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Rethinking place-based gender relations in the new country: the case of tertiary level Syrian students in Istanbul

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Abstract

This paper analyses the dynamic interactions between space and identity by focusing on Syrian students in Turkey. It specifically asks how their migration experiences differentially affect their place-based identities and relationships. I use an intersectional approach and add dimensions of space, time, and everydayness to capture the relationship between the agents (Syrian youth) and the structure (norms, values, and institutions). Drawing on participant observation and in-depth interviews with 30 men and women Syrian students in Istanbul, I show how Syrian students negotiate interactions in the public space, working life, and gender roles, as well as their sense of freedom in the new context. Nevertheless, the migration process does not create the same results for both genders, and expecting a total transformation is not realistic. Women are more eager to adapt themselves to change when they are compared to men respondents. Space-based organizational culture in the daily life of Istanbul contributes to this main difference. In this regard, with sociological imagination, this article draws attention to the role of geography, which in its essence examines temporality and spatiality, and which has been underestimated in migration studies.

Keywords: Space, Identity, Gender, Migration

Introduction

Currently, more than three million Syrians live in Turkey, which makes the country the home of the world's largest community of Syrians thanks to Turkey's generous open-door policy (Interior Directorate General of Migration Management (IDGMM), 2022). According to statistics, 6.7 million people have been internally displaced in Syria and 6.6 million Syrian refugees dispersed internationally, of whom 5.6 million are hosted in countries (Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey) near Syria (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2021). Temporary protection status is given to foreign nationals who arrive at the borders in large groups and are unable to return home (Ekşi, 2016). It is used in situations of mass migration and has been used in Turkey since 2011 for Syrian asylum seekers.

20.4 per cent of the total number of Syrians are young and the average age of Syrians registered in Turkey is 22.2 years, making them remarkable to study, according to

statistics from the Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management (2022). Recent research on young migrants indicates that there is a generational gap between them and elder migrants. Younger migrants are more eager to reconcile their numerous identities. As they attempt to create new meanings in their new society, these young migrants contest the prevalent image of immigrants. Because identity negotiations are contextual, they cannot be discussed apart from the context in which they take place (Dwyer, 1998).

I focused on Syrian students to understand the new forms of identity of youth migrants based on space-based interactions. While I had planned to conduct research with various young Syrian groups, including women at home, workers at workplaces, business owners, and students attending universities and informal educational institutions, I decided to focus on students because migrant students are adapting to daily life by using different places, creating a new sense of space with a new lifestyle, and transforming and negotiating their own identities. Furthermore, they speak Turkish, integrate into the education system, socialise by interacting with different social groups, and are aware of technological and global movements. When compared to other Syrian youths, I have observed that young migrant students interact with larger networks, and they differ from other young Syrian groups stuck in more isolated lives between work and home to survive in Turkish daily life.

Gender should be included in migration literature because it is one of the main organising principles of social life. The primary distinction and contribution of this paper are that the analytical focus is on the integration of space, migration, and gender as well as sociological imagination. Gender experiences are socially constructed and vary geographically, so understanding geographical variations in gender discussions is critical. Migration, by altering space and space-based interactions, inevitably re-designs roles in the new space and assigns different responsibilities to young women and men than those in their home countries.

To grasp this, I not only accept the theoretical concept of intersectionality as it pertains to the social divisions of race, ethnicity, gender, and class (Yuval-Dalis, 2006), but gender, race, ethnicity, culture, age, religion, and education are also on my list to cover different social divisions in the same context. At that point, urban space is critical because urban environments are where gendered meanings are developed, represented, and produced (Raju & Paul, 2016: 128).

Throughout the paper, I will use the terms space and/or place interchangeably. People, their practices, and interactions primarily fill space with social and cultural interpretations and material, historical, and emotional values (Giereyn, 2000). I try to understand gendered space discussions in migration studies by putting gender at the heart of this collaboration that creates space. Furthermore, I highlight the role of geography, which has been undervalued in migration studies (King, 2020). As a result, Syrian students perceive, practise, memorise, and create space as a combination of material, physical, geographical, temporal, gendered, emotional, real, and imagined spaces.

How do Syrian students construct and negotiate identities in their daily geographies, and how does this influence their sense of place in Istanbul? What are the differences in the construction of a new sense of identity and place between young Syrian men and women? These are the primary research questions. To find answers, I used qualitative

research methods, participant observation, and semi-structured in-depth interviews with 30 male and female students in Istanbul. I discovered that post-migration transformations in public space relations, working life and gender roles, as well as a sense of freedom, are the result of a dynamic interaction between space and identity.

