

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY**

MASTER'S THESIS

**RETHINKING THE PRODUCTION OF SPACE AND
MIGRATION: THE CASE OF ISTANBUL
FATİH DISTRICT**

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**THESIS ADVISOR
PROF. ALEV ERKİLET**

ISTANBUL, 2025

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MIGRATION: THE CASE OF ISTANBUL
FATİH DISTRICT**

**by
SERRA DENİZ ARAZ**

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Sociology**

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THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been read by us, and it has been decided that it is sufficient in terms of scope and quality to obtain a master's degree in the field of Sociology.

Thesis Jury Members

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It has been confirmed that this thesis has been written following all the standards set by the School of Graduate Studies of Ibn Haldun University.

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Seal/Signature

ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Full Name:

Signature:



ÖZ

MEKÂNIN ÜRETİMİNİ VE GÖÇÜ YENİDEN DÜŞÜNMEK:
İSTANBUL FATİH İLÇESİ ÖRNEĞİ

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İstanbul'un Fatih ilçesi, 2011'de başlayan Suriye iç savaşının ardından Suriyeli göçmenlerin yoğun göç dalgasıyla birlikte hızla dönüşüm geçirmiştir. Fatih'e yeni gelen Suriyeli sakinlerin yoğun yerleşimi ve aynı dönemde, birçok yerel sakinin Basaksehir gibi yeni kentsel mekânlara taşınması, ilçenin mekânsal dinamiklerini değiştirmiş, yeni sosyal ve kültürel parametreler oluşturmuştur. Bu değişim, Fatih'i mekânın üretimi ve yeniden üretimi üzerinden çok katmanlı bir analiz için güçlü bir örnek haline getirmiştir. Bu tez, etnografik bir yaklaşımla, katılımcıların deneyimlerinden ortaya çıkan tema ve örüntüleri inceleyerek bu dönüşümün altında yatan dinamikleri açığa çıkarmaktadır. Daha geniş sosyo-politik yapılar ile günlük yaşam pratiklerinin kesişim noktalarını ele alarak, mevcut sakinler ve yeni gelen göçmenler için kentsel deneyimin nasıl şekillendiğini analiz etmektedir. Bu bağlamda, tez, mekânın üretimini makro ve mikro düzeydeki süreçlerin etkileşimi ile değerlendiren çok katmanlı bir çözümleme sunmaktadır. Fatih'teki farklı aktörlerin gündelik etkileşimlerini inceleyerek, mekânın üretimini ve yeniden üretimini şekillendiren karmaşık mekanizmaları açıklığa kavuşturmuştur. Bu çerçevede, İslam'ın mekân üretimindeki rolü, güçlü göçmen ağlarının etkisi ve yönetim kavramı, Fatih özelinde mekân ve göç ilişkisini anlamlandırmak için temel boyutlar olarak öne çıkmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göç, Gündelik Hayat, Mekânın Üretimi, İslam, Suriyeli Göçmenler, Yönetimsellik.

ABSTRACT

RETHINKING PRODUCTION OF SPACE AND MIGRATION: THE CASE OF ISTANBUL FATIH DISTRICT

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Istanbul's Fatih district has rapidly transformed since the Syrian refugees started to settle as new dwellers following the forced migration flow due to the 2011 Syrian civil war. Since their collective settlements have accelerated and there has been a noticeable increase in the number of Syrian cafes, restaurants, and small businesses in the Fatih's spaces along with a number of local residents from Turkey have moved out of Fatih for new emerging urban spaces such as Basaksehir district, Fatih district has correspondingly changed its spatial relations and embedded new social and cultural parameters. As this indicates that the district is a significant constitutive and constructed phenomenon, the production of space emerges as a key analytical inquiry. The thesis focuses on this question by conducting ethnographic research. By doing so, it aims to elucidate how broader socio-political agencies intersect with micro-level local dynamics to shape the urban experience for both existing residents and newcomers. Therefore, the study aims to unveil the question of how the socio-cultural urban settings of Fatih have been produced and reproduced by existing residents and new inhabitants. By examining the affinitive interactions between various actors within the urban landscape, the study sheds light on the complex mechanisms driving the production and reproduction of space in Fatih. In this thesis, the close relationship of the Islamic religion with the production of space, significant migrant networks, and the governance practices in the production of space stand out as the primary dimensions of the discussion on space and migration. These factors, which shape

migrants' preferences and settlement dynamics, play a decisive role in the processes of forming their identities, feeling belonging and establishing spatial ties. Within this framework, the thesis analyzes how religious practices, as well as social, political, and economic networks, contribute to the production of space in Fatih.

Keywords: Everyday Life, Governance, Islam, Migration, Production of Space, Syrian Migrants.



DEDICATION

To all those who stand for unity in diversity, protecting the spaces where the mosaic of human existence flourishes and defending them against the forces of exclusion, discrimination, and prejudice.



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Among the esteemed professors who contributed to this study, my supervisor, Prof. Alev Erkilet, holds a special place. She undertook my thesis supervision just a few months before my defense, offering her wholehearted support in a very short time and making a significant contribution to the completion of my thesis. Even before becoming my advisor, the invaluable perspective she offered, the attention and enthusiasm with which she welcomed my thesis topic and encouraged me to create its academic framework are unforgettable. Her sincere, heartfelt and enlightening approach always made me feel encouraged, and her constructive support enabled me to navigate this challenging process with less stress. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to her.

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I am deeply grateful to my family, who helped me develop the perspective to see the complexity, multiculturalism, and diversity a city should embrace. Their endless support and sacrifices have strengthened my academic journey. The unwavering confidence and encouragement of my parents throughout my life have brought me to this point. My loving mother, Selda, has always supported me in pursuing my goals across all areas of life. My dear father, Yılmaz, has consistently provided me with the best conditions, both materially and emotionally, to succeed in my endeavors. My dear sister Zeynep and my beloved younger sisters Zülal and Sudenur have always

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Serra DENİZ ARAZ
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ÖZ	iv
ABSTRACT	v
DEDICATION	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS	xiv
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Methodology of the Thesis.....	5
1.2. Fieldwork Experiences: Overcoming Limitations and Gaining Rapport.....	8
1.3. Structure of the Thesis.....	10
CHAPTER II CONTEXTUALIZATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	13
2.1. Setting the Context: Migration, Space, and Social Transformation in Fatih....	14
2.1.1. Migration in Motion: Understanding Turkey’s Dynamic Migration Patterns....	21
2.2. Production of Space.....	31
CHAPTER III HISTORY, RELIGION, AND SOCIAL SPACE IN FATI H ...	35
CHAPTER IV GOVERNANCE IN SPACE PRODUCTION	52
4.1 Syrian Migration Governance	54
4.2. Formal and Informal Arrival Infrastructures: Networks of Support	58
4.3. Neoliberal Urban Governance.....	69
4.3.1. Neoliberalism as Ideology: Foundations and Influence	70
4.3.2. Neoliberal Urban Development in Turkey: A Historical Context	72
CHAPTER V EVERYDAY LIFE AND SOCIAL SPACE IN TODAY’S FATI H..	84
CHAPTER VI INTRODUCTION	105
6.1. General Framework of the Study	105
6.2. Key Findings from the Field	105
6.3. Theoretical Contributions.....	112
6.4. Recent Developments in Syria and Future Research Topics	113
REFERENCES	119
APPENDIXES	131
Appendix A Map of Edgware Road.....	131

Appendix B Map of Fatih District	132
Appendix C Malta Bazaar Through the Lens of Fieldwork	133
Appendix D Ethics Committee Permission	139
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	140



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1. The Oldest Map of Constantinople by Cristoforo Buondelmonte, 1422....	16
Figure 2.2. The Oldest Map of Istanbul after the Ottoman Conquest by Giovanni Andrea Vavassori, 1520	17
Figure 2.3. Historical Map of Istanbul by Edmondo De Amicis, 1896	18
Figure 2.4. Urban-Rural Population in Turkey	25
Figure 2.5. The Famous Syrian Restaurant, Eyam Şamiyye, in Malta Bazaar	31
Figure 5.1. Lefebvre’s Spatial Triad	86
Figure 6.1. Fatih Mosque, 8 November 2024	114
Figure 6.2. Malta Bazaar, 8 November 2024	115
Figure 6.3. Sarachane Park, 8 November 2024.....	115
Figure A.1. Regional Map of Edgware Road.....	131
Figure B.1. Regional Map of Fatih District	132
Figure C.1. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork I.....	133
Figure C.2. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork II.....	134
Figure C.3. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork III	135
Figure C.4. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork IV	136
Figure C.5. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork V	137
Figure C.6. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork VI.....	137
Figure C.7. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork VII.....	138

LIST OF SYMBOLS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFAD	Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı/Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi/Justice and Development Party
ANAP	Anavatan Partisi/Motherland Party
DGMM	Directorate General for Migration Management
EU	European Union
FRIT	Facility for Refugees in Turkey
IHH	İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri İnsani Yardım Vakfı/Human Rights and Freedoms
HRF	Humanitarian Relief Foundation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LFIP	Law on Foreigners and International Protection
MSP	Milli Selamet Partisi, National Salvation Party
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
RP	Refah Partisi, Welfare Party
TOKI	Toplu Konut İdaresi Başkanlığı/The Mass Housing Administration of Turkey
ZP	Zafer Partisi/Victory Party

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My journey into migration and space began with an unexpected moment of familiarity. While on an exchange programme in London, I found myself walking along Edgware Road, a busy 10-mile stretch of road that runs from the City of Westminster to suburban London. The area I came across is located in Westminster, London's central district.¹ It was a vibrant area, known for its richly diverse communities, especially for the presence of people from the Middle East. As I walked through this area, the flashing lights, aromatic and spicy smells and sounds of Arabic conversation evoked a sense of connection I had not expected. For a moment, I was no longer visiting a foreign city; I was back on the familiar streets of Istanbul.

The smoky aroma of sishas, the smell of sizzling meat from vertical doner ovens² on almost every corner, and piles of freshly baked Syrian pita bread on stalls reminded me of Fatih's food stalls, restaurants, and groceries where the smells, sounds, and sights reflected a Middle Eastern cultural mix within Istanbul's urban mosaic. As I walked past crowded bookshops selling Islamic literature and classics, I was reminded once again of Fatih, where such bookshops served as cultural and religious anchors for the Muslim community. As a Turkish Muslim from Istanbul, who enjoys exploring the richly textured spaces of my city, I found in Edgware Road an echo of the multicultural religious neighborhoods of Istanbul. Especially tempting during Ramadan³, the aroma of freshly baked kunefe, with its sweet, cheese-filled layers, mixes with the nutty scent of baklava from the sweet shops. The experience of walking down Edgware Road during this month brought all these smells and sights into sharper focus. One evening,

¹See the map of this area in Appendix A.

²Doner, a staple of Arab cuisine, known as shawarma, similar to Turkish doner but very different, was being fried on vertical stove

³A holy month for Muslims around the world, during which they fast from dawn to sunset. It is believed to be the month in which the Holy Qur'an was revealed. Before dawn, Muslims eat a pre-fast meal called suhoor, and then refrain from eating and drinking until sunset, when they break their fast with a meal known as iftar.

I found myself drawn to the restaurants that offered special Ramadan menus. After a long day of fasting, baklava and tea brought me right back to the Ramadan nights of my hometown, with families gathering to celebrate the breaking of the fast. The sense of familiarity was striking. Indeed, as sunset approached, the streets filled with people who were eagerly waiting for iftar. It reminded me of Ramadan nights in Fatih, Istanbul. The street vendors and food stalls were packed with families and friends enjoying iftar and afterwards. In Fatih, the historic Fatih Mosque fills with Muslim worshippers during this holy month, and the surrounding streets echo with a unique blend of spirituality and social vibrancy. The joy of breaking the fast with loved ones, followed by evening and taraweeh prayers⁴ and gatherings around tea, intertwines the sacred and social, turning the neighborhood into a vibrant expression of faith. These sensory experiences were deeply felt, from meals to conversations and community gatherings centered around shared plates of hummus and grilled meats. Edgware Road, like Fatih, felt like a thriving, multicultural hub, demonstrating how migrant communities contribute to shaping urban areas.

Reflecting on this, I realized how much my earlier experiences in Fatih had shaped my understanding of Middle Eastern culture. Before my visit to London, my walks through Fatih allowed me to encounter a different culture right within Istanbul, exploring Syrian food and traditions that were distinct yet intertwined with the city's urban landscape. I remember going to Fatih not just to enjoy Turkish cuisine or visit historical sites, but also to try foods like falafel and shawarma, to taste the traditional date-filled ma'amoul cookie, and to experience a culture that was at once different and familiar. That is, alongside my usual stops in Fatih, such as shopping for hijab clothing, visiting local publishers, and mosques and enjoying a Turkish kebab, the Syrian cuisine and culture had also become a significant part of my experience there. Yet, it was in London that I truly realized how familiar I was with a culture I once thought of as foreign. This cultural experience in Fatih fostered a sense of connection that would later deepen during my stay in London. The experience on Edgware Road highlighted how much I had internalized the cultural diversity of Fatih, showing me that I was already connected to the Middle Eastern elements that had become woven into the

⁴Taraweeh prayer is an extended prayer held after the obligatory nighttime prayer during the Ramadan month. Muslims perform it in congregation at the mosque, but it can also be done individually at home.

fabric of my city. In a way, without realizing it, I had adopted some aspects of Syrian culture, seeing it not as separate but as part of my own world.

Yet there were differences too between the two cases. Dubbed “Little Cairo” or “Little Beirut”, London's Edgware Road today is home to a diverse range of nationalities.⁵ While Lebanese, Egyptians, Iraqis, Palestinians, Syrians and many more are present at almost the same level, the multicultural fabric of Fatih is shaped mostly by Syrians⁶ who started to come to Turkey en masse after the Syrian Civil War in 2011. In fact, Istanbul’s most historical site of some parts of Fatih district is dubbed as “Little Syria” or “Little Damascus” as a symbolic at times, controversial space to analyze the transformations caused by migration.⁷

This realization allowed me to view migration in a new light and sparked a deeper curiosity about how migrant communities actively contribute to the spaces they inhabit. This intersection of personal experience and analytical interest became the seed for my thesis, transforming into an inquiry about how migrant communities not only find a home in new urban spaces but also reshape and reproduce these spaces. Migration and space turns into an analytical question which focuses on understanding how migrant communities actively participate in shaping the spaces they inhabit and how these spaces are in turn reproduced and transformed. And, this inquiry led me to consider not only how new communities such as Syrian migrants settle in urban centers, but also how this settlement process shapes both the urban landscape and social dynamics. In the end, these thoughts led me to a broader question in a particular

⁵“Ramadan Recipes from Edgware Road,” Marble Arch London, accessed November 13, 2024, <https://marble-arch.london/culture-blog/ramadan-foods-recipes/>.

⁶Turkey's Ministry of Interior enacted Law 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection in 2013, granting Syrian people the status of "temporary protection" rather than officially recognizing them as "refugees." This distinction arises because Turkey still adheres to the Geneva Convention of 1951 with its geographical limitations on granting refugee status, restricting it to those originating from Europe. In this thesis, the refugee term is used to refer to Syrians' official status in Turkey. For further information regarding the temporary protection status, it can be referred to <https://en.goc.gov.tr/general-information2>. In this thesis, the terms "refugee" and "migrant" will be used interchangeably. Although terms like "asylum seeker" or "refugee" for Syrians in Turkey carry sociological significance due to their experience of forced migration and used in daily life instead of the official terminology, they do not have legal equivalence in terms of official procedures. You can find the state-based records on the statistical demographics of Syrians in Turkey at DGMM's website, <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>

⁷“Istanbul’s Little Damascus: Refugees Leave Their Mark on Old City,” Middle East Eye, accessed November 13, 2024, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/istanbuls-little-damascus-refugees-leave-their-mark-old-city>.

context: How is Fatih, a historic neighborhood of Istanbul, being produced by its old and new inhabitants, and what forces contribute to this evolving landscape?

This thesis, therefore, aims to explore these questions by examining the layers of social and spatial transformation brought by migration, and to explore how this neighborhood has become a canvas on which long-standing traditions, new identities and collective practices are in constant interaction. By analyzing Fatih as a case study, this research brings a unique perspective on the impact of forced migration not only on the lives of migrants, but also on the broader urban space. While research has pointed to the increasing presence of migrants in Fatih, the more nuanced local, social and cultural dynamics shaping this trend have not been sufficiently explored.⁸ So, closely analyzing this rapidly increasing presence of migrant-owned businesses and the spatial clustering of Syrian communities in central Fatih, this study aims to reveal the sociological transformation and reproduction of space triggered by these changes. That is, I aim to uncover the social, cultural and religious dynamics unfolding in Fatih and offer insights into how space is actively produced, contested and negotiated. To do so, my thesis poses the central research question: How do Fatih's new residents, including Syrian migrants as well as Turkish and Kurdish long-time residents⁹, produce and reproduce this historic urban site? Supporting questions examine how this social transformation occurs, what aspects of Fatih enable Syrians to settle, why they choose Fatih over other areas, how these new and long-time residents interact with each other, how living in this urban center shapes their daily practices and how they negotiate cultural and migrant identities within the urban setting. Drawing on the work of Henri Lefebvre, who highlights space production as a dynamic process shaped by both macro- and micro-level dynamics, revealing the multilayered and multidimensional process with multiple agencies involved in space-making,¹⁰ this thesis demonstrates urban space as a multilayered, socially constructed phenomenon that the diverse actors and forces are at play in shaping the urban fabric of Fatih. Based on all this, this study

⁸Murat Erdoğan, Burcuhan Şener, and Merve Ağca, rep., *Urban Refugees of Marmara: Process Management of Municipalities* (Istanbul, Turkey: Marmara Municipalities Union Publications, 2021).

⁹I refer to the local residents of Fatih as "Turkish and Kurdish" based on the ethnic distinctions prevalent in the region. As I interviewed both Turkish and Kurdish citizens as existing inhabitants of the region, these labels reflect the group living for a longer period of time in Fatih, where Turkish citizens, including those from various regions of Turkey, and Kurdish individuals, many of whom migrated from eastern and southeastern Turkey.

¹⁰Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1991

argues that Fatih's transformation is most effectively understood through the interplay of macro- and micro-level dynamics, where the production of space becomes the key factor. In this regard, this thesis argues that Islam, as both a personal and social force, plays an important role in shaping the ways in which Syrian migrants navigate and transform urban space. Through Fatih's large numbers of mosques, religious public spaces and community centers, Syrian migrants find a supportive social and spatial infrastructure that fosters a sense of belonging. Governance practices of state, civil organizations, and individuals are also relevant, as state policies, NGO roles and subjectivity intersect with the religious and social practices of migrant communities, facilitating their adaptation and establishing their presence in the urban fabric. So, it reveals powerful dynamics of space-making, drawing attention to the interplay between religious practices, governance logics, and community networks in shaping a district that resonates deeply with both locals and newcomers alike.

1.1. Methodology of the Thesis

This thesis study is designed based on an ethnographic research model. The aim of the research is not to test a pre-designed hypothesis about the production of space using experimental and quantitative methods, but rather to explore, describe, and analyze the multifaceted patterns of space production within the cultural contexts which allows themes and patterns to emerge mostly from the participants' experiences.¹¹ As a result, for the scope of the study, rather than solely structured or strictly planned qualitative methods, I approached my fieldwork with an openness to informal, organic interactions, embracing the unpredictability and challenges that come with ethnographic data collection. In fact, when I entered the field I anticipated that in-depth interviews would provide primary data, but as I interacted more deeply with Fatih, I found that the lived experiences of the space were best captured through participant observation and informal conversations in addition to in-depth interviews. This realization shifted my methodology toward ethnographic practice; I wanted to understand the complexities of Fatih's evolving cultural landscape firsthand, not just collect information about it. In addition to the ethnographic examination, the case study includes the use of content and discourse analyses such as document/report

¹¹H. Russell Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Fifth (Plymouth, UK: AltaMira Press, 2011).

analyses related to migration and urban governance, news articles, political statements, video contents and written or spoken discourse related to the transformation of Fatih. So, multifold layers of spatial practice can be best studied with comprehensive ethnographic research with field-based in-depth explorations and with considering content and discourse analysis. The cornerstone of this comprehensive examination involves actively or passively observing the field, engaging in direct interactions, and collecting first-hand data.¹² In this regard, the thesis relies on semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted with a total of 17 individuals, including nine Syrian newcomers, consisting of business owners, employees, and students, as well as eight Turkish/Kurdish residents. Personal details of interviewees, including the names of respondents, have been kept confidential to protect their privacy. To find out their relations, experiences, and practices as the implications of the cultural transformation of the district, both existing and arriving residents are examined. Both groups' perspectives reveal how 'old' and 'new' communities negotiate social space, how they perceive each other's presence and how this affects their relationship with the urban environment. This dual perspective highlights both points of cohesion and points of division, which are crucial for understanding the social and spatial transformation of the region. At the same time, Turkish and Kurdish residents, who have deep-rooted connections to Fatih, offer valuable perspectives on how these transformations are perceived, negotiated, or contested within the broader local context. On the other hand, the responses of Turkish and Kurdish residents helped to contextualize the acceptance and adaptation of new spatial practices in Fatih, which may be overlooked if the focus is solely on Syrian migrant experiences. By exploring the interactions and perceptions of both communities, I was able to capture a fuller, multidimensional view of how Fatih's historical identity as a religious and culturally significant district is being reshaped through the lived experiences and everyday practices of its diverse inhabitants. The average duration of the interviews was 45 minutes, sometimes lasting more than 2 hours, and sometimes 30 minutes. My interviews were combined with 20 informal interviews. While these interviews provided valuable insights, the true depth of understanding came from my informal engagements and from participating in the daily life of Fatih. Although informal interviews were characterized by a total lack of structure or control,¹³ I managed to integrate them into a more structured format when

¹²David M. Fetterman, *Ethnography Step-by-Step* (California: SAGE, 1989).

¹³Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*

circumstances allowed. This approach enabled the respondents to succinctly provide striking points of their views on the topic within a short span of time. Additionally, in certain situations, particularly when employees were unavailable due to workload or required permission from their bosses, this adaptable and flexible method allowing for smoother data collection processes resulted in a more efficient and streamlined approach. I observed daily routines, interactions in spaces of Fatih Mosque, Malta Bazaar, and local cafes, and frequented areas such as Ali Kuşçu Neighborhood and Fevzipaşa Avenue, where Syrian and Turkish residents converge.¹⁴ In these areas, the research universe encompasses living spaces that exemplify Syrian culture, including cafes, restaurants, shops, mosques, student dormitories, and civil society organizations. The sample consists of Syrian migrants working in cafes and restaurants in the central district of Fatih in Istanbul, as well as university students residing in foreign student dormitories, business/shop owners, customers, and locals, including Turkish and Kurdish individuals in the area. These spaces, central to my observations, revealed layers of cultural and spatial practices that could not be fully captured through structured interviews alone. Participant observation offers a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the subject matter as it is a way of stalking culture and establishing rapport.¹⁵ It is the fundamental instrument for data collection and analysis as it involves two dimensions to be effectively conducted. Firstly, it entails immersing the researcher actively in a culture, a social world that is initially unfamiliar, becoming part of its daily routines, and establishing relationships with its members. The second dimension is writing down in regular, systematic ways what is observed and learned while participating in daily activities.¹⁶

My researcher position, on the other hand, is unique because I am simultaneously positioned as both an insider and an outsider. As a researcher, I was partially an outsider to the part of Syrian refugees in research, due to my non-Syrian background and Turkish ethnic origin. This allowed me to look at these spaces with fresh eyes and observe how migrants and locals interact in ways that I might otherwise have missed. However, I was also an insider as a local resident living in Istanbul and familiar with

¹⁴You can access the map of this area in Appendix B.

¹⁵Bernard, *Research Methods in Anthropology*.

¹⁶Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, "Field Notes in Ethnographic Research," essay, in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, Linda L. Shaw*, Second (Chicago, US: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1–20.

the cultural dynamics of its various districts. As a semi-insider, my common cultural intimacy, which is practicing Islam, and being a local resident of the city, built rapport and a common platform to connect and experience regular encounters. Therefore, to some extent, it facilitated more open communication because some people did not feel embarrassed and reserved while sharing experiences. In this way, my research methodology became an exercise in understanding the nature of ethnographic work itself.

1.2. Fieldwork Experiences: Overcoming Limitations and Gaining Rapport

I believe it is important to share some notes on my field experiences to more clearly illustrate the conditions under which the research was conducted. These notes allow me to explain the stages the research went through, the challenges encountered, and the strategies to overcome these challenges so that the credibility of the field is increased. Also, a detailed account of field experiences provides the reader with an important reference point to better understand the context of the research and to evaluate the findings.

In order to determine the boundaries of the field, in the first phase, I conducted preliminary fieldwork by visiting and walking around various neighborhoods of Fatih several times for a whole day. When I conducted a pilot study in Fatih in 2023, I randomly selected people who were hanging out in the courtyard of the Fatih Mosque and those from Syrian food places in Malta Bazaar. I started to do informal interviews and take fieldwork notes. However, speaking with Arabic-speaking migrants became challenging for me as they could not speak the languages that I could speak properly. Although I can speak standard Arabic, we couldn't manage to fully understand each other with the majority of respondents, whose dialectical variations posed a significant barrier to comprehension. However, when I was spending my time engaged in participant observation within the courtyards of the Fatih Mosque, I encountered a Syrian woman who was studying at a Turkish university and could speak Turkish very fluently. This was the starting point of my whole fieldwork's data collection and analysis. Our initial interaction transcended the bounds of a conventional research relationship, evolving into a symbiotic partnership characterized by mutual trust and understanding. Therefore, the research-based interview transformed into an intimate

conversation characterized by a sense of rapport between us. She was willing to help me reach out to more people and be with me through the whole interview with Syrian refugees who could only speak Arabic. I visited her residence as part of the thesis' sample, an international dormitory where female migrant students, mostly Syrians, were accommodated. This dormitory is one of the services provided by the Turkish NGO Sefire-i Alem, an international student association established in 2010. The organization aims to offer counseling and guidance to international students studying in Turkey, helping them adapt to their new environment and supporting their educational journey. It also provides various courses, including Islamic teachings, practical skills, cultural enrichment, and academic support, aiming to support students' personal and professional growth.¹⁷ In the dormitory, I met several students and participated in their daily activities. I met Fatma, my friend Şems' sister, and became friends. She also helped me to reach out to other Syrian interviewees and assisted with translation during the interviews. Both Fatma and Şems were enthusiastic about contributing to my thesis. I even attended an event organized by Sefire-i Alem, which further enriched my fieldwork. Indeed, in the Syrian refugees' segment of my fieldwork, the limited Turkish and English proficiency of interviewees, coupled with my own inadequacy of Arabic skills, posed a constraint in terms of communication with Syrian refugees. So, to overcome the language obstacle and challenges of communicating and reduce the limitations to the lowest level, rather than relying on a formal interpreter, I conducted my interviews with these intermediaries, whom I became friends with during the interviews with them. My interviews flowed naturally with on-the-fly translation because I chose a more natural approach and worked with intermediaries who not only helped with translation but also acted as a trust bridge between me and the community. This captured the fluidity and immediacy of our research interactions. During our long discussions after the interviews, Fatma and Şems further discussed the interviewee's responses by integrating them into the culture as an intermediary with extensive knowledge of the research project's background. By confirming the researcher's identity, sincere intentions, and academic background, the intermediary created a climate of trust that allowed for more natural and fluid communication and a deeper level of understanding between me and the other Syrian participants.¹⁸ So, they both played a pivotal role in facilitating introductions,

¹⁷You can have further information about the organization through <https://sefireialem.org/>.

¹⁸Ibid.

providing probes, and mediating interactions between me and community members. Moreover, in these unstructured settings, inherent to ethnographic research, I often faced the challenge of capturing and interpreting organic interactions as ‘data’. Although the boundaries between formal interviews and spontaneous, informal conversations often blurred, each interaction provided valuable insights into the community. This fluidity, although difficult to document systematically, enriched my understanding by allowing me to experience the depth and nuances of participants’ daily lives in a more holistic way.

On the other hand, I translated the transcripts of both Arabic and Turkish-speaking residents’ interviews into English as a part of my research. To provide accurate translation, I paid utmost attention to ensuring semantic and conceptual equivalence because literal translations in the target language may not always convey the essential meanings.¹⁹

1.3. Structure of the Thesis

In Chapter II, I present the context of Fatih as a unique case study of migration and space discussion, particularly in the recent transformation of the area with the inflow of the Syrian migrant community. It is important to deeply understand the Fatih district in terms of its contextual dimensions since the layers of social and spatial transformation reveals how this district becomes a space where long-standing traditions, new identities, and collective practices continuously interact. By examining the different dimensions of space production in Fatih, I argue that it serves as a significant example of migration and space relations, as it illustrates how space production emerges through intertwined macro and micro-level processes. I examine the factors that make Fatih a unique case study in the production of space. In order to understand the current dynamics in Fatih and their relationship with space production, I contextualize the district by providing a background on migration in Turkey and thus the area. This chapter provides a theoretical foundation to understand the production

¹⁹Esther Helmich et al., “‘How Would You Call This in English?’: Being Reflective about Translations in International, Cross-Cultural Qualitative Research,” *Perspectives on Medical Education* 6, no. 2 (February 20, 2017): 127–32, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-017-0329-1>.

of space in Fatih. Following Henri Lefebvre's assertion that space is a social product, this chapter contextualizes Fatih through the lens of space production, exploring both the historical and contemporary dynamics that contribute to its transformation.

