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Article *in* Journal of Refugee Studies · March 2019

DOI: 10.1093/jrs/fez020/5396704

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Categories that Blind Us, Categories that Bind Them: The Deployment of Vulnerability Notion for Syrian Refugees in Turkey

HANDE SÖZER

Political Science and International Relations Program, Middle East Technical University Northern Cyprus Campus, Kalkanli-Guzelyurt, Mersin-10, Turkey
hsozer@metu.edu.tr; handesozer2007@gmail.com

MS received August 2017; revised MS received June 2018

In policy projects on refugees, the concept 'vulnerable populations' is treated as self-evident and any policy intervention about vulnerable refugees is seen as inherently positive. Before all else, such interest in 'the most vulnerable of the vulnerable' recalls the most virtuous aspects of heavily criticized humanitarianism. The category 'vulnerable refugee' has escaped from critical scrutiny by academic literature. The existing studies rely on preconceived notions of vulnerability in line with scholars' normative predispositions, which makes us blind to already existing vulnerabilities on the ground. This article focuses on how the 'vulnerable refugee' category is constructed, appropriated and enacted by self-identified local humanitarian actors regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey. It argues, first, that various humanitarian actors' notion of 'vulnerable refugee' is formed at the crosscurrents of various discourses (e.g. global securitization and global humanitarianism, and nationalism, Islamicism, secularism). Second, local humanitarian actors uniformly present Syrian 'women and children' as the most vulnerable; yet, their identification of particular 'vulnerable women and children' is informed by and enhances their own gendered, ethnonational, religious, political ideologies. This situation results in leaving out some refugees (as those whose vulnerabilities do not count) while exposing and binding the designated vulnerable into contradictory political ideologies and local faultlines. In the end, Syrian refugees may become not more resilient, but more vulnerable.

Keywords: Humanitarianism, refugee categories, vulnerability, humanitarian actors, Syrian refugees, Turkey

Introduction

Policy projects on refugees take the 'vulnerable populations' notion for granted and treat interventions addressing 'vulnerability' as inherently

positive. Academic literature on refugees renders vulnerability notion immune from scrutiny as well. Before all else, such interest in vulnerability reminds of the most virtuous sides of castigated humanitarianism, beginning with its founding principle—'care for others'. Yet, this self-evident value attributed to vulnerability notion delays any discussion about what it entails—that is, what vulnerability exactly means; how it is identified, assessed and addressed; which discourses and practices it provokes; and how such discourses and practices influence 'vulnerable' refugees, the rest of the refugees and broader society. This article critically examines the humanitarian actors' deployment of the vulnerability notion for refugees by analysing local humanitarian actors' accounts regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey.[1]

The significance of studying the humanitarian deployment of the vulnerability notion for refugees partially comes from the existing academic indifference to the matter. On the one hand, most studies on refugees ignore the emergence of the 'vulnerable refugee' notion in the global humanitarian regime when the notion has been in global circulation since the early 2010s. For instance, the European Parliament and Council briefly mention migrants' vulnerability in the Qualification Directive of 2011, while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) introduced the Vulnerability Assessment Framework in 2013–14 (EP 2011; UNHCR 2014). On the other hand, scholarly works tend to treat the vulnerable refugee notion as an empty referent or as a variation of the preceding categories such as 'disadvantageous refugees', 'refugees under risk' or 'refugees with special needs'. Yet, as I argue elsewhere, the vulnerability notion is not a substitute for these notions in humanitarian context, since it implies selective rather than additional assistance. The notion indicates a shift in humanitarian concern from the vulnerability of all refugees to the vulnerability of only some as an instance of the emergence of a new humanitarian morality (Sözer 2019). Thus, studying manifestations of the 'vulnerable refugee' notion is not to fill an intellectual gap, but also to explore an emergent, neo-liberal modality of global humanitarianism (see Sözer 2019 for further discussion).

In principle, as the 'vulnerable refugee' notion hints a new modality of humanitarianism, it could have been explored by focusing on any recent refugee context. Yet, focusing on Syrian refugees is almost mandatory, for two reasons. Chronologically, global humanitarianism widespread vocalized the 'vulnerable refugee' notion only after the Syrian crisis. Practically, humanitarian policies for 'vulnerable refugees' were systematized, tested and implemented for the first time for Syrian refugees in host countries such as Jordan (UNHCR 2015), Egypt (UNHCR 2016), Lebanon (VASYR 2017) and the United Kingdom (CSJ 2017).

Focusing on Syrian refugees in Turkey is important, for several reasons. The first, and most obvious, reason is the relatively high number of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Registered Syrian refugees in Turkey amounted to 3,583,434 by 21 February 2019 (DGMM 2019) and much research presents Syrians' high number as a sufficient justification for research. Yet, regarding

my discussion, Syrian refugees' high number is important mostly because humanitarian actors raise the 'high number of potential beneficiaries' as a pretext for their selective assistance only to 'vulnerable' ones.

Second, Syrian refugees in Turkey are not legally 'refugees', but 'foreigners under temporary protection'. This ambiguous legal status also prevents them from applying for asylum, which adds up to their overall vulnerability compared to Syrian refugees in other countries and compared to non-Syrian refugees in Turkey.[2] Regarding my discussion, Syrians' legally ambiguous status together with their respective rights matters in furthering their vulnerability to unregulated interventions by various humanitarian actors in Turkey.