Theoretical framework

Syrian students between continuity and change

In the classic structuralist paradigm, place is a context for social interactions and meaning. This paradigm undervalues agents, choice, and place dynamics. Bourdieu (1984) opened the door to repositioning agents and structures for the place-making process with various types of capital, and habitus is crucial for understanding migration to new areas. He argued:

The habitus is not only a structuring structure that organises practices and the perception of practices, but it is also a structured structure: the principle of logical class division that organises the perception of the social world is a product of internalisation of the division into social classes (1984: 170).

This means that habitus is the basic stock of information people have through living in specific cultures and a set of “dispositions” (Layder, 2006), and it is a source of knowledge about how people view and understand the world (Huang, 2019). This perspective may lead to a deterministic and unchanging view of past cultural dispositions. My research now goes beyond Bourdieu’s theory. Actors reinterpret and recreate everyday structures to change their objectives and habits, making my method more dynamic than Bourdieu’s habitus (O’Reilly, 2012). From a sociological standpoint, I contend that while some aspects of habitus acquired in the previous society are not necessarily valid in the new environment, others are protected or negotiated. When this sociological perspective is combined with the socio-spatial geographical approach, which sees space as dynamic and continually changing, I observe that Syrian students develop a new sense of place, sometimes protecting and sometimes reinterpreting the places they have migrated to.

Space-based gender experiences: placing migrant students

Agents have different expectations and backgrounds. Place sustains difference and hierarchy by routinising daily activities (Gieryn, 2000: 474). Because places with their physical, cultural, or geographical features define women as insecure, distant, or threatening, gender is crucial to understanding the interplay between agent and structure in space-making. In the bulk of the literature, men are connected with public space and women are connected with private space. Men force women into household relationships to demonstrate economic and public control (Kamla, 2014: 603:605).

In contrast to the public vs. private dichotomy, both men and women migrants experience highly precarious work at the bottom of the labour market at the start of their migration process (Standing, 2011). The changes in the roles of working life produce transformations in gender roles within the houses. The new social order brings family diversity and flexibility (Havlin, 2015: 185). Young women are no longer restricted in their domestic relationships. Thus, ordinary time–space patterns affect migrants’ views of labour, study, and distance. All of this makes gender roles more negotiable. From the beginning of gender studies in post-migration contexts, it has been found that women

have a greater chance of achieving their goals than men (Kats, 1982). Living in a new country also allows women to break traditional roles and increase freedom, making it more beneficial for women than men (Foner, 1978). As women work outside the home, this directly affects the negotiation of gender ideologies, and women generally rewrite gender roles (Lam & Yeoh, 2018). Religiosity is one of the issues on which this research focuses, as the dimension of intersectionality was argued by van Klingeren and Spierings (2020) to clarify how men and women differ under the effect of religion in a post-migration context. As women become more liberal and freer, their religious beliefs change, and the religious community loses power. According to Weinstein Bever (2002: 226), migration changes women's gender roles, although younger men and women still support conventional gender ideology. Despite gender role negotiations, a complete transformation is unrealistic. Socio-economic, cultural, and religious variables shape gender identities in time and space. This means migrants' gender relations and identities may shift, based on the host country's spatial and temporal circumstances (Erdal & Pawlak, 2017: 12).

Despite the many studies comparing migrant men and women, little is known about international students and gender after migration. First, it should be clarified that the literature on international students does not address the specific situation of Syrian students. Pre-migration considerations and temporary protection status mean there is an ambiguity between being students and forced migrants. The complexity of forced migration is intensified with the addition of the gender issue, where there is also a gap in the literature (Hartley et al., 2019). Burke et al. (2022) found that women with forced migration experiences face considerable challenges and facilitators to participating in university education in resettlement environments. Language support, class-based factors, family support, and teaching and learning experiences help post-forced migrants reach higher education. Caring responsibilities, gender roles, cross-cultural clashes, prior learning experiences, and linguistic and pedagogical barriers are the main obstacles. At the same time, they highlight the gap in the literature that this article attempts to fill. Burke et al. (2022) also argue that further research is needed to describe the many ways in which women struggle with cultural expectations regarding gender identities and the values, norms, and assumptions of tertiary education involvement in resettlement. The literature discusses identity issues, including the "complex process of identity creation" (Shwayli & Barnes, 2018:101), yet in tertiary studies, women are represented as actors trying to cope with exclusion. In this regard, the transformative capacity of forced internationalisation of higher education viewed through a gender perspective is still missing. To understand gender and forced migration in higher education, Burke et al. (2022) urgently suggest exploring intersectional and structural issues. One of these structural and intersectional factors is religion, as stated above. According to Ergin and Wit (2019: 10), religion is an integrating factor for forced international students. By using the example of Syrian refugees in Turkey, they explain how religion helps students adapt, as a shared religion ensures people's acceptance of forced migrants to higher education and society in Turkey.