In Chapter III, I demonstrate how Syrian migrants produce space in Fatih and what historical, social and spatial dynamics make Fatih a preferred settlement space for them, while exploring how religion is an important factor in shaping social space in Fatih. So, Fatih is not temporary for them, rather it is an enduring settlement, integrating cultural codes and becoming Syrian neighborhoods for them. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Kim Knott and Setha Low, this chapter emphasizes the role of religion in shaping social space. How migrants live and experience Fatih through religious and cultural practices transforms it into a familiar and new place at the same time; this process underlines how Fatih has become not only a space of residence but also a space of cultural and religious consolidation for Syrian migrants.

In Chapter IV, I focus on how governance practices shape spatial experiences and individual practices for both Syrian migrants and local residents in Fatih, drawing on Lefebvre's theory of the production of space. As space is an active product of social relations, shaped by both broader structures of power and everyday practices, the chapter analyzes how both state-based governance and self-governance contribute to the production of space in Fatih. At the macro level, I consider how state policies and governance reshape the urban environment, influencing spatial practices. It explores migration governance and neoliberal urban governance in this regard. These macro forces are examined in relation to how they impact the material and social fabric of Fatih, transforming it into a complex space where economic, social, and religious practices intersect. This transformation is particularly evident in the context of demographic changes and the changing use of public space and in shaping the lived experiences of both residents. Additionally, the interplay between macro-level governance and micro-level dynamics is explored. The roles of faith-based NGOs, local businesses, and community groups are discussed to demonstrate how these actors, operating at the intersection of macro and micro level, contribute to the evolving spatial landscape of Fatih. Their influence on public space usage and community dynamics illustrates the ongoing production of space, as these groups navigate and respond to the macro-level forces that shape the urban environment.

Chapter V shows how social space and everyday life in Fatih are shaped by the interactions between Syrian migrants and local Turkish/Kurdish residents. The chapter explores how these communities engage with Fatih as a shared yet distinct space, reflecting both cohesive and segregated dynamics by analyzing daily practices, business environments, language use, and religious events. In this chapter, I analyze the ways in which Syrian migrants and Turkish/Kurdish residents contribute to and experience the area's contemporary social fabric, highlighting the evolving character of Fatih as influenced by the intersection of local and migrant practices. Thus, by looking at these encounters, interactions, and segregation, I also show how political and social tensions fuelled by nationalist sentiments and anti-immigrant discourses affect everyday interactions and perceptions among both new and existing residents.

In Chapter VI, I conclude the thesis, by providing a summary of the research and its findings while highlighting its contributions to migration and space studies. It reflects on the broader implications of Fatih's transformation for understanding space production and offers ideas for future research, particularly in relation to the changing spatial dynamics as more communities settle in cities such as Istanbul.

CHAPTER II

CONTEXTUALIZATION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter sets the theoretical and contextual foundation for understanding the relationship between migration and space in Fatih in line with the contextual experiences mentioned in the previous chapter. While examining this research question of how do Fatih's new residents, including Syrian migrants as well as Turkish and Kurdish long-time residents, shape and reshape this historic urban site, first it is important to discuss the context of Fatih and theoretical framework of production of space as a conceptual framework to understand Fatih as a site continuously transformed by social interactions. Therefore, in this chapter, I explore migration beyond conventional macro-level perspectives, delving into how it functions as a dynamic, spatial, and interactive process that actively shapes Fatih's social space. Here, I also introduce Lefebvre's concept of space production as a framework to understand Fatih as a site continuously transformed by social interactions, while also incorporating Setha Low's intersectional approach to space and culture and Kim Knott's framework on the interplay of religion and spatial dynamics.

Exploring different dimensions of space production in Fatih, I argue that the Fatih district serves as a poignant case of migration and space relations since it illustrates how space production unfolds through intertwined macro and micro-level processes. While existing literature often addresses migration in terms of policy impacts or external factors²⁰, my approach explores the impact of migration on space production by examining both macro and micro dynamics. As some scholars note, migration is inherently a spatial phenomenon, as it involves the movement of people across

²⁰Kristen Biehl , "New Diversities in Istanbul: Setting a Research Agenda for Studying Migration and the City," *SSIIM Paper Series* , 10, (2012): 5-6.

different locations and reshaping the spaces they inhabit.²¹ Therefore, this movement of people has a profound effect on spatial and demographic dynamics of arrived space. In line with this, when a group of people move into a new space, they bring with them different practices and perspectives, which can reshape the symbolic meaning and the daily lived experiences of that space.²² Hence, we can argue that migrants actively engage in the space-making process of a destination. Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar describe this active engagement as “emplacement” in their ground work on migrants and city-making.²³ As migrants build relationships with the social and political agencies such as municipalities, politicians and local communities, they also create social networks, reconstitute locality, and establish social spaces that foster a sense of belonging. Through emplacement, migrants navigate and address the practical, social, political, and symbolic aspects necessary to adapt and participate meaningfully in their new environment.²⁴ This process, therefore, highlights how migration is deeply intertwined with and influences the production of space.

2.1. Setting the Context: Migration, Space, and Social Transformation in Fatih

Fatih district, with its 8,500-year history, stands as the most historically significant area in Istanbul, having served as a central location through the eras of the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman Empires.²⁵ Located on the Historic Peninsula²⁶ that connects Europe and Asia, Fatih holds strategic importance, symbolizing a cultural crossroads within Istanbul. For instance, one of the representatives of Istanbul’s ancient history, containing medieval and modern history, is the city walls surrounding the historical peninsula which today are in relatively good condition on the land side and can be seen in places on the sea side.²⁷ Istanbul, which the Byzantines called ‘the city of

²¹Farrokh, Darush. (2024). Space, Migration and Spatial Justice; A Critical Review. 10.13140/RG.2.2.20466.93123.

²²Patricia Ehrkamp and Helga Leitner, “Beyond National Citizenship: Turkish Immigrants and the (Re)Construction of Citizenship in Germany,” *Urban Geography* 24, no. 2 (March 2003): 127–46, <https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.24.2.127>.

²³Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Simsek-Caglar, *Migrants and City-Making: Dispossession, Displacement, and Urban Regeneration* (Duke University Press, 2018): 1-31

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵İlber Ortaylı, “Giriş,” essay, in *Suriçi İstanbul: Fetihten Önce ve Fetihten Sonra* (Fatih, İstanbul: Fatih Belediye Başkanlığı, 2017), 9.

²⁶“Historical Peninsula” in present-day considered as the part that is surrounded by Haliç in the North, the Marmara Sea in the South, and the Bosphorus in the East and governed by the Fatih Municipality

²⁷Neslihan Asutay-Effenberger, “Kapılar ve Surlar,” essay, in *Suriçi İstanbul: Fetihten Önce ve Fetihten Sonra* (Fatih, İstanbul: Fatih Belediye Başkanlığı, 2017)

Constantinus' became the largest settlement in Europe during the Middle Ages when it was declared the capital of the Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire), which was Christianised and moved eastwards, about 1700 years ago. This ancient city was built on a small peninsula, in today's Fatih district, surrounded by the Marmara Sea and the Golden Horn, and has always remained a city with defined borders throughout Byzantine history. Thus, in this period, the populated areas of the city spread from Süleymaniye to the Golden Horn, and the southern shores of the Golden Horn were used for commercial purposes.²⁸ The city walls were continuously moved outwards over the years and the city expanded continuously. As seen in Figure I, the residential areas were included in the walled city, and there was a very limited population outside of the walls before the Ottoman conquest of the city.

²⁸Ibid.



Figure 2.2. The Oldest Map of Istanbul after the Ottoman Conquest by Giovanni Andrea Vavassori, 1520

However, after the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire, the city continued to expand.

With its long historical past, Fatih has welcomed different communities from different socio-historical backgrounds, including Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Romani populations, and consequently has long been the center of internal and external migration flows.²⁹ Serving as the administrative center of Istanbul Governorship and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, the district was consolidated into a single district named Fatih by Law No. 5757 enacted in 2008, merging the Fatih and Eminönü districts located within the Historical Peninsula.³⁰

As in Figure II, the map of 1896, the expansion was displayed and how the city went beyond the walled region.

²⁹Derya Ozkul, "Migration Flows in Turkey's Neoliberal Era: The Case of Kumkapı, Istanbul," *Social Transformation and Migration*, 2015, 151–66, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137474957>.

³⁰Relevant legislation is available on the website of the Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2008/03/20080322M1-1.htm>



Figure 2.3. Historical Map of Istanbul by Edmondo de Amicis, 1896

Zeynep, a tour guide who was born in Fatih and spent her entire childhood there, describes living in Fatih in explaining the unique "Fatih experience," where everyday life and deep history coexist in seamless continuity. Also she reflects how deeply embedded history is integrated into daily life through her own experiences with intimate relationship with the past:

"I think living in Fatih is a very different thing. There is something called 'the Fatih experience' because you live surrounded by different monumental structures on all sides. Being from Fatih is like being both inside and outside of history."

She recalls memories tied to iconic sites, such as being born in the Süleymaniye maternity home, playing in the garden of the Fatih Mosque, and getting engaged in a cistern. For Zeynep, these historical spaces are not only landmarks but parts of her everyday reality, familiar places where memories unfold. She also highlights the unique, almost timeless continuity in Fatih:

"Like an Ottoman might have said, 'Let's meet at the Fatih Mosque,' maybe 300 years ago, people were saying it, and now there is a situation where you are still saying it. So, there is a state of continuity there."

This constancy, she believes, deepens the connection to history for those living in Fatih, imbuing daily life with a feeling of transcending time by seamlessly connecting the past and present, that's hard to grasp for those raised in new areas of Istanbul like Basaksehir or Ümraniye, she adds.

"Our life is surrounded by these places, you have memories, and an intertwined situation occurs. While Kıztaşı(Column of Marcian)³¹ is a historical site for many people in Turkey, it's actually a very distinct place for you, a place that you see everyday, that you meet in front of, that you use to describe the distance to the pudding shop ('muhallebici' in Turkish) from there. Hagia Sophia is a part of your life, for example. You are very used to it. Therefore, I think people in Fatih live history much more deeply, consciously or unconsciously. These are very interesting experiences for

³¹It is a monumental column erected in 455 in Constantinople in honour of the Eastern Roman Emperor Markianos.

modern people, and someone who was born and grew up in new districts like Basaksehir, or in Ümraniye, someone who has only seen these areas of Istanbul, or people in other cities, cannot fully understand this.”

Fatih is also notable for its diversity. In neighborhoods such as Ayvansaray, Balat, Aksaray, Çarşamba, Unkapanı, Kumkapi, Samatya, and Laleli, different cultural textures coexist. While Kumkapi is famous for its taverns, Çarşamba has the opposite atmosphere with its hodjas and sheiks. This mosaic reflects Turkey’s rich and divergent cultural heritage. Furthermore, Akdeniz Street and its surroundings, the district center of Fatih, is like an average of this diversity. It brings together different aspects of the district and to some extent shows that Fatih is a reflection of Turkey. So, we can say that Fatih is like a microcosm of Turkey. For example, when we look at the recent political developments in this district, they reflect the general political atmosphere of the Turkish state. For instance, the 51.4% yes and 48.6% no in Fatih district in the 2017 Turkish constitutional referendum is in line with the results across Turkey and is the only district in Istanbul with an identical result. Similarly, in the 2010 constitutional referendum, with 58% against 42%, Fatih reflected the same results and consequently a national trend.³² On the other hand, serving as the capital of two great empires, the Roman Empire (later known as the Byzantine Empire) and Ottoman Empires, and briefly as the capital of a Latin state by the invasion of the crusade, and witnessing the building of a nation-state, Fatih has been a highly historically loaded district.³³ Also, the district has long held the identity of being a religious center.³⁴ Its religious character will be discussed in the next chapter.

This historical background has led Fatih to become a key space for the migration pattern of Turkey. It is a district that has both received and given migration for many years, and has experienced significant demographic changes accordingly.³⁵ For example, my interviewees noted that the original inhabitants of Fatih gradually migrated elsewhere in search of sufficient infrastructure, greater security and a sterile

³²The results are available at <https://referandum.ntv.com.tr/#istanbul>

³³Koray Durak, “Bizantion’dan Fatih’e ,” essay, in Suriçi İstanbul: Fetihden Önce ve Fetihden Sonra (Fatih, İstanbul: Fatih Belediye Başkanlığı, 2017), 32.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵İrfan Özet, “Kentli Muhafazakarlarda Habitus Dönüşü: Fatih ve Basaksehir Örneği” (dissertation, Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi, 2018).

lifestyle, and were therefore replaced by a new wave of migrants, initially from within Turkey and more recently from abroad, particularly from Syria. The long-term residents who lived in Fatih for several generations and grew up there were referred to as "old Fatihites" by them. However, the interviewees pointed out that these old Fatihites have largely left the area, with the last of them moving to new residential areas such as Basaksehir that emerged as a new symbolic Islamic urban space.³⁶ This replacement with the new emplacement is one of the examples of the migration pattern of the district. Nevertheless, how the general pattern of migration in Turkey has impacted on this contextual process of Fatih district should be highlighted to show the broader dimension in line with the parameters that shape the context.

2.1.1. Migration in Motion: Understanding Turkey's Dynamic Migration Patterns

Indeed, in Turkey, migration has always been one of the main internal and external social dynamics. Looking at just the last 150 years, we can see how migration has affected this geography from the last period of the Ottoman Empire to the establishment of the Republic, and from then to the present day.³⁷ Especially after 1990, migration and refugee movements increased in almost all parts of the world due to the increase in conflicts and the impact of globalization.³⁸ This has also been the case in Turkey. As evidenced by the recent influx of Syrian refugees to Turkey, both the number and diversity of the foreign population in Turkey has increased. Today, Turkey hosts more than four million refugees and other people in need of international protection³⁹, and once it became the country that hosted more than any other country in the world until 2023.⁴⁰ Within this conjecture, while the number of studies on

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Nermin Abadan-Unat, *Unending Migration: From Guest-worker to Transnational Citizen* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press, 2002).; Ahmet İçduygu, Sema Erder, Ö. Faruk Gençkaya, "Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Göç Politikaları, 1923-2023: Ulus-devlet Oluşumundan Ulus-ötesi Dönüşümlere." *MiReKoç Proje Raporları 1*, 2009 ;İlhan Tekeli, *Göç ve Ötesi* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2008).

³⁸Didem Danış, "Misafir Editörden: Göç Sayısı," *Alternatif Politika* 8, no. 3 (October 2016): 6–I–VI, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/misafir-editorden-goc-sayisi/docview/1946279495/se-2>.

³⁹İletişim Başkanlığı, "Türkiye'de Bulunan Yabancıların Sayısı ve Vatandaşlık Durumları İle İlgili İddialara Dair Açıklama," Türkiye Cumhuriyeti | İletişim Başkanlığı, accessed November 18, 2024, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/turkiyede-bulunan-yabancilarin-sayisi-ve-vatandaslik-durumlari-ile-ilgili-iddialara-dair-aciklama>.

⁴⁰Merve Tahiroğlu, "Göç Politikaları: Türkiye'deki Mülteciler ve 2023 Seçimleri: Heinrich Böll Stiftung: Niwèneriya Tirkiyeyê," *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, accessed October 31, 2023, <https://tr.boell.org/tr/2022/09/20/goc-politikalari-Turkeydeki-multeciler-ve-2023-secimleri>.

migration and refugee governance increase, the disputes and debates in the social and political sphere also increase. As the migrant population has grown, Turkey's policies to effectively adapt the migrant population socially and culturally and to integrate them into social life have faced difficulties.⁴¹ This has led to the risk of migrants, especially from the Arab world and Afghanistan, becoming a 'burden' or a 'threat' to society with exclusionary and negative discourses and perceptions.⁴² As a result, migration has recently been at the forefront of the Turkish socio-political agenda regarding controlling, integrating and repatriating migrants and refugees.

Turkey has an evolving and dynamic migration pattern, which has been the result of changes in the socio-political and economic context over time. Its international migration pattern can be traced through four important periods in modern Turkey, as Prof. Ahmet İçduygu and Dr. Damla Aksel explore.⁴³ It begins with the population exchange in the early period of modern Turkey, continues with the large-scale labor emigration in the 1950s, the new period of near-geographic immigration in the 1980s, and ends with the new migration governance since 2000.⁴⁴ So, migration and refugee movements, especially the labor migration agreements of the 1960s or the increasing transnational mobility of people and capital with the liberalization and globalization after the 1980s, have led to a diversification of migration from the population exchanges of the founding years of the Republic of Turkey to the present day.⁴⁵

(Turkey still retains the Geneva Contention of 1951 with its geographical limits in that the refugee status is only applied to those from Europe. However, by 2013, Turkey provides international protection under three different statuses: "conditional refugee", "subsidiary protection" and "temporary protection". In the context of these statuses, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), which was adopted in 2013 and entered into force in 2014, established a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of asylum seekers and migrants in Turkey.)

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²You can see the examples: Yasemin Erdogan-Ozturk and Hale Isik-Guler, "Discourses of Exclusion on Twitter in the Turkish Context: #ülkemdesuriyeliistemiyorum (#idontwantsyriansinmycountry)," *Discourse, Context & Media* 36 (2020): 100400, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2020.100400>.; Özden Melis Uluğ et al., "Attitudes towards Afghan Refugees and Immigrants in Turkey: A Twitter Analysis," *Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology* 5 (2023): 100145, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cresp.2023.100145>.

⁴³Ahmet İçduygu and Damla B. Aksel, "Turkish Migration Policies: A Critical Historical Retrospective," *Perceptions* 18, no. 3 (2013): 167–190.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Yusuf Adıgüzel, *Göç Sosyolojisi* (Ankara: Nobel, 2016).

However, mass internal migration from rural to urban areas between the 1950s and 1960s and after the 1990s is also crucial to the socio-demographic fabric of the country.⁴⁶

Turkey stood out as a country of emigration and internal migration from the early 1960s to the late 1970s. After the Second World War, the center-periphery relations in the global economy were reflected in the social and physical mobility of industrialized countries demanding labor and countries with labor surplus, and states supported labor migration. Thus, the labor demand of the developed European capitalist states was initially met by migration from countries in the south of Europe such as Italy, Spain and Portugal, and in the following years, migrant workers from different geographies such as Algeria, Finland, Ireland, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey, Yugoslavia, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh⁴⁷ migrated to Europe. The increasing unemployment and foreign exchange deficit in Turkey in the 1960s led the government to make official agreements with some European countries such as Germany, Australia, the Netherlands and France.⁴⁸ Thus, through state-organized planning activities, Turkey became acquainted with large-scale migration movements with the 1961 Turkey-West Germany labor recruitment agreement. With the post-Cold War period, globalist trajectories have been an external factor for Turkey in terms of the emerging migrant flows.

On the other hand, within the scope of internal migration, Turkey experienced a transition from agrarian society to industrial, particularly in major cities, driven by substantial investments during the modernization process.⁴⁹ This transformation coincided with Turkey's transition to a multi-party-political system with the founding of the Democratic Party in 1946 and its rise to power in 1950. This period of economic, political, and social reformation, and industrial moves in metropolitan cities prompted internal migration from rural areas to urban centers, particularly to Istanbul. Economic hardship and limited opportunities in rural areas were among the primary "push

⁴⁶İlhan Tekeli, "Türkiye'de İçgöç Sorunsalı Yeniden Tanımlanma Aşamasına Geldi," essay, in *Türkiye'de İçgöç* (İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1998), 7–21.

⁴⁷İçduygu, Erder, Gençkaya, "Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Göç Politikaları, 1923-2023: Ulus-devlet Oluşumundan Ulus-ötesi Dönüşümlere."

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Çaglar Keyder, "Globalization and Social Exclusion in Istanbul," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29, no. 1 (March 2005): 125, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2005.00574.x>.

factors" driving this migration.⁵⁰ In 1951, for example, the US-backed economic support plan, the Marshall Plan, introduced agricultural machinery, leading to a significant increase in the use of tractors, accordingly, movements to expand agricultural activities and exports reduced the need for labor in rural areas.⁵¹ Therefore, for the sake of better life opportunities, mass migration to the cities with their pulling features started and grew. So, the rural population in various parts of Anatolia started to migrate to the bigger cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara and Kocaeli to find work and look for better economic opportunities.⁵² Istanbul became a service and industrial city with the highest number of immigrants from Black Sea and central Anatolian regions, and the most capital invested. These transformations were reflected in the changing socio-spatial arrangements.⁵³ That is, there emerged a transformational effect on the rural and urban space. For instance, Istanbul's urban spaces began to be shaped by the emergence of gecekondus (shantytowns, literally meaning 'built in one night'), which were tolerated by state officials for a long period as internal migrants built these structures because they could not afford legal housing.⁵⁴ The mass migration from rural to urban areas in the 1950s has added a new angle to its nature especially after the 1990s with the migration from eastern regions of Turkey to western cities.⁵⁵ The increase in terrorist incidents in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia regions as of the years in question has led to an increase in forced internal migration of Kurds. While before 1980, mostly economic motivations played an important role in the background of migration of Blacksea and Anatolian part, Kurdish migration, on the other hand, political tensions and conflict processes have been decisive. Therefore, this migration differs significantly from the previous periods as it finds a place in space with identity problems in its baggage.⁵⁶

According to Turkish census data and World Bank urban and rural population data, while only 25% of the population lived in cities in 1950, this rose steadily to 32% in

⁵⁰Kemal H. Karpat, *Türkiye'de Toplumsal Dönüşüm: Kırsal Göç, Gecekondular Ve Kentleşme* (Ankara: İmge Kitapevi, 2003).

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Cağlar Keyder, "Capital City Resurgent: İstanbul since the 1980s," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 43 (2010): 177–86, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0896634600005811>.

⁵⁴See, Karpat, *The Gecekondular: Rural Migration and Urbanisation*.

⁵⁵Mehmet Zambak and Reyhan Özeş Özgür, "Türkiye'de İç Göçün Bölgesel Yoksulluk Üzerindeki Etkisi: Tarım Sektörünün Belirleyici Rolü," *Journal of Economy Culture and Society*, no. 60 (December 30, 2019): 151, <https://doi.org/10.26650/jecs2019-0049>.

⁵⁶Özet, *Kentli Muhafazakarlarda Habitus Dönüşü*

1960, 44% in 1980, 65% in 2000, and today, it surpasses 95%, reflecting the profound transformation of rural and urban spaces.⁵⁷

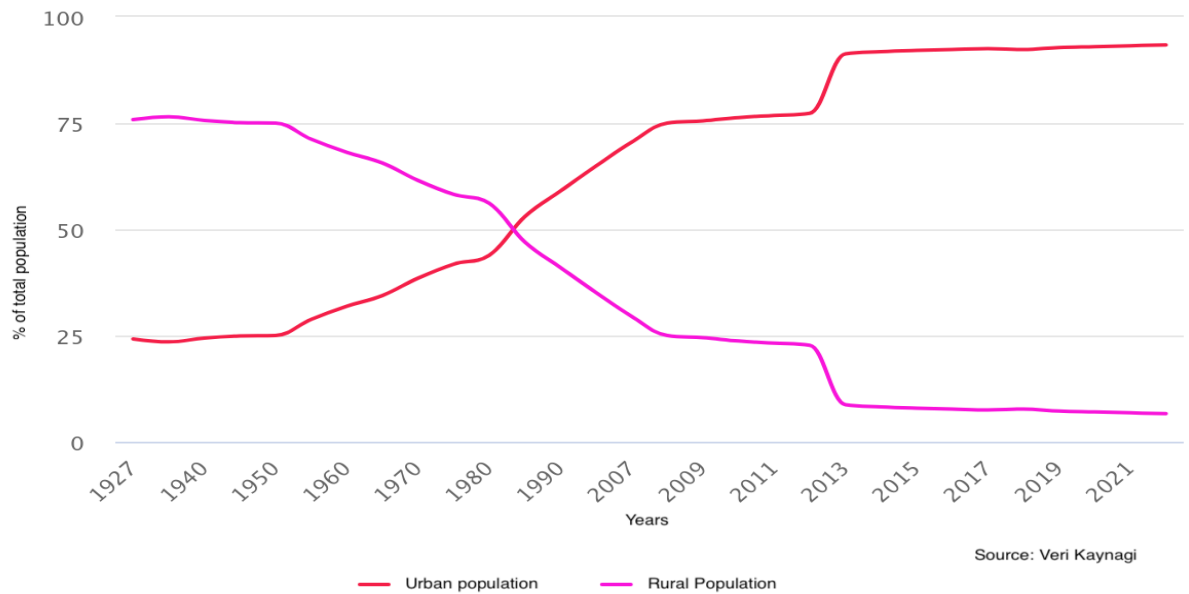


Figure 2.4. Urban-Rural Population in Turkey

At the center of this migration and population movement is the Marmara Region, particularly Istanbul, which, with its developed industrial base, diverse employment opportunities and social infrastructure, is Turkey's main destination for internal migration and the most attractive region for migrants seeking better economic, educational and cultural opportunities.⁵⁸ Alongside Istanbul's overall population growth driven by rural-to-urban migration, the Fatih district, as the city's central area, experienced this demographic shift and became a melting pot of diverse regional origins from across Turkey. In fact, Fatih, with its mix of people from Central and Eastern Anatolia and the Black Sea region evolved into one of the city's most ethnically diverse districts.

⁵⁷TURKSTAT, "The Results of Address Based Population Registration System, 2023," TÜİK , accessed November 28, 2024, <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Adrese-Dayali-Nufus-Kayit-Sistemi-Sonuclari-2023-49684>. ; World Bank, "Urban Population - Türkiye," World Bank Open Data, accessed November 28, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL?locations=TR>.

⁵⁸Erdoğan, Şener, and Merve Ağca, rep., *Urban Refugees of Marmara: Process Management of Municipalities*

My interviewee Ayşenur, who has lived in Fatih for 60 years, recounts Fatih's experience of internal migration in the context of demographic change:

“Many foreign migrants arrived, not only from abroad but also from within the country, especially from the eastern regions. It's quite normal for people living in Istanbul to have roots from elsewhere. In different periods, migrants came from various regions like the Black Sea or Thrace. However, in recent years, due to receiving more migration from the east, the demographic profile is changing.”

So, Fatih has already been a migrants' landscape. For example, in the 1930s, under the decisions of French urban planner Henri Prost, the waterfront mansions along the Golden Horn were replaced by industrial facilities. As a result, the waterfront area including Fatih's Ayvansaray and Balat neighborhoods functioned as an industrial zone until the mid-1980s. The industrial operations along the Golden Horn led to a significant influx of workers from the Black Sea and Central Anatolia regions to Fatih over time.⁵⁹

For instance, İrfan Özet's research on urban conservatives' habitus transformation in Fatih and Basakşehir districts, shows Kurdish inhabitants, late-comers to settle in Fatih, following the first internal migration period including internal migrants from Black Sea and Thrace, are the groups that faced exclusion by existing residents.⁶⁰ Unlike routine migration, which typically includes individuals who can bear its costs, this forced migration involved people too impoverished to afford it, taking place in a conflictual political environment. Therefore, this migration displaced the poor who were barely living in rural areas and brought the deep poverty in the region to the cities. In this context, Kurdish communities have become a primary group transferring severe poverty into city settings, consequently, Kurdish communities in Fatih have become a focal point of collective marginalization.⁶¹ For example, when Ayşenur gives her personal experience of social change in Fatih with the internal migration, she focuses on how the social and cultural fabric of Fatih began to change with the arrival of

⁵⁹Özet, *Kentli Muhafazakarlarda Habitus Dönüşü: Fatih ve Basakşehir Örneği*

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.,132

Kurdish migrants. By giving everyday life experience, she gives the distinction of the rural-urban lifestyles:

“Let me give an example from my apartment building. When we moved in, everyone in the apartment knew each other, met each other, and their children played together. They trusted each other. But today, both the residents in the apartment are changing very quickly and without getting to know each other, you don't trust much, you can't be a neighbor. The simplest example, in our apartment shoes are not left outside. But even though I have told the newcomers many times⁶² “Please don't leave your shoes outside” what I see is that they leave their shoes outside. So, there is also a problem with internal migration.”

After highlighting the everyday example as symbolic of broader shifts in neighborhood culture, she describes the "problem" as a challenge of cultural adjustment, explaining that due to different backgrounds, adopting city life and urban norms isn't easy for everyone. People who come from rural areas might continue practices suited to their earlier village life, as if they're still on their own land, rather than adapting to shared urban spaces, according to her. Ayşenur points out division between eastern and western cultural expectations, with the transition to city life often requiring more time for those from rural backgrounds to understand and follow urban customs:

“The problem is this, because of the difference in culture, the phenomenon called civilisation and urbanization does not develop easily. People coming from the village may think that they can do everything as if they were in their own village, on their own land. We know that there is a difference between western culture and eastern culture. adaptation is not easy. If you tell a civilised person from the city not to do this or that, it is against the rules of the city, it is more difficult for a new immigrant to understand this. These things take time, of course, and then people also differ.”

Overall, her perspective shows how migration affects spatial dynamics with interpersonal relationships and norms at the micro level and it suggests underlying tensions related to changing cultural practices and social expectations.

⁶²She mentions Kurdish people migrated from eastern parts of Turkey

On the other hand, after the 1980s, Turkey also found itself confronted with a new wave of migration that was significantly different from its other experiences. It has experienced alternating patterns of migration since the 1980s.⁶³ From the country of emigration and internal migration to migrant-receiving and transit land, its migration pattern has undergone significant changes firstly with the arrival of Iranians following the 1979 Revolution and Iraqis in 1988 and 1991.⁶⁴ Although Turkey was already a country that received flows of different communities during the late Ottoman Empire and the early Republican era, the new trend of migration unfolded after the 1980s with the arrival of refugees, illegal immigrants, circular migrants, and transit migrants from various origins.⁶⁵ The first international arrivals were mostly the outcome of some agreements during the nation-building process of the country, such as from the late Ottoman territories in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Greek-Turkish population exchange.⁶⁶ These arriving groups were considered as native citizens, rather than immigrants as they were Turkish-speaking people or Muslims who were more adaptable to Turkish culture to some extent.⁶⁷ However, the new angle on migration is in the realm of foreignness after the 1980s. As Turkey has been pushed by globalization, it has been seen as a gateway between Asia, Europe and Africa, becoming an important destination for large numbers of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, with migrations including transit migration, irregular labor migration, asylum seekers, refugees and regular migrants.