Third, after 2011, the emerging complexity of the humanitarian field in Turkey makes studying Syrian refugees in Turkey significant. The humanitarian field regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey has been a complex field regarding humanitarian actors' historical composition, their division of labour, their interactions and concerns regarding refugees (see Sözer 2017). A static and presentist depiction would name the humanitarian actors as the state and semi-state institutions, local branches of international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), national and local faith-based NGOs and Syrian refugees' NGOs. Yet, each category of these actors has displayed some dynamism inside and in interaction with each other, even when the state has increasingly functioned as a gatekeeper in the humanitarian actors' entry, exit and operations in the field (see Çorabatır and Hassa (2013) for the earlier difficulties to operate for a humanitarian actor). Moreover, humanitarian actors' division of labour is not as straightforward as the following statement presumes: 'the state is the policy maker; public actors (on either the ministerial level or the municipal level) are policy implementation agents or; and NGOs and INGOs are service providers.' For instance, historically, the state's policymaking in some significant areas has been after the fact (e.g. official registration, health and education policies); (ministral or municipal) public actors have been in power-play within and between each other in some provinces (e.g. Gaziantep); and some NGOs (especially some faith-based ones) had already established a track record of developing and implementing policies for urban Syrian refugees when the state was primarily dealing with camp refugees. Just as, if 'policy' tentatively means a course of action to address an issue, some NGOs had already emerged as policy designers, others are prevented from services other than the designated ones and many INGOs are prevented or suspended from operating in Turkey (Sözer 2017). This complexity resonates in the deployment of the vulnerability notion. Moreover, the complexity increases as an already ambiguous vulnerability notion has been interpreted by local humanitarian actors with varying ideological dispositions (e.g. Islamist, territorial-nationalist, secular republican, ethnically oriented), humanitarianism

senses (professional or voluntaristic), motives (ideological or technocratic) and forms of operations (relief, aid, protection, advocacy, awareness). Furthermore, this picture gets even more complicated as these local humanitarian actors operate in hosting societies by responding to diverse local political–ideological dynamics that may be different even at the various towns of the same province (see Sözer 2017).

The main argument of the article is as follows: approaching 'vulnerability notion' from an a priori and moralizing point of view may blur our sight both conceptually, namely in terms of how the vulnerability notion is inherently problematic in refugee contexts, and practically, namely how its actual deployment furthers its already problematic nature. The problem with the vulnerability notion is not its mis-implementation, but its very implementation in refugee contexts, while the elusiveness of the concept also increases its possibility to be implemented in incoherent, contradictory and even subversive ways by various actors.

In the article, the first part examines the broader academic literature on vulnerability notion when the critical academic literature on carrying 'vulnerability' to refugee contexts (in Turkey) practically does not exist. I argue that academic literature remains desperately seeking the theory-relevant or policy-relevant, which blinds us to seeing the contextual nature of refugees' vulnerabilities. The second part examines the local humanitarian actors' accounts on vulnerable Syrian refugees in to local contexts Turkey. I argue that these actors do not translate to implement a certain notion, but often interpret, sometimes misinterpret, occasionally manipulate and subvert, an ambiguous, elusive, yet morally guarded notion. By particularly focusing on the portrayal of women and children as the primarily vulnerable groups, I argue that local humanitarian actors have introduced a hierarchical system of differentially vulnerable among Syrian refugees in Turkey. Some refugees are portrayed as properly vulnerable, some others are directly excluded as invulnerable and the others' vulnerabilities do not even count. Local humanitarian actors' identification and ranking of refugees' vulnerabilities is informed by and enhancing their gendered, ethnonationalist and religious-political dispositions. As a result, designated 'vulnerable refugees' are exposed to different local humanitarian actors' differing and occasionally contradictory ideologies, and others are either excluded or ignored, but ultimately left behind to survive.

In the end, howsoever we (academics) tend to differentiate academic and policy studies regarding their purposes, procedures and processes, both launch from the same point in the case of refugees' vulnerability: they employ some a priori vulnerability categories before examining actual refugees' experiences on the ground. Then, this very same launching point leads to the same problem with such a priori vulnerability categories: they blind us to seeing the actually lived vulnerabilities of refugees on the ground, and they indirectly contribute to binding the refugees to often conflictual political ideologies that further refugees' vulnerabilities.

Methodology

The empirical ground of this article comes primarily from fieldwork-based research. My engagement with the theoretical literature on vulnerability and vulnerable refugees in Turkey relies on secondary sources. Some, fieldwork driven ones, among the latter reveal some actual vulnerabilities of Syrian refugees. Yet, my primary data comes from local humanitarian actors' narratives.

The research strictly follows a qualitative research design, which aims at capturing the depth of and variations in social actors' accounts by analysing the central themes, repeating patterns and diversified motifs in their narratives as an alternative to a quantitative research design, which would aim to be numerically and directly representative of social actors' worldviews (Bryman 2012). Therefore, the research utilized non-probability sampling, as the sample's relevance for assessing the diversity of the accounts rather than representativeness of group's overall account is the primary concern in qualitative research design (Bryman 2012).

My selection of field sites was via theoretical sampling. I aimed to pick locales to capture both diachronic complexities (especially refugees and host societies' ethno-religious, political–ideological diversity) and synchronic developments (from 2014 to 2017) in the humanitarian field regarding the Syrian refugees in Turkey. In mid-2014, I conducted my fieldwork in Gaziantep, Mardin, Osmaniye, Hatay and some neighbours of İstanbul, which each represents distinct local ethno-religious and political–ideological patterns that shaped the refugees' experiences. In late 2015, I conducted my fieldwork in western border cities such as Edirne, Çanakkale and İzmir following the mass migrations of Syrian refugees towards western Turkey for irregular crossing and in Antalya, where the provincial Governorate had prohibited registration of Syrians as an exceptional case. Then, in 2017, I detoured to Gaziantep, considering the rise in the number and variety of humanitarian actors in recent years, and visited Şanlıurfa, as the border province with the highest number of refugees lately.