While the experiences of international students are different from the forced internationalisation of higher education, similarities can still be found in terms of students' post-migration experiences. This is because encounters with international students have

a transformative capacity to reshape students' identities (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). O'Connor (2020) contrasted male and female Muslim students in Ireland with an intersectional lens, adding gender, religion, and ethnicity. Religion is important, even in various circumstances and religious beliefs. Male students had more social activities than female students and generated social capital in the new situation. Male Muslim students can more easily integrate into the host country than female Muslim students, who are labelled by their headscarves and barred from pubs and social events. According to Li and Zizzi (2018), female Muslim migrants with hijabs face double prejudice in diverse religious contexts and withdraw from excluded locations.

In addition to religion, studies from other contexts have shown that international students also experience exclusion in daily life because of their ethnicity. Both male and female Asian and African students face discrimination and physical abuse (Baas, 2012; Hanassab, 2006). Verbal abuse creates racial exclusion (Collins, 2010). Space-based gender experiences, on the other hand, do not necessarily create the exclusion of women in daily life. Wee (2019) observed that female international students used tactics to reject negative self-images and perform their identities. From this perspective, intertwining different dynamics and integrating an intersectional approach produce a nuanced understanding of international student identity formation for both genders.

Methodology

My approach was qualitative, involving in-depth interviews and participant observation. These methods enabled me to enter the complex social world of my target group. In-depth interviews and participant observations were conducted concurrently during the field research and could not be easily separated. Observations assisted me in becoming involved in the students' everyday social organisations from the start. I filled in the gaps and gathered personal narratives about the meaning of urban spaces by supplementing observations with in-depth interviews.

For example, at first, I did not understand why female students preferred to meet me in Turkish cafés rather than Syrian cafés. Then, through the interviews, I discovered that female students felt more at ease and relaxed answering questions in Turkish cafés. This is because an in-depth interview, also known as a one-on-one interview, is a means of obtaining more detailed information or a deeper understanding of a subject (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). I conducted interviews with 30 Syrian students, all of whom were over the age of 18. Their ages ranged from 18 to 26 and had been in Turkey for an average of 5.5 years. They are undergraduate and graduate students or are preparing for foreign student university exams (YOS). Because they have lower socio-economic levels in Turkey, most of them work part-time to support their expenses. There were 13 men and 17 women. The interviews were conducted in quiet areas. They lasted about an hour and a half each. I conducted the research following the British Sociological Association's ethical principles, and I also received ethical approval from the University of Essex. I used a snowballing sampling method to gain access to the students, and I used pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

In qualitative research, positionality refers to the process of including ourselves as researchers and human agents in our ongoing examination of social life practices (Benson & O'Reilly, 2022) and related to the researcher's insider/outsider status (Merriam

et al., 2001). I used both insider and outsider perspectives. Being a migrant, a student in another country, and a Muslim created an insider position, whereas being Turkish and speaking another language created an outsider position. Because researchers' identities are negotiated, my student and migrant identities sometimes took precedence, while being Turkish took precedence on other occasions.

For me, transcription is more than just a technical issue involving the conversion of spoken words into written data. Pauses, smiles, and feelings, for example, are all components of qualitative research. I did the transcriptions myself to have complete control over the research. I used the NVIVO programme after the transcription to make the analysis more systematic.

This study also had some limitations. Because of their religious concerns, it was extremely difficult to form close relationships with the male participants. I attempted to gain their trust through more formal relationships in associations and charitable organisations in my role as a participant-observer. Furthermore, access to male-dominated places such as hookah cafés, where men frequently spend long hours and women are excluded, became extremely difficult. Sitting in these places as a woman gave me an uneasy feeling. It was not just me; the men sitting there were also uneasy because they had grown accustomed to viewing these places as "male places". I attempted to overcome this constraint by sitting as close to these cafés as possible and observing them from the outside. Finally, even though the interviews were conducted in English or Turkish, and I speak Arabic at a formal level, I believe I missed some of the jokes, ironic uses, and allusions that are common in people's private spheres.

Findings

Public space relations

Borja (2003) defined public space as a place of interaction. It is not only about the possibility of increasing social contacts and interactions that improve cohesion and integration between different ethnic groups. Furthermore, it has the potential to allow for changes in traditional norms, the questioning of previous learnings, and the exchange of values. From this point, the study of everyday interactions between men and women in urban settings becomes central.

Social connections lead to mental, geographical, and symbolic changes in my informants' perceptions of how men and women should interact in public spaces. Today's young migrants have acquaintances of the opposite sex and may interact together, unlike in Syria. Hasan made the following declaration to describe his internal shift regarding his view on the relationship between men and women:

"One asks oneself where am I and what should I live for? You are stuck in two things. You may say to yourself, 'I will live with my old views', and then you say, 'No, I should change myself; it does not last like that'. For example, the smallest example is having a girlfriend. I am not saying in the sense of a lover. There is no such thing as a girlfriend in Syria; there is no place to sit and make friends. What happens if a girl sits in this seat? What happens if a boy sits? ... Here, Syrian girls are the same as boys. They were wearing a headscarf; now they are not. The girls have become free and socialised just like us"(man, 21, undergraduate).

