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Schools and Refugee Children: The Case of Syrians in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Education is the most effective tool for migrant and refugee integration. When successfully provided, it is particularly useful for eradicating the traces of trauma among refugee children, offering means to social mobility and enhancing social and structural integration into society. This article introduces schooling options for Syrian children in Turkey and deals with how school types shape experiences of these students through the accounts of their parents with attention to the notion of institutional habitus. Drawing on a comparative qualitative case study of refugee children in Temporary Education Centres and Public Schools in Turkey, it specifically investigates how schools with their practices, organization, and regulations contribute to or hinder the integration and adaptation of Syrian refugee children to school and society in Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of international migration regime from labour migration to irregular migration from the 1990s onwards has converted traditional migrant-sending countries such as Turkey into migrant-sending, migrant-receiving, and transit countries (Castles et al., 2014). Located en route to traditional destination countries, these countries now seek to limit international migration towards them while at the same time satisfying the immediate needs of immigrants concerning status, health, housing, and education (Eder, 2015). In response to the increasing number of immigrants, immigrant integration has become a burning issue in these societies (Erder, 2016). The pressure on these countries is noteworthy, because they have little prior experience with immigrants and often lack the institutional set-up for promoting integration (Yıldız and Uzgören, 2016). Furthermore, the rapid, massive, uncontrolled and irregular character of the recent migration poses challenges to the conventional assimilation and integration theories (Alba and Foner, 2015) and complicates ways of possible immigrant adaptation in these countries.

Recently, several studies – such as those by Coşkun and Nur Emin (2015), Erdoğan (2015), Bircan and Sunata (2015) – have advanced knowledge and discourse regarding Turkey's integration capacity of, mainly Syrian, refugees, by documenting the characteristics of irregular immigrants. This article builds on this valuable, often descriptive, literature and enriches it by exploring how existing educational institutions facilitate or hinder the adaptation of Syrian refugee children. Drawing upon the notion of institutional habitus (Reay et al., 2001), this article documents the practices, organization and regulations of two schooling options for Syrian refugee children, Temporary Education Centre (TEC) and Public School (PS), and looks at how these shape their experiences in terms of integration.

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In the following, we discuss the changing nature of immigration from labour to irregular migration and the way it challenges assimilation and integration theories. Afterwards, we depict the context of reception of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Next, we will introduce the concept of institutional habitus and its most essential elements, which have the potential to disentangle the underlying dynamics of the inclusive and exclusive education settings for the integration of immigrant students. Then, we will unpack the institutional habitus of TECs and PSs comparatively and document how they shape pro-school identity and integration of these children into the school context. The conclusion will argue that both TECs and PSs have significant limitations in terms of incorporating Syrian refugee children due to their monocultural organization and exclusionary institutional habitus.

NEW DETERMINANTS OF IMMIGRATION AND CHALLENGES TO INTEGRATION THEORIES

The process of assimilation or integration is usually one by which the characteristics of the members of immigrant groups and those of members of host societies come to resemble one another (Brown and Bean, 2006). There are, however, significant discrepancies between assimilation and integration approaches. The former is dominant in the USA, while the latter is dominant in Europe. Assimilation framework originates from the historical necessity of creating common denominators for an immigrant culture in the formation of the American society and focuses on the economic and social adaptation of immigrant groups into the mainstream (Schneider and Crul, 2010). The understanding of mainstream is not static in the assimilation perspective; it is continuously being redefined throughout history (Alba and Nee, 2005). As with the case of broadening of the-White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant (WASP) mainstream to include Catholic and Jewish cultures over time, several new communities are being Americanized through retaining and celebrating their own culture (Crul and Mollenkopf, 2012).