In each field site, I reached to my informants via convenience and snowball sampling. Before my visit to each field, I had a list of humanitarian actors operating in all field sites. These included the Provincial Governorates, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD in Turkish), the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), Municipalities, Kızılay and a variety of international and national NGOs that are ideologically (from Islamists to secular republicans, to territorial nationalists, to ethnic nationalist) and functionally diverse (i.e. rights-based, relief, development, advocacy, public awareness). I also screened the local newspapers to identify actors that are nationally invisible but locally visible for their engagement with the Syrian-refugee cause. The majority of these actors were dealing with urban refugees when some had access to camp refugees as well. Then I used convenience sampling, as some of these actors were unwilling to participate,

others were not active in particular provinces and then others were not on my list yet active in specific provinces. Finally, I used snowball sampling by requesting that my informants should suggest to me names for potential informants relevant to my research.

The primary research method that formed the basis of this article is semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The issue of vulnerable refugees often emerged directly but sometimes indirectly in the interviews as '*hassas gruplar*' (sensitive groups), which were conceptually closer to the notion of vulnerability in terms of selective assistance than the precedent notions with the implication of not selective, but additional assistance. The total number of interviews is around 80: in 2014, I conducted a total 37 interviews in Gaziantep (nine), in Hatay (13), in Osmaniye (five), in Mardin (seven) and İstanbul (three). In 2015, I conducted 17 interviews in Edirne (five), Çanakkale (four); İzmir (four) and Antalya (five). In 2017, I did 26 interviews in Şanlıurfa (nine) and Gaziantep (17).

Throughout this article, I do not provide detailed information about the informants (their institutional affiliation, rank or even sometimes information on their location), since I received informed consent from them by guaranteeing not only anonymity, but also undetectability. As established in anthropology tradition, undetectability is about preventing any link between the informants' identity and information they had provided, not only the outsiders, but also by the insiders to the informants' community. Especially in the case of public officers (on the ministerial or municipal level), given the offices related to Syrians under temporary protection are clear, undetectability is almost impossible and any specific information could expose my informants to their own local or professional community members.

Academic Work's Taxonomies on Vulnerability: Categories that Blind Us

This section examines academic accounts on the vulnerability notion and its translation into refugee contexts. The literature on broader vulnerability notion is abundant and internally varied, while that on 'vulnerable (Syrian) refugees' is limited. The former relies on empirically untested abstractions and rigid taxonomies (e.g. positive vs. negative, intrinsic vs. situational, potential vs. actual vulnerability) with theoretical–ontological categorizations. The latter leans on existing policy categorizatons and reproduces global humanitarian discourse's perception of vulnerability as a condition of disadvantage for predetermined groups such as women, children and disabled. Yet, both kinds of literature have normative presumptions about vulnerability notion and contribute to the moral aura around and unskeptical sympathy towards interventions in the name of vulnerability alleviation. Furthermore, the literature relying on a priori, theory- or policy-oriented categories may prevent us from seeing refugees' acategorical yet actually existing vulnerabilities.

Broader Literature on Vulnerability: Theoretical Categories that Blind The broader literature on vulnerability roots in Feminist Studies, Research Ethics and Applied Philosophy. Earlier studies see vulnerability negatively, as a marker of oppression, dependency and lack of autonomy, while recent studies emphasize positive, 'constitutive' elements of vulnerability such as generating potential alliances, interconnectivity and empowerment. For instance, Martha A. Fineman locates 'vulnerable subject' at the centre of the political and academic pursuit for a more egalitarian society since it 'is far more representative of actual lived experience and the human condition' (2008: 2). The question, however, is why would our a priori conceptualization of vulnerability (as dependency or empowerment) represent actual vulnerability experiences of people who are located on the wrong side of power asymmetries?

Scholars on vulnerability attempt to generate taxonomies for analytically capturing various forms of vulnerability. Many highlight that vulnerability is a universal condition due to human beings' biological perishability and social dependency (Mackenzie *et al*. 2014) and their need for 'embodiment, enselfment and emplacement' (Turner 2006: 27). They name this vulnerability as 'intrinsic vulnerability' (Mackenzie et al. 2014) or 'precariousness' (Butler 2009). The same scholars also admit differentiated distribution of vulnerability, namely 'situational vulnerability' (Mackenzie et al. 2014) or 'precarity' (Butler 2009). Yet, they emphasize the universality of vulnerability instead of particular vulnerabilities for a pursuit for an egalitarian society. They claim recognition that 'we are all vulnerable' may trigger the development of better institutional frameworks (Turner 2006), states' active involvement (Fineman 2010) and 'concrete social policy regarding such issues as shelter, work, food, medical care and legal status' (Butler 2009: 13). However, these categories oversimplify refugees' experiences by showing their intrinsic vulnerability (as human beings), their overall situational vulnerability (as refugees) and their particularly situational vulnerability (since, for some, being a refugee means particularly harsh conditions). It clusters the 'situational' vulnerabilities of a financially deprived Syrian refugee who left his property back home and another one who is equally dispossessed and working in precarious jobs despite his or her law diploma.