The migration in the 1980s was for the first time the migration of ‘foreigners’ who were neither Turkish nor Muslim.⁶⁸

Turkey, which became an important region affected by this worldwide mobility process as it serves a multifaceted migration landscape, has accelerated the migrant

⁶³Juliette Tolay, “Discovering Immigration into Turkey: The Emergence of a Dynamic Field,” *International Migration* 53, no. 6 (May 23, 2012): 57–73, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2012.00741.x>.

⁶⁴Kemal Kirişçi, “Turkey: A Country of Transition from Emigration to Immigration,” *Mediterranean Politics* 12, no. 1 (March 2007): 91–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629390601136871>.

⁶⁵Sebnem Koser Akcapar, “Re-thinking Migrants’ Networks and Social Capital: A Case Study of Iranians in Turkey,” *International Migration* 48, no. 2 (February 9, 2010): 161–96, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2009.00557.x>.

⁶⁶Kirişçi, “Turkey: A Country of Transition from Emigration to Immigration,” 93.

⁶⁷Didem Danış and Ayşe Parla, “Nafile Soydaşlık: Irak ve Bulgaristan Türkleri Örneğinde Göçmen, Dernek, Devlet,” *Toplum ve Bilim* 114 (2009): 131–158.

⁶⁸İçduygu and Aksel, “Turkish Migration Policies: A Critical Historical Retrospective”

and refugee movement in the 2000s. As the purpose of migration has diversified, such as employment, education, settlement, service and fleeing from war, the profile of migrants has also diversified. Finally, with the influx of Syrian refugees since the 2011 Syrian Civil War, there has been a significant increase in both the numerical strength and diversity of the foreign population residing in Turkey. The concurrent rise in both the volume and diversity of migrants and refugees highlights the complex challenges and shifts that Turkey, along with many other nations, faces amid escalating global migration trends and evolving conflict and globalization dynamics. With over 3 million Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey, Istanbul alone is home to more than 520,000 Syrians under temporary protection.⁶⁹ When undocumented individuals are considered, this number is estimated to be even higher. For example, while the official count of registered Syrians in Istanbul stands at 601,000 in 2019, the actual number living in the city may reach around 963,000.⁷⁰ In this regard, Fatih district, in particular, has become a focal point for Syrian refugees, attracting over 30,000 Syrians, who make up approximately 6.2% of its population.⁷¹ Foreign nationals as a whole, on the other hand, make up 41.79% of the district's population, illustrating the central role as a hub for migrants within Istanbul. In response to this demographic concentration, in 2021, the Turkish Interior Ministry imposed strict residency restrictions, targeting neighborhoods in Fatih and Esenyurt, the districts with the densest foreign populations.⁷² These districts were officially closed to new residency permits for foreigners, reflecting the increasingly assertive role of municipal governments in Turkey's migration governance.⁷³ In this regard, these different forms of migration have left their mark on every aspect of the city's material, social and cultural landscape in the urban spaces, changing not only Istanbul's physical attributes but also its 'cultural imaginary'.⁷⁴ Fatih offers a striking microcosm of Turkey's internal and international migration dynamics. The district not only reflects the broader patterns of

⁶⁹Mülteciler Derneği, "Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Sayısı Ağustos 2024," Mülteciler ve Sığınmacılar Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği, accessed November 28, 2024, <https://multeciler.org.tr/turkiyedeki-suriyeli-sayisi/>.

⁷⁰Erdoğan, Şener, and Ağca.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı, "'İstanbul'da 39 İlçenin Yabancıların İkamet İzinlerine Kapatıldığı' İddialarına İlişkin Basın Açıklaması," T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, accessed November 28, 2024, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/istanbulda-39-ilcenin-yabancilarin-ikamet-izinlerine-kapatildigi-iddialarina-iliskin-basin-aciklamasi>.

⁷³Zeynep Yılmaz Hava, "Akışkan Mutfaklar: İstanbul-Fatih'teki Suriye Mutfağında Göç, Yemek ve Kültür İlişkisi" (dissertation, İstanbul Medeniyet Üniversitesi, 2023).

⁷⁴Biehl, "New Diversities in Istanbul"

rural-urban migration within Turkey discussed earlier, but also the impact of international migration, particularly the influx of Syrian refugees and other migrants. Fatih's evolving demographics reveal the layering of different waves of migration, with Turkish citizens, internally displaced Kurds and foreign-born migrants converging within a single urban space. This convergence highlights the intersecting forces of cultural adaptation, economic integration and social negotiation, and illustrates how different migratory movements collectively shape Fatih's urban and social landscape.

In the recent Syrian migration flow, in Fatih its dynamics diverges significantly from the typical forced migration narrative. As highlighted in the Marmara's Urban Refugees report, Istanbul's most economically challenged districts generally host the largest refugee populations.⁷⁵ Fatih, however, diverges from this pattern to some extent. While these refugees have indeed been forced to leave Syria due to the conflict, their settlement in Fatih also reflects a conscious choice.⁷⁶ They are not simply forced migrants in Fatih anymore, rather they are individuals making a deliberate choice to establish a long-term life, to settle rather than just transit by preferring Fatih as a destination. This choice is also shaped by the class structure among migrants, distinguishing the migration pattern in Fatih from other Syrian settlements in Istanbul. My Syrian respondent Rami explains this situation as:

"I know from my own acquaintances. Those who live in Fatih are not mostly from Aleppo. They don't come from poor places in Syria. Because Fatih is now an expensive place, people from Damascus come to Fatih. You don't see Aleppians, you see them in Esenyurt or Esenler, more decentralized places with lower home rents, shop rents. Here, of course, let's not say rich, it's not like Basaksehir but prices are higher. The restaurants here are not Aleppo restaurants, but Damascus restaurants."

The demographic profile of Syrians in Fatih reflects these distinctions based on class structure and levels of capital. Fatih is no longer seen as a temporary stop but as a more permanent settlement. Unlike other neighborhoods like Esenyurt or Esenler, which

⁷⁵Erdoğan, Şener, and Ağca.

⁷⁶Feriha Nazda Güngördü and Zerrin Ezgi Kahraman, "Investigating Syrian Refugees' Choice of Location in Urban Areas as a Subjective Process: A Cross-Case Comparison in the Neighbourhoods of Önder (Ankara) and Yunusemre (İzmir)," *International Journal of Islamic Architecture* 10, no. 2 (July 1, 2021): 387–412, https://doi.org/10.1386/ijia_00049_1. ; Erdoğan, Şener, and Ağca, rep., *Urban Refugees of Marmara: Process Management of Municipalities*

tend to attract Syrians from industrial underdeveloped areas such as Aleppo due to more affordable rent and living costs, Fatih attracts people primarily from Damascus.



Figure 2.5. The Famous Syrian Restaurant, Eyam Şamiye, in Malta Bazaar

The restaurants and businesses in Malta Bazaar, which prominently showcase Damascene culture rather than Aleppian, reflect this demographic. Fatih's particular combination of religious significance, migration histories, and class dynamics creates a distinctive space where Syrian migrants not only live but actively shape the urban landscape, therefore it is important to delve into the concept of production of space.

2.2. Production of Space

Space is becoming the principal stake of goal-directed actions and struggles ... it has now become something more than the theater, the disinterested stage or setting, of action ... its role is less and less neutral, more and more active, both as instrument and as goal, as means and as end.⁷⁷

⁷⁷Lefebvre, 410–11

Since the late 1960s, there has been an emerging way of thinking about space that sees it as both shaped by society and shaping society.⁷⁸ One of the leading figures is Henry Lefebvre, who argues that space is socially constructed and socially constructive. In his groundbreaking book of *The Production of Space*, he provides analytical tools to examine how space, as a social product, is continuously produced through the interaction of political, economic and social relations in everyday life by different actors for different goals, while at the same time shaping these relations and practices.⁷⁹ Thus, space and practicing subjects are deeply interconnected, as space is not a static entity but rather a product of the social relationships that exist within it. It is constantly shaped and reshaped through various social, cultural, political, and economic processes. Lefebvre takes physical, mental, and social levels of space to shape and produce it at different levels with his spatial triad, which corresponds to spatial practice, representation of space and representational spaces, the multiscalar character of space is evident.⁸⁰ Consequently, space is both a framework for construction and a constructed phenomenon, shaped and reshaped by experiences, attributes, emotions, and interactions.

Lefebvre's approach to 'deciphering and reading' space emphasizes the importance of everyday life, which is well suited to an ethnographic approach.⁸¹ People as subjects are both productive and reproductive in their everyday practices. As space is not an independent material reality, it embodies meanings that are attributed to it by different social actors. As Setha Low also emphasizes, the creation of material settings is influenced by a combination of social, economic, ideological, and technological factors,⁸² space and spatial relations are shaped primarily by individual and collective identities, which encompass values, traditions, cultural habits, and the rationalities underlying various practices. For instance, Low's theory on the affective dimensions of space makes an important contribution to understanding migrants' sense of belonging. Low argues that the social reproduction of space is a result of social, economic, ideological, and technological factors. This approach plays a critical role in

⁷⁸Setha Low “*Spatializing Culture: An Engaged Anthropological Approach to Space and Place.*” 2014

⁷⁹Lefebvre

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, 33-38

⁸¹Deborah Pellow, “The Architecture of Female Seclusion in West Africa,” in *Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, ed. Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zúñiga (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 169–203.

⁸²Lefebvre.

explaining the perception of Fatih as a “home” and “safe harbor”, especially by migrants. Migrants' connections to space in Fatih are shaped not only by the physical environment, but also by cultural beliefs and practices. This reveals the organic and dynamic relationship between space and identity. Thus, urban space is tied to the socio-cultural identities and political frameworks that influence its formation. This connection creates a dynamic and organic relationship between space and identity, both of which are integral to individuals' experiences and sense of self. The material environment becomes a social entity as a meaningful and lived space. As such, space is not only constructive but also continuously shaped, reshaped, and reproduced through experiences, associations, emotions, and relationships. Cultural practices and beliefs hook individuals to a place, transforming it into a lived and practiced space.⁸³

In this context, Kim Knott's theory of religious space provides an important framework for understanding how space is reproduced through sacredness and embodied in everyday practices. Knott's approach reveals that Fatih's religious identity was shaped not only by physical elements such as mosques, but also by the practices, beliefs and social ties of the individuals who inhabited this space. Based on this theoretical foundation, the following chapters will analyse the production of space in more depth, exploring its articulation with cultural and religious dimensions and its manifestation in everyday life.

On the other hand, the multilayered nature of space necessitates a combination of micro and macro dynamics. Lefebvre's theory reveals that space is shaped by both individual daily practices and larger-scale structures such as state policies, economic systems and ideological processes. At the micro level, individuals' relations with space are shaped by their daily life practices, beliefs and social ties, while at the macro level, state policies and social norms determine the overall structure of space. So, states, institutions, and policies significantly influence how individuals interact with and reproduce space. In this regard, as Lefebvre's macro perspective highlights, space is a socially produced entity, shaped by power structures, economic systems, and social relations. The state, through its policies and interventions, plays a significant role in organizing and regulating space to reflect and reinforce broader social and political dynamics. Through this process, individuals remain deeply intertwined with their daily

⁸³Ibid.

practices, perpetuating these experiences under the guise of autonomy. In this process, individuals remain embedded in their daily practices and actively reproduce these experiences. In this regard, this thesis considers Fatih spatial product which is constructed through intertwined social, economic, ideological, political and technological relations. Moreover, Lefebvre asserts that perceiving space as a product necessitates the consideration of its historical dimension.⁸⁴ The formation of social space is a gradual process that unfolds over time. As a result, space becomes imprinted with the traces of past actions and events,⁸⁵ embedding history within its physical and social structure.

Consequently, this thesis treats Fatih as a social space that harbors traces of history and is constantly reproduced through the everyday practices of individuals at the micro level and social, economic and political processes at the macro level. Both Lefebvre's theory of the production of space and the contributions of Knott and Low provide a critical theoretical framework for understanding the spatial dynamics of Fatih and analyzing its multi-layered structure.

⁸⁴ Ibid.,46

⁸⁵ Ibid.,37

CHAPTER III

HISTORY, RELIGION, AND SOCIAL SPACE IN FATIH

“If space is produced, if there is a productive process, then we are dealing with history”⁸⁶

The historical and cultural identity of Fatih is profoundly connected to religious expressions, which has significantly influenced the district's spatial dynamics. As discussed in Chapter II: Contextualization and Theoretical Framework, Islam arises as a prominent agency in the production of space in Fatih. So, it serves as a pivotal site of Islamic importance, encompassing not only a geographical area but also a complex amalgam of religious heritage, historical narratives, and social relations that shape the experiences of its residents. Since it is the primary reason for Syrian migrants' preferences to settle in an area to which they attribute religious significance, Islam becomes the main phenomenon shaping their spatial choices. All my Syrian respondents made the same argument as Hossam explains his move from Syria to Fatih motivated by the existing religious atmosphere with a prominent Muslim community:

“Fatih is a religious district, in fact, there are always Muslims who live here, so that is why we came here.” (Hossam)

So, their preferences are mostly shaped by the religious components of the space. Nonetheless, religion is equally important for existing residents, including Turkish and Kurdish citizens, who also define Fatih as a religious space. For instance, Ali emphasizes Fatih's Islamic character through the visible presence of mosques:

“There are 15 or 20 mosques where I live. When the call to prayer is heard, I leave the house and go to whichever one I want.” (Ali)

⁸⁶ Lefebvre, 46.

Similarly, Sena illustrates Fatih's religious identity by contrasting it with other districts in Istanbul, noting that Fatih allows for a more visible and practiced Islamic lifestyle:

“Fatih maintains its Muslim identity and Islamic life. For example, if you compare it with other regions, you can clearly see the difference between Bebek or Nisantasi districts. I can say that it is a place where you can live as a Muslim, at least a Muslim will not experience the fear that a Muslim will experience in other regions. But when you go to Besiktas, there is an immediate segregation of the human profile, you are in the minority there. I think that when they return to Fatih, Muslims feel that they have returned to their own region.” (Sena)

For these long-term residents, Islam is deeply internalized and intertwined with their daily lives, culture, and space in that it is not something they consciously separate from their identity. Religion, therefore, is lived and embodied in their everyday routines, smoothly integrated into their environment. For Syrian migrants, religion becomes a focal point in constructing their identity in a foreign land. As migrants, faced with the uncertainties of displacement, they highlight their religious identity as a way to preserve their sense of belonging, security, and cultural intimacy. Thus, Islam emerges as a visible identity marker, something they hold onto consciously to preserve different aspects of identity and the conscious effort to retain it in a foreign context. However, Islam is also a part of identity marker for Turkish and Kurdish citizens, but their ways of experiencing their relationship with it are different from Syrian migrants as they do not have international migrant status in the country. For these long-term residents, Islam is not something they actively distinguish or separate from their personal narrative. Religion is a natural part of their routines, seamlessly integrated into their surroundings. It contributes to a sense of stability and belonging that has been established over generations in the Turkish context. Their embodied experience of the space may be less about conscious adaptation and more about the natural flow of their daily life, where religion and culture are already ingrained into their standpoints and their daily lives. So, the difference lies primarily in the distinction between being a migrant and being a citizen with ethnic roots in Turkish territories.

In fact, attribution of religious meanings to the Fatih's spaces is not only based on the two group's personal experiences but also on the historical process that the Ottoman

Empire embraced and embodied Islam into the places such as mosques, palaces or every single Ottoman architecture. This is an important part where we see the religion's interaction with space. So, in this chapter, how Syrian migrants produce space in Fatih and what historical, social and spatial dynamics make Fatih a preferred settlement space for them, while exploring how religion is an important factor in shaping social space in Fatih with reference to the theoretical frameworks of Kim Knott⁸⁷ and Setha Low.⁸⁸ While Setha Low's concept of embodied space emphasizes how individuals and groups live and experience these spaces through religious and cultural practices,⁸⁹ Kim Knott's spatial theory of religion illustrates how religious beliefs and practices are inscribed into physical spaces.⁹⁰ These interrelated frameworks help me explain how the religious significance of Fatih has been produced over time and continues to evolve as a religious and social space, particularly under the influence of migration patterns.

As Kim Knott's spatial theory of religion argues that religion is not restricted to sacred or symbolic spaces but expands to all kinds of spaces⁹¹, religion in Fatih is not just about physical spaces like mosques. It's also about the embodiment of religious thought and practice in everyday life. By drawing on contemporary spatial theory, particularly the work of Henri Lefebvre, Knott locates religion within the broader social, cultural, and physical spaces of everyday life.⁹² So, according to her, religious ideas, behaviors, and practices shape how spaces are used, understood and experienced. Setha Low's concept of embodied space highlights that space is not a static or neutral entity but one that is deeply influenced by how people live within it. The perception and experience of space expands or contracts based on various factors such as emotions, sense of self, social relations, and cultural predispositions.⁹³ In this sense, space becomes dynamic, shaped by religious and cultural actions, and is closely tied to how individuals and communities express their identity, navigate social relations, and interact with their environment. Since Fatih is a religion-embedded

⁸⁷ Kim Knott, "Religion, Space, and Place: The Spatial Turn in Research on Religion," *Religion and Society* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.3167/arrs.2010.010103>.

⁸⁸ Low, *Spatializing Culture*.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Knott, "Religion, Space, and Place"

⁹¹ *Ibid.*,

⁹² *Ibid.*, 36

⁹³ Low, 10

space where social, historical, and cultural dimensions intertwine, Knott's framework on the embodied nature of religion in space where physical behaviors, such as prayer or particular dress codes, actively shape the space's religious character, proves relevant to understanding Fatih's spatial production.

Fatih's identity as a religious space is deeply rooted in its historical development, from its Byzantine Christian past to its central role in Ottoman Islamic culture. During the Byzantine era, Fatih was home to numerous churches and religious institutions, which shaped the district as a sacred space long before its Islamic transformation.⁹⁴ With the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, the district became a symbol of Islamic sovereignty, marked by the construction of iconic mosques such as the Fatih Mosque. This mosque, along with other Ottoman religious institutions, such as madrasas and Sufi lodges, became the backbone of Fatih's religious landscape, embedding Islamic thought into the fabric of the area. In this respect, it is one of the key centers where the pulse of Islamic intellectual thought and practices has been beating from the past to the present. Approximately 1700 years ago, when the Roman Empire embraced Christianity and shifted its capital to the east, its polytheistic religious traditions with its eternal capital city of Rome transitioned into an empire with the majority of its population being Christian with Constantinople as its new capital.⁹⁵ It was constructed as a replica of the former capital Rome to replace it and was also referred to as New Rome (Latin: Nova Roma and Greek: Nea Romi). In a short period of time, it acquired many of the structures that the old capital had such as the Hippodrome, Forum of Constantine, and Great Palace of Constantinople.⁹⁶ During this time, the influence of pagan culture remained significant, yet both antiquity and paganism were in decline. A new era was emerging with the establishment of New Rome, symbolizing the rise of the empire and the increasing dominance of Christianity.⁹⁷

Within the urban landscape, the designated areas for churches and monasteries, the development of architectural forms, and the various aspects of imperial ideology in Byzantium, as well as the piety of the emperors, which served as a model for the

⁹⁴ Durak, "Bizantion'dan Fatih'e"

⁹⁵ Ibid.,17

⁹⁶ Albrecht Berger, "Bir İmparatorluk Merkezi Olarak Konstantinopolis," essay, in Suriçi İstanbul: Fetihten Önce ve Fetihten Sonra (Fatih, İstanbul: Fatih Belediye Başkanlığı, 2017), 44.

⁹⁷ Durak,23.

religious traditions of Byzantine society, were fundamental elements that shed light on the urban environment. These elements not only reflected religious traditions but also defined the spatial and cultural fabric of the city. A key example of this is that where the Fatih Mosque now stands, there was once the Church of the Apostles, which served as a Byzantine imperial mausoleum. The area gained prominence with this monumental tomb of Constantine and the Church.⁹⁸ During the Byzantine period, churches served as centers around which each community was settled. Therefore, the Church of the Apostles (Havarium Church) became the earliest representation of Christianity. Following the Fall of Constantinople, it continued to shape history with the tomb of Sultan Mehmed II and the Fatih Complex. It reinforced the area's historical and spiritual significance for Muslims, much like the Byzantine imperial mausoleum before it for Christians. So, the symbolic significance of Fatih within the urban and Islamic habitus began after the conquest of Istanbul in 1453, when the Fatih Complex was built on the site of the Byzantine Havarium Church. The new buildings that developed around the complex, with the participation of religious and commercial groups brought from Anatolia, ensured the rapid Islamisation of the region. The area around this complex, which symbolized Ottoman power, was named 'Fatih'.⁹⁹ With the commercial, religious and social structures built after the conquest, an Islamic identity emerged, shaping the socialization patterns and daily lives of individuals. This transformation maintained the same functional aspect with the mosque at the center and the housing surrounding it, preserving the central role of religious structures in shaping urban terrains. We can say that this characteristic has been carried from the Ottoman era to the present day, as evidenced by today's settlements around the Fatih Mosque. As can be seen, in addition to the existing ones, the silhouette of the city has started to be decorated with domes and minarets in the newly built buildings. These landmarks left significant imprints on history, solidifying the district's status as a hub of religious significance throughout the ages. Thus, Fatih became known as an Islamic cultural center from the moment it was founded.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 24

⁹⁹ Mehmet Mazlum Çelik, "İstanbul'un Semt Isimleri Nasıl Doğdu?," Independent Türkçe, March 7, 2024, <https://www.indytrk.com/node/705506/haber/i%CC%87stanbulun-semt-isimleri-nas%C4%B1-do%C4%9Fdu>.

However, the foundational religious motifs laid during the Ottoman period are what have shaped the identity of the walled city (intra muros)¹⁰⁰ of Istanbul as we know it today. The new era that began with the conquest by the Ottomans not only partially shaped the physical characteristics of today's metropolis but also determined its social and ethnic structure. Istanbul, being a significant center of one major religion, Christianity, and becoming adorned with elements of another major religion, Islam, has experienced a vastly different historical development. This situation has fundamentally altered its entire social structure. However, as İlber Ortaylı argues, certain spatial characteristics of the city did not change until the middle of the 18th century when Istanbul began undergoing a modernization process in the 19th century.¹⁰¹ These characteristics are the central administrative zone, the business district, residential areas, and the periphery where marginalized groups settle.¹⁰² So, for him, the spatial organization started to change after embracing modernization and the new mode of production. However, this does not mean the social structure remained unchanged as well. Conversely, within a similar spatial organization, social life transformed into Islamic religious-centered practices. The reconstruction activities that began with the conquest were fundamentally nourished by the Islamic faith and the traditional Ottoman understanding of urbanism. This state-led initiative was also a symbol of power. Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque, a foundation was established, an intensive migration to Istanbul was initiated by the state and a new settlement policy was adopted.¹⁰³

In traditional cities, differentiation in residential areas is usually based on ethnic and racial differences rather than income and social status, and this is also the case in Istanbul. While the Muslim population is generally concentrated in the center and inner parts of the city's residential districts, non-Muslim minorities, and non-system groups have settled in the periphery.¹⁰⁴ In the early days, settlements were established around churches converted into mosques, and later, with new migrations, some new neighborhoods also emerged. Although there isn't a pronounced class distinction in

¹⁰⁰ İlber Ortaylı, "Giriş," essay, in *Suriçi İstanbul: Fetihden Önce ve Fetihden Sonra* (Fatih, İstanbul: Fatih Belediye Başkanlığı, 2017), 7.

¹⁰¹ İlber Ortaylı, "İstanbul'un Mekansal Yapısının Tarihsel Evrimine Bir Bakış," *Amme İdaresi Dergisi* 10, no. 2 (1977) 77-98.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 85

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 86

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 85

neighborhoods, 'Çarşamba', being close to Süleymaniye and Fatih Madrasas, was known as the neighborhood of the religious scholars (ulema).¹⁰⁵ However, the differentiation in space in Istanbul is determined more by religious and ethnic factors than by class status and income differences. For instance, in Istanbul, minority communities and non-Muslims were settled in the part of the city facing the Marmara Sea, the Golden Horn, and the walls. Naturally, Greeks, Jews, Armenians, and Roma were settled in the outskirts of the city. The Latins were settled in Galata.¹⁰⁶ The projection of religion onto space, therefore, cannot be explained solely through material settings; it is also deeply intertwined with the lifestyles and values of the people living there. In other words, alongside the physical construction and religious embodiment of space, there exists a humanized, embodied practice of religion that manifests through daily life. This is particularly evident around Fatih Mosque, where the area functions as a religious sphere, especially in the Çarşamba neighborhood as mentioned earlier. The people there are defined by their religious identity as Muslims, and the space is shaped by their performative acts, social norms, clothing styles, consumer habits and every aspect of daily life. These elements collectively reinforce the religious identity of the area, embedding Islam into the very fabric of the neighborhood, from its social interactions to its economic and cultural practices. So, the religious character of the neighborhood is not only embedded in its architecture but also in the lived experiences and practices of its residents, making it a dynamic and humanized religious space. In short, today, physical structure, cultural trends, and daily life practices in the district demonstrate a strong presence of an Islamic cultural environment. This is further reinforced by the concentration of various religiously motivated associations, including congregations, which have established a significant presence in Fatih. Also it is important to understand Fatih's identity as both a religious and historical space, it is essential to consider the perspectives of those who engage with it daily. While the area's religious character manifests through physical structures, cultural practices, and daily life, it also embodies a living history, as seen through the lens of longtime residents. Mr. Fetih, a 42-year-old historian who has been a native of Fatih since the earliest of his ancestors, sees Fatih as a laboratory for history:

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 86

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 88

“This is a neighborhood with a historical Islamic identity. You look differently at all the places you pass, inns, baths, mosques, churches, and synagogues. You wonder about their history. Fatih is a laboratory in that respect, the most beautiful place in the world. Fatih is where a historian should live. The heart of the city. The main city. The center of the three empires. In the old Ottoman Empire, when they talk about Istanbul, they talk about Fatih. Beyoglu and Uskudar are complementary to Istanbul, but the main city (in the kadi registers it is referred to as the kadiate of Istanbul) is Fatih. It is not even Beyoglu. For me, Fatih is what makes Istanbul Istanbul. Fatih, in fact, is Istanbul. It is inside the city walls. If you completely demolish Istanbul, even if there is nothing left of Istanbul, the essence of Istanbul is Fatih.” (Fetih)

On the other hand, as a tour guide, Zeynep brings this sense of continuity to others, introducing visitors to Fatih’s rich historical layers from Byzantine and Roman to Ottoman times, explaining how these historical monuments shape religion and space:

“Fatih is a place I go to very often on the occasion of tours... You cannot see both Byzantine, Roman, and Ottoman artifacts in this density. No matter where you go, if you go to Rome, you will only see its artifacts, you will only see things related to Christianity... When you come to Fatih, there is a Muslim layer, there is a Christian layer, there is a pagan layer, and this is a very, very valuable thing. I understood these things later, especially after I became a tour guide. We were sitting on a history we didn’t know.” (Zeynep)

So, for Zeynep, whose own life is inextricably linked with the continuity of Istanbul’s past, Fatih represents an irreplaceable fusion of the personal and the historical.

In a similar vein, Ahmad also reflects a deep historical and religious heritage of Fatih by drawing an analogy to his homeland, Damascus:

“Fatih is like Damascus. An old city. There are old bazaars and many foreign companies, so there is a lot of work. It is similar to Damascus in terms of history. There are streets, mosques, and old houses, all the same.” (Ahmad)

This historical connection resonates deeply with Mr. Hossam, who merges the physical manifestations of religion-embedded history with personal and communal lived experiences, rooted in the rich religious and historical Muslim culture that defines Fatih. Reflecting on the cultural and religious atmosphere, he expresses his strong bond with this history:

“Religion is very good. The history is very good here. The heart is very happy here. Ottoman. There are Muslims. There is life. There are mosques. Muslim Arabs love it very much. There is no problem. But if you go to another place, there is racism there. There is no racism here. Alhamdulillah¹⁰⁷. It is a safe place here. People are both religious and Arabs love it.” (Hossam)

In fact, this relationship between history, culture and religion stands out in how people relate to Fatih. For instance, Syrian Aya also explains this historically-embedded cultural familiarity, emphasizing the connection that intertwines smell, identity, and history in her experience of Fatih:

“When my brother came here in 2011, there were no Arabs here. My brother said that there was not even an Arab restaurant. My brother did not know anything. His main friends suggested Fatih is a good place. For example, there are mosques here. The streets are wider and more comfortable. Let’s take a place similar to Damascus. We have, for example, Malta Bazaar. It smells like Damascus here.” (Aya)

Aya’s reminiscent imagery, the street, mosques, and the vibrant bazaars reminiscent of Damascus, and the profoundly familiar scenes, conveys more than mere physical similarity to home. Indeed, these sensory aspects reflect how the historical, cultural and religious elements of Fatih resonate deeply with people from similar places, creating a distinct atmosphere that goes beyond simple familiarity. So, this connection, seen in Aya’s words, shows how similar identity and history together foster a sense of belonging. For Aya and rest of my Syrian interviewees, Fatih is not just a physical space, but a place where these cultural, religious and historical layers intertwine, solidifying their connection to the space. According to Knott, the lived experiences

¹⁰⁷Alhamdulillah is an Arabic phrase that means "praise be to God" or "thanks be to God." It is used by Muslims to express gratitude, contentment, or appreciation for God's blessings

and religious expressions of the people who live there and interact with it give space its religious significance, not just because of historical buildings or the existence of Islamic architecture.¹⁰⁸ So, in order to preserve their identity and foster a sense of belonging, Syrian migrants find that as they settle in Fatih, the neighborhood becomes layered with their own religious and cultural meanings, incorporating components like language, community, and shared religious norms.