The modalities of integration in Europe are diverse, depending on the context and history of the countries. Integration refers to a cultural homogeneity regime for social cohesion characterized by difficult access to individual citizenship rights in Germany (Thomson and Crul, 2007). It means, however, a civic-assimilationist regime characterized by easy access to individual legal equality but little accommodation of diversity in France, and a multi-culturalist regime with easy access to individual legal equality, combined with a high degree of accommodation of diversity in the Netherlands (Ersanilli and Koopmans, 2011). Compared with these long-term immigrant destination countries, Swedish integration policies grant immigrants easy access to full citizenship rights, security of residence, state support, and protection for their languages, cultures and ethnic organizations and institutions (Koopmans, 2010).

Both assimilation and integration approaches largely address the integration of regular labour immigrants into industrial societies (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). The evaporation of the integrative economy in the advent of deindustrialization and restructuring of the economy (Bean and Stevens, 2003) along with the radical shift from labour migration to irregular migration since the 1990s (Castles et al., 2014) have significantly weakened the validity of assimilation and integration approaches. This resulted in the emergence of new theories such as the Segmented Assimilation Theory (SAT) by Portes and Zhou (1993) in the USA and the Comparative Integration Context Theory (CICT) by Crul and Schneider (2010) in Europe. Portes and Zhou (1993) argue that the assimilation experiences of recent immigrants are more diverse and uneven than suggested by the classical assimilation theory due to structural barriers – such as discrimination or an hourglass economy – and poor resources of the immigrant groups – such as low educational profile. As a result, some immigrants can experience downward mobility rather than straight-line assimilation

into the mainstream. Crul and Schenider (2010) contend that comparative integration contexts characterized by institutional arrangements in education, labour market, housing, religion and legislation strongly shape the participation of immigrants in social organizations and belonging to local communities.

In the current wave of massive irregular migration, many refugees are now accepted into receiving countries on a humanitarian basis and permanent immigrants turn into temporary ones (Crul, 2016). This rapid movement undermines legal frameworks, rights, solidarities, and institutions, such as educational institutions, which were designed to serve an *imagined* homogenous community of nation-states (Anderson, 2016). Schools now seek to assist a diverse group of children of immigrants, in terms of skill and resource levels, who speak different languages and have different motivations for staying.

THE CONTEXT OF RECEPTION: SYRIANS IN TURKEY

Since the start of the crisis in Syria in 2011, approximately six million Syrians have been displaced internationally (Dallal, 2016). Today, Turkey accommodates more than three million registered Syrians. While Syrians in camps only make up eight per cent of the total population, the rest of them live in urban areas (Erdoğan, 2017). Historically, Turkey's refugee regime had been limited to the reception and the settlement of Turkish-origin refugees. Also, according to the geographical limitation of the 1951 Convention, Turkey is not obliged to grant refugee status to asylums seekers from non-European countries (İçduygu, 2015). As such, the presence of Syrians in Turkey was initially considered "temporary". However, the protracted nature of the war in Syria significantly amended Turkey's national immigration policies.

In 2014, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection provided legal status to Syrians who came under "Temporary Protection" and provided rights and obligations to its beneficiaries (DGMM, 2014). As of 2014, the government initiated several long-term integration policies, namely in terms of access to employment, education and health. While these policies regulated the status and rights of Syrians at a legal level, they intensified the concerns in public debates about the permanence of Syrians and heightened negative public opinion against them. Besides, the presence of Syrians has often been portrayed as an economic and security threat in the media (Efe et al., 2015; Erdoğan et al., 2017). In public discussions they have been strongly associated with crime and the abuse of the country's resources (Abrams et al., 2016).

INSTITUTIONAL HABITUS

The role of national educational policies and systems in the integration of children is well known (Heath et al., 2008; Song, 2011; Alba and Foner, 2015). Comparative studies on refugee children in various educational systems in Europe have demonstrated that factors such as a welcoming class, teachers with migration backgrounds, and a multicultural learning environment, significantly engage refugee students with school and contribute to their learning process, which is pivotal to long-term adaptation into society (Crul et al., 2017). Inclusive and multicultural schools mainly promote a sense of belonging and pro-school identity among refugee students (Çelik, 2017).

