals and Syrians, religious organisations and networks got involved to reduce tensions. They took an active role in mediation commissions committed to carrying out immediate resolution measures. On one occasion, this type of commission issues a press release and disseminates brochures prepared both in Turkish and Arabic.[6] The brochures note down the shared norms and rules of living together in the city, the importance of kindness, and the sensitivities of local people that refugees might not fully understand. It reasserts the host-guest hierarchy. Several examples of such joint mediation initiatives traced in the media search show that official provincial authorities, NGOs and local media organs come together with Syrian NGOs and community leaders to discuss how to mediate increasing tensions.[7]

Over ten years of refugee, it is possible to observe increased awareness about

4-See https://www.ajansurfa.com/gundem/urfadan-dunya-ulkelerine-seslendiler-h6531.html, https://www.ihh.org.tr/haber/suriyeli-vicdanlar-bir-arada, https://www.gaphaberle-ri.com/haber /23070/alimler-ihhda-bulustu.html, Access date: 19 April 2021.
5-See https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/muhacir-ensar-kardesligi-dernegi-acildi-37110334, Access date: 19 April 2021.
6-See https://www.sanliurfa63.com/sanliurfa-daki-suriyelilere-onemli-uyarilar/10418/, Access date: 19 April 2021.
7-See https://www.gapgundemi.com/haber-gerem-provokasyonlarin-farkindayiz-30613.html, Access date: 19 April 2021.

rights. From the perspective of religious actors, Syrians are often satisfied with accessing health and education services but encounter problems in registration, taking identity cards, and citizenship application, on the one hand, the severe challenges in the labour market including exploitation and lows wages on the other.

Besides many positive experiences of living together, some Syrian feel dissatisfied with the treatment of the host communities and some degree of discrimination and marginalisation and the challenges in accessing rights. Notably, the temporary protection status is questioned and criticised by some Syrian religious leaders, as mentioned in the following quotation: "Syrians under temporary protection do not have the same rights as Turkish citizens or refugees. They should be given either of this status, instead of temporary protection" (Male, 44, Syrian Scholars Şanlıurfa Branch President)
Almost all Syrian religious actors agree to give Syrians Turkish citizenship opportunities. One woman Quran course lecturer mentioned it: "All the rights mentioned in the universal human rights should be given to Syrians. Without discriminating, all the rights enjoyed by the local population should also be granted to Syrians, including citizenship right" (Woman, 45, lecturer).

Discussion

Research findings here illustrate how religious organisations and networks maintain their positions after the forced displacement experience and how they take part in the integration process. In general, such organisations and networks have relations and interactions through their links in border provinces like Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, Kilis and Hatay and in the metropolitan areas where Syrians live in large numbers such as İstanbul, Ankara, Bursa. The patterns of institutionalisation, the types of activities, and fulfilled functions observed among Syrian refugees' religious organisations in this

study show many similarities with the examples discussed in the literature from across the work, particularly the research strand on the involvement of organisations and networks' in integration processes (Hirschman, 2004; Foner and Alba, 2008; Eby et al., 2011; Massey et al, 2014; NASEM, 2015; Giordan and Zrinščak, 2018).

The study shows that SRONs impact the integration in relation to their level of resources and capacities. They get involved in and carry out substantial roles in the various the integration components described in the theory of Ager and Strang (2008), including employment, housing/shelter, education, health, social bridges, social bonds, social links, language and culture, safety and stability, rights and citizenship. These wide ranges of the sphere of influence can be attributed to three functions of religious organisations and networks defined by Hirschman (2004): respectability, refugee and resources. SRONs contribute to the life of refugees by bringing a sense of decency. They also open space for refugees and provide resources mediating the settlement and integration processes in a new context.

The findings of this study are in line with the arguments of Hollenbach (2004) about how such organisations meet some emotional, cognitive and psychological needs that emerged out of forced migration experience. Engagement with SRONs supports refugees in meaning-making, anxiety reduction, and access to social support. They contribute the overall well-being and mental health of migrants in trauma cases by recommending the recitation of Quran and spiritual therapy. The findings of their role in psychological health align with the results of other studies about Turkey (Ercüment 2018; Arslan 2003).

As mentioned in other immigration country contexts, migration networks provide some opportunities for refugees to find a job, housing and facilitate border crossing or financing onward migration (Haug, 2008).

Religious organisations and networks carry out mediating and guiding roles in accessing to rights and services (Chatelard, 2003; Danış, 2010). They facilitate benefits from social aid, employment, and public services in registration, education, housing, and health integration sectors. Also, religious leaders use their resources and sphere of influence to help new refugees tackle the bureaucratic process. SRONs seem to be the sources of social capital for resources for building trust relations, extending the communication channels through local, national and transnational fields, the religious leaders' sphere of influence/power participate in the process that enables migrants access to resources and services. These findings align with what is found in the example of Iraqi refugees' religious networks in Jordan (Chatelard, 2003).

Also, the findings of this article reflect the Putnam's emphasis on social capital, in particular discussions about how social capital serves in building bridges (Bourdieu 1986, 1993; Field, 2008). It is worth underlining that the intermediator and guidance functions of networks and their role in the construction of social capital, trust, and communication channels cause hierarchical power relations within the refugee community. The power relations are not necessarily among the refugee and the host state public service providers, but instead between refugee layman and the persons representing the religious organisation/network as an intermediator in the host state public space. Also, religious sites function as the socialisation spaces for refugee children, youth and adult. As underlined by Ayhan Kaya (2021), they emerged as diasporic spaces in which religious groups imitate the homeland's symbols, colors, figures, and cultural norms. They contribute to the education and social interactions between local and refugee communities as the Turkish pious public join in such activities on the one hand. On the other, they increase the risk of social ghettoisation as relations and interactions in such spaces continue in the line of patterns in the home country. Such ghettoisation and the limited connections between home

and host communities (Cantle, 2008) may cause the emergence of more sites where "parallel life styles" are observed. For example, some refugees take a distance to the mosques run by the Turkish Religious directorate because the Friday sermons are recited in Turkey. These refugees create the alternative sites for exercising their religious rituals because of the language limitations.