In this context, the spatiality of Fatih, which has transformed through a historically embedded religious motif, serves as a foundation for various social changes. This religiously-loaded culture not only shapes the area but also acts as a trigger for embracing, adapting, or driving change. In this regard, my findings indicate that Islam is the foremost factor influencing Syrian migrants' choice to settle in Fatih. However, it does not function in isolation but intersects with other elements, such as language, cultural intimacy and a sense of belonging, and a sense of security. Thus, the spatial theory offers an angle through which to view religion as a lived, performed, and materialized belief system rather than merely an abstract one. According to Setha Low's theory of embodied space, the body's interactions with social norms, rituals, and cultural practices actively shape spatial experiences. The production of space in Fatih, therefore, is not merely architectural or geographical; it is a lived experience shaped by religious and social practices.

Although many studies have focused on the broader role of the Turkish state in refugee and migration policies, there is a notable gap in understanding the localized dynamics that have emerged, especially in Fatih since the absence of a centralized resettlement policy in Turkey has led refugees to settle in various regions, provinces, districts, and neighborhoods based on their personal preferences.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, the district's importance to Syrian migrants extends beyond the state's provision of temporary protection status. Fatih's religious and cultural significance offers more than just a refuge, it presents a space where the identity, particularly through Islam, is preserved. Furthermore, the proliferation of Syrian food establishments reflects how deeply these migrants are shaping and being shaped by the neighborhood's socio-economic fabric.

¹⁰⁸ Knott, "Religion, Space, and Place: The Spatial Turn in Research on Religion"

¹⁰⁹ Erdoğan, Şener, and Ağca.

Religion is deeply intertwined with a sense of belonging, as it encompasses cultural intimacy and often serves as a simulation of homeland for many migrants. Practicing Islam in Fatih allows them to recreate familiar patterns from their home country, reinforcing their connection to their heritage.

“I received other job opportunities for better wages in Taksim. But I preferred to work and live in Fatih because here is religious and Turkish people here are also religious and behave according to Islamic principles.” (Muhammad)

As Syrian chef Ahmad explained:

“For me, the Fatih Mosque is more than just a functional mosque. It closely resembles the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, which makes the space feel familiar to me. That’s why I like Fatih.” (Ahmad)

This sense of familiarity, combined with religious practices, fosters a cultural intimacy that helps migrants feel grounded in an otherwise foreign setting. Similarly, Syrian student Hiba highlighted,

“Fatih resembles our home in Syria more than any other district with its Muslim people, mosques, and religious lifestyles.” (Hiba)

Through these shared religious experiences and spatial connections, Fatih becomes more than just a new place of residence. It transforms into a space where they can preserve a sense of continuity with their past, cultivating a deep feeling of home and belonging. In fact, this cultural intimacy expressed through religious practices helps migrants feel rooted in a new environment. In this way, religion becomes more than just a personal faith; it is a social and spatial mechanism through which they maintain continuity with their past and cultivate a sense of home and belonging to where they migrated.

Religion of Islam has also a pivotal role in providing security for them. As one of the most important reasons for someone to live somewhere, especially those who were forced to seek refuge from his/her homeland due to insecure humanitarian conditions, security becomes the prominent element for permanent settlement. In this regard,

Islam provides them with a secure environment. The Syrian accountant expresses this as following:

“For example, I’m an accountant, and sometimes I leave the shop around 12-1 at night. I can easily leave here halfway through the night with the cash register from this shop and another shop in my bag. I can go home without any fear. Because I know I’m in a religiously trustworthy place. I couldn’t do this anywhere else. Everyone here knows I’m an accountant. If I were somewhere else, I would definitely take precautions, but I don’t do that here. (Zubayr)”

Also, when Syrian student Yasmin compares two districts of Istanbul, she connects her religion, Islam, with feeling secure because it is one of the pillars of social behaviors towards Muslim migrants.¹¹⁰ She says:

“This place is safer for me. Şişli is a bit problematic. For example, we encountered people there who don’t like Arabs or Muslims, actually. (Yasmin)”

In addition to these factors, Islam, in connection with the Arabic language, which is the mother tongue of Syrians, also emerges in the spatial discussions of Fatih. The fact that Islam originates from the Quran, written in Arabic, and that the Prophet Muhammad, the messenger of Allah and the leader of Islam in religious, political, social, and economic spheres, was an Arab, the pioneer, demonstrating the inseparable unity of Islam and Arabic language. The Islamic intellectual heritage and educational fields being written in Arabic also makes it clear that learning Arabic is inevitable for deepening one’s knowledge of Islam and Islamic studies. On the other hand, for a Muslim, reciting the Quran in Arabic shows that Arabic, regardless of the concept of nation-states, remains an integral part of daily life for Muslim community. Likewise, since many religious practices are conducted in Arabic, familiarity with the language becomes essential for a Muslim. For example, the recitation of specific chapters from the Quran during salah prayer¹¹¹, or the frequent use of expressions like

¹¹⁰ It's not just about being Muslim when it comes to welcoming migrants; Muslims, too, can express anti-immigrant sentiments. However, in this context, the key factor is the shared religious identity, which fosters a sense of familiarity. The common religious background creates a connection that transcends potential divisions, allowing for a deeper sense of belonging and comfort among migrants.

¹¹¹ Salah is performed by Muslims five times a day. It is a direct form of communication between the believer and Allah, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam, which are the core practices required of every Muslim.

“Bismillahirrahmanirrahim,”¹¹² “Masha’Allah,”¹¹³ and “Insha’Allah”¹¹⁴ demonstrate the everyday integration of Arabic into their lives. While it’s beneficial to emphasize that these expressions have become intertwined with culture, we can say that their Islamic roots and perspective significantly influence their widespread adoption.”

Fatih, with its historical madrasas becoming centers of Islamic teaching, its numerous mosques, and its status as a primary hub for selling Islamic books, has long been a gathering place for Islamic communities. Additionally, the fact that funeral prayers for well-known Muslim scholars and politicians are held at Fatih Mosque, and that it is often the site of Islamic movements (protests), highlights its importance. To fully understand why Syrians value this area, one cannot overlook the already prevalent use of Arabic in Fatih before their arrival. Therefore, the use of Arabic, which was already common before Syrians arrived, is one of the factors that has enhanced cultural collaboration here. This shared cultural space also explains why many Syrians chose Fatih as their place of residence. Every Syrian I interviewed mentioned how the widespread use of their language in Fatih made them feel recognized and helped solidify the area as a destination for them:

“Before Syrians became prominent here, there was already an Islamic culture connected to the Arab world. There were Turks who could speak and read Arabic. Islam is the strongest link between the two cultures, and that’s the most important factor that makes Fatih attractive to us.” (Hossam)

In fact, for many Syrians, Fatih has become a place where they can gain economic participation through their language. With the increasing Syrian population and the historical district’s touristic appeal, Arabic has transcended its purely religious significance and now plays a role at the economic level as well. For instance, several business owners have started hiring Syrians to overcome language barriers with customers and tourists from Middle Eastern countries. It is also important for Syrian migrants to engage in social space through their language. Additionally, people who

¹¹² It’s a saying that in the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful while Muslims begin any new activity.

¹¹³ It means what Allah has willed. Muslims use it to acknowledge Allah’s will in particular appreciation, joy, or praise of something

¹¹⁴ It signifies that anything happens only if Allah wills it. Muslims frequently use it to convey their intention or hope that something will happen, while also acknowledging that the outcome is ultimately in God’s hand.

wish to learn Arabic have started taking lessons from Syrians. So, focusing on economic motivations for exchange of languages also needs to account for broader socio-economic context including labor market integration, social and cultural capital.

“Fatih’s society loves arabs. They love religious people. They are interested in the Arabic language. In general they are already conservative people here. Positively, for example, I was exposed to many people who wanted to learn Arabic.” (Hiba)

Aya reflects on her experiences, noting that they provide her with a valuable cultural exchange, rather than economic gains:

“Some of my friends asked me to teach them Arabic. They want to read the Qur’an. In high school I was teaching Arabic to a friend of mine – his grandfather is Arabic, he only speaks Arabic – I was teaching her Arabic and she was teaching me Turkish.” (Aya)

This exchange illustrates how language learning fosters connections between communities, enabling mutual understanding and enriching their shared cultural landscape. As language is considered one of the main discussions in migrants’ integration process, it appears as a tool for access to various social systems, such as the labor market, education, and public services.¹¹⁵ In this thesis, rather than discussing the integration of migrants at their destination, the focus is on the mutual social adaptation and cohesion through the lens of production of space. As integration is a controversial concept and can be expressed through different terms such as adaptation, assimilation, acculturation, and social acceptance,¹¹⁶ while taking on different trajectories from economic, political, and cultural perspectives, approaches to the topic vary across disciplines and viewpoints. Therefore, the concept of integration is not deeply analyzed. Instead, the active role of migrants in the social construction process, their influence on the spatial production of their settlement areas, such as Fatih, provides an important background for understanding social change and transformation. Moving from a holistic perspective where political, economic, legal, and cultural

¹¹⁵Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, “Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 21, no. 2 (April 18, 2008): 166–91, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fen016>.

¹¹⁶Yılmaz Hava, “Akışkan Mutfaklar: İstanbul-Fatih’teki Suriye Mutfağında Göç, Yemek ve Kültür İlişkisi”

spheres are intertwined, Alastair Ager and Alison Strang’s framework outlines ten key domains that define the concept of integration. These domains include access to and achievement within sectors such as employment, housing, education, and healthcare; perceptions and practices related to citizenship and rights; social connection within and across community groups; and obstacles to connection, often arising from a lack of cultural and linguistic gaps, fear and instability.¹¹⁷

However, when the use of Arabic became more prominent with the arrival of Syrians, it started to significantly alter the everyday linguistic landscape of Fatih. Arabic became more visible and audible, not just in religious context, but in daily life—on the streets, in transportation, in schools, and in local businesses. This shift was particularly striking for Fatih’s long-term residents, even though Fatih was already known as a district where Arabic was commonly spoken or understood. The difference now was that Arabic was being used more extensively by native speakers, not only in personal conversations but also as the primary language in workplaces and public spaces. This change emphasized the growing presence of Syrians and marked a shift in how space and language intersected in Fatih’s social fabric.

“You get on the bus and you start to hear Arabic. They speak Arabic in your neighborhood and this is very common and they are not tourists anymore, they are the children of an uncle or an aunty. The signboards of stores have changed. Of course, the people who come here have to do trade in order to survive, they will be engaged in some business, and after they have received permission to open a workplace, this migration has actually become more visible.”

“In the street, children are playing ball and they say ‘yallah’ to the one who shoots. One of them speaks Turkish, the other Arabic, 8 out of 10 children are Arabs. This is not a normal thing. Look, if one of those ten was an Arab, that would be normal. It’s a good thing. It’s a change. It’s necessary. But if eight of them are Arabs, there is a strange situation.” (Fetih)

¹¹⁷Ager and Strang, *Understanding Integration: A Conceptual Framework*, 184-185

So, while Islam serves as a connective element between the two groups in terms of cultural intimacy and the use of the Arabic language, the surrounding elements—such as nationhood, cultural values, and citizenship—reveal distinctions that set these groups apart. For Turkish and Kurdish residents, their engagement with Islam is deeply intertwined with their national and cultural identity, which they express through shared values and an established sense of belonging within the country. In contrast, for Syrian migrants, Islam is a critical part of preserving their identity in a foreign land, emphasizing a need for belonging and security. These differing relationships with religion, influenced by citizenship and cultural context, highlight how Islam can unite these groups but also underscore the distinctions between them.

To conclude, this chapter demonstrates the significance of localized (micro) dynamics in shaping production of space. The findings indicate that Islam is a fundamental factor in Syrian migrants' settlement preferences, intertwined with identity, sense of belonging, cultural intimacy, language, and security, creating a deeply rooted, lived experience that transforms the neighborhood. In fact, examining how Syrian migrants produce space in Fatih reveals the historical, social, and spatial dynamics that make it a preferred settlement area. As religion in Fatih manifests itself in several areas, religious practices and beliefs are not confined to traditional religious sites but permeate everyday spaces, affecting both private and public realms. So, as Knott's and Low's theoretical frameworks highlight the materialization of religious beliefs, embodied practices, and cultural norms within physical spaces, in Fatih,¹¹⁸ this is reflected in the mosques, bazaars, and streets – the daily practices of residents from visiting mosques to clothing choices. Through these dynamics, Fatih emerges as a pivotal locus where local identities converge with the transforming social fabric of Istanbul. In this regard, religion will be further examined as a micro concept, focusing on how both groups' everyday life experiences and practices shape and reproduce space in alignment with their perceptions and activities. This analysis, featured in Chapter VI on social space and everyday life, considers how each group encounters and interacts with one another in their shared environment. However, religion also emerges as a key point in macro-level discussion of production of space in Fatih. It is interwoven into both the cultural and political discourse on migrant reception

¹¹⁸ See: Knott, "Religion, Space, and Place".

practices within local communities and the state's narratives on this particular migration. This macro-level perspective will be explored further in the following chapter on governance.



CHAPTER IV

GOVERNANCE IN SPACE PRODUCTION

When we discuss the production of space in Fatih, governance practices emerge as key to grasp social transformation and change in the spatial dynamics of the district since it is fundamentally tied to the making of space. They inform how space is made and remade and encompasses the various mechanisms, both state-directed and self-regulated, that govern and shape these transformations. In line with Lefebvre's understanding of the production of space, this process is framed by the interplay between state power and spatial dynamics. As a key player, the state is constantly engaged in creating, regulating, and transforming spaces through governing practices, such as policies, ideological and economic motivations while also interacting with micro-level dynamics, including individual and community practices, as discussed before.

In this context, discussing Turkey's Syrian migration governance, I show how migration governance is a macro-level dynamic that enables Syrians to settle and produce spaces actively in Fatih district. However, migration governance is not only a matter of top-down state intervention. The arrival infrastructures, which facilitate the settlement of Syrian migrants, are key to understanding how space in Fatih is continuously produced and reproduced through a combination of governance, societal practices, and individual agency. Arrival infrastructures, as defined, are "those parts of the urban fabric within which newcomers become entangled on arrival, and where their future local or trans-local social mobilities are produced."¹¹⁹ So, they refer to the combination of physical, social, and institutional elements that specifically facilitate arrival.¹²⁰ These infrastructures are the spaces where migrants interact with the state,

¹¹⁹ Bruno Meeus, Karel Arnaut, and Bas van Heur, *Arrival Infrastructures: Migration and Urban Social Mobilities* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 11.

¹²⁰ Susanne Wessendorf, " 'The Library Is like a Mother': Arrival Infrastructures and Migrant Newcomers in East London," *Migration Studies* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 2022): 172–89, <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnab051>.

NGOs, and the local community, and where their social and spatial mobility is shaped. As discussed in the previous chapter on religion, Islam is the main pillar for Syrians' settlement preferences in Fatih. However, it is not only limited to affecting their preferences but also functions as a key determinant of arrival infrastructures. That is, it shapes both the reception practices of local communities and the state's discourse on migrant reception. Lefebvre's framework allows us to understand how these practices are deeply embedded in the production of space in that space becomes a product of both top-down governance, state policies and institutions, and bottom-up self-governance, the practices of local residents, NGOs, and migrant communities. In this context, the arrival infrastructures are closely tied to governance, which poses questions about how space makes it possible to receive migrants and the mentalities of the reception practices shape and are shaped by space. In light of this, the arrival infrastructures established to assist and support Syrian migrants have been significantly shaped by the role of existing residents, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the state, whose actions reflect an interplay of state-based and self-governance. The role of NGOs, particularly those rooted in Islamic principles, serve as mediators between state and society, embodying a governance strategy where non-state actors contribute to regulating migrants' arrival and active participation in society. This illustrates how power functions by regulating behavior, not just through top-down state mechanisms but also through the ways in which individuals and communities govern themselves according to broader societal norms and state expectations.¹²¹ It encompasses diverse networks of power that permeate various facets of society.¹²² So, it regulates subjects and populations in their daily lives. So, power operates through the methods by which individuals and groups regulate themselves in alignment with overarching societal norms, expectations, and state rationalities. In this regard, this thesis conceptualizes governance as it is understood in two intertwined ways: the self-governance of the subjects and the state-based governance practices. In that sense, self-governance includes the reception practices, actions, and responses of existing inhabitants and NGOs that are not apart from the state's rationality and so that their relationship with state agencies. The reception of

¹²¹ Leonard Lawlor and John Nale, essay, in *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon* (New York City: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 68–74.

¹²² Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," essay, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York, US: Pantheon Books, 1984), 51–76.

Syrian migrants in Fatih, for example, has been shaped by these overlapping layers of governance, where NGOs facilitate not only the practical arrival of migrants but also long-term services for them to settle and actively participate in the community.

Furthermore, the state's religious discourse, embraced also by some religious individuals or groups, mainly by Islamic narratives like the Ansar-Muhajirin analogy, has also reinforced the legitimacy of these reception practices, framing refugee hospitality as a moral and religious obligation. The chapter also considers the broader implications of neoliberal urban governance on Fatih. So, this thesis considers state governance as it emerges in the context of spatial governance and urban planning, primarily reflecting the logic of neoliberalism recognizing market incentives. On the one hand, state's actions and implementation of legal processes on spatial transformation in line with the neoliberal governance logic have significant influence on the production of space as in the Lefebvrian discussion underlining state's role in space-making.¹²³ On the other hand, as long-term residents increasingly moved out of the district in search of better-designed, gated communities, Fatih is simultaneously transformed into a space of arrival for migrants. This shift reflects how spatial governance under neoliberalism is not only about physical urban planning but also about how subjects are made and remade through market-driven logic. Subjects could be brought to internalize state control through self-regulation since power is productive in generating the field of relationality in which subjects get forms through,¹²⁴ in this context, governance extends beyond state control as individuals and groups internalize and enact state rationalities in their everyday lives.

4.1. Syrian Migration Governance

Turkey, already a country of migration, accelerated migrant and refugee movements with the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2011. With its 'open door' policy for the first Syrians, Turkey received 58,000 refugees in 2011 and became the largest host country from 2014 to the end of 2023.¹²⁵ The peak occurred in 2021-2022 with more than 4

¹²³ Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays*, ed. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

¹²⁴ Paul Rainbow, ed., "Introduction," essay, in *The Foucault Reader* (New York, US: Pantheon Books, 1984), 51–76.

¹²⁵ Erdoğan, Şener, and Ağca.

million refugees, including 3.7 million Syrians under temporary protection.¹²⁶ However, after the number of refugees fell to 3.3 million and the unprecedented increase in the number of refugees in Iran, Turkey became the second largest refugee host country in the world.¹²⁷ Although the first part of the Syrians arriving in Turkey were settled in the camps built rapidly in southern cities such as Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Sanliurfa with the support of AFAD, as the numbers increased and the arrivals continued uninterruptedly, in a short period of time, many more Syrians than those living in the camps started to live outside the refugee camps, not only in the border region but in all regions of Turkey, mostly by their own means.¹²⁸ Therefore, they are urban refugees who have become one of the most important components of the urban fabric.

The Turkish government welcomed Syrians and labeled them as “guests”, a term that implicitly suggested their stay would be temporary. However, the increase in their numbers and the spread of their settlements throughout the country led to new debates causing a series of policies. Accordingly, the establishment of the Directorate General of Migration Management of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Turkey in 2013 and the enactment of the Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2014 are the most important developments that laid the groundwork for a management strategy in the fields of migration and asylum in Turkey.¹²⁹ The main idea behind the law was to offer emergency support including humanitarian rights and non-refoulement guarantees to those who were forced to leave their country in cases of mass asylum.¹³⁰ With the regulation in an article of the law, temporary protection was issued for those asylum seekers. Syrian migrants were also considered within the scope

¹²⁶ “Refugee Data Finder,” UNHCR, accessed November 18, 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>.

¹²⁷ Einar H. Dyvik, “Major Refugee-Hosting Countries Worldwide 2023,” Statista, July 4, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263423/major-refugee-hosting-countries-worldwide/#:~:text=Refugees%20%2D%20major%20hosting%20countries%20worldwide%20as%20of%202023&text=As%20of%20mid%2D2023%2C%20Iran,second%20with%20around%203.3%20million>.

¹²⁸ Erdoğan, Şener, and Ağca.

¹²⁹ You can access to the details of the law: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/kurumlar/en.goc/Ingilizce-kanun/Law-on-Foreigners-and-International-Protection.pdf>

¹³⁰ Ahmet İçduygu and Doğu Şimşek, “Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Towards Integration Policies,” Turkish Policy Quarterly, accessed November 16, 2024, <http://turkishpolicy.com/article/828/syrian-refugees-in-turkey-towards-integration-policies>.

of this status. The LFIP, further amended in 2016, also regulates their access to health, education, social assistance, and the labor market.

The European Union negotiation processes and the EU's influence on migration management in Turkey are important as they have largely shaped formal and non-formal practices towards Syrian refugees. In 2015, Europe witnessed the most ever-recorded refugee arrivals in a single year with 1,032,408 people in the Mediterranean region, the majority of them Syrian.¹³¹ During this period, countless refugees faced dire conditions at European borders, and many tragically lost their lives while trying to cross the sea in search of safety. According to International Organization for Migration data, the number of people who lost their lives while attempting to reach the shore in search of a safer life in the Mediterranean was 3,771.¹³² In response to the significant influx of refugees into EU countries, concrete steps began to be taken. The West labeled the situation as a “crisis”, leading to significant turmoil across the continent.¹³³ In fact, although Europe faced far fewer Syrian migrants compared to the Middle East, it still termed the situation a “crisis.” For example, Hungary, which granted international protection to only 370 individuals in 2018, declared itself to be in a “refugee crisis.”¹³⁴

The ways in which the EU countries deal with this “crisis” vividly highlight the global inequalities and their externalization policies.¹³⁵ The primary goal was not to manage the humanitarian crisis in the Aegean Sea but rather to stem the flow of refugees into the West. At the end of 2015, the EU started a series of talks with Turkey and signed the EU-Turkey statement & action plan in 2016.¹³⁶

¹³¹ See: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean>

¹³² “IOM Counts 3,771 Migrant Fatalities in Mediterranean in 2015,” <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-counts-3771-migrant-fatalities-mediterranean-2015>

¹³³ Göç Araştırmaları Derneği (GAR) and Heinrich Böll Stiftung (HBS), *5. Yılında Avrupa Birliği-Türkiye Mutabakatı* (Istanbul), 2021), 7

¹³⁴For statistics in Hungary, refer to the official website of the Asylum Information Database (AIDA) at <https://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/hungary/statistics> (accessed June 15, 2019). For statistics in Turkey, consult the official website of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) at <https://www.goc.gov.tr> (accessed June 15, 2019).

(https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/imig.12753?saml_referrer)

¹³⁵Göç Araştırmaları Derneği and Heinrich Böll Stiftung, *5. Yılında AB-Türkiye Mutabakatı*

¹³⁶You can see the whole agreement through <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/03/18/eu-turkey-statement/>

On November 24, 2015, the European Commission decided to establish the “Facility for Refugees in Turkey” (FRIT) to provide financial assistance. On November 29, 2015, during the Turkey-EU Summit, it was decided to implement the Joint Action Plan of October 15, 2015, aimed at supporting Syrian refugees and the host country Turkey, as well as strengthening cooperation to prevent irregular migration flows towards the EU. However, according to Amnesty International, this plan did not significantly reduce irregular migration flows to the EU. Seeking a more comprehensive solution, the EU and Turkey announced on March 18, 2016, that they had reached a second agreement, officially known as the EU-Turkey Statement.¹³⁷”

The EU’s bargaining with Turkey to halt the mass refugee flow serves as a prominent example of Europe’s externalization approach, reinforcing its “fortress” mentality against external migration. It is also a prominent fact of how migrants and refugees are instrumentalized as tools in both foreign and domestic policy. Three years after the EU-Turkey migration deal, many of the promises made to Turkey remain unfulfilled. While the flow of migrants has not been completely halted, the EU has emerged as the clear biggest beneficiary.

Initially, Turkey established a legal framework for Syrians by classifying them as “persons under temporary protection.” However, over time, Turkey gradually acknowledged the growing likelihood that this prolonged displacement could evolve into long-term settlement. “important step in showing the Turkish government recognizes that the settlement of Syrians in Turkey could turn into a long-term and/or permanent settlement.”¹³⁸ Firstly, this agreement represents a crystallization of current global inequalities. It vividly exposes the asymmetric power relations between EU member states and those on the periphery of Europe, as well as between states and refugees. Secondly, because of these global inequalities, the agreement implemented to halt the intense migration and associated deaths in the Aegean Sea is a clear manifestation of the EU’s externalization policies. Finally, it serves as a prominent example of how migrants and refugees are instrumentalized as tools in both foreign and domestic policy.

¹³⁷Göç Araştırmaları Derneği and Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 5. Yılında AB-Türkiye Mutabakatı

¹³⁸ İçduygu and Şimşek, *Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Towards Integration Policies*.

This Turkish migration governance structure has had profound implications for the spatial organization of cities, particularly in Fatih. The legal frameworks that structure Syrian refugees' lives have directly influenced their spatial practices, such as becoming urban refugees who actively participate in commercial and residential settlement practices. For instance, the closure of Fatih to new residence applications, alongside the same restriction in other districts¹³⁹, directly influences the physical and social fabric of the area. Fatih, already densely populated with Syrian migrants, is further affected by policies aimed at controlling foreign populations in specific districts of Istanbul.

4.2. Formal and Informal Arrival Infrastructures: Networks of Support

Arrival infrastructure provides critical resources such as affordable housing, employment opportunities, networks, necessary information for social connection, and cultural and religious institutions that help newcomers feel a sense of belonging.¹⁴⁰ In light of this, the manifestation of arrival infrastructures in the Fatih context varies from bureaucratic institutions, civil organizations, and informal, religious, and educational institutions. Its central location and easy access to services catering to migrants also play a key role in this arrival infrastructure. Among the most significant are official institutions that manage migrants' legal and bureaucratic processes, such as the Istanbul Governorship Provincial Directorate of Migration Management, where they deal with their legal status in the country, including work permits, residency, and relevant licenses. My 26-year-old respondent refers to one of the arrival infrastructures as vital for her to live in that space:

“First, I found the FSE.¹⁴¹ Course, then I stayed in student housing in Karagümrük¹⁴². There were FSE students around me. Everyone was Syrian.”

¹³⁹ T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı, “‘İstanbul’da 39 İlçenin Yabancıların İkamet İzinlerine Kapatıldığı’ İddialarına İlişkin Basın Açıklaması,” T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı Göç İdaresi Başkanlığı, accessed February 6, 2025, <https://www.goc.gov.tr/istanbulda-39-ilcenin-yabancilarin-ikamet-izinlerine-kapatildigi-iddialarina-iliskin-basin-aciklamasi>.

¹⁴⁰ Göç Araştırmaları Derneği, “Migration and Arrival in Turkey: Urban and Spatial Approaches,” *GAR* September 28, 2024, <https://gocarastirmalaridernegi.org/en/events/workshops-and-conferences/336-migration-and-arrival-in-turkey-urban-and-spatial-approaches>.

¹⁴¹ The Foreign Student Examination (FSE) is an exam taken by international students aiming to attend higher education institutions in Turkey

¹⁴² Karagümrük is one of the historic neighborhoods located on the western side of Istanbul's city walls. 'gümrük' translates to 'customs' in English, as the neighborhood was named after the Customs Authority established there during the Ottoman Empire. This authority was responsible for regulating goods

This statement reflects how essential educational networks can be in establishing a foothold for migrants, particularly young students. In her case, the presence of fellow Syrians and educational opportunities offered a pathway for academic achievement and a sense of belonging. The student housing became more than just a place to stay—it evolved into a micro-community that facilitated both her active participation in society and her broader educational journey.

On the other hand, when first Syrian comers started to settle in Fatih, it went beyond the temporary; the new emerging social and environmental space also became an arrival infrastructure as it began to include several shops, restaurants, and groceries established by people with migration backgrounds. Therefore, Fatih's spaces started to function as accommodation zones for newcomers. They were better equipped to settle newcomers because of the existing social networks, shared religious and cultural practices, and available services tailored to their needs. So, arrival can thus be understood as more than just physical settlement; it signifies the movement from the margins to becoming an integral part of the social, economic, and cultural fabric of where migrants find themselves.¹⁴³ In doing so, migrants actively shape and influence the space they join, contributing to its ongoing transformation.¹⁴⁴ Many of the Syrians I interviewed mentioned that even before leaving their homeland, they were aware of Syrians who had already settled in Fatih. When they arrived in Istanbul, they went directly to this location. My Syrian respondent Ahmad gives an example of the role of familiar agencies in this arrival infrastructure:

“Fatih began attracting many Syrian immigrants after well-known cafes from Damascus started operating here. We already knew them from Damascus, and later we heard they managed to establish businesses here. Through word of mouth, people came to know about this place. Fatih feels familiar to us because of them. (Ahmad)”

entering the empire and overseeing trade flow into and out of the city. See: Süleyman Zeki Bağlam et al., *İstanbul'UN Kitabı Fatih. 1* (İstanbul: Fatih Belediye Başkanlığı, 2013).