While educational organizations significantly shape incorporation of immigrant students in multiple ways, the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of school organisations have received comparatively little interest in integration research (Bührmann and Schönwälder, 2017). This field often concentrates either on the macro-level of educational policies or the micro-level of migrants' experiences, agency and trajectories while the meso-level remains relatively understudied (Crul and Schneider,

2010). Schools administer macro-level national educational policies at a meso-level; and these, in turn, structure interactions, motivations and identities of agents/students at a micro-level. However, as Marrow (2009) suggests, institutions do not implement macro-level policies homogenously because of, for example, missions and roles of bureaucrats. We draw on Bourdieu's concept of habitus to understand how differences emerge in the way schools translate policies into practice, depending on their positions in the field of national education. Bourdieu defines habitus as a "generative and unifying principle which retranslates the intrinsic and relational characteristics of a position into a unitary lifestyle, that is, a unitary set of choices of persons, goods and practices" (Bourdieu, 2008). The individuals located in neighbouring positions in a field are socialized in and by similar conditions and these conditions act on their behaviours, attitudes, tastes and choices – that is, the structure of their habitus, which generates structuring dispositions that form social practices (Bourdieu, 1985). We argue that, just like individuals, specific schools located in adjacent positions in the field of education, as constituted by national education policies, develop their traditions with their regulations, practices, organizational culture, teacher and student profiles. Specifically, individual habitus refers to the structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways (Wacquant, 2005), whereas institutional habitus refers to the coordinated practices in a social field, which constitute dispositional qualities of institutions (Burke, Emmerich, and Ingram, 2013). These dispositional qualities of school form social fictions that act through and upon its students. More specifically, schools instil specific motivations, manners, identities and future expectations in its students. Reay et al. (2001) comprehend the concept as a set of predispositions, taken-for-granted expectations and schemes of perceptions based on which schools are organized. Tarabini et al. (2016) explicitly define the concept as educational status, organizational practices and expressive order, which covers expectations, conduct, character and manners in school.

Against this backdrop, this study enriches both the largely descriptive studies on the integration of Syrian refugees in Turkey and the limited critical literature on the institutional habitus in integration research by providing qualitative evidence about the institutional habitus of the two schooling options for Syrian children in Turkey. We suggest that the notion of institutional habitus can help explain the experiences of Syrian children in school and show how schools affect their inclusion or exclusion.

DATA AND METHOD

This study draws on semi-structured in-depth interviews with parents from Syrian background, who came to Turkey between 2013 and 2017. We interviewed a total of 14 parents and six teachers. At the time of the interviews, all interviewees had at least one child who was attending either a TEC or PS. In some cases, the interviewees had children who had previously participated in TECs and presently participate in PSs or had children who had experienced both types of schools along with their trajectories. This diversity in the sample was useful in allowing us to compare the experiences of students and parents in each of the two school types. Beside parents, we interviewed teachers who were working at TECs and PSs. These interviews allowed us to understand the similarities and discrepancies of the institutional habitus of TECs and PSs and how each of them effectively shapes interactions with parents and students.

We sampled parents using the snowball technique, starting from a pool of counselees of an association, which actively works in the field of refugee protection. We received help from a Syrian social worker working in the association, who introduced us to interviewees. This allowed us to successfully attain trust and build rapport with the informants. After the interviewees received counselling service from social workers at the association, they were asked whether they wanted to take part in the interview. While we aimed to include the students themselves in the research, we

were not able to do so due to the difficulties related to gaining access to them. Instead, we conducted in-depth interviews with parents to gather information about their experiences as well as those of their children. Therefore, this study is limited to parent and teacher interviews only.