Another analytical distinction in the literature is about the potentiality or actuality of vulnerability. Accordingly, vulnerability as susceptibility to harm may remain as a potential state, namely 'dispositional', or could have been realized and turned into real harm, namely 'occurent' (Mackenzie et al. 2014). This conceptual set on vulnerability is also insufficient for understanding refugees' complicated situations. It suggests potential ('dispositional') vulnerability for all refugees due to refugee conditions, while some refugees are actually hurt so they experience 'occurent' vulnerability. Yet, would not all refugees experience 'occurent vulnerability' at the moment of the border-crossing decision? This taxonomy does not help in understanding the possibly differentiated vulnerabilities of a Syrian single-woman refugee in Turkey and

a Syrian single-woman refugee suffering gender-based violence in Turkey when both are attributed 'current' vulnerability.

The literature on vulnerability during humanitarian crises suggests examining the relationship between pre- and post-crisis vulnerabilities. For instance, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin discusses how humanitarian crisis causes 'compounded' vulnerabilities for already vulnerable women (2011). My case also points out the need to look at pre- and post-migration vulnerabilities of refugees, yet it challenges the anticipation of cumulated vulnerabilities. It shows that some formerly vulnerable groups' get 'compounded vulnerability' after migration while some other formerly vulnerable groups reversed their status in their own community after migration. For instance, my informants state how despised Turkmens or IDless Kurds in Syria had been structurally disadvantageous in pre-conflict Syria, but they become relatively more advantageous compared to other Syrians due to their linguistic and kinship-based advantages.

One major flaw in the broader literature on vulnerability is how its normative, ontological categorizations treat social actors' vulnerabilities as static conditions. A careful study on refugees' vulnerabilities would challenge such accounts. Particularly refugees' vulnerabilities are treated as self-contained experiences, although they are far from being so in reality. Studying vulnerability by focusing on refugee contexts teaches us how refugees' vulnerabilities are structured within and across a refugee community, and between refugee and host communities in intricate ways. On the one hand, refugees are categorically vulnerable due to their shared refugee experience, which makes them different from a host community, yet refugees and locals may share similar vulnerability conditions, such as socio-economic deprivation. How are similar and different are the vulnerability of a Syrian engineer working as a waiter in Turkey and that of a local waiter in the same restaurant? On the other hand, despite their shared vulnerability due to refugee experience, many refugee communities are also inherently heterogeneous. Refugee communities may be internally heterogeneous not only in a sociological sense (e.g. age, gender, class, ethnicity, religion), but also in ideological terms (e.g. political affiliations, orientations, engagement) in and outside their home country, before and after the migration. Furthermore, these internally diverse refugee communities often resettle in host settings where local populations are sociologically, economically, ideologically and politically diverse, which may increase or ease some of the refugees' vulnerabilities. Do a Christian Orthodox Aramaic-speaking Syrian refugee and a Sunni Arabic-speaking Syrian refugee escape from different parties to the conflict and experience the same vulnerabilities due to refugee situation? Do they have the same refugee experience when both settle in Antakya in Turkey where Arabic-speaking Alevi Muslims are dominant?

This article argues that howsoever our vulnerability categories are comprehensive and precise, their explanatory power is limited in the face of sometimes layered, other times intersectional and occasionally isolated but always

already-complicated vulnerabilities of refugees. The categorical approaches to refugees' vulnerabilities cannot help in understanding the complexities of refugees' vulnerability, which is often both intrinsic and variously situational, and at once potential and actual and always more. Refugees' vulnerabilities are as much contextual as the very refugee experience.

The Literature on Vulnerability Regarding Syrian Refugees in Turkey: Policy Categories that Blind Academic literature on Syrian refugees in Turkey has been preoccupied with issues such as refugees' legal status (Biehl 2015), their permanency (e.g. Baban *et al.* 2017), integration (e.g. Erdoğan 2015, 2017) or discrimination against them (Hrant Dink Vakfı 2014). In this respect, especially the earlier academic research has been seeking policy relevance and, in fact, they came out in the format of policy reports and briefs for various international and national institutions and organizations (e.g. Dinçer *et al.* 2013; Özden 2013; Çağaptay and Menekse 2014; İçduygu 2015; Erdoğan 2017).

A direct discussion on Syrian refugees' vulnerability is completely absent in the literature except for *Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Istanbul* by Ayhan Kaya for the Support to Life (Kaya 2016). The report operationalizes the vulnerability notion from a perspective of the 'basic needs' and is based on data on Syrian refugees' profiles, displacement, routes, shelter and hygiene conditions, protection, access to education and health, income sources, expenditure, food consumption, coping strategies and aid received (Kaya 2016: 11). The research has policy orientation and is concerned with quantifying possible areas of vulnerability in a very comprehensive way. Yet, it does not explain what vulnerability means for the researchers, leaving aside proposing a critical conceptualization of the vulnerability notion.

Some studies instead imply Syrians' vulnerability in Turkey by promoting an unsceptical approach to the very notion. These works do not recognize the overall vulnerability of Syrians in Turkey except some problematizing Syrians' makeshift legal status as 'guests' instead of refugees (e.g. Özden 2013). The rest utilize variations of the 'subpopulational approach' to vulnerability (Luna 2009) by examining registered and unregistered refugees (e.g. Ay 2014; İçduygu 2015), Syrian women (e.g. Mazlum-Der 2014), Syrian youth (e.g. Mercy Corp 2014), women, children and disabled (e.g. Sanduvac 2013). The term 'vulnerability' is a substitute for 'disadvantage'.

