

AN INQUIRY INTO SOCIO-SPATIAL SEGREGATION: CASE STUDY OF SYRIAN URBAN REFUGEES IN A TURKISH BORDER CITY

Nil Tuzcu

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

School of Architecture and Planning

Massive influx of displaced people into urban areas reshapes cities' economic, social, political and spatial structures. By analyzing the formation of urban marginality in the case of Syrian refugees in Turkish border city Gaziantep, this research creates a broader understanding of the displaced-persons phenomenon as one of the main drivers of urban transformation. This paper uses the findings from the fieldwork that I conducted in Gaziantep including in-depth interviews with both refugee and host communities, and a series of mapping exercises showing the spatial distribution of urban refugees in the city. The urban marginalization explored in the research reveals that understanding the city as a distinct social and physical entity is as important in the integration process of refugees as traditional policy interventions.

1. Introduction

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) stated that more than half of the world's 10.5 million refugees live in the urban settings rather than designated camp-based settlements (UNHCR, 2009). In other words, almost 5.5 million people have fled into cities, creating new forms of urban marginality and inequality. Cities are being reshaped by diversity, conflict and rapid population growth from the arrival of urban refugees, yet urban studies still fail to address the question of displaced people. Undocumented refugees in urban areas are considered to be the most vulnerable group as they are unable to claim any rights or justice from the system they have entered (Grabska, 2006). I argue that if we are to discuss spatial social justice in cities for refugees and other persons of concern, we need to understand the mechanisms and facilitators behind social and spatial inequalities. I have observed that the presence of uprooted persons is one of the main drivers of urban transformation, and aim to create a broader understanding of this phenomenon through analyzing the formation of urban marginality in the case of Syrian refugees in a Turkish border city, Gaziantep.

Since the first uprising against the Bashar al-Assad government of Syria, ongoing armed conflict between various rebel groups and Syrian government forces has caused destruction of urban

settlements and massive displacement of local populations to Syria's neighboring countries: Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. UNHCR reported that Turkey is hosting 1,759,846 Syrian refugees (2015), and more than 70% of them live in cities and towns as urban refugees (AFAD, 2013). What does this influx mean for the city? More specifically, how do displaced peoples establish themselves in an urban area, and consequently how do they transform the urban fabric?

This paper analyzes social and spatial transformation in Gaziantep, Turkey the most affected city in Turkey by the massive urban refugee influx from Syria (Figure 1). Within my research, I define transformation as a mutual process in which the city's infrastructure and socioeconomic/demographic patterns shaped how refugees enter and establish themselves in the city, and simultaneously the displaced population produces a new spatiality through their social, economic and spatial activities, thereby reshaping the city's existing structure. Urban spaces are not only social and physical configurations but also political entities, so the actions of the municipality are also critical in shaping the experiences of refugee and host populations (Sanyal, 2014). The predominant transformation I have witnessed is marginalization, and this process of segregation is complicated by multiple actors, institutions and political forces. Unfolding this marginalization requires an understanding of multiple facilitators and their interrelationships. The major organizers of urban refugees and their ways they restructure the city, as I describe in this paper, are refugee policies and the city itself as a socioeconomic and physical entity.



Figure 1. Density of Syrian Urban Refugees in Southeast Turkey

2. Related Research

Research on the integration of displaced requires interdisciplinary approaches combining various branches of social sciences including political science, economics, sociology, anthropology and urban studies (Castles *et al.*, 2002). From Castles's disciplinary standpoint, this paper examines the relationship between refugees, the city and urban marginality in order to bridge the gap between

forced migration studies and urban studies. In addition, the definitions, standards, and measures used in refugee literature not only affect subsequent scholarly research but also influence policy decisions and practices implemented (Korac, 2003). The manner in which refugees are absorbed into a city defines the types of transformation that takes place in that urban space; therefore a clear definition of this process of entry and absorption is critical not only for this paper but also for refugee policy in general. Many terms have been used to describe the absorption of migrants into host societies: integration, assimilation, acculturation and inclusion (*ibid.*). Of these “integration” is most relevant to my research; Berry (1997) has defined integration as a mutual accommodation wherein both host and refugee populations maintain their original cultures and identities while connecting with the broader society through daily interactions. The concept becomes intricate, however, when different modes of integration such as social, cultural, economic and political are considered. Besides the objective dimensions of adaptation such as employment and education, refugees’ own perception of their integration are critical subjective indicators for understanding and measuring the success or failure of integration (Montgomery, 1997). Building upon these arguments, I define integration of refugees as the achievement of spatial and economic equality with the host community, social inclusion, and perceptual integration between the refugee and the host populations.