This study's two findings are significant for the issues of social bridges in integration. First, religious groups and networks contribute to the emergence of further connections at local and national levels between refugees and host communities. This contribution creates a new religious-based network or social groups, particularly in the local neighbourhoods. Second, the connection occurs in the cooperation attempts initiated by collaborative groups of local and refugee organisations. They may jointly form an organisation (e.g. *madrasas*, courses, or *masjid*) where they further institutionalise their cooperation for a more extended period. So, this study's findings confirm the hypotheses of Ager and Strang (2008)'s on the integration and those addressing the importance of social bridges and networks for social capital, types of social capital proposed by Furbey et al. (2006), Putnam (cited in Field 2008) and Bourdieu (Bourdie, 1986;1993). Aligning with the findings of Jacobsen (2001, p.18), the study shows that the success of integration depends on the relations between the local population and refugees as much as it relies on the host government policies, legal and political context, and, the duration of international migration.

As mentioned above, such networks, however, risk creating the different types of power relations and social polarisation. In particular, the informal organisations structurally do not comply with the principles of legality, accountability and transparency. Their further actions are not predictable with these characteristics, thus embedding the potential to feed social tensions or irregularities. Despite the general harmonious social

environment in the city regarding home-host community relations, there were situations in which Syrians faced with locals' reactions. They took the forms of discrimination, marginalisation, and even a few incidents of violent threats targeting Syrians or their workplaces. During such tensions which might have aggravated if not prevented in the early phases, SRONs leaders took the mediating roles and coordinated with the local authorities in the jointly formed commissions for tension reduction.

The findings in this study also show that SRONs tend to take active roles in advocating rights and citizenship in a lower tone. As underlined by Ager ve Strang (2008, p.175), the host governments should be explicit and concrete about their naturalisation (citizenship acquisition) policies and refugees' rights to develop and implement effective integration policies. However, this is not the necessarily a case in the integration and citizenship policies of Turkey; instead, it is pretty complex and ambiguous. SRONs gave importance to the rights granted to Syrians in Turkey, accepted it as the prerequisite of social cohesion and got involved in public discussion, at least at local levels. It can be argued that such collectivities play a role in the naturalisation processes and the participation in politics of the host country (NASEM, 2015, p.193).

In the sectoral base, the research findings confirm comprehensive integration studies using survey data, such as the Syrian Barometer (Erdoğan, 2020). Similar to the general results, in my research, SRONs mentioned the relatively high satisfaction with access to health and education services. However, they complain about the obstacles in registration process, work and travel permits. Additionally, they also draw attention to the issue such as the ambiguities in the naturalisation process, difficulties in the finding jobs and exploitation in the job market.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the role of SRONs in Turkey, drawing from the analytical lense of Ager and Strang about the component of integration (2008). It has argued that SRONs are actively involved in the ten different integration elements concerning their resources and capacities. This is an important contribution to the integration discussion about Syrians at the empirical level, religion-integration nexus at the theoretical level. While the refugees' religious organisations and networks have not yet completed their institutionalisation processes in the new settlement country, they are the source of trust and belonging for Syrians, making these organisations and networks the refugee site for them. Besides the cognitive-emotional contribution of being affiliated with these organisations, migrants can access more resources and accumulate their social capital. SRONs also serve as a partial remedy (or site of comfort) against the trauma of war, stress and psychological problems caused by forced displacement. While such organisations play a central role in building social bonds for refugees, they also serve as to build links and bridges with the host community. As these organisations and networks enable interactions between communities, they also contribute to reducing potential tensions. They carry out substantial intermediatory and guiding roles in Syrians' access to humanitarian assistance and public services (education, health), meeting basic (housing) and accessing the livelihoods through employment.

Nevertheless, these intermediary roles in accessing rights and services give these organisations a discretion power that might generate hierarchical patronage relations over refugees. The primary mission of many organisations is to impart religious education. However, due to their informal status, the survival of these organizations is contingent upon the discretion of local state authorities.It is essential to note that, religious groups/organisations/networks -in definition- are exclusionary because they prioritise 'us' those

who affiliated with them and exclude the 'other.' With these characteristics, SRONs's integration support is often limited to a certain group of affiliated people, but not accessible to outsiders. Hence, the integration contribution of them are partial, subjective and non-sustainable in the long-run

In addition to the initiatives of refugees and positive attitudes of host community about integration, government's legal, economic, and social policies are the critical component of successful integraiton. The absence of any part may cause the emergence of parallel lives, social closures, and marginalization. If all parts of integration are not present in the process, the risks of the emergence of parallel lives, social closures, and marginalisation are more likely. Some of the potential barriers in the integration process can be listed as prevailing ambiguities in integration policies, weakening economic strucutre of the city, rising unemployment and poverty, and lessening of th empathy and hospitality feelings among locals towards refugees. To better understand and benefit from the potentials of different stakeholders in the integration process, there is a need for evidence-based research about both the refugees and local's religious organisations and networks.

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