The portrayal of women and children and elderly and disabled as 'vulnerable' is not surprising for anyone familiar with public awareness campaigns on any refugee group, yet the global academic criticism of such conceptualization is sharp. For instance, Lisa Malkkii argues that humanitarian actors use images of women and children because not only do they constitute the majority of the refugees, but also they reinforce 'the institutional, international expectation of a certain kind of helplessness as a refugee characteristic' (Malkki 1995: 11, 1996: 388). Cynthia Enloe argues that treating 'womenandchildren' as a single category presents them as a single entity that is innocent

but victimized and that needs protection, and therefore justifies intervention (Enloe 1990). Charlie Carpenter shows that interventions by presuming the innocence of women and children violate the broader norm of 'impartiality' in conflict settings when adult men are actual targets of violence (Carpenter 2003, 2005).

The criticism of such gender essentialism resonated in the global academic and policy circles. The global humanitarian focus has recently shifted from earlier essentialism regarding the vulnerability of women, children, elderly and disabled on supposedly biological grounds (i.e. sex, age and ability) to these groups' socially induced vulnerabilities. A quick glance at the UNHCR's Vulnerability Assessment Framework would prove this point. Now, vulnerable refugees include not refugee women, but single women, single-parent women and gender based violence-victim women refugees. Now it is not any refugee children, but unaccompanied refugee children, working children and abused children are vulnerable. This change, namely the use of the same categories only with different grounds, still has biological essentialism underneath when recognizing single refugee men's vulnerability is still a taboo! In the case of the literature on Syrian refugees in Turkey, such a critique does not resonate in existing work at all.

A Way Out from Theory-oriented or Policy-oriented Academic Categorizations Multiplying vulnerability categories, models and taxonomies is not a solution to understand refugees' complicated vulnerability experiences. Some scholars already show that an overpopulated vulnerability category that includes all humanity is too broad and too narrow at once (e.g. Levine *et al*. 2004). Others show how all vulnerability categories are internally homogenous 'labels' on 'subpopulations' and generate stereotypes about actually 'layered' experiences (Luna 2009). Luna's 'layered vulnerabilities' notion signals that 'different layers [of vulnerabilities] operating [while] these layers may overlap' (2009: 128) and calls for multiple strategies to unfold these different layers one by one (p. 130). The 'layered vulnerabilities' approach actually helps in seeing patterned fluctuations in vulnerability from individual to collective levels, from unique to structural reasons, from its permanent to changeable aspects. Yet, the 'layer' metaphor also implies a hierarchy as well. Which layers would be the base for the other layers? If the point is avoiding the 'subpopulational approach' due to its fixed, stereotypical conceptualizations, how are we going to avoid fixing and stereotyping the vulnerability of *sub*-sub-populations? Is the point merely hunting for the extra adjectives in comparing the vulnerabilities of, for instance, random refugee women and illiterate refugee women, and illiterate, poor, ethnically marked women?

My point here is neither a call for abandoning categorization attempts nor an invitation for new categories. The problem in the academic literature is not the lack of new categories for still-unnamed vulnerability conditions. The problem is not one of accuracy, since it seems our vulnerability

categorizations are destined to remain inaccurate howsoever they appear comprehensive. The piercing problem is that we cannot recognize some existing vulnerability conditions, since we are conditioned to look at them through our a priori categorizations, taxonomies and models. The solution is reversing the way we see, think and analyse vulnerabilities, by avoiding imposing our analytical conceptualizations on the reality and by examining the real-life vulnerabilities with a fresh eye before attempting to generate vulnerability categories. My suggestion is studying refugees' vulnerabilities from a *theory-irrelevant research perspective*, which echoes Oliver Bakewell's call for 'policy-irrelevant research' (2008). It is not against attempts to theorize, but against imposing predetermined trajectories, predesigned models and a priori conceptualizations on existing reality.

My call for a critical assessment of the moral shield around vulnerability notion is not due to a concern for empirical accuracy in academic works. Ultimately, any concern with vulnerability is unavoidably a concern for social inequality and justice; therefore, it has a normative character. Yet, often, the way we like to see the world may blur our sight about the way things are. As Alyson Cole states, our normative dispositions, such as academic attempts for 'resignifying vulnerability' as a universal condition for empowerment, can risk 'muddling the important distinctions about specific vulnerabilities' and underweighting the power inequalities that have induced various vulnerabilities (Cole 2016: 262). Moreover, the capability to impose our normative dispositions on refugees' experiences emanates from our privileged position. In the end, echoing Gayatri C. Spivak's statement that 'subaltern can speak but cannot be heard' (1988: 66–111), vulnerable populations may 'speak, but they cannot be heard', since our own normative convictions already deafen us. Furthermore, howsoever our intentions are altruistic and comradely, the cost of such deafness is high: our conceptualizations may destined to inform and even justify intervention mechanisms for vulnerable groups and we, academics, are no less susceptible than policymakers in complicating 'vulnerable' populations' lives.

Local Humanitarians' Taxonomies on Syrian Refugees' Vulnerability: Categories that Bind Syrian Refugees to Local Ideological Currents

This section examines local humanitarian actors' vulnerability categorizations for Syrian refugees in Turkey by focusing on territorial nationalists, Islamists, professional humanitarianists as well as Syrians' organizations. Each group of humanitarian actors is diverse internally regarding their sense, methods and means of humanitarian engagement. I argue that local humanitarian actors do not merely translate to implement an already definite notion of vulnerability from global humanitarian discourse. They sometimes interpret this notion, other times misinterpret, occasionally re-manipulate and subvert, frequently re-invent it in light of their political–ideological dispositions about citizenship, religion, ethnicity and gender. Furthermore, their political–

ideological dispositions are shaped by and responses to national and local-level political–ideological currents on the 'Syrian refugees' issue. Each of these actors, interestingly, identifies Syrian women and children as vulnerable, yet they are quite diverse in determining which women and children are vulnerable.