By referring to the tolerance of differences between the host and his home country, Hasan clarifies the changes in his perception of friendship between men and women in everyday life. He draws our attention to the unwritten rules, tolerance, and reciprocal respect that society unconsciously accepts (Goffman, 2009). In different contexts, these unwritten rules produce different results. In Arab culture, wife, daughter, or sister are regarded as the “sacred thing of man” and a mechanism for preserving family honour (Afsaruddin, 1999:10). Nevertheless, the interaction with the opposite sex in Istanbul’s spaces has altered the meaning of honour and borders.

Aside from the differences in activity types, the women participants feel free to socialise in Istanbul’s streets. Instead of only interacting with close family and relatives, they can go to parks, cafés, and street festivals, and participate in the activities of civil organisations. Although Syrian women felt they were violating male-dominated spaces when they were outside of their private spaces (homes) when in Syria (Kamla, 2014: 613), they have become more active in Istanbul’s public spaces.

“I am more active than I was in Syria. I believe that I can now live in any place in the world. I have friends of many different nationalities. I know every part of Istanbul. For instance, there was a coffee festival last week. We came together and had fun.” (Meryem, woman, 18, YOS student).

The reason for women’s increased use of public places can be found in the attitudes of Turkish and Syrian men towards women. “Public space becomes an important area in Syria, allowing for alternative forms of masculine affirmation, including harassment” (Peoples, 2008:16 as cited in Kamla, 2014: 613). Unlike in Syria, men do not bother women with their gaze in Turkey, according to women migrants. For example, if a man starts bothering them on public transportation, they are relieved when they are shielded from harassment by other passengers. Regarding the usage of public spaces by Syrian women in Turkey, as women, they feel freer than in their identity as Syrian migrants.

Rama associated the sense of freedom and the attitudes of men towards women in the following statement:

“I feel free when I can go alone and use transportation. I have new experiences here, but there I did not have many. In Syria, a man would take us from one place to another. Transportation was not easy. A man does not look at or disturb a woman here. This is not accepted. That gave me a feeling of greater safety. This is the best thing, because I can return home at night. Now, it is ten o’clock. It is really good.” (woman, 21, undergraduate).

This shows how important the intersectional method is, because migrant identity and young women’s identity are inextricably linked. While this group considers itself free in its female identity and feels more integrated into the Turkish public space, they feel excluded as Syrian migrants and generally complain about discrimination. When I told Sirin that I understood she felt safe as a woman but not as a Syrian, she replied, “Yes, that is a completely true determination.”

Islam shapes the relationships between men and women in public and private places; hence, religion should be a major dynamic in this intersectionality. During the field study, many students prioritised their faith and values as part of their identity. However,

because social categories are perceived differently by each group or its members, religion, gender, and ethnicity may result in subjective and individual positioning. Religion remains important in this relationship because it is difficult to separate it from the cultural codes of each society. Although most Syrians and Turks believe in Islam, their interpretations differ.

Muslim students are excluded from non-Muslim countries due to their identities and religious practices such as the hijab (Li & Zizzi, 2018; O'Connor, 2020), while Turkey's majority Muslim population allows them to practise their religion. In Turkey, however, woman students benefit more from Islam than man students. According to Khalidi and Tucker (1992: 8–12), while many Western perspectives perceive that Islam opposes equal rights for men and women, the Quran, hadith, and Islamic rules do not explicitly address women. Islam has been intentionally used to legitimise patriarchal regimes in social and work settings (Metcalf, 2008: 86). Thus, Turkey's Islam is contextually distinct from Syria's, which helps women students more than men.

Muhammed (25, man, graduate) expressed his surprise when he realised that Islam was not universally perceived:

"I lived in both Syria and Saudi Arabia. But when I came here, I was very surprised. I chose this place because it is a Muslim country. Yes, I can pray and fast easily, but other things are very different. Turks are more comfortable on the streets; especially the girls are more confident."

The quote from Muhammed not only implies differences in public space relations between the two countries but also depicts the scope of Islam. Gender relations in public spaces can be seen in the context of religion. While male students are happy to perform their religious identities, as his words indicate, close female relationships in public spaces are not easily accepted from their cultural perspective.

To better understand the relationship within public space, there are intergenerational gaps between old and young migrants in terms of negotiating their multiple identities (Ahmed, 2009) that should be clarified with global changes, educational differences and technological improvements. When I went to Ayse's house, her father joined our conversation. He referred to the effect of technological and global changes by saying, "My children are different from me because they use technology very effectively and connect in other parts of the world." Ayse (25, woman, graduate) agreed with her father and said that:

"My siblings and I follow YouTubers in other parts of the world. We are looking for connections for the future. I am educated and plan a life in other parts of the world."