¹⁴³ Wessendorf, *'The library is like a mother': Arrival infrastructures and migrant newcomers in East London*, 174

¹⁴⁴ Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Simsek-Caglar, *Migrants and City-Making: Dispossession, Displacement, and Urban Regeneration* (Duke University Press, 2018).

Through the network of connections they established among themselves, they discovered Fatih and came here, emphasizing that the area had already formed a kind of homeland simulation with Syrian settlements. For them, Fatih represented the ideal place to live. In this context, factors such as job opportunities, social environments, and cultural encounters in daily life gained momentum through the immigrants who had already begun settling and shaping the space. The sense of belonging, the feeling of home, and the simulation of a homeland were amplified through these settlements, reflecting in various ways—most notably through food culture, with Syrian-themed restaurants, markets selling Syrian products, and cafes. These reflections further strengthened these feelings. In this regard, Zeynep Yılmaz Hava’s doctoral thesis, “Constructing Migrant Foodscapes: The Case of Syrian Refugees in Fatih, Istanbul.”¹⁴⁵ Delves into the relationship between food and migration, examining the function of the concept of food—one of the most fundamental elements of daily life—in shaping new migration cultures, identity-belonging transformations among migrants, and the processes of social acceptance and adaptation following migration. This sense of cultural intimacy, facilitated through shared experiences like food, reinforced Fatih’s appeal as a destination while also contributing to forming a space that intertwined elements of both a familiar and new environment.

Moreover, Islam also coincides with the concept of arrival infrastructures as a religious and religiously political way of welcoming the newcomers. That is, reception practices of existing residents as well as the government are the main pillars of the arrival infrastructures. Their role is to facilitate newcomers’ arrival.¹⁴⁶ Local residents’ attitudes and discourses of hospitality and their perspectives on refugee reception coincides with their religious beliefs which support them to hospitably welcome their Muslim fellows who were forced to displacement. However, I think, it should also emphasize that the Syrian migration was not welcomed with happiness by the majority of the local people, yet, there was no negative reaction that would come to the public agenda.¹⁴⁷ However, since the arrival of Syrian refugees, there has been a strong use of religious symbolism, explicitly referencing the historical narrative of the Ansar and

¹⁴⁵ Yılmaz Hava, "Akışkan Mutfaklar.

¹⁴⁶ Wessendorf, "The Library Is like a Mother"

¹⁴⁷ Cem Özen, "Fatih Nasıl Kırmızı Oldu?," *Daktilo* 1984, June 28, 2022, <https://daktilo1984.com/forum/fatih-nasil-kirmizi-oldu/>.

Muhajirin by both state discourse and Muslim conservatives.¹⁴⁸ In Islamic tradition, the Muhajirin were the Muslims including Prophet Muhammad who migrated from Mecca to Medina, while the Ansar were the local inhabitants who warmly welcomed and supported them through providing aid for basic needs, shelter and social assistance. This story is also referenced in the Quran several times.¹⁴⁹ The Ansar of Medina were praised in the Quran as righteous, devout, and hospitable individuals:

“As for the foremost—the first of the Muhajirin and the Ansar—and those who follow them in goodness, Allah is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him. And He has prepared for them Gardens under which rivers flow, to stay there forever. That is the ultimate triumph.”¹⁵⁰

Consequently, for many devout Muslims in Fatih, offering hospitality to refugees is considered a religious duty.¹⁵¹ For instance, Syrian respondent's experience highlights the situation in Fatih as such:

“I witnessed many people saying this is your home; inshAllah, we could be Ansar.”
(Hiba)

On the other hand, the government discourse on the Syrian refugees before they arrived in Turkey strongly represented the religious and political aims in it.

For instance, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has consistently invoked the ansar-muhajirin analogy to describe Turkey's role in receiving Syrian migrants. In 2024, he reiterated this sentiment:

“We will proudly wear the honor of being ansar to Syrian muhajir ins in their most difficult days as a medal of honor on our chest.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸Didem Daniş and Dilara Nazlı, “A Faithful Alliance between the Civil Society and the State: Actors and Mechanisms of Accommodating Syrian Refugees in Istanbul,” *International Migration* 57, no. 2 (August 24, 2018): 143–57, <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12495>.

¹⁴⁹ You can find the verses: Qur'an, 9/Tawbah:100,117; Qur'an 8/Anfal: 72,74

¹⁵⁰ Qur'an, 9/Tawbah: 100

¹⁵¹ Daniş and Nazlı, “A Faithful Alliance between the Civil Society and the State: Actors and Mechanisms of Accommodating Syrian Refugees in Istanbul,” 148

¹⁵² “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Ne Biz Ne Milletimiz Ne de Suriyeli Kardeşlerimiz Bu Sinsi Tuzağa Düşmeyecek,” Anadolu Ajansı, accessed October 24, 2024,

This statement reflects Erdogan's long-standing use of the Ansar-Muhajirin discourse to frame Turkey's reception of Syrian refugees within the Islamic tradition of solidarity and brotherhood even as his discourse has gradually evolved to themes of repatriation, maintaining Turkey's humanitarian image by referencing international norms.¹⁵³ Turkish government alignment to refugee reception with Islamic values has made these policies resonate with the conservative and religious segments of Turkish society. Therefore, pro-government civil society organizations, including Islamic NGOs, along with long-term residents who embraced this analogy, played a critical role in disseminating the Ansar-Muhajirin discourse. They further linked Turkey's refugee policies with a moral duty rooted in Islamic tradition. This religious framing strengthened public support for the government's pro-refugee stance, fostering a stronger state-society bond around this issue.

However, the function of NGOs in Fatih must be viewed as an essential part of the larger arrival infrastructure, going beyond religious and governmental narratives. The extension of governance through non-state actors is embodied by NGOs that offer social services and assist migrants in navigating any related obstacles. Therefore, these groups help migrants move from newcomers to active contributors to the production of space in Fatih. During my research, as I mentioned in the Methodology part of the thesis, I did some of my interviews in the dormitory for foreign female students, particularly young Syrians, which is founded by IHH.¹⁵⁴ and a part of its complex organization for supporting students. The dormitory is part of the Sefire-i Alem International Student Association in cooperation with IHH. I attended a tea meeting with my gatekeeper friends organized by the Sefire-i Alem International Student Association. It was an event where students from various countries, particularly Syria, came together. Its location within a historical and symbolic area, the Sahn-ı Saman Madrasa, part of the Fatih Mosque complex, highlights how such spaces provide a sense of community and belonging for these migrants. This gathering, indeed,

<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-ne-biz-ne-milletimiz-ne-de-suriyeli-kardeslerimiz-bu-sinsi-tuzaga-dusmeyecek/3264087>.

¹⁵³ Kerem Morgül, "Sending 'Our Brothers' Back 'Home': Continuity and Change in President Erdoğan's Discourse on Syrian Refugees," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 69 (October 9, 2023): 30–51, <https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2023.23>.

¹⁵⁴ Humanitarian Relief Foundation is one of the government-aligned Islamic NGOs, serving supporting victims of war, occupation, and natural disasters, including displaced refugees, through in-kind donations, financial aid, and long-term development projects

exemplifies how the physical and cultural spaces of Fatih are deeply interwoven with the activities of NGOs, contributing to the production of space in the context of both social and religious practices. The Sahn-ı Saman Madrasa is a 15th-century Ottoman-era educational complex, significant within the Fatih Külliyesi (Fatih Mosque complex), making its role in these NGOs' activities even more poignant. The Fatih Sahn-ı Semân Eğitim ve Araştırma Merkezi, under the umbrella of İlim Yayma Cemiyeti, serves as a prominent institution focused on the promotion, teaching, and research of Islamic scholarly traditions. This center, located in Fatih, Istanbul, is a key player in the educational activities of İlim Yayma Cemiyeti, which aims to foster a deeper understanding of Islamic sciences. The center's mission includes educating individuals and contributing to Islam's intellectual and cultural heritage through both traditional teachings and modern academic research. The Sahn-ı Semân Educational Center's role in Fatih showcases how religious institutions and their educational wings influence the social fabric, particularly through their integration into urban spaces with historical significance, like the Fatih district. Its educational activities, steeped in the Islamic intellectual tradition, help shape the area's cultural landscape. This example emphasizes the multi-layered ways in which these NGOs utilize and transform religious, historical, and social spaces in Fatih, facilitating not only the settlement of refugees but also the creation of a vibrant, interconnected community. Through these organizations, Fatih's spaces are actively practiced and reshaped, creating new forms of belonging and solidarity among migrants.

Didem Danis and Dilara Nazlı conceptualize the relationship between NGOs and the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government as “faithful alliances” in their discussion on the reception of Syrian refugees.¹⁵⁵ My field supports their conceptualization, mainly through an interview with a key figure in the early establishment of NGOs dedicated to helping Syrian refugees in Fatih. Interestingly, my interview with 76-year-old Necmi happened by coincidence. While interviewing Mehmet as part of my research with local residents, I encountered Necmi and ended up conducting two interviews with him. These interviews assist me not only with the NGOs' discussion but also with the historical developments of Turkish politics in the space discussion. Starting from a young age, he has had a pioneering role in Islamic

¹⁵⁵ Danış and Nazlı, “A Faithful Alliance between the Civil Society and the State”

faith-based NGOs; from founding to serving, his efforts exemplify this "faithful alliance" and shed light on the governance practices in the Turkish context, particularly regarding the rise of institutionalization of Islam in the country.

Before the state engaged in the process, Necmi took significant steps to provide educational and social support for Syrian children through his own NGO. His prominent work reflects a form of self-governance where local actors filled gaps left by the state in the early stages of the refugee arrival.

“In 2011, the Syrians came here. As a result of their arrival, the secretary of the ÖNDER Foundation called me.¹⁵⁶ He was my student. He said that, for the first time, around 20 students from Syria came to Fatih. He asked if there was a classroom. I said there is, but we give it to Turkish children in the afternoon. I told them that they could be taught here from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. A teacher came, and we agreed. They started classes there, and they came every day. They had lessons with their own teachers. Later, we had 1000 students. We rented various places from different associations.”

He details his journey in establishing schools and working with Syrians:

“A Muslim family, parents from Morocco and Spain, who were looking for a good Islamic education for their children, moved to Syria after the war. They somehow found me through the Turkish Aeronautical Association (THK), where I had been the president for 15 years. Their knowledge of Turkish helped us immensely in working with Syrians. Over time, we had around 1,000 students in different buildings. We gave them report cards and worked with them for years.” (Necmi)

He explains how the state became involved in his efforts to support Syrian refugees after his initial independent work without formal state support:

¹⁵⁶ ÖNDER Association of Imamate High School Alumni is an organization focused on supporting and advocating for graduates of Imam Hatip schools, which are state-run educational institutions that combine general education with religious teachings

“I went to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and told him, 'I'm working on a project for the Syrians.' He asked what I was doing, and I said, 'I opened a school.' He asked what kind of school, and I said, 'We opened one for their education and social activities, and we're even giving them report cards.’” (Necmi)

Necmi described how, within a few days, the President's son, Bilal Erdogan, visited him to check out the project. Necmi's efforts to educate Syrian children continued for several years. After Al Jazeera media organization took notice of their efforts and shared a report about his classes, they've been further recognized:¹⁵⁷

“After that, the Director of National Education in Ankara contacted me, asking who I was and what I was doing. They said they were impressed with the work.” (Necmi)

With this recognition after six years, Necmi was given access to more schools in the Fatih district for Syrians by the Ministry of Education. His remarks reveal several discussions that show how micro-level experiences are the main reflections of macro-level dynamics. First, the role of NGOs in shouldering immediate responsibility, particularly in their relationship with the state, becomes a critical aspect since organizations founded by individuals like Necmi played a pivotal role in providing support to refugees, helping them to be actively part of society. This also sheds light on the broader political context in which these NGOs operated, showing how closely they worked with state actors. This connection between Necmi and the state officials demonstrates how state actors affect his NGO activities. Indeed, Necmi's Islamic-based ideology and the AKP's political agenda are in line, showing how these groups are not just charitable organizations but also intricately linked to the government's social policies and governance.

In fact, this close relationship stems from his early involvement in politics and the social mobilization of the Islamic movement. His long-standing engagement is rooted

¹⁵⁷ You can access news articles about this topic from Sümeyye Ertekin, "Suriyeli Çocuklara Gönüllü Eğitim," Al Jazeera Turk - Ortadoğu, Kafkasya, Balkanlar, Türkiye ve çevresindeki bölgeden son dakika haberleri ve analizler, accessed October 24, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com.tr/al-jazeera-ozel/suriyeli-cocuklara-gonullu-egitim>. and Hassan Ghani, "The Turkish Judo Club That Doubles as a Syrian School," Al Jazeera, June 7, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2015/6/7/the-turkish-judo-club-that-doubles-as-a-syrian-school>.

in the struggle he committed to from a young age. Necmi is one of those who has not only witnessed but actively participated in the historical evolution of the Turkish government from within. He was a witness to the first major political shift when Turkey transitioned to a multi-party system. Living through the political journey of Turkey after the multi-party transition, he became deeply embedded in the political and social changes of the country. Even in his early teens, at the age of 14-15, Necmi actively embraced Islamic values and played a key role in social and political efforts aimed at driving change. He is a well-known figure in the community for his work beyond his personal career as a jeweler, dedicating his time and energy to political and social causes. His personal and political history sheds light on how he developed these close connections with high-level state actors over the years, shaping his involvement in NGOs and their work with Syrian refugees. Being active in the Islamic movement since the 1970s –this long history– has given him a high level of credibility and has led to the fact that many non-governmental organizations, which today are shaped under the influence of political power, are directly or indirectly affiliated to Necmi. In today's Fatih, he heads many Islamic NGOs operating in different fields such as sports, Islamic and formal education. In this context, the relations, resources, and financing structure, as well as how the associations he led function, constitute an essential example of the role of NGOs in transforming space and social habits. These NGOs under his leadership provide a remarkable model for understanding how space is reproduced and transformed through civil society organizations.

Necmi's close relationship with the AKP government allowed his initiatives to gain formal recognition and support. His direct communications with the prime minister and the Ministry of Education played a crucial role in integrating his efforts into the broader state framework. This collaboration illustrates how civil society actors can shape governance by influencing state policies and practices, further blurring the lines between self-governance and state-based governance. So, from this point, how Islamic organizations have gained such power should be briefly mentioned. Alev Erkilet's perspective on social movements and Islamic movements emphasizes the active role of individuals who demand change within existing systems. According to Erkilet, people involved in social movements are those who not only have desires and needs

but actively engage in practices to bring about change in the system.¹⁵⁸ As a subset of broader social movements, Islamic movements are integral to Erkilet's argument, acting as the action-oriented component of Islamic ideology.¹⁵⁹ So it resonates with NEcmi's own journey in the social sphere and pro-Islamic political parties embracing the movement, known as Milli Görüş (National Outlook), which was led by Necmettin Erbakan in 1970 and sought to challenge the secular, Western-inspired model of governance because, for a long time, Turkey was governed by this Kemalist ideology. After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the Kemalist movement, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, emerged as the principal force in establishing the new Republic of Turkey, which represented a radical rupture from the Ottoman past. The new nation-state was defined by Turkish nationalism, secularization, and the adoption of Western modernization ideals. The new governance system prioritized suppressing religious and Kurdish nationalist revolts against the secular Turkish state. In this process, exclusionary mechanisms were deployed, marginalizing Muslims and their practices, which shaped social and political dynamics in the country for decades. The history of exclusion was built on efforts to distinguish Turkey from its Ottoman and Islamic past. The Kemalist reforms, including changing the alphabet, banning the Arabic call to prayer, and enforcing Western-style clothing, were symbolic attempts to exclude Muslim identity from the public sphere and welfare distribution.¹⁶⁰ Nilüfer Göle, for example, explains that these reforms, including the unveiling and the hat reforms, reflect the internalization of Orientalist notions that veiling or Islamic clothing was 'uncivilized' and 'backward'—an obstacle to national development.¹⁶¹ So, these reforms linked Westernization with progress while associating tradition and religious practices with underdevelopment. In this regard, not only to voice discontent with the Kemalist, secular, and Westernized governance model of Turkey but to actively replace it with an alternative—rooted in Islamic-Ottoman traditions, a proactive political movement embraced by Muslim people like Necmi. As a response to the

¹⁵⁸ Emek ve Adalet Platformu, "Alev Erkilet Röportajı: İslamcılık ve Kapitalizm Üzerine" Emek ve Adalet Platformu, March 20, 2019, <https://www.emekveadalet.org/alinti/islamcilik-ve-kapitalizm-uzerine-alev-erkilet/>.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ See Ayşe Çavdar, "Building, Marketing, and Living in an Islamic Gated Community: Novel Configurations of Class and Religion in Istanbul," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 40, no. 3 (May 2016): 507–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12364>.; Cihan Tuğal, *Passive Revolution: Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).

¹⁶¹ Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

pressure they experienced, Muslims who sought to embrace Islam as a comprehensive lifestyle expressed their will more clearly.

Necmi recalls his early experiences with Islamic activities and sociability during the late 1960s. He notes the process of the Islamic movement as follows:

“Islamic activities were moving slowly at that time. There was not much sociability then; I was learning about Islam from opinion writings in the newspapers and journals.”

So, his religious knowledge started accumulating, and he regularly followed and read newspaper articles by Muslim authors advocating the Islamic movement in their works. Noting that he frequently visited the publishing houses located in Beyazit Square in Fatih (which he believes is now a hotel) as part of his weekly routine, he fostered his involvement in the intellectual and religious circles of the time, providing him with a direct connection to those forming the first Islamic political party.

“As soon as I returned from the military service, I went straight to Fatih,” he says, recalling a rented apartment near Martyrs Park in Fatih where the party’s activities began.¹⁶²”

Following the party’s closure¹⁶³, they regrouped and formed the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, MSP). Necmi reflects on how they rented a building on Fevzi Pasha Street through collaborative solidarity efforts to continue their work. In this process, he strengthened his ties with old friends in the Islamic movement, many of whom, he remarks with some nostalgia, have since passed away. His journey mirrors the broader evolution of Islamic movements in Turkey’s social and political sphere. So, the religious right, which had been a marginal faction within the broader center-right politics, began to emerge as a distinct political force in the early 1970s. However, it was not only political engagement but also societal involvement among

¹⁶² He mentions the National Order Party (Millî Nizam Partisi, MNP) which was dissolved by the Constitutional Court, a year later its foundation.

¹⁶³ During the military coup d’etat in 1971, it was banned for being against the country’s laicise nature (Yang and Guo, 2015, 3)

Muslims. So, in addition to these movements, in response to the secularizing and elitist modernization policies of the Turkish Republic, Islamic civil organizations emerged with the mission of promoting Islamic consciousness within Turkish society.¹⁶⁴ These organizations were initially seen as opposing forces to the state's secular ideology and to the governments of the time. However, after the AKP took power in 2002, they transformed from oppositional entities to institutions that made alliances with the government.¹⁶⁵ Although the AKP, established by reformist youths of the Milli Görüş tradition¹⁶⁶, initially came to power with a platform that seemed to distance itself from its Islamist legacy for a more moderate stance, focused on EU integration¹⁶⁷, it did not take long for the party to re-embrace its ideological roots, drawing on its Islamist and Ottomanist past. Islamic NGOs have started to have very close relations with the state, benefit from state support and carry out many of their activities in cooperation with public institutions.

4.3. Neoliberal Urban Governance

The analysis of migration dynamics in Istanbul's Fatih district extends beyond just merely resettling migrants, also encompassing the migration of long-standing residents who are moving towards newly emerging urban locales such as Basaksehir because of government urban policies driven by neoliberal economic principles. This latter phenomenon is spurred by governmental urban policies driven by neoliberal economic principles, resulting in the migration of residents towards newly emerging urban locales. So, it is important to understand the urban planning history of Turkey concerning neoliberal policies on spatial dynamics since the 1980s and significantly during the AKP government, which has been in power since 2002. This situation has

¹⁶⁴ Lütfi Sunar, rep., *Türkiye'de İslami STK'ların Kurumsal Yapı ve Faaliyetlerinin Değişimi* (Istanbul: İlke Yayınları, 2018)

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 73

¹⁶⁶ The founder, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has held many positions since his MSP days in the 70s when he started his political career. He established very close ties with the party base with his performance as the Chairman of MSP Youth Branches in 1976, Welfare Party (continuation of MSP) Beyoğlu District Chairman in 1984, Istanbul Provincial Chairman, and Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor in 1994.

¹⁶⁷ See Ziya Öniş, "Monopolising the Centre: The AKP and the Uncertain Path of Turkish Democracy," *The International Spectator* 50, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 22–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2015.1015335>. ; 1. Fatih Varol, "From Developmentalism to Neoliberalism: The Changing Role of the State and Development of Islamic Business and Finance in Turkey," *Turkish Journal of Islamic Economics* 5, no. 1 (December 31, 2017): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.26414/tujise.2018.5.1.1-15>.

often been the subject of discussions regarding the merging of state and government in Turkey. Especially in the period after 2000, Turkey witnessed a construction boom era after adopting the neoliberal economic incentives model as a new way of urban planning. It has dominated especially big cities and metropolises with capitalist economic growth. Loaded with plenty of constructions, such as constructions of roads, skyscrapers, huge, long buildings, gated communities, and plenty of shopping malls. We can describe the new emerging spaces of urban wealth as characterized by increasingly privatized urban governance, a disconnection from the city, a retreat into the domestic sphere and family life, urban fear, and security concerns, as well as social and spatial isolation as features that define a new form of urban existence.¹⁶⁸ Istanbul's urban landscape is marked by residential compounds enclosed by gates or walls, alongside consumption, leisure, and production spaces that are under constant surveillance through stringent security measures, particularly in areas such as Basaksehir and Beylikdüzü districts. Before exploring Turkey's integration into neoliberal governance, it is crucial to first examine the rise of neoliberal thought and its impact on space and space production.

4.3.1. Neoliberalism as Ideology: Foundations and Influence

Although classical liberal thinkers, such as Hume, Mill, and Smith, varied in their purposes and methods, they were on the same side of the focus on individual autonomy within liberal political thought. Moreover, unfettered market and market-oriented individuals within the non-interventionist state, which is for the pursuit of safety, a competitive market, and the individual's property rights, are the crucial tenets of classical liberal thought.¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, Keynesian ideology as an egalitarian liberalism that justified the state interventions was hegemonic from the post-World War II until the late 1970s. By the late 1970s and 1980s, neoliberal rationality in economy and politics had proliferated as a response to the ongoing political, economic, and therefore social crisis across the globe but especially in the global North. The

¹⁶⁸ Ayfer Bartu Candan and Biray Kolluoğlu, "Emerging Spaces of Neoliberalism: A Gated Town and a Public Housing Project in İstanbul," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 39 (2008): 5–46, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0896634600005057>.

¹⁶⁹ Jason R. Hackworth, "The Place, Time, and Process of Neoliberal Urbanism," essay, in *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism* (Cornell University Press, 2007), 1–14.

problems of inflation and the budget deficit were very crucial determinants to radically restructuring the economy. In fact, not only the Global North but also the Global South had severely out-of-control inflation and budget deficits. So, neoliberalism is articulated mostly by Hayek and Friedman as an ideological opposition to egalitarian liberalism and supporter of classical liberal thought.¹⁷⁰ They consider the government as a protector of free exchange. So, the only intervention by the government can be for the consolidation of the free market thesis. The neoliberal practices started to be embraced under the Thatcher and Reagan administrations in the UK and the USA, respectively. New trade and financial regulations by international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank are implemented, and they have played a key role in the global South declaring the neoliberal economic model as a requirement of development supply (aid).

So, within this executive, public housing, income supplements, and medical subsidies were supplanted.¹⁷¹ So, economic welfare, security, the privatization of housing, and delivery of goods and services are the main components of the neoliberal change. Privatization is a way of giving authority to non-governmental organizations and institutions to execute the resources and services. So, the public services and resources have been redistributed in accordance with the private agencies. While deconstructing previous modes of governance, neoliberalism has also created socially interventionist policies and initiatives to regulate the social and political order in a way that serves the interest of neoliberalism.¹⁷² In economically speaking, neoliberalism is concentrated on the trilogy of "open, competitive, and unregulated market," which refers to the liberation from state intervention and to an optimal mechanism for economic development.¹⁷³ However, although neoliberalism is against any interference by the state, it imposes the embraced market rule upon all aspects of social life by coercive and disciplinary forms of state intervention.¹⁷⁴ So, we see the opposite double-edge feature of neoliberal rationality in terms of the differentiation of ideology that it produces and the implementation that it proceeds. Although the neoliberal model has

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Adalberto Jr. Aguirre, Volker Eick, and Ellen Reese, "Introduction: Neoliberal Globalization, Urban Privatization, and Resistance," *Social Justice* 33, no. 3 (2006): 1–5.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

been embraced under the condition of higher interest rates, uncertain returns shrinking tax revenues, and declining profits of industrial firms as in a way that economies were shaped, social, economic, and political inequalities have emerged between nations and different classes. Also, cities are strategically essential tools for the initiatives of neoliberalism. From urban managerialism to urban entrepreneurialism, Harvey¹⁷⁵ emphasis on the transformation as the rolling out of neoliberalism. In this regard, administrative governance has become the center of political decentralization by giving autonomy and decision-making to the local administrations.¹⁷⁶

4.3.2. Neoliberal Urban Development in Turkey: A Historical Context

Neoliberalism also has a geographical nature. As neoliberal projects have been produced within geographical contexts such as national, local, and regional, the contextualization of neoliberalism is a prerequisite for its varied socio-political consequences. So, how neoliberal thought is produced, reproduced, and perpetuated in the Turkish context is different from advanced capitalist states because of the different legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, state regimes, and social class relations.¹⁷⁷ In this part, the Turkish neoliberal way of governance is discussed.

The 1950s was the period of transition for Turkey to multi-party politics. Accordingly, movements to expand mechanization in agriculture and exports activities have begun as discussed earlier. In this period of economic, political, and social reformation and industrial moves in metropolitan cities, like Istanbul, encountered rapid migration influx as discussed in Chapter II. Istanbul has become a service and industrial city with the highest number of immigrants from other cities and the most capital invested. After the intense immigration verge to Istanbul, the city faced urbanization and harboring problems. In the regions where industrialization is extensive, squatting has started, and the housing and resettlement policies of the state have been insufficient for new

¹⁷⁵ David Harvey, "From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 71, no. 1 (April 1989): 3–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/04353684.1989.11879583>.

¹⁷⁶ Tuna Kuyucu, "Türkiye'de Kentsel Dönüşümün Dönüşümü: Kurumsal Bir Açıklama Denemesi," *İdealkent* 9, no. 24 (August 31, 2018): 364–86, <https://doi.org/10.31198/idealkent.447526>.

¹⁷⁷ Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, "Cities and the Geographies of 'Actually Existing Neoliberalism,'" essay, in *The Urban Sociology Reader*, ed. Jan Lin and Christopher Mele (London, Abingdon, and Oxon: Routledge : Imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 138–47.

residents. The Amnesty Law, introduced in 1953, gave the land title to the slums and provided permanence in urban spaces.¹⁷⁸

Another factor that triggers the squatting process is the mobilization of immigrants in their neighborhood, which is formed by themselves. Immigrants, most of whom came from the village, endeavored to adapt to urban life with their own squatter neighborhoods. After the 1960 coup, the planned economy began with the State Planning Organization, providing economic and social development. The migration from the village to the city continued at great speed. With the expansion of industrial zones, slum areas in Europe and Asia have increased. Not just being limited to Istanbul, squatting in all areas of Turkey has gained significant momentum. Squatting was seen as a "housing problem," and it was believed that this problem could be solved with varied precautions. New legal regulations have started with increasing housing demands of different economic classes and difficulties in access to housing in the market. These requests were answered with three different housing options: the production of slums and cooperative and constructive housing. The Property Ownership Law, issued in 1965, opened a way to sell easily and to turn houses of the middle class into apartment buildings. By the end of the 1970s, this was the only method for the production of housing for the middle class. The Law, which permits the establishment of multi-owned residential buildings in a parcel, has encouraged the creation of a new built environment in the multistorey and often adjacent building structures instead of the existing urban fabric in the areas with small and multi-part property patterns. The Shanty Law No. 775, issued in 1966, directed the measures taken against the slum problems to a planned process, such as the rehabilitation and liquidation of the existing slums. Public housing initiatives of the period can be considered as another important development. However, although it supported the housing production system through the State Real Estate Bank, it took little active role.

In short, the period from 1950 to 1980 represents a critical moment in Turkey's urban history, particularly for Istanbul. We can define the 1950-1980 period as a period in which the state did not actively provide public housing despite the increasing need for housing, except for Real Estate Bank applications and a few slum prevention zone

¹⁷⁸ Karpat, *Türkiye'de Toplumsal Dönüşüm*

implementations, especially amidst the rapid rural-to-urban migration.¹⁷⁹ The migration patterns during this period significantly reshaped Istanbul's urban fabric. Not only has it led to demographic changes, it has also transformed the social and political landscape of urban centres. With the proliferation of informal settlements, new urban residents, often mobile and energetic, sought integration into the urban fabric rather than isolation, and the gecekondu neighborhoods became key sites for social and economic organization.¹⁸⁰ For instance, Islam became more visible in public spaces, challenging the secular, state-driven modernization project that had dominated Turkey's early Republican period. Islam provided a common framework that fostered unity and community among the new arrivals because religious practices, deeply rooted in their rural background, were reinterpreted in the urban context to help migrants navigate their unsettled lives.¹⁸¹ For instance, the headscarf (başörtüsü) as an informal veiling style in this internal migration process, emerged as a marker of migrant identity, symbolizing class distinctions and the ongoing struggle of new inhabitants over urban space and lifestyle.¹⁸²

The global economic transformation, neoliberalism, aims to eliminate the obstacles in market operation, trade, production, consumption, and finance after 1980. So, it is the turning point for Turkey to apply the structural transformation to its economies, such as an outward-oriented economy, privatization policies, trade liberalization, financial liberalization, and export-oriented industrialization under the endowment of a military junta government in 1980. On the other hand, a new model of metropolitan governance emerged. When you combine these two changes in economic and administration systems, the greater municipality of Istanbul has become a powerful office used to implement big projects. Two important changes in cities during the mid-1980s were prevalent. As financial and administrative changes were implemented, new financial resources emerged for metropolitan governance. An example of the former is

¹⁷⁹Ayşe Öcü, "The Politics of the Urban Land Market in Turkey: 1950–1980," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 12, no. 1 (March 1988): 38–64, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.1988.tb00073.x>.