Various political discourses influence humanitarian imperative about Syrian refugees in Turkey. At the international level, the impact of global humanitarianism is visible: Syrians' migrations is announced as a 'humanitarian matter' by the government (see Davutoğlu 2013) and governing party members (see İcduygu *et al*. 2017); an open-border policy was declared (Dinçer *et al*. 2013); the migration management is transferred from security forces to the DGMM as a civilian authority (see the Law on Foreigners and International Protection 2013); the legal framework has developed; and the humanitarian sector has progressively opened to INGOs, national NGOs, local NGOs and Syrians' NGOs, although the state strictly controls it (compare Çorabatır and Hassa (2013) and Mackreath and Sağnıç (2017) for the change). Yet, the impact of global securitization of migration is also visible especially but not only after mid-2015: the open-border policy is implemented selectively (see Koca (2015) for an earlier discussion); refugees' registration started to be enforced, introduced another stage for background check and then de facto closed; refugees' mobility across borders and then within the country is strictly regulated, particularly after mid-2015.[3] The securitization paradigm became effective particularly after Syrian refugees' irregular migration attempts to Europe in mid-2015 and following the European Union–Turkey Readmission Deal—a joint statement by Turkey and the European Union on 18 March 2016 that enforces the return of irregular immigrants to Greece from Turkey in return for liberalization for the visa requirement for Turkish citizens.

At the local level, the humanitarian imperative has developed within heavily polarized national public opinion between rising Islamic conservativism and its secular opposition, shattering the globally well-known formula, liberal left sympathizing to and conservative right reacting to refugees. The Islamic conservative Justice and Development Party's (JDP) base was welcoming while the liberal left and nationalists were sceptical of Syrian refugees' migration to Turkey (see Erdemir 2017). The exception has been some already marginalized advocacy networks from the left side of the political spectrum. An informant from the local branch of a national NGO in Hatay put it as follows: 'Humanitarian aid and political issues have overlapped now. We have to give an account of what we with do even to our friends. They say 'what do you do with Syrians when we have our own poor?' The political polarization had started to ease before the November 2015 elections when opposition parties (e.g. the Republican People's Party and the People's Democracy Party) included in their election bulletins clauses about Syrian refugees' rights, although it has never fully dissolved.

The humanitarian sector regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey, within the aforestated context, emerged as a complex field with local humanitarian actors with varying dispositions and ideologies (e.g. Islamist, territorial-nationalist, secular republican, ethnicist), understandings of humanitarianism (professional or voluntaristic) and motives (ideological or technocratic) and forms of operations (relief, aid, protection, advocacy, awareness). Such diversity has marked their engagement with vulnerable Syrian refugees.

The use of the phrase 'vulnerable groups [*hassas gruplar*]' by local humanitarian actors is relatively recent and related to exposure to global humanitarianism especially after late 2015, yet, before, local organizations were aware of differentiated conditions of Syrian refugees, even when public opinion, politicians, academics were portraying Syrians as a homogenous community. Local actors, however, follow the same pattern as the academic works on vulnerability: only a few recognize the overall vulnerability of Syrian refugees and they do see it as an excuse for misbehaving, since 'their psychological condition is deteriorated due to war' as an informant from Osmaniye stated during our interview. The general tendency is to see only some Syrian refugees as 'vulnerable'. Each local humanitarian actor, while defining some groups as vulnerable, also created a ranking system of not-so-vulnerable refugees, invulnerable refugees and refugees whose vulnerabilities do not count.

The local humanitarian actors uniformly identify Syrian women and children as 'vulnerable refugees', yet they are diverse in identifying which Syrian women and children are vulnerable, in line with their citizenship, class, religion, ethnicity and gender ideologies. In the rest of this article, I examine accounts of some local humanitarian actors, namely territorial nationalists, Islamists, global humanitarians and Syrians themselves, on who constitute the vulnerable Syrian refugee women.

Paternalizing the Vulnerable, Patronizing Invulnerable: Territorial Nationalists' Accounts Paternalism, as Michael Barnett states, is an 'organizing principle of international humanitarian order which relies on dual notions of care and control while involving in others' lives to protect them even against their will' (2012: 485). Paternalist care implies the claim to know the best interest of one who is seen as incompetent or inferior. The paternalist control means intervening in others' lives without their consent (Barnett 2012). Global humanitarianism's burgeoning emphasis on 'vulnerable refugees' is paternalism over paternalism: it is a claim to know who is the neediest for care and control within a refugee community. With regard to Syrian refugees in Turkey, some local humanitarian actors' paternalism about vulnerable refugee women and children is accompanied by territorial-nationalist and patriarchal ideologies.