A significant portion of refugees build an informal livelihood in urban settings through their engagement with illegal employment and trade. A case study in Eastleigh, Nairobi where the population was predominantly composed of Somali refugees revealed that the urban refugees built trade networks and businesses in the informal economy and eventually expanded them enough to start providing employment for members of the host society (Campbell, 2006). Similarly, according to a research on Sudanese refugees in Egypt, despite the economic, social and political marginalization of that population, Sudanese refugees established schools, centers and housing networks in Cairo, thereby creating a new spatial layer in Egypt (Grabska, 2006). Consequently, they became social and economic actors of the society as well as an important labor resource for the economy.

The integration process of displaced people into the host community largely depends on the goals and efficiency of policy intervention. However, the major challenge is that host governments do not usually recognize urban refugee rights defined in international standards of UNCHR. (Buscher, 2001). Even in circumstances where proper institutional integration programs and legal frameworks are present, the level of integration greatly varies based on the success of programs and policy

terms. A comparative study of Yugoslavian refugees in the Netherlands and Italy shows that policy frameworks and reception strategies of each country shape the perception of refugees in the host societies, which eventually affects the social and economic inclusion of the newcomers (Korac, 2003). Besides the impacts of policy concepts on refugee experiences, Reitz (2002) points out that existing social structure of the receiving society is a critical factor for the inclusion of the migrants. Racial and cultural diversity in a host country helps the integration process, because established ethnic and racial communities as well as existing immigrant groups, create a social framework for refugees to enter.

3. Gaziantep, Turkey

Gaziantep is the financial center of southeastern Anatolia and the largest city in the region. Between 1990 and 2000, the population increased by 31.25% as a result of immigration related to economic growth (TUIK, 2005). In 2008, 1 out of 3 people was a rural immigrant and 69.5% of these people immigrated for economic purposes (Genis and Adas, 2011). Consequently, Gaziantep, as a city receiving internal migration, has been struggling with housing and employment problems. In 2011, when the refugee influx began, the population of the city was 1,753,596 and the official unemployment rate was around 16%. Because a significant portion of employment in the city goes unrecorded, the actual rate of unemployment is unknown.

The first wave of Syrians fled across the border to Turkey in April 2011, and in October 2011, Turkey declared an open-door policy for Syrian refugees and established a legal framework known as “temporary protection” (Dincer *et al.*, 2014). A majority of the refugees came from regions close to the Turkish-Syrian border including Aleppo, Idlep and Raqqa. Close to half of them indicated that their homes in Syria had been severely damaged and were not inhabitable. Many of refugees indicated security reasons for their departure and a smaller portion of them reported political reasons (AFAD, 2013). The number of Syrians who crossed the Turkish border has dramatically risen with the rise of violence in the region. The number of registered refugees in Gaziantep is 314,917, with 240,000 of them being urban refugees not residing in camps (GMM, 2014). Because of Turkey’s open-door policy, the exact number of displaced people outside of camp settings is unknown. Many local authorities claim that the real number of Syrian migrants includes undocumented refugees, and is far more than what official records indicate.

4. Research Questions

The framework of this research is built on a number of questions. What are the main drivers behind urban marginalization of uprooted communities? How do the existing socioeconomic and spatial structures in the city affect the urbanization process of refugees? What determines the spatial distribution of the displaced population, particularly when there is a lack of effective policy and/or implementation? How do the terms of a policy associated with refugees contribute to the integration or marginalization process? To answer these questions, I conducted a field investigation in Gaziantep during August 2014. My fieldwork included a series of mapping exercises showing the general spatial distribution of urban refugees in the city and open-ended interviews with the key informants from both refugee and host communities.

In parallel, and complementary to the field investigation, I analyzed refugee policies, as well as socioeconomic profiles and spatial distributions of refugees. My study method had four components: The first component was to examine and reveal an overall process of social exclusion by using findings from the interviews. The second was to analyze how local refugee policies contributed to urban marginalization. The third was to compare socioeconomic identities of host and refugee populations. Finally, the fourth component was to examine mapping studies produced during fieldwork to determine whether new spatial patterns and configurations had formed in the city.