¹⁸⁰Karpat, *Türkiye'de Toplumsal Dönüşüm*.; İbrahim Sirkeci, İsmail Aydınğün, and Ahmet İçduygu, *Türkiye'de İçgöç* (Beşiktaş, İstanbul: Türkiye Ekonomik ve Toplumsal Tarih Vakfı, 1998); I. Oğuz Işık and M. Melih Pınarcıoğlu, *Nöbetleşe Yoksulluk Sultanbeyli Örneği* (İstanbul, Türkiye: İletişim, 2001).

¹⁸¹ Karpat, *Türkiye'de Toplumsal Dönüşüm*; Çavdar, "Building, Marketing, and Living in an Islamic Gated Community, 511.

¹⁸²Anna J. Secor, "The Veil and Urban Space in Istanbul: Women's Dress, Mobility and Islamic Knowledge," *Gender, Place and Culture* 9, no. 1 (March 2002): 5–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690120115010>.

introducing a new model for metropolitan governance, which the 1984 law brought a "two-tier system," which refers to the existence of greater municipality and district municipalities.¹⁸³ These changes were the most crucial in terms of how urban politics was run. An example of new financial resources is applying to an international agency to get loans. Due to these two fundamental changes, the great municipality governance has been a very powerful office. The implementation of these changes also enabled metropolitan mayor Bedrettin Dalan, a member of the center-right Motherland Party (ANAP), to initiate a series of urban renewal projects in Istanbul in the late 1980s, including the Tarlabaşı Boulevard and Golden Horn projects. The consequences of such a centrist urban governance system are evident in the area of urban development. Prior to the AKP taking office, development plans prepared by municipal bodies required approval from the Ministry of Public Works, which had the authority to single-handedly reject these plans.¹⁸⁴ Central state authorities had also power to directly their own plans in areas classified as "disaster zones," "special environmental areas," "tourism areas," and "mass housing zones".¹⁸⁵ When municipal administrations aligned with the central government, which depends on the two being from the same political party, municipal plans are implemented smoothly. Conversely, if they were politically opposed, the central government easily block local efforts, reject plans, deny financial assistance, and impose its own projects.¹⁸⁶

Development Plan Law, Squatter Repentance Law, and Mass Housing Law (TOKİ) had a vital effect on urban dynamics. In order to solve the problems of the growing shanty towns, many zoning amnesties were implemented, and they made shanties be legalized. According to neoliberalism supporters, legalizing informal property leads to the integration of urban poor and formal markets, so poverty becomes demolished. The other crucial regulation for the housing issue was the formation of Mass Housing in 1984. Today, the cooperation of TOKİ held, the biggest part of the construction sector, is a work of a new structuring process in 1980.

¹⁸³ Tuna Kuyucu, "Law, Property and Ambiguity: The Uses and Abuses of Legal Ambiguity in Remaking Istanbul's Informal Settlements," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 2 (May 22, 2013): 609–27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12026>.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Aylin Güney and Ayşe Aslıhan Çelenk, "Europeanization and the Dilemma of Decentralization: Centre–Local Relations in Turkey," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, no. 3 (September 2010): 241–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2010.506810>.

The 2000s is a period in which the AKP came to power over the greater municipality and many districts of the municipalities in Istanbul. A number of changes have taken place during the post-2000 period. These changes were centralization of power, uncontrolled "crazy" neoliberalization, and the construction sector as the engine of a new economy such as mega projects, crazy projects, and urban renewal projects. Municipality laws introduced in 2004 and 2005 made the government more centralized and powerful. In 2005, the introduction of new Municipality Law and a Metropolitan Municipality Law enhanced the administrative and financial capacity of local governments. More importantly, these reforms granted a (limited) level of autonomy to local governments from the center as well as these administrative changes; another set of laws have been implemented to legitimize ongoing urban restructuring in the city. So, neoliberalism deepened and became more entrenched during this period.¹⁸⁷ Ayfer Bartu Candan and Biray Kolluoglu summarize this changing dynamics in power as:

These new powers include: (1) broadening the physical space under the control and jurisdiction of the greater municipality; (2) increasing its power and authority in the development (imar), control, and coordination of district municipalities; (3) making it easier for greater municipalities to establish, and/or create partnerships and collaborate with private companies; (4) defining new responsibilities of the municipality in dealing with "natural disasters"; and (5) outlining the first legal framework for "urban transformation," by giving municipalities the authority to designate, plan and implement "urban transformation" areas and projects.¹⁸⁸

The fundamental distinction between the AKP and ANAP periods is that laws and legitimacy are very important and crucial. So, legality, the passing of a number of laws, is very important to understand many projects that were implemented during the AKP period.¹⁸⁹ Enacted in 2005, law including the Law on Conservation by Renovation and Use by Revitalization of the Deteriorated Historical and Cultural Immovable Property (5366), placed Istanbul in a new urban regeneration/transformation process. Including historically significant districts like Fatih allows projects that could make great shifts in the urban fabric under the guise of preserving heritage. In the following year, to progress in urban renewal projects, a series of subsequent legislative changes, such as

¹⁸⁷ Candan, Kolluoglu, Emerging Spaces of neoliberalism: A gated town and a public housing project in Istanbul

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁸⁹ Kuyucu, "Türkiye'de Kentsel Dönüşümün Dönüşümü: Kurumsal Bir Açıklama Denemesi"

Laws No. 5998, 5793, 6306, and amendments that expanded the role of TOKİ, were implemented.¹⁹⁰

In this regard, with its significant part of Istanbul's historical texture, Fatih became one of the main targets of Law No. 5366. Accordingly, under this law, four major renewal areas can be identified that can be characterized as state-led gentrification: Sulukule, Süleymaniye, Tarlabası, and Fener-Balat-Ayvansaray. With the exception of Tarlabası, all of these areas are located within the Fatih district, highlighting the importance of Fatih district with its rich history and cultural structural areas that attracted the most interest of capital due to their high rent value.¹⁹¹ Although it may not be the central focus of this thesis, discussing an urban renewal project in the Fatih district is crucial for illustrating how state-led spatial interventions produce and reproduce space and spatial transformations. The urban regeneration process in Sulukule, one of the oldest settlements of the Romani community in Istanbul, is one of the most important areas where this strategy has gained an appearance. Sulukule, characterized as a "depressed/deprived area" in the city center, was declared a renewal area within the scope of law 5366 and was the first site to undergo this transformation, with the project carried out by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, Fatih Municipality and TOKİ, which was put into practice in 2007, with the complete demolition of the existing buildings and the construction of new buildings to be built by TOKİ in their place.¹⁹² My respondent, Zeynep, emphasized the significance of the Sulukule transformation:

¹⁹⁰ Asuman Türkün et al., "2000'li Yıllarda Radikal Değişimler, Yasalarda 'Kentsel Dönüşüm' ve TOKİ'nin Artan Yetkileri," essay, in *Mülk, Mahal, İnsan: İstanbul'da Kentsel Dönüşüm* (Şişli, İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi, 2014), 122–40 ; Kuyucu, *Türkiye'de Kentsel Dönüşümün Dönüşümü: Kurumsal Bir Açıklama Denemesi*,

¹⁹¹ Alev Erkilet, "Bu Kent Kimin? İstanbul Bağlamında Şehircilik ve Kent Hakkına Dair Bazı Mülahazalar," essay, in *Kenti Dinlemek* (İstanbul: Büyüyen Ay, 2024), 101–5.

¹⁹² Türkmen, *2000'li Yıllarda Radikal Değişimler, Yasalarda 'Kentsel Dönüşüm' ve TOKİ'nin Artan Yetkileri*, 131, 132

“I think Sulukule gave a break to the whole of Fatih. Something is changing in Fatih now. People are leaving, or people from Sulukule are coming back, which has also brought about a change.”

In time, a significant part of the population living in the households settled in the new areas built in Kayabaşı and Taşoluk, 40 km away from Sulukule, which is located on the periphery of Istanbul, with the guidance of the Fatih municipality. The use of spatial rent in favor of certain groups at the level of class and identity, as required by the rationality of gentrification at the beginning of the process, can also be read through the newly built houses in the style of ‘Ottoman-Turkish architecture’ after the demolished houses.¹⁹³ As new, upscale villas replaced the homes of the former residents, Zeynep remarked, "These were sold at high prices... it became a dead neighborhood of Fatih," underscoring the stark contrast between the past vibrancy of the area and its current state:

“This caused a demographic change there. it became a dead neighborhood of Fatih. It became a place where no one else could enter or leave or find anything except for those who lived there. Sulukule, frankly, we did not go there much when the Romani lived there, but it was interesting to pass through there... It belonged to Fatih and everyone knew that. It was a place where we liked to look around while passing by and we liked to tell many sparkles belonging there.”

However, Romani had to return to the areas around Sulukule due to economic and social difficulties in the areas assigned to them during the process. Their return and resettlement around inner parts of the Fatih district also add new layers to the demographic of the space since the return has reversed the gentrification project. Previously representing a local social group, the community has now expanded throughout Fatih. In this sense, they have been becoming visible in the everyday details of life. On the other hand, the growing presence and visibility of the Romani have elicited reactions among the conservative population of Fatih. This dynamic is reflected in Zeynep’s comments:

¹⁹³ “İstanbul’u Heyecanlandırın Değişim,” ntv.com.tr, accessed October 24, 2024, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/ekonomi/istanbulu-heyecanlandiran-degisim,9sDAYpCydUOCneixAWG1YA>.

“Many of them came to inner neighborhoods like Akşemseddin and Karagumruk, and the Sulukule area became gentrified entirely. This has also brought about a change. For example, Romani people are used to living in detached houses; they are used to a more noisy and crowded lifestyle, but the inner neighborhoods of Fatih are not like that. There are apartment buildings, not detached houses. There is apartment life. However, when the people from Sulukule came, there was an integration process for them. In fact, it was not very easy for both the neighborhood and for them.” (Zeynep)

In this regard, this discussion in urban renewal projects in line with neoliberal governance of the land generates further discussions as land is a fictitious commodity¹⁹⁴ which is not actually a commodity because it is not produced for sale. So, the transformation of land as a commodity by creating the exchange values out of it has been discussed in the sphere of the history of capitalism by critical theorists such as Marx, Polanyi, and Harvey. Although it has belonged to the public sphere, with neoliberal logic, it has transformed in the privatization process by the hegemonic power relations. At the expense of the interest of capital holders whose capital has been enriched by transforming urban space into construction zones and diminishing the rights of ordinary citizens, particularly low-income and disadvantaged people.¹⁹⁵ So, already disadvantaged people become even more disadvantaged, and for the already high-income owners of certain capitals, the advantaged spaces become open to step further in their situation of business, investments, and economic wealth. It emphasizes the central feature of cities as a way of reproducing neoliberalism in that cities are used in short-term forms of interspatial competition, place-marketing, and regulatory undercutting in order to attract investments and jobs.¹⁹⁶ The fundamental mission of the neoliberal state is the idea that bigger lands and shorter time are the best to facilitate conditions for profitable capital accumulation at national and international levels.¹⁹⁷ Socio-spatial discrimination and exploitation by giving the example of 'urban regeneration projects' that have been considered a main tool for transforming urban poor sites since the early 2000s. The criticism claims that the main outcome of this

¹⁹⁴ Karl Polanyi, “The Self-Regulating Market and the Fictitious Commodities: Labor, Land, and Money,” essay, in *The Great Transformation* (Beacon Press, 1994), 71–80.

¹⁹⁵ Brenner and Theodore, "Cities and the Geographies," 138–47.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, September 22, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199283262.001.0001>.

approach to 'urban regeneration' has been, in practice, the displacement of low-income households through an increase in real estate values and (forced) eviction, therefore increasing substantial inequality, violation of social rights, poverty, social exclusion, spatial segregation, persistent social insecurity, and homelessness.¹⁹⁸ Focusing on short-term benefits and serving the interests of certain groups and institutions results in destructive consequences in long-term social relations as well as economic growth. So, neoliberalism is considered a set of principles oriented toward the concerns of profit and rent in this context. It is exploiting some for the benefit of others. This exploitation is not only on human beings but also on nature itself. The environment is plundered and used for the purpose of its exchange and surplus value.

In addition to the urban renewal projects targeting existing settlements, the emergence of new residential spaces highlights the dual nature of this urban governance model. As noted, many families moved out of Fatih to more luxurious neighborhoods like Basaksehir after reaching a certain economic threshold. This trend reflects broader societal shifts in living preferences and aspirations. During this period, the middle-class population of Fatih has increasingly migrated to newer, more affluent neighborhoods throughout Istanbul, particularly Basaksehir. This migration can be understood as part of a broader neoliberal logic of governance in urban space, where the marketization of housing and urban development has shaped not only the physical landscape but also the preferences and subjectivities of its residents, thereby reshaping residents' preferences for their living environments. The decision to leave Fatih is driven by several factors, including the structural decay of buildings, changing lifestyles, and overcrowding in the area. My respondent Ayşenur's observation about the appeal of Basaksehir in the last decade underscores how new developments can attract those seeking improved quality of life:

“In Fatih, families like my mother's and grandmother's friends generally moved across to more luxurious and beautiful homes after reaching a certain economic level. Many of our relatives left here, either with their children, themselves or as a family. They are native Fatih residents. One of the main reasons for this change was the structural

¹⁹⁸ Binnur Oktem Unsal, “State-Led Urban Regeneration in Istanbul: Power Struggles between Interest Groups and Poor Communities,” *Housing Studies* 30, no. 8 (April 2015): 1299–1316, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2015.1021765>.

deterioration in Fatih, the aging buildings in residential areas, changing lifestyles, and the area's excessive overcrowding. This change began approximately 30 years ago, while Basaksehir became popular in the last 10-15 years.” (Ayşenur)

Neoliberal urban governance not only affects the physical landscape but also shapes the subjectivities of the individuals. As residents of Fatih move into modern neighborhoods, their identities and social status become intertwined with their living conditions. This shift reflects a broader societal trend in which economic capital increasingly determines spatial choices. This is leading to a reconfiguration of community dynamics both in Fatih and in newly popular neighborhoods. Therefore, we can argue that, in the context of Fatih, subjectivity manifests neoliberal subjectivity, which refers to how individuals and communities internalize neoliberal ideologies, often adapting their behaviors to fit market-driven values.¹⁹⁹ Since individual subjectivities become clear when we examine how they engage with the structures, in that regard, I argue that the movement of the middle class from Fatih to gated communities shows the internalization of neoliberal subjectivity as families seek improved living conditions, security, and status in more affluent areas. Fatih, subjected to pressures of commodification and gentrification, has pushed its residents to engage with market-driven housing solutions. This transformation is not merely about economic factors but reflects a shift in social behaviors and aspirations, where urban spaces are increasingly defined by privatization, individualism, and consumerism. As families moved, citing reasons such as overcrowding, aging infrastructure, and changing lifestyles, they engaged with these neoliberal processes by choosing privatized and exclusive residential spaces over traditional community-oriented living. This reflects the desire for security and comfort, all hallmarks of neoliberal subjectivity. This is the drive for individuals to self-regulate within the market system. This spatial reconfiguration, driven by market incentives and individualistic desires, exemplifies how neoliberalism shapes urban subjectivities. The reflections from long-time Fatih residents, Fetih, illustrate the significant shifts in urban living preferences that accompany the move to newer neighborhoods like Basaksehir:

¹⁹⁹ Cihan Tuğal, "Serbest Meslek Sahibi": Neoliberal Subjectivity among Istanbul's Popular Sectors," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 46 (2012): 65–93, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0896634600001515>.

“People are looking for two or three things: A place to park a car. You will not find a place to park a car in Fatih; it is impossible because the city was built according to medieval times. Alternatively, people are looking for the following: if they are well-off, let me live in a detached house, a house with a garden, etc. If it is a little lower middle segment, let me live in housing estates, like TOKI housing estates, etc. Let children grow up in a closed area, and let him/her go home to school in front of me. When something happens, no stranger should come in. Let him live in that controlled mechanism. Let me park my car. Let me take my child to the park when he gets bored. People look for practical and pragmatic solutions. Normal human behavior is already inclined to this. These opportunities are more in places like Basaksehir.” (Fetih)

This shift towards security, control, and comfort, exemplified by gated communities, showcases the growing influence of neoliberal urbanization. It also mirrors a global trend of middle-class retreat into privatized, isolated spaces—away from older urban centers' perceived chaos and inconvenience. As mentioned in the quote, the desire for a practical, pragmatic lifestyle based on security, parking, and ease of movement is a reflection of the neoliberalization of urban preferences, where controlled mechanisms and privatized amenities are valued above communal life in historically rich but infrastructurally challenging areas like Fatih.

However, subjectivity introduces its own complexities. It involves the nuances of personal identities, where external structures do not simply mold individuals but engage with them actively through a form of self-governance.²⁰⁰ So, this perspective highlights that although structures and social conditions influence people, individuals still manage to assert their identities and agency. They navigate and even critique the very structures they are a part of. This ambivalence is evident in the story of my respondent, Mehmet, who moved from Fatih to Basaksehir five years ago. He recognizes the material advantages of living in Basaksehir, which represents neoliberal urban governance with its spacious, organized environment and modern amenities. Yet, he also expresses a solid attachment to Fatih:

²⁰⁰ Sherry B. Ortner, “Subjectivity and Cultural Critique,” *Anthropological Theory* 5, no. 1 (March 2005): 31–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499605050867>.

“I have been living in Basaksehir for 4-5 years, but I come here(Fatih) every day. I stay there only on Sunday. I hardly spent that day there. The man who gets used to Fatih does not stop anywhere. My house is still here. It's rented, next to the mosque. You can see from one flat to the other here. We went to Basaksehir. It's open, spacious and cozy. It's easy to come and go. You can't park the car here. At first, all the rich people) sold their home and left Fatih. I was angry about how they left here. Then, they had the means and money to live comfortably. We couldn't find such a suitable apartment here.” (Mehmet)

His sense of belonging to Fatih, despite their move, demonstrates the paradox of neoliberal subjectivity. While they criticize the wealthy for abandoning Fatih for more comfortable living conditions, they ultimately realize that their own decision to move was similarly shaped by pragmatic concerns—space, ease, and access—typical of neoliberal decision-making. This reveals how subject formation under neoliberalism operates within a contradictory domain, where people are both agents and critics of the systems they navigate. Moreover, his admission that they come back to Fatih every day, leaving them feeling disconnected from Basaksehir, further illustrates the ambivalence embedded in this subjectivity. While their material conditions might improve, their sense of identity and attachment remains rooted in their original space. So, they remain aware of the loss of communal ties and the cultural shifts occurring in spaces like Fatih. This dynamic highlights how subjectivity is not static but is continually negotiated in response to the material and emotional demands of urban life under neoliberalism. The decision to move may be rational in economic terms, but it is also laden with social, cultural, and emotional complexities that reveal the limits of neoliberal rationality.

In conclusion, from this broader perspective, we can argue that the production of space in Fatih is related to a multi-layer process with the historical development of governmental logic in it. This chapter illustrates the need for an understanding of urban dynamics that accounts for the multifaceted processes influencing the lives of both long-term residents and newcomers, emphasizing that space is not merely a backdrop for social interactions, but a dynamic entity shaped by power relations and socio-political contexts.

CHAPTER V

EVERYDAY LIFE AND SOCIAL SPACE IN TODAY'S FATIH

After discussing all the multi-layer dynamics in shaping and transforming the space in Fatih, this chapter builds on the previous discussion to explore how it is presently being produced and how people's perceptions and uses of space are continuously reproduced through everyday practices. In this chapter, I analyze the ways in which Syrian migrants and Turkish/Kurdish residents contribute to and experience the area's contemporary social fabric. By examining everyday practices and shared environments, we can evaluate the degree to which the habits and spatial practices of these two groups converge or diverge, thus highlighting the evolving character of Fatih as influenced by the intersection of local and migrant practices. Thus, by examining these encounters and interactions, I also demonstrate how political and social tensions, fueled by anti-immigrant rhetoric and nationalist sentiment, influence daily interactions and perceptions among the existing and new residents. This could clarify that anti-migrant sentiment doesn't just exist as abstract discourse but has real, tangible impacts on the ways people navigate and produce space in Fatih. This shows that anti-immigrant sentiment is more than just abstract discourse; it has real and physical consequences for how people navigate and create space in Fatih.

In this context, the discussion of everyday life is something beyond what basic daily activities are. It includes how and why we do things on a daily basis. According to Lefebvre, everyday practices are more than just individual actions; they reflect and are influenced by power dynamics, discourses, and societal pressures.²⁰¹ Therefore, everyday life is a complex layering of human actions that are not static but are subject to constant reproduction, shaped by cultural beliefs, social norms, discourses, and power relations as they are shaped and organized through connections to space.

²⁰¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 229-234

Consequently, spatial relationships and the creation of spaces involve social production, embodied experiences, and discursive practices.²⁰² Furthermore, everyday life serves as both a setting for and an outcome of spatial production, which is shaped by evolving spatial codes that transition from the mental to the social domain. This dynamic process changes not only how people perceive and use spaces, but also how they interact with one another within these spaces.²⁰³ These elements mean that the production of space is an ongoing process, where physical spaces are continuously imbued with new meanings and uses as people interact with them. While spaces are influenced by discourses, they also take on new meanings through their interactions with people, leading to their reproduction. In essence, space can be seen as both a constructive force and a construct, shaped by the social, political, and economic relationships of various actors. As Lefebvre suggests, space is not just created and constructed, but is also continuously produced and reproduced through attributions, experiences, emotions, and relationships.²⁰⁴ As a result, he conceptualizes it as being produced across practical, discursive, and symbolic dimensions. Since it is not a passive locus of social relationships, it is embedded in three inseparable dimensions including physical, social, and mental relationships. So, when we think about space, we should consider physical space, the mental construct of space, and the social relationship that exists in space. We create or produce an environment and this environment recreates us and molds us.

So, Lefebvre's "conceptual triad" categorizes these dimensions as perceived space, conceived space, and lived space, each of which offers a unique way of understanding and interacting with our surroundings.²⁰⁵ These correspond to the following respectively:

²⁰²Low Setha, *Spatializing Culture: An Engaged Anthropological Approach to Space and Place*. 2014. In *The People, Place, and Space Reader*. J. Gieseeking, W. Mangold, C. Katz, S.Low and Saegert, eds. New York and London: Routledge.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 233

²⁰⁴ Lefebvre, 38,39

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 39

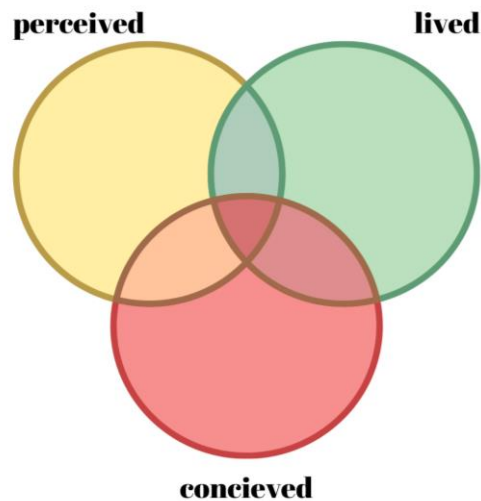


Figure 5.1. Lefebvre's Spatial Triad

- i. Spatial practice, which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of social space, and each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a guaranteed level of competence and a specific level of performance.
- ii. Representations of space, which are tied to the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, and to 'frontal' relations
- iii. Representational spaces, embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art (which may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational spaces)²⁰⁶

Perceived space (Spatial Practice), therefore, represents the physical and material elements of everyday life in space. That is, what is observable and usable in daily routines. Conceived space (Representation of Space) includes the planning and design elements shaped by ideologies and representations of power including scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers, and social engineers identifying what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived.²⁰⁷ Finally, lived space

²⁰⁶ Ibid.,33

²⁰⁷ Ibid.,38

(Representational Space) embodies the symbolic and experiential aspects, where personal and collective meanings, memories, and identities interact with the environment.²⁰⁸ In this regard, perceived space and lived spaces are mainly connected to the everyday life of people. The evolving perceptions and interactions between Turkish/Kurdish and Syrian communities in Fatih demonstrate this production of space and show how space is created through daily practices. Consuming local foods, socializing, and attending religious events are examples of how these communities interact with and shape space on a daily basis.

A poignant example of these intersecting dynamics is the “Eating Istanbul” episode on TRT World, where Fatih was labeled as “Little Syria.”²⁰⁹ In 2022, the Turkish state's international broadcaster shared a video on a trip to Fatih's Malta Bazaar on its social media accounts YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. In the video, the presenter shows the area of emerging Arabic food places in an informative and casual way.²¹⁰ Showing how to spend 30\$ in Little Syria where there are Syrian foods, snacks, desserts, and anything related to Syrian cuisine, the video mentions that many Syrians have settled and established their communities in some of the Fatih's neighborhoods and brought their own cultural elements including foods, cultural belongings, language, and even smells. In fact, this video is one of the episodes of a video series called “Eating Istanbul”, in which different restaurants, different budgets, and different meals were eaten and broadcasted in different episodes including Afghan, Yemeni, and Uyghur cuisines. However, when the focus shifted to Syrian cuisine in Fatih, it provoked a significant backlash.²¹¹ After a flow of reactions, from citizens to political party members, following this episode, accusing the video of being an enemy of Turkey and this comparison is not representing the reality as Fatih is a Turkish space, the video was first taken off the air and then the video series was stopped.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 38-41

²⁰⁹ “TRT’Nin Paylaştığı ‘istanbul’un Küçük Suriye’sinde 30 Dolar Nasıl Harcanır?’ Videosuna Tepkiler Yağıyor - Dailymotion Video,” Dailymotion, March 26, 2022, <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x89dzfn>.

²¹⁰ “Little Syria - Fatih,” YouTube, accessed November 4, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHEDImn0COo>.

²¹¹ “TRT World’ün “küçük Suriye” ifadesi sosyal medya gündeminde -”, accessed November 2, 2024, <https://www.diken.com.tr/trt-worldun-kucuk-suriye-ifadesi-sosyal-medya-gundeminde/>.

On the one hand, the video recording, representing Fatih as “Little Syria” and the discourse as well as the displays including migrant foodscapes and communal settlements is a public display of how Fatih's spaces have been changing and how new kinds of socio-spatial use indicates the dense existence of Arab communities in Istanbul's city center. Not only have shops that once belonged to local settled Turkish people been replaced by Arab migrants' shops, but also homes, the living spaces have been replaced by the immigrants. That is, Fatih has become attractive for those other than Turkish citizens to settle in as the Turkish state's most interactive province of Istanbul with its densely populated structure and major state institutions. In addition, Having witnessed this social change with changes in population, social relations, and texture in its spaces, Fatih has transformed by the process of the different layers of space production. So, Istanbul's city center has dramatically witnessed social transformations in its social fabric, population dynamics, and urban space as discussed in detail in the previous chapters. On the other hand, the reaction to the video highlights a tension between the evolving identity of Fatih and the perceptions of Turkey's society. So, the feeling of being disturbed by this video reflects Turkish people's anti-sentiments against Syrian immigrants, with Arabic-related elements and their understanding of space which is related to nationhood, and Turkishness. Reactions against the association of space with certain ethnic groups significantly highlight social and political discussions over space production. Indeed, this incident underscores how the production of space in Fatih is not just shaped by the physical and social presence of local inhabitants, and Syrian migrant dwellers, but also by the contestation of cultural narratives, local identities, and national politics. For Syrian migrants, Fatih is a place of refuge, familiarity, and settlement. It is here that cultural elements such as food, language, and religion can develop. For others, however, this changing landscape is seen as a challenge to the traditional national identity of the district. The removal of the video and the cancellation of the series reflect broader anxieties about migration, cultural integration, and the transformation of urban spaces in Turkey. Furthermore, Fatih's social and spatial landscape is actively reshaped by discriminatory practices and exclusionary rhetoric, which are frequently driven by political agendas and designate particular spaces as belonging to particular groups. The Syrian migrant governance is at the forefront of Turkish politics due to Turkey's role as the primary host for the largest refugee population, and a general belief that Syrian migrants are a

contributing factor to Turkey's economic and social problems.²¹² The migrant population is frequently used as a focal point for discussions on social stability, public resources, and job opportunities. As a result, political discourse increasingly frames migration as a national and security concern.²¹³ Because migrants are occasionally used as scapegoats for more significant structural problems, this political framing has increased social tensions.²¹⁴ An increasingly hostile environment for refugees and immigrants has been created by the political sphere's anti-immigrant sentiment, which has exacerbated racist and discriminatory attitudes toward migrants in society. Political parties frequently use exclusionary rhetoric, portraying immigrants as threats to national unity and sovereignty, especially those with right-wing populist agendas.²¹⁵ This narrative presents migrants as the "other"- a source of threat to security, economic, and social well-being.²¹⁶ In addition to portraying migrants as essentially incompatible with a homogenous nation-state, these discourses serve to perpetuate negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes in the general public. These political narratives foster xenophobic and racist viewpoints by portraying migrants as a threat to the country's identity and well-being. As social tensions increase, these viewpoints permeate everyday interactions. As a result, migrants face discrimination and marginalization on a daily basis. Social media's growing role in spreading these narratives serves to normalize and strengthen anti-immigrant sentiment by portraying racism and xenophobia as socially acceptable reactions rather than damaging prejudices.²¹⁷ In this context, the Turkish far-right political party, Zafer Party, which has built a large part of its discourse on anti-immigrant sentiment and has argued that Syrian refugees should be expelled from Turkey,²¹⁸ is the main political party that is most active in bringing the issue of Syrian refugees to the forefront of political discourse, leveraging this stance to galvanize support among segments of the Turkish

²¹² Taner Deniz and İnci Aksu Kargın, "Twitter'da Göçmen-Karşıtı Söylemlerin Yükselişi: Zafer Partisi Örneği," *Göç Dergisi*, 2, 10 (November 2023): 217, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33182/gd.v10i2.867>.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Didem Daniş and Hilal Dikmen, "Türkiye'de Göçmen ve Mülteci Entegrasyonu: Politikalar,, Uygulamalar Ve Zorluklar," *İstanbul Ticaret Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 21, no. Özel Sayı (November 11, 2022): 38, <https://doi.org/10.46928/iticusbe.1106715>.