As can be understood from the words of Ayse, women not only negotiate their past and present experiences with men, different from their parents, they also make plans for the future with technological and educational tools, and by being adapted to global changes, which makes them more mobile. Beyond the dichotomy between public/private space in the host country, they want to open up other parts of the world. Their horizons and plans exceed the borders of the country. While adapting to local relations, they are also on the way to being global (Massey, 2005). From this perspective, the meaning of public space cannot be restricted to conventional understanding. Past, present, future,

and also home, host and future countries are the dimensions of the public space, which shows the transformations in migrants' perceptions.

Working life and gender roles

Massey (1994) discussed regional restructuring in the UK in her early work and drew attention to gender differences and working relationships across localities. Like Massey, I want to understand gender, work, and space by focusing on local and contextual issues rather than abstract global capitalist system theories. This is because different types of industries are reorganised into peripheral regions and neighbourhoods rather than being organised into a unique form in the city. In this regard, it is crucial to understand the local labour organisational culture in Istanbul to see what has changed as a result of migration. It is critical to see the spatial and work-based organisational differences between Syria and Turkey because we will miss out on local differences if we assume abstract capitalist business relationships. This is because occupational segregation and gender-based experiences vary by location, even within metropolitan areas.

The spatial and social organisation of cities, according to Massey (1994), is based on a mix of public and private spaces. This inevitably results in a hierarchical power structure that confines women to the home. Nonetheless, working outside the home has altered the organisation of family relationships. Working women have begun to occupy male-dominated spaces.

"My mother did not work in Syria. Here she works in textile manufacturing from 8 am to 8 pm. It is too long, but she has to work because life is very expensive here. In Syria, one salary was enough; here, it is not. When we were in Syria, my father was working outside; my mother was at home. Now, everything has changed." (Meryem, woman, 18, YOS student).

As it is understood from Meryem's quotation above, Syrian student women have a new space, different from Syria, and they share common spaces with men currently. As will be discussed in depth later, Meryem by saying "everything has changed", refers to the inevitable results of changes in the logic and distribution of roles within the family, making women more powerful than ever with their participation in working life. On the other hand, the debate extends beyond the man/woman divide. As Syrian women, they face workplace exclusion.

Sirin, who started out in a low-paying job, eventually found a better one. She demonstrated the possibility of negotiating power dynamics at work. She describes her experiences, clarifying the meaning of the changing positions in working life:

"There was a girl where I was working as a salesperson. She was constantly insulting me because I was Syrian. I endured her insults for one year. Before I left that job, I told her that I had got a new job as a translator at the hospital. She asked me, laughing. "Did you find another job? So, you won't be working in the store anymore?" I said, "Yes, people like you stay in the store and work here for years. I know both English and Arabic. You have no languages; you are not educated." If she had been a normal person, I wouldn't have spoken like that, but she hurt me so much that I did"(woman,22, graduate).

While power relations in gendered spaces are divided into public and private in the bulk of the literature (Kamla, 2014), Sirin's example shows that activity spaces such as the workplace can offer new hierarchical orders of power between people of the same gender. At that point, being a migrant is critical. Although she has power as the family breadwinner and goes outside the private space, she is still excluded from the public space. In this regard, describing gendered space as private or public is insufficient to comprehend migrant women's working lives. Aside from the problematisation of public vs private diversity and the new order of power resulting from migration status, the meaning of work differs depending on the context. Although women in Syria worked in the feminised sector, such as teaching and nursing, which served the geography of women's labour markets (Hanson & Pratt, 1995), this continues in the Turkish context, albeit in a precarious manner, due to the legal restrictions imposed by temporary protection status. Women who want to stay in Istanbul are still forced into women-only jobs. Finding a job in a female-dominated occupation remains the organisational culture in Istanbul. Rather than the governmental sector, manufacturing is now one of the most dominant female workplaces.

"My mother worked in Syria as a teacher from 9 am to 2 pm. It was like a part-time job, and the workplace was close to our home. However, she is now a worker in a factory for long hours. My mum is having a hard time adapting to working life" (Hasan, man, 22, undergraduate).

