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Emotion of Fear, Language and Body Politics: Narratives of Syrian Migrants in Istanbul

Turkey is going through a social, cultural, economic and political turmoil due to arrival of millions of migrants from neighbouring countries and other conflict and post-conflict places in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Istanbul as the leading host city in the country is being challenged by diverse issues and problems in this process. This paper aims to investigate the power dynamics between Syrian migrants and mainstream Turkish society in the context of emotion of fear, politics of language and discourses and how they are stuck on the surface of the bodies of migrants in everyday life in Istanbul. The Turkish politics of exclusion, stigmatization and discriminatory discourses along with exhausting bureaucratic procedures and papers works have led a constant state of felt fear, despair and anxiety in the lives of Syrian migrants. Migrants have tried to cope with violent climate created against them during which they have developed new tactics of survival. Their language as a sign of their existence and their dress codes as visible forms of their existence have been attacked on daily basis. This paper aims to investigate how the circulation of anti-migrant emotions through different mediums in the mainstream Turkish society has contributed insecure life condition for migrants. Based on an ethnographic oral history project, the paper documents emergence of these survival tactics and the discriminatory violent factors that generates them in the light of narratives of ordinary migrants residing in different districts of Istanbul.