We also sampled teachers by snowball technique through the connections of social workers and researchers. Teachers worked in TECs and PSs in different parts of Istanbul. Four of the teachers were from TECs, two of them from PSs. The sample of the interviewed parents included only one male, but the gender distribution of the interviewed teachers was balanced. While parent interviews revealed their experiences of the two school types as well as the experiences of their children, teacher interviews provided in-depth information about the institutional habitus of the schools. The interviews were conducted in Istanbul and lasted between 35 and 60 minutes. They were carried out in Arabic, and the recorded interview material was translated into English. We analysed the translated materials using the ATLAS.ti, following the principles of qualitative content analysis. We systematically subjected the data to the procedures of summary (reducing the data to smaller parts), explication (formation of categories and coding rules) and structuring (extracting a consistent structure) (Mayring. 2007).

THE INSTITUTIONAL HABITUS OF TECs AND PSs IN TURKEY

Turkish national educational policies are mainly characterized by uniformity, modernization, and centrality. Though it was never fully achieved, the state recognized primary education as a public duty for all for the first time with the General Education Regulation of 1869 (Maarif-I Umumiye Nizamnamesi) during the Ottoman period (Gök, 2007). After the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the Law on Unification of Education in 1924 eliminated the pre-existing duality between secular and religious schools and unified education. The educational system appropriated the French "secular" national education model (Akyüz, 1993). The Ministry of National Education brought all types of education under its control and consolidated this structure as a central institution (Gök, 1995). The central state authority used education efficiently to transform the traditional Islamic community into a modern secular nation; it was used for both modernizing and homogenizing ethnically and religiously diverse population through the formation of a modern and secular "Turkish" identity (Gök, 2007). During the AKP period, while we witnessed de-secularization, privatization and marketization of education concerted with neoliberalism, education remains the most active state apparatus in terms of reproduction of national identities (Gök, 2002). To illustrate, national education policies do not reflect the country's ethnic and religious minorities such as Kurds, Romans, and Alevis (Çayır, 2014). The monoethnic and monoreligious curriculum only recognizes Turkish Muslim Sunni principles and does not acknowledge Kurdish language and Alevi values (Çayır and Gürkaynak, 2007).

To pursue their education in Turkey, one of the options for Syrian children is to attend TECs. These centres only cater to Syrian children and employ almost exclusively Syrian teachers. They provide education in the Arabic language and apply the slightly modified Syrian curriculum (Save the Children, 2015). Alternatively, Syrian children can enrol in PSs according to the law provision in 2014 (MoNE, 2014). These schools employ Turkish teachers to deliver education in the Turkish language and according to the Turkish curriculum. While it is impossible to homogenize all PSs, as they occupy different locations in the field of education, they can be generally characterized as having exclusionary institutional habitus, given the historical and political formation of national education policies explained above. The monolingual curriculum does not leave any room for students from ethnic minorities to learn or preserve knowledge of their mother tongues (Ayan, 2016). It was often reported that nationalist and militarist elements in the monocultural curriculum reproduce opposing categories of "we" and "them" (Çayır, 2014). There is no education policy introducing

quotas with regards to hiring teachers or social workers from a minority background (Çelik and Erdoğan, 2017). Furthermore, a growing body of literature suggests that teachers lack resources to communicate and teach Syrian children due to the language barriers in the absence of proper in-service-training programmes and activities. Also, they tend to be strongly influenced by widespread negative stereotypes and prejudices about Syrians circulating in the media (Nur Emin, 2016).

Considering the uniformity described above, modernization, and the centrality elements of the formal education, the TEC system is unusual in the history of the country's educational policies. It finds its origin in the temporary nature of policies addressing the Syrian refugees' situation in Turkey. While policy regarding instruction in TECs – in Arabic, following the Syrian curriculum – was officially justified as aiming to minimize problems Syrians may face when they return to Syria, it intended to prevent Syrians from staying in Turkey for a longer time. TECs are mainly primary and secondary education institutions. The Syrian curriculum, used in these schools, was modified by the Ministry of Education of the Interim Syrian Government, who removed Baathist content, and then revised by the Turkish Ministry of Education (Aras and Yasun, 2016). Most TECs are outside the camps and run by civil society organizations. They often provide education in apartments-turned-schools that are not suitable for education. There are also TECs which use the public-school facilities during the school's downtime.