Hasan emphasises the shift from one female-dominated occupation to another. More intriguingly, he explains that, as Hanson and Pratt (1995: 212) show, there is no evidence that women choose jobs in female-dominated occupations to maximise their earnings and living standards. "Such jobs—and taking them close to home—are usually part of a time-management strategy to meet the simultaneous, and very immediate, daily demands of earning a wage and caring for a family." When considering the Syrian student context in Istanbul, the main motivation of the students is to cover their living expenses while also studying. Furthermore, legal restrictions encourage women to be segregated in temporary positions, but I do not see female students as victims of migration. They base their decisions on family structures, educational responsibilities, proximity to the home, and social networks. In other words, they negotiate job opportunities and the organisation of their daily lives. Working close to home, for example, is very common among migrant students, not only as a survival strategy, but also as a responsibility to both the home and education. For instance, when Sirin first arrived in Turkey with her siblings, she was a female student who had to shoulder their responsibilities in the absence of her family elders. When I asked her how she got a job at the store near her house, she said it was solely because of its proximity:

"I left the house and started looking for a job. The store preferred me because I know Arabic and Turkish. Because it was close to my house, I was able to get home from work and take care of my siblings. What made me find that job was the fact that it was close to the Syrians again. The boss, who wanted to do business with Syrians, preferred me." (woman, 22, graduate).

Most women work near home and are supported by neighbourhood social networks, whereas men are supported by their large community. Men also have a better chance of getting work in diverse geographies because they do not worry about proximity or nighttime security. Cultural assumptions that organise work and living socio-spatially favour men over women because men are seen as breadwinners in their culture. Abdulhey teaches at an Arabic international school because he speaks Arabic and English, and most of his coworkers are men. Traditional networks and roles exclude women from skilled occupations and force them into unstable informal networks. Women and low-status workers commonly work near their homes (Hanson & Pratt, 1995). My research shows that family-oriented women are forced into low-wage jobs. Sirin worked as a clerk near her house when she initially arrived in Turkey. After a few years, she looked for a career that fit her. However, higher-paying jobs entail long hours, night shifts, and transportation. Gender-based occupational segregation, parallel to socio-spatial working organisations, can help men overcome the disadvantages of migration.

Work-life balance and gender roles are important because women's spatial organisation after migration has changed the traditional roles of men and women in the home. The question "Does the transition from one gender role to another result in a redistribution of family roles?" should be addressed in this regard. Work experiences should also be taken into account. Working life in a post-migration context reinforces the transformation of gender roles and restructures the social organisation, which results in new family diversities and flexibilities (Havlin, 2015: 185). Women generally re-write gender roles (Lam & Yeoh, 2018). Young women are no longer confined to the home. Instead, they socialise with their friends outside, explore the city streets, and contribute to the family budget; as a result, they have gained more decision-making power within the home (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Cranford, 2006: 118). As a result, time-space patterns in everyday life have altered Syrian migrants' perceptions of work, study hours, and distance. Although some of the participants had the opportunity to work close to their homes in part-time jobs, as seen in the words of Hasan and Sirin, today, due to Istanbul's size many of them must work far away from their homes until late at night. This, of course, alters their perceptions of daily life routines. They attempted to manage time and space following the conditions in Istanbul rather than those in Syria.

As previously stated, there was a clear distinction between private (home) and public (economic and social) spaces in Syria, because women were seen as responsible for domestic relations and men for social and financial dimensions (Kamla, 2014). In this regard, since the dominant Arab family structure facilitates the strength of patriarchy (Olmsted, 2005: 54–55), the long-term transformation in domestic patriarchy may be linked to increased autonomy and power of women through their participation in working life, as men do. Furthermore, when compared to Syria, the absence of traditional authority figures—generally fathers—in the private space raises concerns about gender roles. Hatice's father had been unable to find work in Turkey due to the language barrier and his age. During the interview, she described her hectic work schedule and numerous responsibilities, both at home and elsewhere. She expressed her expectations and contrasted them with the following statement:

"I think the responsibility of the home is everyone's duty now. My dad had never done it before, but now he helps to remove the dinner plates. I used to be angry

with my brothers because they were not doing anything. I was thinking like that in Syria, but I couldn't express it because they didn't see such examples. Now they feel ashamed, and they do it here. However, there they were saying that they were men. I'm getting my brothers to do housework because we all work now" (woman, 19, undergraduate student).

According to Lopata (2006), changes in economic structure following industrialisation and urbanisation have influenced contemporary family roles in the past. These changes did, in fact, have an impact on Syria, as demonstrated by Hatice's family. She questioned gender roles while in Syria, but was unable to express this, indicating that the core of this change occurred before migration. Nevertheless, questioning the roles and changing the requirements of these roles are two distinct concepts. Although they could question the situation before migration, the organisation of time and space resulted in an active transformation in daily life due to the demands of work and education. Amartya Sen pioneered the capabilities approach to explain quality-of-life assessment in economics. It is used in gender-based discussions to answer the question, "What is she actually capable of doing and being?" (Nussbaum, 2002: 123). It is not only about the resources that are available but also about how those resources work or do not work to enable women to function. For example, in the Syrian-Turkish migration context, women who can work outside the home have more resources to change traditional gender roles in their domestic relationships. In this regard, Syrian female students are adapting to working life more than ever before because many recognise that having an occupation and surviving strategies are important after migration, and they must be integrated into the new context. In other words, these students have been most compelled to change their space-based organisations. To put it another way, because young women migrants in Istanbul have more resources to change the logical organisation that they were used to in Syria, patriarchal constructions continue to be seen among boys rather than girls.