5. Field Investigation

As a part of the fieldwork in Gaziantep, I conducted open-ended interviews with Syrian refugees and members of the receiving community. The main goal was to map the process of social exclusion in chronological order and to explore the reasons for this segregation. In the literature, qualitative interviewing is a common method for refugee research; however researchers tend to focus on the voices and experiences of refugees and their subjective evaluation of their experiences. This approach ignores that integration is a mutual phenomenon between the receiving society and the new entrants, since it disregards the perspective of existing population. My research, on the other hand, gives attention to the voices of both newcomers and the existing community. Interviews with refugees are intended to gain information about their use of city, their economic activities and their settlement locations since they crossed the border, while the interviews with the local residents focused on their interaction with the migrant population.

Despite the availability of camp residency, Syrian refugees in our study preferred to live in non-camp settings because they already had relatives and business contacts in the city. Economic relations across the border over the years have created kinship relationships between the Turkish and Syrian communities, and in 2011 many refugees used their family routes upon arrival in Turkey. When the refugee inflow began and the population of urban refugees was considerably smaller, integration of displaced people into the host society was established through pre-existing networks. Refugees gradually constructed their lives in the city with the humanitarian support by the local community in the form of housing and livelihood. The successful integration of the first Syrian community has led to chain migration of refugees into the urban areas of Turkey. However, the growing population in Gaziantep of recently forced immigrants has begun to have severe impacts on housing and labor markets.

High demand on housing in Gaziantep has led to an extreme rise in rental prices and housing scarcity, which had been problems already. According to my interview with the president of the Association of Real-Estate Agencies, monthly rents for apartment units increased from 300 TL to 900 TL in 2013. Housing market problems emerged as a potential source of tension between refugee and host communities. One Turkish interviewee, a landlord, explained that she rented her apartment to a seven-person Syrian family; but, the family began hosting other refugees and the total number of people in the apartment went up to twenty, causing unrest and infrastructural problems in the building. Similar situations have resulted in an unwillingness to rent housing to refugees. On the other hand, many refugee respondents stated that illegal tenant-landlord arrangements led to exploitation and abuse of refugees. High rental prices, scarcity of housing, and discrimination against the refugees have forced Syrians to find shelters in public parks and abandoned buildings, as well as vacant garages, roof terraces and storage rooms (Figure 2). As a result, the Syrian population is largely located in the inner city, where they have found such vacant and unused spaces.



Figure 2

Left: A vacant house occupied by 30 Syrian refugees.

Right: A vacant garage used as a market place by a Syrian refugee

Besides the housing problems, another dramatic impact of rapid population growth is on the labor market. Because the Turkish government does not issue work permits to those with refugee status, the Syrians in urban settings in my study had built up illegal livelihoods. Many Turkish business owners were taking advantage of refugees' inability to engage in formal employment, and forced them to work under exploitative conditions. The data collected from the interviews shows that the urban refugees provided labor at below-market rates without demanding any benefits from the employers. Consequently, refugee workers replaced local workers and the unemployment rate in the host society increased dramatically. During my fieldwork, I interviewed Turkish employers from three businesses. The first respondent, owner of a contract manufacturing business, stated that when he saw that Syrians provide the same quality of work at a lower salary, he started to hire them. Over time, because of the language barrier, he had to make a decision to have either all Turkish employees or all Syrians so that they could communicate with each other. At the time of the interview, all of his workers were undocumented Syrian refugees who had replaced Turkish workers. The second respondent, owner of a pistachio orchard, had hired both Turks and Syrians as temporary agricultural workers. Although they worked for the same number of hours, Turkish workers earned 35 TL per day, while Syrian workers earned 18 TL. The third respondent, owner of a small grocery store in the city center, stated that he was going out of business because the new residents of the area, Syrian urban refugees, preferred to go to Syrian-owned shops. Turkish interviewees mentioned the existence of "Little Aleppo" (or "Little Syria") as one of two commercial centers that belong to the refugee community. As a result, both receiving and migrant populations have faced challenges and setbacks as a result of the lack of a clear refugee employment

policy. Refugees are subject to exploitative employment conditions and serious security problems, and many begin to feel hatred towards the host country and society. At the same time, the local community develops resentment toward refugees, holding refugees responsible for rising unemployment rate and lack of labor opportunities.

Rising rents due to the increasing demand by the urban refugees and growing unemployment among Turkish locals have given rise to social tensions and to protests against the Syrian population in Gaziantep. Threats against Syrians have also impacted their daily lives and routines. One Syrian informant stated that he had to sell his car, which had Syrian license plates, because the car was attacked several times by Turkish people. Another Syrian interviewee explained that they did not feel secure going outside of their home because their Turkish neighbors threatened them with eviction. The findings of this fieldwork indicate that over a two-year long interaction between host and refugee communities, multi-dimensional conflicts and social tensions have emerged gradually through complications in housing and labor markets.