TECs often do not meet specific criteria regarding legal status, infrastructures, curriculum and textbooks, as well as training and recruitment of teachers (Aras and Yasun, 2016). They reportedly demand monthly and yearly fees from the students to pay the rents of the buildings and this constitutes a substantial burden for the families who are already in a disadvantaged situation (Coşkun and Nur Emin, 2015). UNICEF, NGOs, and private donations are the primary sources for providing wages to teachers, and therefore they are not uniform in this school (Aras and Yasun, 2016). The quantity and quality of Turkish language courses are reportedly low; Turkish teachers are mostly volunteers in the Turkish language classes, but do not work regularly and are not well equipped to teach Turkish to non-native students (Ercetin, 2018).

In the following section, we will focus on experiences of students attending TECs and PSs and try to unpack how their institutional habitus affects the inclusion or exclusion of Syrian students.

STUDENTS IN TECs: LIVING IN AN AQUARIUM

In-depth interviews with parents whose children attended or still attend TECs reveal that they send their children to this school mainly because the language of instruction is Arabic, and the curriculum and the teachers are Syrian. They think that TECs value their culture and language and will ensure that their children will learn Arabic and maintain their culture. Salam, a Syrian mother who came to Turkey in 2013, commented that, "the Syrian curriculum in the TEC is more fruitful and richer because of valuable cognizance of Syrian culture".

According to parents, the TECs represent a familiar place in a foreign land, in which they know the "rules of the game". It assists them in transmitting Arabic language, culture and knowledge to their children and therefore minimizes their concerns and anxieties, at least within the realm of education. Nevertheless, the data suggest that the parents' fears about loss of their language and culture were mediated by the age of their children. Despite one unusual case in the sample, younger children were enrolled in TECs, whereas older ones were attending PSs. When asked why this is the case, Sabah, a mother whose children attend PS, stated:

> As for my kids, they are old enough not to lose their Arabic language, but if they were younger like in their first years at school, I would worry about that. So, because of their age now since they know how to read and write in Arabic I am not afraid of them losing their Arabic language.

Immigrants and refugees invest in their integration process more when they perceive that the context of reception is welcoming (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006). Likewise, students perform academically better and feel more attached to their school when they think that their culture and language are respected (Çelik, 2015). While we lack systematic data to compare and analyse educational performances of the students in TECs and PSs, we argue that the symmetry between home and school for the Syrian children contributes to the more regular attendance of the students to TECs compared to PSs. Concerning the closing of the TECs by the authorities, one of the parents, Taghrid, expresses her dissatisfaction and that of other parents as follows:

> We would really wish that the TECs remained open until the end of the primary levels so that the children can learn Arabic before. When they get older, they can join Turkish school. It is the biggest mistake to close the TEC especially from grades one to six. These levels should be taught in Arabic in addition to Turkish because one can learn both languages at this age.

The TECs, which offer education in Arabic, adopt the Syrian curriculum, cater to a Syrian student body and recruit Syrian teachers, significantly close the socio-cultural gap between home and school. By attending TECs, the students do not feel torn between two languages and cultures. The compatibility between home and school offers advantages to parents in monitoring their children's academic performance; similarly, it gives students the feeling of belonging and makes them attached to the school environment. Almost without any exception, the parents who sent their children to TECs stated that they attended Parent-Teacher Meetings (PTM) regularly, and could monitor their children in school. Talking about communication with the teachers in TECs, Rima, a Syrian mother from Aleppo who moved to Istanbul four years ago, remarked that

> We had good communication. When they called me for PTMs, I used to go and talk about everything related to my children's education.

Fatima another parent made a similar point concerning her interaction with school;

> My children used to tell us everything and every single detail that happens at school when they used to come back home. There were PTMs, we used to attend all of them.

The parents effortlessly communicated with the staff working in the TECs. The PTMs were held in Arabic. This empowered parent to trust the institution and allowed them to be engaged in the schooling of their children. It seems that the symmetry between the institutional habitus of the TECs and household not only facilitates interaction of parents with school but also encourages their children to act pro-actively in the school environment, which is one of the most important preconditions of academic achievement (Çelik, 2017).