Nonetheless, even though women have gained power and autonomy through their participation in the labour force, with patriarchal relations and men still benefit from their status as men (Hondagneu-Stoelo and Cranford, 2006: 117). This was evident, particularly in the constructs of the male participants. Men continue to oppose the new spatial organisation of daily life because they remember how it was in Syria. Abdulhey (man, 25, graduate) explained how mental transformation is possible in the workplace in the new context:

"Personally, I do not prefer my wife to work because it is much too tiring. If she really wants to work, she can do it in a specific place but not in all places. I was thinking like that when I was in Syria. My perception has not changed. But in daily life, social life has changed. Now I support them for going to cafés, riding, receiving a university education."

According to the quotation, when men and women participants are compared, women are more accepted in working life today, despite men's breadwinner role in their culture. While both genders have undergone logical transformations in their positions in terms of working life/gender roles, and both genders are negotiating their temporalities and spatialities as they did in Syria, men continue to fight to maintain their traditional

position. From this perspective, exercising revolutionary change is not realistic in terms of men's and women's social expectations.

Sense of freedom

More than just having the freedom to make your own decisions, freedom is a feeling that is closely linked to space and the social structures that it contains. The concept of freedom has altered along with changes in space. Since socio-spatiality in Syria is different from Turkey, the participants felt more restricted, based on the neighbourhood culture there. However, in Istanbul today, old connections have broken down and a new kind of spatial and temporal connection has developed. Because of their freedom of choice, migrants are now more anonymous and are not rejected or stigmatised by their social networks, as demonstrated by Tayima's comment below:

"I feel free now. In Istanbul, no one cares about anyone. You are anonymous. Everyone in Syria knew everyone. Before I went home, our neighbour was telling my mum where I was." (woman, 21, undergraduate).

Girls who are oppressed by their neighbourhood culture are happy to be anonymous in their daily lives. When girls are compared to boys, it is clear that they see advantages in terms of a sense of freedom. Young men also see its advantages. The most important factor is to be less dominated by neighbours, relatives, and young people's close social ties.

"When we first came, I liked being close to other Syrians to help each other, but afterwards, it bothered me that everything was known about me as if I was still in Syria. Being out of sight and going to different places made me feel more like an individual on my own in Istanbul." (Hasan, man, 22, undergraduate).

Tayima and Hasan are both content with space-based everyday encounters in Turkey, so men and women students are very similar in that regard. In addition to the loosening of restrictions on neighbourhood culture, the young women elaborated on their increased sense of liberty and freedom following their relocation to Istanbul as well as the shift in the dominant space they used in their daily lives. Girls are more active in social life today; they study and work, changing family perceptions of gender roles. Working and studying have increased the self-esteem of female students, and they are no longer limited to domestic relationships. Birgül addressed this issue in the following way:

"Syrian women are liberated like Turkish women. Previously, they needed to get permission to go out. It was very difficult to be a divorced woman there. I think it is not here. A lot of such women here. Another reason is that the men here are afraid of being complained about to the police. A man cannot shout at the woman. They may be unhappy that the woman does not cook, but they cannot say anything. If he were in Syria, he would have expected the cooking to be done by the woman." (woman, 25, graduate).

According to Birgül's words, there is a power dynamic between men and women when it comes to exercising and maintaining freedom. To avoid losing her freedom in

the new country, the woman resists and, if necessary, scares the man with legal rights. Despite this opposition, space-based power relations are difficult to change, and increasing women's consciousness and perceptions of themselves is difficult. Even if patriarchal relations are weaker than in Syria, expecting a complete mental shift is unrealistic. Bever (2002) compared migrant and non-migrant households to better understand the impact of migration on gender roles and ideologies. Despite her findings that migration played an important role in the transformation of gender roles, she also argues that both genders strongly defended traditional gender ideologies.

To some extent, my research yielded similar results. Some informants still believed that women should give up their freedom by being cautious in their relationships, viewing domestic work as their responsibility, and not working if they had children. For example, despite knowing that working life is a means of achieving freedom within family relationships, Sirin believes that long working hours are unsuitable for married women with children.

"It is good to work and earn your own money, but it is very difficult to keep it up with marriage and a child. We are talking about this issue with my boyfriend. I guess I'll have to quit my job after getting married." (woman, 22, graduate).

According to Sirin's words, when man and woman Syrians are compared, female participants are more willing to sacrifice their sense of freedom for the sake of the continuity of order within the borders of their homes. Men, on the whole, do not give up their rights. When opposite genders negotiate for their rights, it is woman students who give in first. The main reason for this is that cultural, religious, and social expectations impose themselves on women, making them vulnerable in negotiations.