5.1 Policy Analysis

What is the contribution of policies related to urban refugees in the process of social and spatial transformation of the city? Refugee policies implemented by the United Nations and the Turkish government, as well as Turkey's border, security and registration strategies, each affect urban refugees in different ways, leading to various degrees of marginalization or inclusion of those communities. For this paper, I focus on the policy decisions that have direct impact on the social, economic and spatial restructuring of the new population in Gaziantep. I have used policy reports provided by the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality, because this city council is a primary organizer of the urban life of refugees (2014).

The Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality has categorized issues related to the influx of refugees as security, housing, health, social, environmental, education and economic problems; on municipal reports, policy proposals are introduced and decisions announced/made for each kind of problem. Local housing policy focuses on the relationship between homeowner/landlord and refugee tenants, and introduces a legal framework for contracts and rent control by the municipal authorities. The framework also requires that landlords rent their properties only to registered refugees to encourage refugees to legalize their status. In fact under international refugee convention, refugees are accorded a right to housing, but policy responses to the situation of inadequate housing have not addressed refugees' problems. Although lawmakers/policymakers

have proposed to build affordable housing for refugees, they have not made a serious attempt to put this into practice.

Employment policy takes two critical steps: first, the policy seeks to minimize the pull of the future immigration by legitimizing refugee employment and second, it aims to preserve the civil peace and prevent social conflict. The policy suggests that only 10% of a business's Syrian employees may have the same employment rights as Turkish citizens, including earning the minimum wage and access to the health insurance plan. Similar to housing policy, these employment strategies fail to address the broader problems of unemployment and exploitative employment conditions. Also a number of unanswered questions remain as potential sources of future conflict: What will happen to the thousands of urban refugees who are already employed illegally? Under what condition will urban refugees gain legal work permits? In addition, policymakers have not made a recommendation as to when the policy will go into operation and who will be responsible for controlling employment conditions.

In the case of public services, urban refugees have had free access to medical care and education. Although refugees' access to state hospitals has been a successful attempt, access to education has failed because of language barriers and curriculum differences between Syrian and Turkish education systems. The only policy directly targeting the integration of refugees is a municipality campaign that encourages refugees to learn the Turkish language.

Refugee studies scholars advocate offering a path to refugees to gain legal status as an important step towards sustainable and permanent solutions (Grabska, 2006), an approach that is also embraced by the Gaziantep Municipality. Through policy interventions in employment and housing, the municipality encourages refugees to obtain legal status in the city. However, an overall evaluation of refugee strategies shows that integration into the receiving society has not been a priority of policy approaches. The lack of state-led attempts toward refugee integration has resulted in severe social and spatial segregation and created isolated refugee communities. (Dincer *et al.*, 2013).

5.2 City as a Social Entity

How does the city's existing socioeconomic structure affect the urbanization process of refugees? The city as a social entity plays a critical role: depending on how similar or different the newcomers and local people are, social and economic conflicts may arise between communities and eventually lead to segregation of refugees. Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Disaster and Emergency

Management Authority (AFAD) conducted a profiling survey in 2013 using face-to-face interviews with refugees. Using AFAD survey results (2013), I conducted a comparative analysis between host and refugee communities based on indicators related to housing and employment.

	REFUGEE POPULATION	RECEIVING POPULATION
HOUSEHOLD SIZE	6.2 PEOPLE	4.8 PEOPLE
GENDER DISTRIBUTION	MALE: 51.4 FEMALE: 48.6	MALE: 51 FEMALE: 49
WORKING AGE (19-54)	45%	44.50%
ILLITERATE	18.80%	14.20%
SCHOOLING	72%	85.10%

Table 1. Comparison between refugee and receiving populations

Table 1 compares refugee and host populations based on household size, gender distribution, education level, and age distribution. Related to the issue of employment, the most crucial finding is that in both communities the working-age group forms the largest proportion of the total population—45% of refugees and 44,5% of the receiving society. The massive influx of a working-age population into the city has added heavy pressure to existing unemployment problems. In the matter of urban resettlement, a critical factor is the greater household size of the refugee population, which creates another layer of problems. Housing typology in the region is developed in accordance with the typical household size of the local population, thus both building infrastructure and models of housing units are not capable of accommodating a larger number of people. Both populations have a greater percentage of males, and the education level is only slightly lower in the refugee community, which indicates that the two populations share demographic characteristics. Daley’s (2009) case study of community relations in a settlement designated for refugees shows that similar identities in terms of gender, age and language help the interactions among refugees, migrants and existing residents, and provide close relationships across differences. However in Gaziantep, where Syrian refugees do not have spaces specifically designated for them to reside, a reverse situation has emerged. There, similar identities compete for the same social, economic and educational resources in the city, which causes social tensions and segregation of refugees.