Territorial-nationalist reaction to Syrian refugees has been prevalent in the national public opinion since the very beginning.[4] It questions whether Syrians in Turkey are *real* refugees and why resources are allocated not to the local poor, but to Syrians. This view existed in the local state offices in

the earlier periods of the refugee flow. These offices had been for social policy projects for local populations while they turned into humanitarian institutions following the migration of Syrians. These actors were also questioning whether Syrians in Turkey are 'true refugees' on various grounds. Interestingly, even for the most critical ones, Syrian women and children are vulnerable. The following are excerpts from two informants who were working at two different state offices in Gaziantep in 2014:

> Why would not I seek asylum here if I were a Syrian? I am not saying this for women and children. Yet, others, we do not even know if they run away from Esad …. Of course, these are my personal opinions. Yet, I believe they do not come from persecution; they cross and re-cross the border to take care of their soil, their animals, to bring back and forth goods …. There needs to make a distinction between those who are victims and those who are not. Some hang out in parks, smoke water-pipe; those are not asylum seekers.
>
> We should spare women and children, but the rest, especially young men should not have been accepted …. For instance, young widowed women left with her children … it is acceptable to make them stay in camps. Yet, we could not have taken men at the ages between 18 and 65. They should have remained in their country and struggle; they should have fought.

As exemplified above, 'women and children' among Syrian refugees are spared to make the distinctions between real and unreal, vulnerable and invulnerable, deserving and undeserving refugees. These actors' reference to vulnerability is informed by a peculiar juxtaposition of paternalism with territorial-nationalist and patriarchal ideologies. They promote a particular form of 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell 1995) ideal: women and children are victims and men are fighters in Syria, and women and children are vulnerable and men are invulnerable in Turkey. Then, the designated vulnerable is paternalized while the designated invulnerable is patronized.

The designated vulnerable (women and children) receives paternalist care. One paternalistic form of care was offering these groups a place in camps. These local humanitarian actors presented camps as a 'treat' for vulnerables, since, in camps, access to shelter, food, security and basic health and education services is free, as came out frequently during my interviews in mid-2014. Even some European officials presented the camps as 'magnificent …on a different level than those elsewhere' (ICG 2013: 4). Further, vulnerable refugees are located in container camps instead of tent camps. Paternalist control, however, follows paternalist care. Refugees' behaviours, namely their display of gratitude, their living and consumption habits (e.g. staying up late, going to parks at night, wearing makeup and perfume, buying shampoo) and their child-care practices (e.g. trying to 'correct' the customary practice of stopping breastfeeding for one-year-old babies), are all put under surveillance to continually assure their *properly* vulnerable status. Otherwise, their refugee status is questioned, as an informant from Hatay stated in 2015:

> Daytime no one is around, nighttime, they come out with water pipes to the parks. There is no man next to them. They do not look like they run away from war with their epicurean ways.

Notably, a mismatch between expected and actual behaviour puzzles humanitarian actors. For instance, for these actors, pregnancy, on the one hand, makes women rightfully vulnerable but, on the other hand, increases the expectations from them, as an informant from a state office in western Turkey stated in 2016:

> The most vulnerable group is unaccompanied children …. Next comes pregnant women; pregnancy is widespread. It is because they think that the God will provide for the newborn, or it may secure a residential permit or even refugee status in the country of arrival. Yet, [when they attempt to cross the border irregularly and caught] when we say 'you are risking the life of your child,' they say 'the life of the child is not important.' How are we going to explain it to them? It is a matter of [their] mentality!

This informant is outraged with the idea that the supposed grounds for refugee women's vulnerability—pregnancy—can be a tool for legal rights and a mother can 'sacrifice, her unborn child'. While he attributes 'the problem' to the mentality of individual women, he does not ask the question of the types of structural problems behind their 'mentality'. Why does serial pregnancy appear for women as the only solution to access minimum refugee rights of residence and legal status? Why do women take the sea path as irregular migrants or what do they go through in their current host state so that they come to the point of the paradoxical pursuit of risking their own and their children's rights to live a decent life?

The designated invulnerable people, namely the Syrian refugee men, are patronized for not fitting into a particular notion of territorial-nationalist hegemonic masculinity which dictates that men should fight for their country. The refugee men, therefore, are continuously reminded that they did not fight for their country and criticized for their migration to Turkey. Syrian refugee men's accounts do not count when they say that 'it is way too complicated now and we do not know whom to fight aginst? Esad? Nusra? ISIS? PYD? FSO?'. Pacifism is an unimaginable option for a man.

Patronizing operates in a faintly different way than paternalizing; it relies not on 'care', but on its lack, indifference and even recklessness. The designated invulnerable, the Syrian refugee man, faces patronizing: in 2014, Syrian refugee men without a wife or a family were not allowed to register even when they wanted to do so, as stated by some informants. The registration was seen as a 'treat' with access to free health services and these Syrian refugee men were seen as undeserving. The patronization is visible in depriving a group of refugees (single men without family) of their legal rights when there is no legal ground for doing so, and it gives the message that they are unwanted and have two options: leaving or living an unregistered life.

Overall, these local humanitarian actors have carved 'the vulnerable' from the whole body of Syrian refugees. They have paternalized these groups by the care and by control and, finally, they blamed refugees if they did not comply. Then they located refugee men as 'invulnerable' based on some territorial-nationalist hegemonic masculinity idea. The patronizing of the refugee occurs as they are derided for their decision not to partake in the war and prevented from living with their choice as proper refugees.

Assisting to the Vulnerable for Honouring the Vanished Invulnerable: Faith-based Actors' Accounts Since 2013, local faith-based charity organizations have been actively involved in the issue of Syrian refugees due to their perception of the Syrian conflict as a legitimate one and their JDP government's policies on the subject. They have focused on urban refugees while providing emergency relief, recording the newcomers, collecting and distributing aid and assisting in matters of health and education. As a result, the faith-based local charities and organizations emerged as one of the earliest non-state humanitarian actors working with Syrian refugees.