Despite its positive aspects, TECs have some undesirable properties. The disorganization of administrative regulations and the deterioration of education quality recurrently emerged in the data analysis. The interviewees recounted that the registration fees fluctuate considerably, and the same TEC may charge different fees from different parents. Some TEC teachers were reported to teach only the Quran and some Turkish letters, rather than implementing the Syrian curriculum. Interviewees noted strongly that the TECs were better but that they are becoming worse. For example, Mirna, whose children had attended different TECs over two years, remarked,

> It was better even last year. They used to organize PTMs and we used to see the teachers and talk to them. It was great to meet with the teachers and learn about everything related to our kids in the school. But there weren't any meetings with parents this year, and we didn't talk to them or know about our kids. They also changed the teachers many times, that is not good.

While such remarks point to the disorganization of TECs, their gradual deterioration is related to the vagueness of their future. The teacher interviews substantiated that the fact that TECs will be closed soon had detrimental effects on the working and quality of this school type. Mervat, who has been teaching in two different TECs simultaneously for four years, observed that many qualified teachers had already left this school type;

> Before it was much better. Teachers were highly educated and qualified. The schools were well equipped; teachers would find everything they needed in the classroom. Everything is getting worse, honestly, even the materials we use are not like before.

The teachers think TECs do not have a future. This constitutes a risk of socioeconomic marginalization for them and has a significant impact on their motivation to work. Another teacher, Rani, who presently works at a TEC remarked: "the most qualified Arabic language teachers will work in Imam Hatip schools, the rest of the teachers won't stand a chance".

STUDENTS IN PSs: BEING A FISH IN UNKNOWN SEAS

While the interviewees in this study varied in their perceptions and opinions about the quality of education provided in PSs, they all related PSs to their long-term plans of staying in Turkey. Once they embraced the idea of living in Turkey, they consider PSs as a key for their children to learn Turkish and integrate into the Turkish educational system and society. Lamya, a mother of two girls who attend the same PS, said;

> There are great universities [in Turkey]. People try their best to learn the language so that they can enrol in university. So, that's why I want my kids to learn the Turkish language well in school to enrol in university in the future.

Despite the ideal match between attending state schools and building a future in Turkey, the data suggests that both parents and students cannot find what they were looking for in PSs. Once the children start school, the parents discover that they cannot monitor their children's schooling, due to the language difference and that their children are fully exposed to a curriculum, which is not cognizant of Syrian language and culture.

Schools play a critical role in facilitating the adaptation of refugee youth into the host society, and parent-school interaction is one of the significant determinants of school-centred adaptation processes (McBrien, 2011). Schools should have an ethos of inclusion, celebrate diversity and promote a positive image of refugee students to engage parents with the school actively (Taylor and Sidhu, 2012). However, PSs lack these notions; they do not employ Syrian teachers nor provide translation in PTMs, which altogether makes Syrian parents' involvement with the school nearly impossible. When asked how she was communicating with teachers in PSs, a parent, Salam, who had previously sent her children to PS and then changed to TEC remarked;

Salam: I don't know much, just a few words [of Turkish]. I didn't even attend any PTMs because I wouldn't understand anything. So, they were calling us, but I never went [to school].

Researcher: Then, how did you follow up with her situation?

Salam: She [her daughter] went once instead of me. She told the teacher that "I want to attend instead of my mother and father because they won't be able to understand anything". So, she went on our behalf.