²¹⁵ Yannis Stavrakakis, "The Return of 'the People': Populism and Anti-Populism in the Shadow of the European Crisis: Return of 'the People':," *Constellations* 21, no. 4 (December 2014): 505–17, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12127>.

²¹⁶ Emre Erdoğan and Pınar Uyan Semerci, "Scapegoats to Be 'Served Hot': Local Perceptions About Syrians in a Fragile Context," *Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security* 8 (2020): 28–52.

²¹⁷ Deniz and Kargın, "Twitter'da Göçmen-Karşıtı Söylemlerin Yükselişi: Zafer Partisi Örneği,"

²¹⁸ Ibid.

population that feel economically or culturally threatened by the presence of migrants. Since the party's primary rationale is that Syrian refugees negatively impact Turkey's economy and constitute an economic burden, it suggests that the presence of refugees exacerbates issues like unemployment, housing shortages, and inflation.²¹⁹ This narrative reinforces anti-immigrant sentiment among its supporters. Also even if these narratives are not directly embraced by the masses, there is a risk that they will take root in people's minds.²²⁰ Since Fatih is one of the places where Syrian migrants are most visible in the public sphere, eyes are often turned here. Zafer Party's visits to Fatih attract attention with its reactions towards Syrian shopkeepers, especially in Malta Bazaar.²²¹ For example, during a visit to Malta Bazaar by Hande Karacasu, the Fatih mayoral candidate of ZP for the 31 March 2024 local elections, her angry remarks against a shopkeeper whom she claimed to be Syrian attracted attention.²²² Karacasu shared this situation on her social media accounts and claimed that the shop owner was Syrian and described her behavior as a 'social experiment. However, it was later revealed that the shop owner was actually from Siirt and a former civil servant.²²³ This example shows how misleading anti-immigrant discourses can be and how they serve to perpetuate a racist agenda by easily ignoring the facts. Karacasu's posts provide a striking example of how lies and misinformation can be perpetuated even after the truth is revealed.

In fact, it is possible to give many examples of the increasing collective racist discourse against Syrians, actually going beyond the discursive practices and leading to harmful consequences including direct physical impacts on individuals and communities. In June 2024, Turkish citizens in Kayseri province, carried out violent assaults on Syrian

²¹⁹ Ibid.,

²²⁰ Emel Kökpınar Kaya, Emre Yağlı, and Yeliz Demir, "Twitter'Da Suriyelileri 'Öteki' Olarak Çerçeveleyen Bakış Açıları ve Bunları Destekleyen Savlar," *Dilbilim Araştırmaları Dergisi* 33, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 281–304, <https://doi.org/10.18492/dad.1119978>.

²²¹ "Fatih Esnafı Özdağ'a Dert Yandı;"KepenK Kapatıyoruz!" - Zafer Partisi Resmi Web Sitesi," Zafer Partisi Resmi Web Sitesi - Bilim Birlik Barış, April 4, 2022, <https://zaferpartisi.org.tr/fatih-esnaf-ozdaga-dert-yandikepenk-kapatiyoruz/>.

²²² You can access: "Hande Karacasu on Instagram: 'fatih'te Suriye Çarşısı Diye Anılan Malta Çarşısı'nda Beni Gören Esnaf, "Göndereceğiz" Dediğimde "İnşallahhhh" Çekiyor.," Instagram, accessed November 2, 2024, https://www.instagram.com/hande_karacasu/reel/C372ov0NNik/. or "Zafer Partili Hande Karacasu'nun Sosyal Medyada Gündem Olan Esnaf Ziyareti!," T24, accessed November 2, 2024, <https://t24.com.tr/video/zafer-partili-hande-karacasu-nun-sosyal-medyada-gundem-olan-esnaf-ziyareti,59446>.

²²³ Serbestiyet, "Zafer Partili Adayın İrkçi 'Sosyal Deneyi'Nde Son Durum: Esnaf Suriyeli Değil Siirtli Çıktı," Serbestiyet, March 3, 2024, <https://serbestiyet.com/haberler/zafer-partili-adayin-irkci-sosyal-deneyinde-son-durum-esnaf-suriyeli-degil-siirtli-cikti-159154/>.

refugees, setting fire to their properties and vandalizing their vehicles in the streets. Amidst the tension, demonstrators shouted slogans calling for the deportation of all Syrians back to their home country.²²⁴ This conflict is characterized as the largest violent protest against Syrians in Turkey. As the Turkish interior minister explains the mobilization of the assault was mostly by the manipulative, negative, and unrealistic posts made by bot accounts:

“There is a process of provocation on the migrant issue, especially on social media. The rate of bot accounts increased to 38 percent. This is the highest rate I have seen since I took office. The rate of negative posts also broke a record. It exceeded 68 percent.”

The minister stated that 855 individuals were detained in Kayseri, with 13 of them being arrested. He emphasized that among those detained, 468 had criminal records for 50 different offenses, including human trafficking, intentional injury, robbery, theft, sexual abuse, threats, insults, drug-related crimes, property damage, fraud, and extortion.²²⁵ So, we can also deduce that the high crime rate among perpetrators of anti-migrant violence reflects the existing criminal elements of such violent protests, fuelled by social and economic grievances and exacerbated by misinformation on social media. On the other hand, in August 2021, anti-refugee sentiment reached a stage in Altındağ, Ankara, where crowds attacked Syrians’ homes and businesses. A few months after this incident, in October 2021, several Syrians who posted videos of themselves eating bananas on TikTok were detained and risked deportation after government authorities accused them of ‘inciting or insulting the public to hatred and hostility’.²²⁶ So, all these examples show that the anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiment has been on the rise in society. And, this sentiment has transcended mere discourse, manifesting in harmful and violent attacks. My Syrian respondent Rami gives the example of these violent racist attitudes while also emphasizing that these

²²⁴ Kayseri Olayları ve Suriyeli Mülteciler: Toplumsal Krizler ..., accessed November 2, 2024, <https://teyit.org/ekipten/kayseri-olaylari-ve-suriyeli-multeciler-toplumsal-krizler-bilgi-akisini-nasil-etkiliyor>.

²²⁵ “Bakan Yerlikaya: Kayseri’de 855 Şahıs Gözaltına Alındı, Bunların 13’ü Tutuklandı,” Anadolu Ajansı, accessed November 2, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/bakan-yerlikaya-kayseride-855-sahis-gozaltina-alindi-bunlarin-13u-tutuklandi/3266927>.

²²⁶ Danış and Dikmen, “Türkiye’de Göçmen ve Mülteci Entegrasyonu: Politikalar,, Uygulamalar Ve Zorluklar,”

kinds of racism emerged recently, not at the beginning of their arrival. So, what we see is the influences of these kinds of political discourse on society.

“The people of Fatih were more sincere towards foreigners, they embraced them. There was no antagonism or racism. It was quite normal at first. There was no problem. There was neighborliness. There was an understanding that newcomers should work and earn, but now it has turned into an understanding that ‘they earn money yet I cannot work’. For example, we had a neighbor. He was a barber here at the back. He had two children. They were walking around the neighborhood, they were beaten by a group just because they were speaking in Arabic. They were beaten to death, they were taken to the hospital. Such things are happening. It didn’t used to be, but now because of social media, the Turks here have also started to change.”

The instrumentalization of refugees by politics plays an important role in the escalation of social tensions.²²⁷ Especially during the May 2023 general elections, the issue of refugee return became the focus of intense debates in the political arena. In this process, the opposition group, Nation Alliance (Millet İttifakı), carried out an election program advocating the return of refugees, either compulsorily or voluntarily.²²⁸ By arguing that the large number of migrants and refugees in the country had negative impacts on social issues such as the economy, public services, and national security, it proposed stricter immigration policies, emphasizing the need to tighten control procedures and limit the entry of migrants.²²⁹ The Nation Alliance’s anti-immigrant agenda resonated with those who perceived the presence of migrants and refugees as a threat and burden to national identity, culture, and resources. In this regard, anti-immigration discourse was further strengthened by the fact that the opposition alliance, failed to win a parliamentary majority in the first election. In the second round by running a campaign that appealed more to nationalist sentiments, The Nation Alliance reinforced its stance on immigration, especially with the support of the anti-immigrant Zafer Party.²³⁰ On the government front led by President Erdoğan, the People’s

²²⁷ Ibid.,

²²⁸ Evren Balta, Ezgi Elçi Elçi, and Deniz Sert, rep., *2023 Seçimleri Ve Türkiye’deki Göç Tartışmaları* (İstanbul: Heinrich Böll Vakfı, 2023)

²²⁹ Ibid.,

²³⁰ BBC News, “Özdağ, Kılıçdaroğlu’na Destek Açıkladı: Protokolde ‘İçişleri Bakanlığı’ Sözü Yer Almadı, ‘Kayyum’ Yargı Kararına Bağlandı,” BBC News Türkçe, accessed December 1, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/articles/ceq67j2p216o>.

Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı) adopted a policy that Syrian refugees would not be forcibly returned and that safe return would be ensured over time while emphasizing the concept of religious brotherhood between refugees and the Turkish population.²³¹ At the same time, the party put forward a vaguely defined voluntary repatriation option in its election manifesto.²³² This situation shows that politicians' instrumentalization of migrant and refugee issues for political interests contributes to the reproduction of anti-immigrant sentiments in society. Indeed, it reproduces xenophobia and racism in Turkey. The inability of politicians to offer permanent and reasonable solutions to social problems such as poverty, income inequality, and the weakening of the welfare system paves the way for the spread of anti-refugee discourses.²³³

On the other hand, in Fatih, the socio-cultural distance between the existing and migrant society is gradually widening due to the language barrier between the two cultures, prejudices, the hierarchical positioning of cultures, the uncertainty of migration policies, and the increasing hate speech in society.²³⁴ This social distance manifests itself in food places, social habits, and the language barrier (no Turkish is spoken in most of the Syrian-owned stores) thus these are the areas where space assumes a discriminatory function in the context of space production in Fatih. There is often a noticeable hesitation among local residents to engage with Syrian shops, whether due to unfamiliarity with the products or a perceived disconnect from their own daily routines and preferences. This reluctance—sometimes tied to distance against trying different flavors 'palate conservatism'²³⁵ Or a preference for familiar tastes—creates a boundary between local and migrant communities. My respondent gives her family's example as a distance to different cultural tastes, highlighting that, despite the proximity and intertwining of communities in Fatih, a truly shared living space has yet to emerge:

²³¹ Yılmaz Hava, "*Akışkan Mutfağlar: İstanbul-Fatih'teki Suriye Mutfağında Göç, Yemek ve Kültür İlişkisi*",

²³² You can access to Ak Party's election manifesto: Türkiye Yüzyılı için - Doğru Adımlar, accessed November 2, 2024, <https://www.akparti.org.tr/media/dwyd05pu/tu-rkiye-yu-zyılı-ic-in-dog-ru-adımlar-2023-sec-im.pdf>.

²³³ Hava, "*Akışkan Mutfağlar: İstanbul-Fatih'teki Suriye Mutfağında Göç, Yemek ve Kültür İlişkisi*",

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

“I think a common living space could not be created. For example, my family still does not shop from a Syrian shop. It's not that they don't do it, but there are more local things in their markets, there is nothing to wonder and try from there.” (Zeynep)

On the other hand, Fetih's statement reflects a blend of curiosity and cautious distance toward Syrian food and businesses:

“There is a place that sells Syrian bread. Sometimes I buy from there. I have a traditionally accustomed palate, the Syrian desserts I buy do not suit my palate, for example. Their chicken döner kebab was too greasy for me. I tried it, but I don't eat it all the time. There was nothing in my daily life that I said I started to eat anymore. I go to the shopkeepers I am used to, greengrocers, grocers, dessert shops, butchers, etc.” (Fetih)

Although he has tried some Syrian products, his traditionally accustomed palate and personal preferences draw them back to familiar foods and stores. It demonstrates how eating customs can contribute to a subtle but enduring kind of social distance by reinforcing cultural boundaries, even in minor, daily decisions. However, some particular taste has a reconciling role between the two cultures. My Syrian respondent Zubayr and Ahmad explain their experiences as both working in Syrian restaurants and cafes:

“I have limited relations with Turks. For example, some customers are my neighbors, they come here. Now the Turks are used to it, so they come here. They eat falafel, and hummus.²³⁶ or sandwiches. I speak a little Turkish but we communicate in Turkish. They show understanding, they try to understand what I say. Our children go to school now, their Turkish is better, so we communicate through their translations.” (Zubayr)

“I have Turkish customers, friends, and neighbors, and they are starting to appreciate our culture more. For instance, we share similar desserts, but when they want

²³⁶ Falafel and hummus are two well-known foods associated with Syrian and broader Middle Eastern cuisine.

something with less sugar, they prefer ours, as Turkish baklava and its varieties tend to be sweeter than ours.” (Ahmad)

This reconciliation is taken further when Zeynep and Sena mention that they enjoy a particular Syrian dish, showing that there is an openness to new tastes among the locals.

“They have a bakery in Malta bazaar, they make very delicious croissants. I like to try new things, so I buy different desserts.” (Zeynep)

“I like Arab flavors. I like their food culture from coffee to food culture. As a person from Turkey, I guess my taste is close to theirs. But I don't have many habits in terms of shopping. Maybe a few times I have had the experience of buying coffee from Malta Bazaar. Since most of the students here are Syrians, when there is a need, I ask them or I can fulfill my needs with their gifts.” (Sena)

Zeynep’s willingness to try new things contrasts with the broader trend, emphasizing that openness to Syrian food can vary within the local community. And, despite Sena’s limited shopping habits, her occasional purchases and appreciation of Syrian food culture point to a level of cultural receptivity based on shared culinary preferences rather than regular consumption patterns. These Turkish and Kurdish women's tendencies with Syrian Uzair and Ahmad’s experiences show how everyday interactions, such as sharing a meal or shopping, provide opportunities for small but significant exchanges between locals and newcomers. And also that shows how cultural connections are subtly woven into the fabric of everyday life in Fatih. Thus, food not only serves as a medium of exchange but also helps to reduce prejudice and build familiarity to some extent.

However, the segregation between the two groups also extends to language use. Fatih provides a space where Syrian immigrants can comfortably use their native Arabic without necessarily learning Turkish. They can interact, socialize, and recreate their cultural spaces without linguistic adaptation. So, since Syrians can communicate and conduct daily activities in their native tongue, there is less need for deeper integration

through Turkish, which furthers socio-cultural divisions. Hüda explains this experience:

“When I’m in Fatih, I speak only Arabic because I know that everyone understands me. Others also don’t have to learn Turkish, even if they work here, as there are enough Arabic speakers to communicate with.” (Hüda)

And, Fetih’s perception of this visibility of the Arabic language creates a sense of segregation between the two cultures:

“Firstly, the official language of Fatih is Turkish. A Turkish district and a conquered city. It is actually a representation of Turkish Istanbul. I am not saying that Arabic is not spoken here. But it is not normal that 90% of the signs are in Arabic. The signs should be Turkish. There may be one or two Arabic signs. English, and Arabic are fine. But if 8 out of 10 signs are in Arabic, there is a problem. On the street, children are playing ball, they say Yallah to the one who shoots. One of them speaks Turkish, the others are Arabic, and 8 out of ten children are Arabs. This is not a normal thing. Look, if one of those ten was an Arab, that would be normal. It’s a good thing. It’s a change and it’s necessary. But if 8 of them are Arabs, there is a strange situation.” (Fetih)

He views the predominance of Arabic signage and communication not just as a reflection of demographic change but as a challenge to the Turkish identity that he associates with Fatih. Indeed, seeing language as a marker of belonging reflects a sentiment of displacement and cultural anxiety about the threat to the dominant national identity. It actually underscores the desire to preserve this identity in a space that he sees as inherently Turkish. The fear of a challenge to the cultural and linguistic hegemony of Turkish identity is mainly associated with the nationalist understanding of the space.

However, Muhammad highlights how even minimal knowledge of Turkish can foster shared experiences and interactions across groups:

“I speak a little Turkish with the customers, I greet them in Turkish and I can talk about the food in Turkish. I have Turkish friends but I don't have close friends because my language is weak. I have acquaintances, we stop and greet each other when we meet on the street, but I have no direct close friends because of the language barrier.”

Although a common language can bridge divisions and foster real social ties, the limited use of Turkish among Syrians in Fatih quietly maintains limits between the two groups.

On the other hand, local discomfort and a redefining of social interactions are caused by the transformation of certain public spaces that once catered to particular Turkish traditions into new cultural practices and routines brought by migrants. As Fetih further reflects on his experiences of losing his sense of national identity—his nostalgia for the group rituals surrounding Eid prayers at Fatih Mosque shows a deep bond with his cultural identity, which is currently overshadowed by the shifting local demographics:

“I have been performing my Eid prayers at the Emir Buhari Mosque since I was a child. I get up in the morning, I go to the mosque, from there I go to the Fatih Mosque, I visit the tomb of Mehmed the Conqueror, I pass by my primary school (stone school), I buy a newspaper, I buy bread, etc. and I walk around. When I go up to Fatih Mosque for Eid prayer, I don't see any Turks anymore. And the culture of dispersing and eating there is completely gone. There is not a single Turk. I go to Fatih Mosque. Whoever you call Mehmed the Conqueror is one of the greatest fathers of this state. Now Free Syria is unfurling the flag. I mean, it's the Fatih mosque, brother. Open your flag, and do whatever you want, but on the day of the feast, it's not your square. You can hang it in your house, I'm not saying anything about it. Yes, they went through hard times, they were bombed, etc. but there are no Turks in the Fatih mosque on the morning of Eid. This is abnormal.” (Fetih)

A broader sense of loss and discomfort is reflected in the absence of Turks around the mosque and the transition to new cultural practices. In fact, this suggests that one's understanding of migration, citizenship, and nationalism has a significant role in shaping one's sense of place and belonging. This suggests that because they are

grounded in nationalist discourses, they feel a stronger sense of ownership over certain spaces—not only physical authority, but also a sense of claim over how these spaces should be used and experienced. Ayşenur, on the other hand, reflects the fear and anxiety of losing her national and cultural identity:

“For instance, there's a bakery run by Lebanese people where I occasionally buy bread because I enjoy it. I don't discriminate against them for not being Turkish. However, I do worry about the future. I wonder if our people and our nation will still be represented. It feels like foreigners are multiplying, and soon they might outnumber us. I question whether we are becoming a minority. I have a concern about alienation; if the influx of migrants becomes overwhelming in a short period, it creates problems. Adaptation is not easy to accept, but if changes occur gradually, it feels less pronounced and more natural—just as we are moving to Europe, they are coming here. Nevertheless, I believe there should be some form of quota. It's akin to trying to fit 40 apartments into a building designed for 20. Fatih is already a very crowded district, but I'm not inherently opposed to foreigners.” (Fetih)

Ayşenur grapples with the fear of the potential for her national community to become a minority. There is a selective openness to migration reception; on the one hand, acceptance and appreciation of migrants to some extent, while on the other, the fear of loss of national identity. This duality reflects the complex emotions surrounding migration, where the recognition of the contributions of migrants coexists with anxieties about cultural dilution and the transformation of social landscapes. It also shows how power dynamics, such as nationalist sentiments and anti-immigrant discourses, are enacted in daily life and manifest in the way that space is perceived, inhabited, and contested.

Nevertheless, the social transformation is perceived also positively, seeing improvements in the cultural atmosphere around Malta Bazaar and the embodiment of religious activities. For instance, the same person expressing anxiety about the future of the space as it may lose national identity, Ayşenur notes how the marketplace in the Malta Bazaar has become more elegant and sophisticated under Syrian ownership, reflecting a new level of care and presentation. This change contrasts with the previous more austere shopfronts and emphasizes the enhanced visual appeal brought by Syrian

businesses. These businesses also are perceived as an economic contribution to the national economy. Veysel, the owner of a delight store in Malta, employs Syrian workers, noting Syrians are the contributor to economic growth in this space:

“Syrians have been very beneficial to us. My son produces wallpaper, and he says he can't find enough workers. They struggle to find people to employ. Syrians come here, they work, they open businesses. They contribute to the country; they pay VAT, taxes, and rent. Without these people, our economy would be very bad. It would be zero. I don't believe that Fatih has turned into Syria. Those who don't want Syrians here are the ones saying that.” (Veysel)

However, it should also be emphasized that the informal economy, including undocumented employment and unregistered businesses, remains significant in Fatih.²³⁷ In fact, this unregulated economic participation of Syrian migrants is not only prominent in Fatih but is also a broader issue across Turkey that affects the integration of Syrian refugees into the national labor market.²³⁸

In this economically and socially changing context, Mehmet and Sena add a religious dimension to the appreciation of change in space. Mehmet says that he felt as if he had moved to a street in the holy city of Medina, admiring the cleanliness and respectful atmosphere. He also notes that Syrians are a strength for education and religious learning, reinforcing the intellectual sphere in religious teachings. For them, the evolving market and the influx of Syrian businesses means not only economic growth but also a deeper sense of cultural and spiritual enrichment.

“Syrians are very good teachers and scholars. We know them. Whether in universities, there are trained scholars. We guide them. We say they can give lessons to children.” (Mehmet)

Sena finds attractive a more public display of the Muslim identity after Syrians' settlements:

²³⁷ Hava, 125

²³⁸ Onur Bayrakçı, “Kayıtdışı Çalışma ve Suriyeli Sığınmacı İşçiler,” *Motif Akademi Halk Bilimi Dergisi*, November 24, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.12981/mahder.1317670>.

“There were things that they added to our culture and life. That is to say, no matter how much we are Muslims, even if Islam is written on our identity card, our contact with the Quran is not very visible. When we open our shops in the morning, nothing is listened to or music is switched on, etc. In other words, we adopt a more secular life outside, on the street. When the Syrians came and established dominance, especially in Malta, I could hear the Quran from the shops when I passed there in the morning. People do not see any problem in showing their Muslimness.” (Sena)

They both see the active presence of Syrian Muslims as reinforcing the Islamic character of the area. Another space where the impact of Syrians' presence is particularly visible is in the mosques. Syrians are not merely attendees; they participate actively, organizing religious gatherings, and prayers, and involving their families and children in mosque life. This active participation has transformed mosques into vibrant communal spaces where local traditions as well as Syrian cultural and religious practices are expressed. It also creates a sense of familiarity and converging practices for both groups. Zeynep shares her observations on the active participation of Syrians in mosque life and thus the common experiences between the two groups as follows.

“At Mihrimah Sultan Mosque, there was the Delalul Hayrat reading session– a book of Salawat²³⁹– It was organized by Syrians. My mother was very interested and went. When she arrived, she found out that a sheik from Syria had come and he led the prayer. My mother said it was very beautiful, and there were children as well. She added that Syrians bring their children to the mosque more often, which is a good thing. So, these kinds of interactions happen from time to time.” (Zeynep)

The symbolic significance of the intersection between religion and space in terms of gender must be emphasized, as gender is not only based on the “perceived differences” between the sexes but also serves as a means of signifying “power differentials”.²⁴⁰ In this regard, from the perspective of "relationships of power," socially constructed and culturally maintained dimensions of gender, with its effects permeating various

²³⁹ It is a collection of invocations and praises that Muslims recite to express their love and respect for the Prophet.

²⁴⁰ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1067, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1864376>.

aspects of life, including law, politics, education, religion, and everyday practices,²⁴¹ reflects how relationships defined by gender change in relation to spatial and temporal factors, making gender intricately connected to the production of space. In this regard, performing religious practices in mosques or division of labor in the workplace are gendered phenomena. When Syrian migrants began settling in Fatih, it influenced how local women engaged with religious spaces. This shift led to changes in women's bodily practices within mosques. My interviews with local women, who are Muslim and regularly perform their religious duties, reveal how their relationship with the mosques has changed following the arrival of Syrian women. They argue that, since their arrival, they find it easier to perform religious practices in mosques, that is to be visible there, particularly during prayer times. They underline that the male-dominated structure of religious spaces, the mosques, is changing due to the visible presence of Syrian women. These women, often accompanied by their children, are collectively present both inside and outside mosques, challenging the traditional male-centered allocation of space. This collective presence disrupts the implicit hierarchy that previously favored men in these religious spaces. For example, my respondents note that they no longer face the "mad and condescending" attitudes from men, expressed through glances, body language, verbal communication, or silence, that once made them feel unwelcome and uncomfortable. The men, they argue, now recognize that they cannot easily suppress or dismiss the increasing number of women who wish to pray. The numerical presence of these women, alongside a kind of unconscious solidarity, has empowered them to resist these exclusionary behaviors, creating a more inclusive and accessible environment for women in mosques. Although these local women do not explicitly express their discomfort with the predominantly male-oriented structure of the mosque, their satisfaction after the arrival of Syrian women is evident. They now find it easier to enter and exit the mosques, which has made them feel more comfortable and welcomed in these religious spaces.

At first glance, it might seem that it's because Syrian women are praying in mosques in their homeland and have settled in a place like Fatih, which is rich in religious spaces, they simply continue these cultural practices in such a district, but my interviews with Syrian women revealed that this assumption does not fully reflect the

²⁴¹ Ibid.

reality. During my interviews, Syrian women stated that they rarely went to mosques in Syria and usually performed their prayers at home. Also, when I asked them about the gendered division of labor among Syrian businesses in Fatih and mentioned that almost all the businesses I visited had only male employees, I received the response that this was a continuation of the gender understanding in their home country. One of the clearest statements reflecting this situation in working life can be seen in the following words of Hüda:

“I’m studying gastronomy, okay? I want to work, but I realize that I can’t work in Arab restaurants, why? Because there is such a perception. No matter how modern the restaurant is, even if it is fine dining, all the people working in the kitchen and in the background are men. I want to work and gain experience. There are very good Arab restaurants here, but no one employs women. Once I tried to go to see if I could work, they looked at me strangely. They said this job is not for you, it is not suitable for you.”
(Hüda)

This, in fact, reveals how women's position in the public sphere is shaped by the intersection of religious and traditional norms with culture. For example, in this context, the use of mosques can be considered only as a micro-component of Syrian women's visibility in the public sphere. In general, women who do not prefer or are not allowed to go out to work, shop or socialize, naturally do not feel the practical need to pray in the mosque.

If they go to the mosque, they fulfill their religious practices in this way by entering through special doors where the entrances are completely separated from men. Although this male-female segregation shows some similarities with the mosques in Turkey as there are sometimes different doors for women and men, it is understood that mosque practices in Syria are much stricter in terms of gender segregation. For example, one of my interviewees stated that women cannot enter the main part of the mosque in Syria, not only to worship but even to see or observe the inside of the mosque. But she shared that she has walked around the main parts of several mosques in Istanbul, something that would be unthinkable in Syria. It was also emphasized that important religious duties, such as Friday prayers, were not allowed to be performed

by women in the mosque.²⁴² Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, it's also the case for Turkey as in the previous discussion mentioned above about local women residents' discomfort for entering the mosque, and it's a topic that has sparked public debate. That is, for example, The Women in Mosques Platform raises concerns about the conditions of the women's areas in mosques, which are often situated in the rear and are perceived as unclean, cramped, poorly lit, and lacking ventilation. They criticize both the limited visibility of women in these religious spaces and the disparity in quality between the areas designated for women and those reserved for men.²⁴³ The perspective of women's invisibility in the public sphere can be observed in restaurants in Fatih. Some restaurants have a family section. That is, when men come alone, they sit in a separate area; families or groups of women sit in another section. In other words, men can only enter the women's section with their families. These family sections are usually served by women. The areas where women work and are associated with are shaped by the concept of 'family'. My Syrian interlocutor Şems emphasized that while such sexist segregation is less prevalent in Turkish society, in Syria it is much more pronounced in schools, places of worship, and even at home, and it distances women from common spaces. This clearly demonstrates the impact of religious spatiality on gender roles and the public-private divide in Syria. In addition, cultural and religious perspectives on Syrian women's visibility in the public sphere are also revealed. Şems, who believes that women do not need to pray in the mosque or work in the public sphere, stated that women in Syria are not obliged to take part in such public spaces and are generally kept away from such spaces. This discourse provides an important clue to understanding how existing social norms regarding Syrian women's visibility in public and religious spaces have changed in the post-migration period. These examples show that religious spaces and practices are related to a set of cultural norms that shape women's place in social and public life. As Syrian women migrating to Turkey move their religious practices and experiences in the public sphere to a different spatial and social context, they also renegotiate their cultural identities. At this point, a deeper study can be conducted on how Syrian women re-experience/reproduce their religious and cultural practices in Turkey by

²⁴² In the classical interpretation of Islam, Friday prayers are obligatory only for men. On the other hand, collective worship such as Eid prayers is obligatory for men.