Discussion and conclusion

By using an intersectional approach in the context of Turkey and including space, time, and everyday life as the main variables of the research, with sociological and geographical discussions, this paper has contributed to the literature by analysing how migration has affected male and female young Syrian students differently. Since the meaning of space may vary among social actors due to different positions of migrants, such as age, gender, and socio-economic background, they may attribute various meanings to the places because of the inequalities and heterogeneities within society. In this regard, I expand on the negotiation of spatiality and identity discussions by adding gender as a factor, as there is a gap in the literature in terms of how young men and women experience space-making processes differently in an urban context.

This study shows that in addition to understanding gender and ethnic identification in migration studies, other intersectionality dimensions essential to young people should be integrated. Being a student is central. Young women's gender interactions are empowered by education to challenge their social roles and manage their daily lives. Intersectional migration studies should also include religion. As a guiding principle of daily life, religion is effective in the organisation of spaces in migrants' lives and it is seen as one of the reasons for the integration of forced migrant students into the new country. Although I agree that religion is a mechanism of cohesion for different ethnicities, my research contributes to the literature with the understanding that the same religion

also has a transformative capacity on migrants, because the interpretation of religion is cultural and spatial. For instance, with the interpretations of young students, Islam in Turkey produces more comfortable gender relations for women. Despite their Syrian migrant identities, female students feel freer in Turkey than in Syria. The most intriguing part of the gender issue for me is that women immigrants feel free as women, yet excluded from Turkish culture as migrants. This shows that gender experience is also linked to expectations. As a middle-class, educated Turkish woman, it was interesting that Syrian women did not find that Turkish men made them feel uncomfortable. They view Syrian men as different from Turkish men; hence, they believe that their positions in Turkey are better than in Syria.

My field research in Istanbul indicated that in the routinisation of daily life in the new space, the migrants had the capacity and resources to transform structural relations and create new norms and values in public space relations, gender roles, working life, and freedom. However, short-term changes are unrealistic. Thus, both change and continuity are conceivable. I noted that while young women had profited most, male students had gained flexibility in terms of public space and a sense of freedom. In public space, gender roles/working life, and a sense of freedom, women appeared to profit more from the relaxing of patriarchal boundaries and the new dynamic relationship between men and women. However, it should be clarified that I focus on locally based interactions in Istanbul, a global city with a different form of societal public space/relations than other parts of Turkey. This means that local socio-spatial structure (Massey, 1994) affects both genders differently on several levels, and contextual changes lead to varied outcomes.

Migrant women are not passive victims in the new context. They plan their everyday responsibilities. Family, education, proximity, and social networks influence their choices. Unlike men, who are supported by large cultural and patriarchal communities, women usually struggle alone or with limited local assistance. When compared, women students are better at using their individual skills. These talents are founded on transformative resources in the new space rather than by questioning gender roles. Despite logical organisation of home country, women students may build their lives today with their educational resources, breaking patriarchal ties more than men. The literature's reduction of power to the private versus public space dichotomy is misleading. Local time and space management show that power dynamics change, even when migrant women are in public spaces. Public space extends beyond local relations. As global agents, male and female students employ education and technology to redefine public spaces. However, although patriarchal construction still affects both genders, women are more vulnerable in negotiations to alter their career and future expectations. They are more willing to give up their acquisitions in daily life. These considerations may contribute to the broader discussion about migration and educated women's prosperity. The reason why educated/professional women give up their own future for family relations, spouses, and new life expectations during the migration process may be a new research topic.

Since this study focuses on young students, one question may arise at this point: Does the exclusion of young "women at home", "workers in the workplace", and "business owners" make the arguments biased? That is, are the space/gender arguments only relevant to young migrant students? One of the reasons it was concentrated on youth was

because they are the most “active” and “networked” group. Does the fact that the others are less dynamic and socially embedded imply that they do not engage with space/gender dimensions? If so, what does this signify from a migration standpoint? To begin answering these questions, it should be considered that migration from Syria to Turkey is still recent. Expecting each migrant to adapt to society, form relationships, and establish similar geographical and gender relationships from the outset is unrealistic. The socialisation patterns of the students differ from other young Syrian migrants, even though I expect all of them will develop gender-based spatiality. Although young migrants other than students also produce spatiality, their temporality and spatiality are currently smaller and more isolated. However, the distance may close in the future. Other groups may mingle in similar areas, interact with the host society, and develop gender-based spatiality like the young students. Thus, although they now differ greatly, future studies may follow a similar path, and more comprehensive studies may contrast different young migrant groups.

Abbreviations

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
IDGMM Interior Directorate General of Migration Management

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Competing interests

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