We glimpse, through what Salam says, a sense that attending a PS is almost a humbling experience for Syrian children and their parents; one that potentially makes them think that their language and culture are devalued and that they are not warmly welcomed. Furthermore, the quote above exemplifies how monoculture institutional habitus strengthens parent-child role-reversal among Syrian refugees. Migration is associated with a series of adaptation challenges, which adds stress to the family. As children often learn the new language faster than their parents, they are asked to act as translators in facing authorities. Research shows that this causes role-reversal between parents and children and may undermine the authority of the parents and generate shame (Weisskirch, 2010). Renzaho et al. (2011) for example studied the adaptation process of Arabic speaking migrants in Australia. They argued that the challenges they face cause a parent-child role-reversal and lead to disharmony within the family. This contributes to the distrust of the legal system and the host society by migrants, as they perceive that these two entities undermine the core family dynamics and values. Similarly, our findings indicate that the exclusive language policy prepares the ground for undermining the family values of Syrian refugees by causing role-reversal – as exemplified in the quote above. This harrowing process for parents undermines their authority and potentially leads to mental health problems (Oznobishin and Kurman, 2009). It may also cause them to distrust the Turkish authorities, as in the case of Arabic-speaking families in Australia.

Salam's sentiments are widely held. They are reflected in another Syrian mother's words differently. Speaking of the registration process of her kids to PS, she asserted:

> It was hard for us. We were scared to take this step because we didn't know how to deal with the people there. We were scared as we didn't know the language.

In the words of both women's and those of the clear majority of the other parents we interviewed, we are presented with a sort of fear and anxiety as dominant feelings when it comes to contacting the PS due to the exclusionary regulations and language policy.

Monoculture institutional habitus not only undermines the capacity of the parents to monitor their children's schooling and potentially weakens their authority but also disengages the students from school and may lead to a feeling of depression. One parent, Zilal, described that her child felt sad because she could not understand the verbal expressions at school follow the courses:

> In that school, there weren't many Syrians. There were only five girls. She suffered a lot, and she used to say, "I no longer want to go to school". Even one of the girls with her in the school and who lives in the same building with us, she pushed her down the stairs to make her fall... there are girls like that, very aggressive especially towards us.

Various studies have focused on interethnic relations in multicultural schools and considered dealing with diversity as a new developmental task for children and adolescents in culturally heterogeneous societies but did not sufficiently focus on the role of schools in these relations (Monks et al., 2008; Strohmeier, Spiel, and Gradinger, 2008). Unlike them, our study reveals how institutional habitus of schools mediates interethnic relations. Syrian students felt more rejected and marginalized in PSs. They systemically complained about bullying and negative stereotypes in and outside of school by their peers. While some can solve these problems by asking for help from their teachers, many felt depressed, stigmatized, bullied and alienated. Another mother, Manal, spoke about her daughter's negative feelings and subsequent unwillingness to attend school:

> There is always a bit of tension among kids. Someone pointed at my daughter and said, "go back to your country, why did you come here, we don't want you here with us". So, one day she came home crying and told me, "mum the kids don't want me in that school. They are telling me to go back to Syria". She decided not to attend the school anymore. So, she did not want to see those

> kids. . .finally she had to force herself to go every day until the end of the school year. She had no other choice; there were no other solutions, so we were forced to accept this situation.

The case of Manal and her daughter was not unusual in our sample, as many others could not make a choice but were compelled to specific options. Our data systematically reveals that the Syrian students often feel marginalized and alienated at school, particularly when there are few Syrians in the school. Combined with lack of communication with teachers and friends, they are regularly subjected to discriminatory behaviours and attitudes. While we are aware that macro-level policies and larger social realities strongly contribute to the discriminatory attitudes, we argue that the exclusionary institutional habitus of PSs significantly facilitates materialization of unfair practices towards Syrian children.

The parents also voiced their concerns about the monocultural nature of the curriculum, which focuses only on Turkish culture and history. One parent, Sima, described her daughter's confusion caused by the monocultural nature of the curriculum;

> They are learning everything about Ataturk and their (Turkish) history. There's a long poem the kids learn at school, praising Ataturk. At home, she asked me "what did Ataturk save us from?". . .. She wants to know and understand. And she sings the poem all day long at home. While playing, working, she keeps repeating that he saved us and saved our lives. They were praising him like a prophet.