²⁴³ Mehmet Furkan Ören, "Toplumsal Cinsiyet ve Cami: Kadınlar Camilerde Platformu Örneği," *Akdeniz Kadın Çalışmaları ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Dergisi* 6, no. 1 (May 31, 2023): 210–31, <https://doi.org/10.33708/ktc.1167780>.

living in a neighborhood like Fatih. However, in light of the findings of this thesis, it can be stated that the active use of mosques by Syrian women, to the extent that it has created a space where local women can enter mosques more easily—with less exposure to discomfort from men's gazes—is an important reflection of the dynamics that have emerged after migration. The presence of Syrian women in mosques has transformed the social dynamics of these spaces, allowing local women to reshape their religious practices. Mosques have now become spaces not only for worship but also for social interaction and solidarity.

As discussed earlier, the production of space is not only the construction of physical spaces but also the process of reinterpreting these spaces with social and cultural meanings. In this context, we can say that the active participation of Syrian women has enabled mosques to become spaces of unconscious solidarity that spontaneously evolve beyond being merely places of worship. While this transformation has led to the reshaping of the social dynamics of mosques, it has also invited us to question gender norms. The presence of Syrian women has enabled religious spaces to cease to be a space dominated solely by men and has enabled women to take part in these spaces in a more visible and effective manner. Therefore, the participation of Syrian women in mosques, together with local women, has encouraged the renegotiation of the social, cultural, and communal meanings of these spaces. As a result, these new post-migration dynamics are transforming religious spaces for both Syrian and local women, while at the same time increasing women's visibility in the public sphere. This contributes to the reshaping of gender norms in society at large and to the transformation of mosques into more inclusive, social spaces.

While there are positive relations between newcomers and local residents, these interactions continue to be constrained by existing barriers. The nature of their encounters encourages connections shaped by shared spaces where both communities interact, albeit at a limited level. These shared environments, notably mosques, bazaars, and squares, provide opportunities for interaction and cultural exchange. However, the wider socio-political context often hinders the deepening of these relationships due to the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments in Turkish society. Thus, the dynamics of coexistence in Fatih reveal a complex tapestry of cultural exchange and tension.

CHAPTER VI

INTRODUCTION

6.1. General Framework of the Study

This thesis approaches the production of space from a process-oriented perspective, rather than as a static phenomenon, in order to understand social transformation through the debate on migration and space. In this context, it aims to reveal the intertwined structure of spatial transformation with a series of social, political and economic transformations by analysing multi-layered and multi-actor dynamics through the example of Fatih district. Focusing on Henri Lefebvre's understanding of space, it discusses how space as a dynamic and changing social formation is shaped and reproduced in the case of Fatih, a historically and culturally rich district of Istanbul. Based on Lefebvre's theory of the 'production of space', the historical context and social accumulation of Fatih reveals how this space has gained meaning and transformed itself as a living witness of the history, "lieu de memoire".²⁴⁴ The main contribution of the study is that it sheds light on the dynamics at the intersection of neoliberal policies such as religion, migration, everyday life, self and state administration by treating the production of space as a multi-layered process.

6.2. Key Findings from the Field

Fatih is a settlement that has been historically shaped by the phenomenon of migration and stands out for this characteristic. By hosting different migration processes, it has been confronted with different dimensions of the migration process that Turkey has gone through. From the Byzantine period to the Ottoman period, from the Republican period to the present day, internal and external migration processes have determined the social, cultural and physical identity of this place. It has experienced migration

²⁴⁴ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.

processes that can be roughly divided into external and internal migration, and it has always been one of the central points of this mobility. In the process of Turkey's evolution from a country of outward migration to a country of inward migration, it has been one of the main destinations or transit points for foreign nationals and groups. The internal migration movement in the post-1950 period, caused by Turkey's internal social, political and economic reasons as well as external relations, has also deepened Fatih's relationship with migration. Historically, from Byzantium to the Ottoman Empire, from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey, the phenomenon of migration has become an integral part of Fatih and one of the main elements shaping its basic characteristics. Therefore, migration is already (inherently) a part of Fatih. The settlement of Syrian immigrants in Fatih is an extension of this historical process and reinforces the 'inherent with migration' identity of the space. This study analyses the processes of Syrian migrants' incorporation into the space and their interactions with local residents in the context of the production of space.

This thesis discusses how the Fatih district of Istanbul is produced by the old settlers, Turks and Kurds, and the new settlers, Syrian refugees. With more than 7 million Syrians forced to migrate after the Syrian Civil War, seeking refuge in neighbouring Turkey and settling mostly in Turkey, the question of how forced migration, from what was considered a temporary settlement, has had a deep and lasting impact on the settled life of the Fatih district and symbolically bears the signs of permanent settlement is discussed within the framework of the production of space. By analysing how former residents and new Syrian settlers experience, produce and reproduce space in Fatih, this thesis reveals the multi-layered structure and process of the production of space, emphasising historical accumulation and interactions and social relations.

In order to understand today's spatial production, the dynamics that led to the social transformation that came with the Syrian settlement are analysed, the reasons for the newcomers' choice are examined, as well as the attractiveness of the space, the opportunities it offers, and the social and cultural structure of the space.

At this point, the close connection of the context with the Islamic religion and the cultural, symbolic and practical significance of religion in the public sphere have been emphasised both by the residents and the silhouette of the place. Moreover, Fatih's

identity as a religious space is deeply rooted in its historical development, from its Byzantine Christian past to its central role in Ottoman Islamic culture. During the Byzantine period, Fatih was home to numerous churches and religious institutions, making it a sacred space long before its Islamic conversion. Later, with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople, the area became a symbol of Islamic sovereignty with the construction of iconic mosques, madrasas and complexes such as the Fatih Mosque. This high level of engagement with Islam is not only the main reason for the initial settlement preference of Syrian migrants, but also one of the factors that creates an attractive space for their native Arabic language, which promotes their sense of belonging, security and closeness once settled. The field study, which focused on the immediate surroundings of the Fatih Mosque, shows that both groups perceive Fatih as a place intertwined with religion and history, and that individuals and groups reproduce the space in this sense.

In addition, one of the important findings of the thesis is not only how the interaction of religion at the individual and micro level is part of the production of space, but also how it influences the religious discourses of the government as well as the migration policies implemented by the state, and how some informal civil organisations - with the support of the state - play an active role in this migration management process. Moreover, the way in which the two groups produce space today is largely due to the strong influence of Islam on cultural, symbolic and practical spaces. Thus, Islam functions as a binding element between the two groups in terms of cultural affinity and the use of the Arabic language. For Syrian migrants, religion plays a central role in the construction of their identity in a foreign country, as they emphasise their religious identity as a means of maintaining a sense of belonging, security and cultural affinity in the face of the uncertainties of displacement. In contrast, for Turkish/Kurdish residents, Islam is deeply intertwined with their national and cultural identities, which they express through shared values and an established sense of belonging within the country. It is here that elements such as nationality, cultural values and citizenship reveal the differences that distinguish these groups. In short, how religion permeates the physical, social, political, symbolic and cultural dimensions of space and shapes the experiences and identities of its inhabitants is one of the main debates of this thesis.

Based on Lefebvre's process-based understanding of space, it is impossible to question the production of space without examining the social transformation of space. As a living testimony of history, Fatih has evolved over centuries through the interactions, perceptions and conflicts of various actors, along with changing forms of governance and everyday life, as well as other historically situated and contextual influences, making it a place of memory. Therefore, Fatih, with its deep historical roots, serves as a robust example for studying the production of space through a process-oriented approach.

From this point of view, the factors that have triggered this transformation have been another research point of this thesis. After discussing the reasons for the settlement of Syrian migrants, it will also ask how this space has enabled this settlement and transformation. The management of Syrian migration, self-governance by non-state actors and neoliberal urban governance have both macro and micro effects. Arrival infrastructures - the combination of physical, social and institutional elements that facilitate arrival - are closely linked to governance mechanisms, raising questions about how space enables the reception of migrants and how the mindset of reception practices shapes and is shaped by space. Against this backdrop, the arrival infrastructures established to assist and support Syrian migrants have been significantly shaped by the role of existing residents, civil society organisations (CSOs) and the state, whose actions reflect the interplay between state and self-governance. Here, governance practices examines state and non-state actors and discusses both autonomous and interacting phenomena of self-governance and state governance.

The state's management of Syrian migration and the neoliberal mechanism of urban governance and its macro-level effects have an impact on how space is produced in the specific case of Fatih, enabling social transformation there. Non-state actors, which are not independent of this, are represented by NGOs that provide social services and help migrants overcome related obstacles. The reception of Syrian migrants in Fatih, for example, has been shaped by these overlapping layers of self- and state governance, where NGOs facilitate not only the practical arrival of migrants, but also long-term services for their settlement and active participation in society. The function of NGOs

in Fatih should therefore be seen as an important part of the wider infrastructure of arrival that goes beyond religious and official discourses.

Moreover, the broader effects of neoliberal urban governance on Fatih are another dimension of the production of space. On the one hand, the state's implementation of policies and legal processes related to spatial transformation in line with the logic of neoliberal governance has a significant impact on the production of space, as the Lefebvrian debate emphasises the role of the state in the production of space. On the other hand, as long-term residents affected by neoliberal subjectivity increasingly move out of the district in search of better designed, gated communities, Fatih is also becoming a destination for migrants. This shift reflects how spatial governance under neoliberalism is not only about physical urban planning, but also about how subjects are constituted and reconstituted through market-oriented logics. As power is productive in producing the field of relationality in which subjects take shape, subjects can internalize state control through self-regulation, and in this context governance practices extends beyond state control as individuals and groups internalise and enact state rationalities in their everyday lives.

After examining the multi-layered dynamics that underlie this social transformation and play a role in the production of space, the final discussion of the thesis focuses on how Fatih is produced in its current form. By examining everyday practices and shared environments, the extent to which the habits and spatial practices of the two groups converge or diverge is assessed, highlighting the changing character of Fatih as influenced by the intersection of local and migrant practices. At this point, the place of current discourses and symbolic references and perceptions of Fatih and its place in the anti-immigrant rage through political tensions is also included. This highlights how the production of space in Fatih is shaped not only by the physical and social presence of local residents and Syrian migrants, but also by the contestation of cultural narratives, local identities and national politics. For Syrian migrants, Fatih is a place of refuge, familiarity and settlement, where cultural elements such as food, language and religion can flourish.

However, for those with an anti-immigrant political stance, this changing landscape is seen as a challenge to the district's traditional national identity. Moreover, the

contemporary social and spatial landscape of Fatih is being actively reshaped by discriminatory practices and exclusionary discourses, often driven by political agendas, that designate certain spaces as belonging to certain groups. On the other hand, the socio-cultural distance between the indigenous and immigrant communities in Fatih is widening due to the language barrier between the two cultures, prejudices, the hierarchical positioning of cultures, the uncertainty of migration policies and the increasing hate speech in society. This social distance manifests itself in the places where people eat, in social habits, and in the language barrier (Turkish is not spoken in most of the shops owned by Syrians), and these are the areas where space assumes a discriminatory function in the context of space production in Fatih. Whether due to unfamiliarity with the products or a sense of disconnection from their own daily routines and preferences, there is often a palpable reluctance among locals to engage with Syrian shops. This reluctance - sometimes linked to 'palate conservatism' or a preference for familiar flavours - creates a boundary between local and migrant communities.

On the other hand, the transformation of some public spaces that once catered to specific Turkish traditions into new cultural practices and routines brought in by migrants is causing local discomfort and a redefinition of social interactions. While Fatih reflects on his experience of losing his sense of national identity, his nostalgia for the group rituals surrounding Eid prayers at the Fatih Mosque shows a deep connection to his cultural identity, which is now overshadowed by changing local demographics: There is a selective openness to immigration, with a degree of acceptance and appreciation of immigrants on the one hand, and a fear of loss of national identity on the other. This dichotomy reflects the complex emotions surrounding immigration, where recognition of immigrants' contributions coexists with concerns about cultural dilution and the transformation of social landscapes. It also shows how power dynamics, such as nationalist sentiments and anti-immigrant discourses, are enacted in everyday life and manifest in the way space is perceived, lived and contested.

However, social change is also perceived positively, with improvements in the cultural atmosphere and the embodiment of religious activities around the Malta Bazaar. For example, the Malta Bazaar marketplace has become more elegant and sophisticated

under Syrian ownership, and these businesses are also perceived as making an economic contribution to the national economy. The active presence of Syrian Muslims reinforces the Islamic character of the region, meaning that Syrian businesses are not only a source of economic growth, but also a deeper sense of cultural and spiritual enrichment.

The symbolic significance of the intersection of religion and space in terms of gender also emerges in light of the key findings of the thesis. Gendered practices such as the division of labour and the use of mosques highlight the impact of traditional and religious norms on women's visibility in public spaces. It can be argued that the arrival of Syrian migrants in Fatih has, to some extent, changed local women's relationship with religious spaces, particularly mosques.

The presence of Syrian women in congregations, often with their children, has disrupted traditional male dominance and made local women feel more comfortable and visible during worship. Interviews show that the active participation of Syrian women reduces the exclusionary behaviour of men and makes mosques more inclusive and accessible. Contrary to assumptions, Syrian women emphasised that while they rarely prayed in mosques in their home country due to stricter gender segregation, going to mosques in Turkey represents an important cultural shift. This shift also reflects broader societal norms, as many Syrian women in Fatih face barriers in male-dominated workplaces that reflect gender roles stemming from the cultural and religious framework of their home countries. Mosques, traditionally male-oriented spaces, are transforming into spaces of solidarity and social interaction for women. This migration-induced transformation challenges traditional gender norms and reshapes religious spaces as more inclusive environments. The increased visibility of women in mosques contributes to broader societal changes by encouraging the renegotiation of gender and creating opportunities for both local and Syrian women to redefine their roles in the public sphere.

While there are positive relationships between newcomers and locals, these interactions continue to be constrained by existing barriers. The nature of their encounters fosters relationships characterised by shared spaces where both communities interact, albeit to a limited extent. These shared environments,

particularly mosques, bazaars and squares, provide opportunities for interaction and cultural exchange. However, the wider socio-political context often hinders the deepening of these relationships due to rising anti-immigrant sentiments in Turkish society. The dynamics of coexistence in Fatih thus reveal a complex tapestry of cultural exchange and tension.

6.3. Theoretical Contributions

This thesis makes an important contribution to understanding the multi-layered structure of the production of space by analysing the spatial transformation and social change of Fatih through the axis of religion, migration and governance. The study develops a new perspective on the production of space through the example of Fatih, showing that space is not only a physical phenomenon but also a dynamic structure shaped by historical, social and cultural processes.

The thesis also enriches Henri Lefebvre's theory of the social production of space by reinterpreting it within the framework of religion, migration and governance. The physical, representational and lived dimensions of space are assessed through the settlement practices of Syrian migrants and their relations with the local community, and the determining role of religion in the intersection of these dimensions is analysed. In addition to Lefebvre, Kim Knott's theory of religious space provides a critical framework for understanding how space is reproduced through sacredness and embodied in everyday practices. Fatih's religious identity was shaped not only by physical elements such as mosques, but also by the practices, beliefs and social relations of the people who lived in this space. In this context, Setha Low's theory of the affective dimensions of space has made a significant contribution to understanding migrants' sense of belonging; in particular, it has been used to explain the perception of Fatih as 'home' and 'safe haven'.

The study also provides a critical perspective on the practices of religious solidarity by revealing the role of the Ansar-Muhajir discourse, a discourse of Islamic solidarity, in the production of space, and how this discourse functions as both a unifying and a divisive element. Furthermore, by analysing the impact of neoliberal policies on space, the thesis reveals the transformative effects of the state's market-oriented urbanisation

policies on individuals and communities. In this context, Fatih is analysed not only as a living space, but also as a complex social space, interwoven with religious, historical and cultural meanings. The spatial practices of Syrian migrants have made visible the intersections of cultural codes, belief systems and state policies. This offers a new perspective for understanding how migrants transform Fatih into a space of meaning.

6.4. Recent Developments in Syria and Future Research Topics

About a month before my thesis defence, new developments in Syria began to dominate global headlines. On 27 November 2024, a surprise offensive launched by opposition forces against the Assad regime in Aleppo resulted in the regime losing control of key cities of political, strategic and symbolic importance, such as Homs, Hama and Daraa. After 11 days of significant advances, the opposition took control of the capital Damascus on 8 December, marking the official end of the Baath regime.²⁴⁵ The fall of the Assad regime marked a critical turning point in a tragic 13-year civil war that has claimed more than 500,000 lives²⁴⁶, with the United Nations Human Rights Office estimating that between 1 March 2011 and 31 March 2021 at least 306,887 civilians were killed²⁴⁷, more than 14 million Syrians displaced²⁴⁸ and more than 15,000 people tortured and killed.²⁴⁹

The fall of the regime was welcomed with enthusiasm by Syrians scattered in different parts of the world. For Syrians living in Istanbul, the center of the victory celebrations was the Fatih Mosque and its surroundings. The celebrations began with the lowering of the regime flag at the Syrian consulate in Şişli and its replacement by the pre-Baath era flag representing, used by the First Syrian Republic in 1930. Then Syrians flooded

²⁴⁵ Staff Reporter, "Around Syria in 11 Days: A Timeline of Assad's Fall," TRT World, December 8, 2024, <https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/around-syria-in-11-days-a-timeline-of-assads-fall-18241176>.

²⁴⁶ Middle East Monitor, "Over 0.5m Lives Lost in 13 Years of Conflict in Syria," Middle East Monitor, March 15, 2024, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240315-over-0-5m-lives-lost-in-13-years-of-conflict-in-syria/>.

²⁴⁷ UN Human Rights Office estimates more than 306,000 civilians were killed over 10 years in Syria conflict | Ohchr, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/un-human-rights-office-estimates-more-306000-civilians-were-killed-over-10>.

²⁴⁸ UNHCR, "Syria Refugee Crisis Explained," UNHCR, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>.

²⁴⁹ SNHR, "Death Toll due to Torture," Syrian Network for Human Rights, August 30, 2024, <https://snhr.org/blog/2024/08/30/death-toll-due-to-torture/>.

into Fatih and filled the Fatih Mosque with tears of joy and prayers, celebrating a historic moment. Although there had been no official call for a celebration, I assumed that Syrians would gather in Fatih to celebrate. I wanted to understand how this historic day would be received by everyone, young and old, who had been waiting for this news for years. After completing my dissertation, I conducted a small pilot study. I made participatory observations and conducted informal interviews around the Malta Bazaar, the Fatih Mosque and Saraçhane, one of the historical squares suitable for gathering.²⁵⁰



Figure 6.1. Fatih Mosque, 8 November 2024

²⁵⁰ Serra Deniz Araz, “Syrians in Istanbul Celebrate the Fall of Assad’s Regime,” TRT World - Breaking News, Live Coverage, Opinions and Videos, December 9, 2024, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/syrians-in-istanbul-celebrate-the-fall-of-assads-regime-18241574>.



Figure 6.2. Malta Bazaar, 8 November 2024



Figure 6.3. Sarachane Park, 8 November 2024

However, shortly after the fall of the regime, a harsh reality emerged and replaced the celebratory atmosphere with a cold silence. The notorious Sednaya Prison on the outskirts of Damascus, as well as many other torture and killing centres during the

Baathist regime's rule in Syria, came to the fore again in all their nakedness.²⁵¹ These centers, resurfaced in public discourse, remind the world of the fate of thousands of individuals who disappeared during the civil war. This reality once again revealed the tragedy of thousands of Syrians who were persecuted under the regime and lost their loved ones.²⁵² The Syrian government had called for the return of refugees in July 2018. This call, made at a time when the civil war was in full swing, was controversial from the outset.²⁵³ At the point reached today, the fact that most of those who returned in those years were arrested and subjected to torture has been revealed with all clarity.

Moreover, the collapse of the Assad regime has also reignited long-standing debates about the possibility of Syrians returning to their homeland. There are projection studies on the Syrians' perceptions of return to their homeland once the war is over and security has been established.²⁵⁴ For instance, Prof. Murat Erdoğan's comprehensive 2021 Syrian Barometer study highlights the evolving preferences of Syrians regarding the possibility of returning to their homeland. The attractiveness of the option 'I will return if the war ends in Syria and an administration we want is established' has varied over time. While the rate of those who supported this option was 59.9% in SB-2017, this rate decreased to 30.3% in SB-2019 and 16% in SB-2020, and increased again to 33.1% in SB-2021.²⁵⁵ So, we can argue that it is an evolving phenomenon under certain circumstances.

However, the realisation of this situation depends on the conditions for both security and political stability.²⁵⁶ Post-war developments in Syria, as well as the positions of regional and global actors, will be decisive in enabling safe, sustainable, and voluntary

²⁵¹ Anadolu Agency, "Collapsed Syrian Regime Used 72 Torture Methods in over 50 Prisons, Detention Centers," Anadolu Ajansı, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/collapsed-syrian-regime-used-72-torture-methods-in-over-50-prisons-detention-centers/3420937>.

²⁵² William Christou, "Inside the Hunt for Hidden Cells in Sednaya Prison, Syria's 'Human Slaughterhouse,'" The Guardian, December 9, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/dec/09/inside-sednaya-torture-prison-syria-assad>.

²⁵³ Ahmet İçduygu and Enes Ayaşlı, "Geri Dönüş Siyaseti: Suriyeli Mültecilerin Dönüş Göçü İhtimali ve Gelecek Senaryoları," *MiReKoc*, 2019,10..

²⁵⁴ You can see the examples: İçduygu and Ayaşlı, "Geri Dönüş Siyaseti: Suriyeli Mültecilerin Dönüş Göçü İhtimali ve Gelecek Senaryoları," ; M. Murat Erdoğan , *Syrians Barometer: A Framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrians in Türkiye* (Ankara, Türkiye: Egiten book publishing, 2022).

²⁵⁵ Erdoğan , *Syrians Barometer 2021*.

²⁵⁶ İçduygu, Enes.

returns for Syrians. This is a multi-layered area that needs to be researched in the future.

As I discussed in my thesis, Syrians were initially accepted and welcomed as 'guests' in Turkey. Over time, they became permanent residents and began to be seen as people who 'had to go' due to their prolonged stay, coupled with political propaganda and economic concerns.²⁵⁷ This situation has increased exclusionary practices and racist attitudes towards Syrians and has led to dire consequences in the political arena and at the social level. It is obvious that the voluntary return of Syrians is not possible in an environment where safety has not yet been fully established in Syria and access to basic public services remains unavailable. Therefore, attempts to accelerate the return of Syrians through pressure may further increase discriminatory discourses and practices against Syrians. In this process, preventing the increase in discriminatory attitudes towards Syrians is much more important in terms of protecting social peace and human rights in Turkey.

Two fundamental realities emerge from this situation: not all Syrians will return, and those who do will not return immediately. In this context, the successful implementation of return processes will require time for Syria to reestablish its political, social, and economic order. The fact that returns should be voluntary should be adopted as a fundamental principle in the policy-making processes of international and local actors. In this regard, the fall of the Assad regime undoubtedly marks the beginning of a new era concerning both the return processes of Syrians and Turkey's migration policies, as well. In this context, questions such as whether the return process is voluntary or not, and how the returns will be shaped by regional and global dynamics stand out as important topics that need to be addressed in academic studies. Moreover, the impact of Syrian refugees' return processes on Turkey's social dynamics offers a new research area. Thus, in line with the research to be conducted, the factors affecting the voluntary return of Syrians, the spatial and social consequences of returns, and the transformation of anti-refugee discourses in Turkey can be analysed. In addition, it would also make an important contribution to examine how religious and culturally

²⁵⁷ Erdogan, *Syrians Barometer 2021*.

significant spaces like Fatih serve as meaningful sites for migrant communities and how these spaces might transform during the return process.

In conclusion, these developments present a multilayered research area that profoundly affects not only the return processes of Syrians but also Turkey's migration policies and social dynamics. Such studies can make important theoretical and practical contributions to both migration and space production literature.



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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

MAP OF EDGWARE ROAD

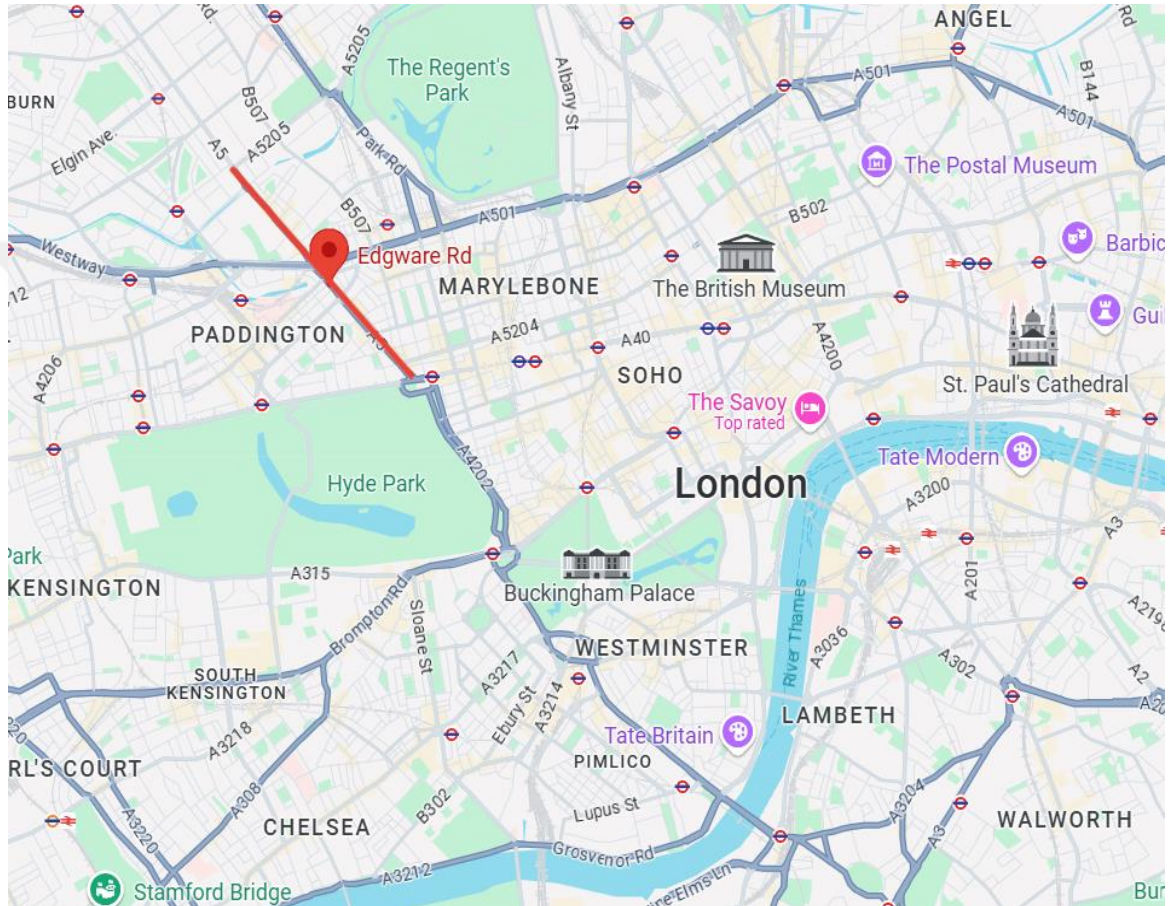


Figure A.1. Regional Map of Edgware Road

APPENDIX B

MAP OF FATİH DISTRICT



Figure B.1. Regional Map of Fatih District

APPENDIX C

MALTA BAZAAR THROUGH THE LENS OF FIELDWORK



Figure C.1. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork I

(Photos Taken by the Author)



Figure C.2. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork II

(Photos Taken by the Author)



Figure C.3. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork III

(Photos Taken by the Author)



Figure C.4. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork IV

(Photos Taken by the Author)



Figure C.5. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork V
(Photos Taken by the Author)



Figure C.6. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork VI
(Photos Taken by the Author)



Figure C.7. Malta Bazaar through the Lens of Fieldwork VII

APPENDIX D

ETHICS COMMITTEE PERMISSION

Evrak Tarih ve Sayısı: 20.12.2024-50855



T.C.
İBN HALDUN ÜNİVERSİTESİ
Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği
Kurulu Başkanlığı

Sayı : E-71395021-050.04-50855
Konu : Etik Kurul Kararı - Serra DENİZ
ARAZ

20.12.2024

İLGİLİ MAKAMA

Kurulumuza başvuran Serra DENİZ ARAZ'ın, "Rethinking The Production of Space And Migration: The Case of İstanbul Fatih District" isimli projesi; amaç, araştırma türü, veri toplama araçları, süreç ve işlemler, veri analizleri dikkate alınmak suretiyle 13.12.2024 tarihinde değerlendirilerek 2024/10-10 karar numarası ile etik açıdan uygun bulunmaktadır.

Bilgilerini ve gereğini arz/rica ederim.

Prof. Dr. Alev ERKİLET
Başkan

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Publications:

1. Araz, Serra Deniz. “Syrians in Istanbul Celebrate the Fall of Assad’s Regime.” TRT World - Breaking News, Live Coverage, Opinions and Videos, December 9, 2024. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/syrians-in-istanbul-celebrate-the-fall-of-assads-regime-18241574>.
2. Araz, Serra Deniz. “Palestinian Child Goes to Collect Bread but Is Killed Instead by Israel.” TRT World - Breaking News, Live Coverage, Opinions and Videos, November 1, 2024. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/palestinian-child-goes-to-collect-bread-but-is-killed-instead-by-israel-18227260>.

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