5.3 City as a Spatial Entity

What determines the spatial distribution of the displaced population in the context of lack of state-led resettlement? The mapping exercises produced as a part of this fieldwork show that the urban fabric facilitates the distribution pattern of refugees. Existing spatial configurations in the city

become the pull and push factors that determine the movement of new arrivals and where they tend to settle. The major challenge of the mapping study was the lack of data on refugees; hence the study relied on the qualitative data collected during the fieldwork. Data collection involved interviews with municipal authorities, real-estate specialists and NGO workers, as well as Syrian urban refugees who were asked to explain why they chose to reside in particular neighborhoods. Refugee respondents were also asked about their use of city, such as what places they visit more often, which streets they are familiar with in the city, what kind of transportation they use, and where they go to socialize.



Figure 3. Map of Gaziantep and areas of urban refugee settlements.

As shown in the Figure 3, in Gaziantep, the spatial organization of refugees has a main spine, which became an attractor point, pulling new refugees to the surrounding area. This spine, Inonu Street, is the other commercial and business center of the refugee community in the city, aside from Little Aleppo. Most of the businesses on the street are either owned or managed by Syrians. The primary attractions of this area are the pre-existing Syrian-owned businesses, which have been located here since before the refugee influx, and the intercity bus, which is the main means of access to the city for people who cross the border from Syria. The secondary areas that have high refugee populations are the existing Turkish neighborhoods of marginalized and urban poor, shown as Area 1, Area 2, Area 3 and Area 4 on the map.

Another point of attraction for refugees is small-sized industry, where most employees are Syrians.

Area 5 has become a refugee-worker zone where most small-sized factories in the city are located. Although this area is defined as the primary business zone, refugees actually work all around the city in various businesses. However, it is difficult to map where refugees are working in Gaziantep accurately because much of refugee employment is undocumented. Regarding how refugees are using public space, interviews revealed that the Syrian population is primarily using Park 1, Park 2, Park 3 and Park 4 as depicted in Figure 4. The image also attempts to visualize general flows of refugees in the city by connecting public park spaces with housing and business zones.



Figure 4. Map of Gaziantep and use of public space by Syrian urban refugees

To sum up, the urban fabric of Gaziantep is the primary organizer of refugees' spatial distribution, and mapping analysis reveals a number of notable spatial features of urban-refugee activity:

- Urbanization of refugees is centered on a business main spine.
- Transit stations and its surrounding areas are pull factors for urban refugees.
- Neighborhoods of urban poor and ethnic communities are pull factors.
- Neighborhoods where vacant houses are available are pull factors.
- Small industry sites and service sector zones are pull factors.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

The massive influx of displaced people into urban areas reshapes the cities' economic, social, political and spatial structures. Systematic analysis of refugee segregation in this paper demonstrates that the generators of urban refugee marginality are multifaceted with complex interrelationships and require interdisciplinary research. A new layer of urban marginality and inequality has emerged in Gaziantep through social and spatial exclusion of Syrian urban refugees. This paper documents that social exclusion of refugees is not an immediate outcome; rather a gradual process with multiple actors and factors. The drivers of social exclusion in the case of Syrian urban refugees are the conflicts that emerge in the labor market and in housing issues. These problems can only be addressed with more thorough policy regulations that recognize refugees' right to housing and employment.

This research also reveals that analyzing the spatial distribution of refugees is a significant component of refugee research because it identifies potential areas of marginalization. Spatial organization of the refugees in urban settings is clearly dominated by the pull of the city's existing poor neighborhoods, particularly where people of the same ethnicity reside, and that of transit stations which provide entry points to the city. This key finding about the role of city's spatial fabric in refugee integration brings up two critical questions for future studies: Is there a typical spatial model that urban displaced populations produce? Can we predict the spatial distribution of urban refugees before the migration begins? In conclusion, I argue that to be successful, integration strategies and policy concepts must rely on an understanding of the distribution patterns of displaced population in urban areas as well as the factors that facilitate these patterns.

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