There is a strong sentiment among parents that their children are only taught Turkish values and history. This seems to sadden the parents. Another described how she was disturbed by the feeling of losing her child in PS;

> Our students learn about Turkish history and Turkish culture, and everything about the Turkish country and life. Even the phrases they use in teaching mathematics are different from the ones our children knew. This is a negative point. For sure, they will improve in the Turkish language, but I think all the other subjects will recede.

When we shared our findings with the teachers working in PSs, suggesting that Syrian students are occasionally depressed and that their parents are concerned, they confirmed these findings. They explained that while they try to help the students individually, they do not know what to do. Pakize, who is a primary school teacher remarked;

> They sit in the classroom and do not speak at all for the first six months, not a single word. They look into my eyes while I am speaking. I use my body language to explain the topics to them. We carry out home visits, try to help, but teachers like me have limited capacity.

While they want to help, we inferred from our interviews that teachers felt disoriented by the increasing number of Syrians students and often panicked, as they lacked institutional support. Another PS teacher, Pervin, whom we met at a workshop on the education of Syrians, made an analogy between Kurdish and Syrian students and complained about the absence of an inclusive approach;

> We are actively participating in panels, conferences to learn how to help Syrian students because our on-the-job training about this topic are not adequate. We lack perspective to think about them, lack material to use in the courses. We experience with the Syrians students what we have experienced with Kurdish students. Perhaps Syrians are luckier because Arabs and Arabic are not perceived "separatists" like Kurds and Kurdish. Anyway, Turkish education has a standard strategy when it cannot cope; "just pretend these students are not there".

Despite the well-intentioned policies of trying to promote the access of Syrian children to PSs, the examples across all PSs in this study revealed that teachers lack the institutional support to develop intercultural skills; PTMs are held in Turkish while the Syrian parents do not speak Turkish; there is no welcome, preparation, or orientation classes in PSs. The schools also lack efficient counselling services for traumatized Syrian children. These factors together seem to frighten Syrian parents and undermine their trust in state schools.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study is based on interviews with Syrian refugee parents, and teachers to explore the institutional habitus of TECs and PSs and empirically document how these shape the educational experiences, learning process and adaptation of Syrian children to the school context. It has revealed how the institutional habitus of both schools may result in exclusionary practices for Syrian students, and thereby, makes a novel contribution to the nascent literature on the notion of institutional habitus from a Turkish context.

We document that TECs work like a Syrian enclave in a foreign land with its ethnically homogenous student and teacher bodies, monolingual and monoculture education and curriculum. The convergence between home and institutional habitus of school facilitates interactions between parents and school and increases students' sense of belonging to school. It does not, however, help students to interact with Turkish society. The incorporation of Syrian students into the state schools emerged along with the gradual acceptance of Syrians as permanent settlers. While this policy is presented as an inclusive reform, our findings in this study indicate that PSs, with their monoculture, monolingual organizational practices and expressive order often work to exclude Syrian students. In this type of school, Syrian parents cannot monitor their children, and students frequently feel depressed and alienated.

We are sympathetic to the incorporation of Syrian students into state schools. Our findings, however, suggest that PSs, as they are, serve to an "imagined" homogenous community and, therefore, can potentially result in pushing Syrian children out of school. PSs should develop an intercultural, inclusive institutional habitus for the incorporation of students coming from non-Turkish backgrounds. As Matthews (2008) maintains, schools can provide safe places, learning opportunities and new encounters and interactions with the host society. We consider the presence of Syrian students as an opportunity to develop intercultural schools and cultivate a school-centred integration model for equal participation of immigrants and refugees into society.

While we wished to include Syrian refugee students in our sample, we could not gain access to them. Therefore, our findings are limited to the parents and teachers' reports of the students' experiences. The inclusion of the students' descriptions of their own experiences can enrich this debate in meaningful ways. Despite this limitation, however, we claim that our results and relevant theoretical articulations are unlikely to be confined to Syrian refugee children and Turkey alone. They are likely to enrich studies and inform policy efforts about the integration of refugee children into educational systems in various countries.

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