At first glance, faith-based humanitarian actors have an inclusive approach to all Syrian refugees. Rhetorically, they portrayed Syrian migration to Turkey as a modern-day *hijra*—that is, the historical migration of Prophet Muhammed from Mecca to Medina with his devoted followers—so that they refer to Syrians as *muhacir* (i.e. migrants, referring to Muslim migrants from Mecca) and themselves as *ensar* (i.e. helper, referring to host populations of Medina who welcomed the migrants). The phrase '*ensar olmak*' (being like *ensar*) to Syrians, together with 'pursuit of humanity', has been stated as their motivation for humanitarian engagement with refugees. Yet the *hijra* reference is clearly the prioritization of some Syrians with whom they feel religious–ideological unity even they often point out how they assist refugees from various backgrounds.

Faith-based NGOs clearly differentiate various vulnerabilities within Syrian refugees and highlight vulnerabilities of women, children and the poor. This situation, however, does not mean they are inclusive of all Syrian women and children. It is not all women but *şehit eşi* (i.e. wife of the martyrs), not all children but *yetim* (i.e. children whose fathers died in Syria), not all families but *şehit aileleri* (i.e. families of martyrs) who count as priorities. To them, Syrian women and children's vulnerability is conditioned by and derives from their connection to a man, who is either a husband or a father, and in both cases a fighter, dead or alive:

> We provide aid if those newcomers have a divided family like a fighting male and a woman staying in here, or a family of a martyr …. We do not help overly-needy and Haymatlos [i.e. stateless, referring to Kurds] or Gypsies since they reduce the aid. Also, we do not provide for families of troublemakers (Interview in Osmaniye, 2014).

> We have a … building and we let … apartments to Syrians …. Especially the families of martyrs, disabled and elderly are sorted and prioritized. Families of martyrs are vital since they have people who cannot work or who are disabled (Interview in Gaziantep, 2014).
>
> The most disadvantageous ones are those who are living outside the camps, who are widows since their husbands became martyrs and their children (Interview in Şanlıurfa, 2017).

The term 'martyr' implies that the man should have lost his life in Syria during the fight; that the man should be a Muslim; and that the man should be a Muslim who fought at a presumed 'right side' in the Syrian conflict. The women and children's vulnerabilities are derived from a man who was by default an invulnerable person and whose death made the rest vulnerable. Simply put, from this perspective, the vulnerability of some women and children is conditioned by the presence of a vanished invulnerable, ''the martyr''.

Humanitarian engagement with these designated vulnerables shows a particular blend of paternalism as well. Assisting these women and children is not to make them resilient, but also to honour the vanished invulnerable. The paternalist care and control are grounded in the disappearance of a patriarch (the man of the house) replaced by another patriarch (his humanitarian brothers sharing the same faith and political ideology). Paternalism has remained constant for these women and children; only its actor has changed from a private, individual patriarch to a public, collective patriarch.

The paternalism of the faith-based humanitarian NGOs operates on a particular 'hegemonic masculinity' model (Connell 1995) that honours men who partake in war even at the cost of leaving their wives and children across the border at an unpredictable universe and that forms them as honourable invulnerable. Then such men's wives and children deserve care if the honourable invulnerable vanishes. Ultimately, this hegemonic masculinity ideal automatically places the other, refugee Syrian men into the category of excluded invulnerable. Those are the Syrian men who migrated with their family to Turkey or who died due to natural reasons or accidents on the way or in Turkey, or who died in the conflict but not necessarily at the 'proper' side. Other women and children are not vulnerable at all, for instance, if they are unmarried or married to men who refused to fight and migrated with the rest of the family or married to men who 'fight' for another side. Children are not vulnerable, for instance, if they lost their mother or if their fathers died after migration due to natural causes or accidents or if they were forced into child labour or underage marriage for survival. In fact, many frame underage marriage and child labour not as problems, but as solutions for 'real problems' for prostitution for girls or criminal activities for boys.

Quantifying the Vulnerable, Leaving Out Not-so-vulnerable: Local Humanitarians' Accounts Humanitarian INGOs' operations in Turkey have been subject to state permission and restricted in practice. In mid-2014, only 10 INGOs were permitted to work in Turkey and only two of them could work in south-eastern Turkey (Kirişçi 2014); in mid-2015, the number of permitted INGOs increased (IRIN 2015) and, in 2017, some formerly allowed INGOs were asked to leave the country (IRIN 2017). This environment of uncertainty led to INGOs' partnership with national and local NGOs, although earlier national NGOs' operations were limited as well. Only in late 2015, INGOs and national NGOs opened new offices in places where Syrians reside.

Adherent to global humanitarian principles, local branches of INGOs and national NGOs use international organizations' vulnerability criteria or develop their own versions. This may result in variation in their assessment of the same refugee group. For instance, various INGOs have used differentiated configurations of vulnerability for health, household members' number, income, housing conditions, legal status, and women and children. Specifically, concerning 'women', DRC counts female-headed households and women at risk of sex and gender based violence while CARE International adds to these pregnant women and nursing mothers. Regarding children, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) counts children under age two and unaccompanied minors, while CARE also includes working children or children at risk of sex and gender based violence (UNHCR 2013a).

Local offices of some INGOs and national NGOs use UNHCR's Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF). VAF aims for 'standardized criteria to talk about vulnerabilities in equivalent terms' and includes vulnerability categories under the titles 'child at risk', 'unaccompanied or separated child', 'women at risk', older person at risk', 'disability', 'serious medical condition', 'family unity', 'specific legal and physical protection needs', 'torture' and 'sex and gender-based violence' (see UNHCR 2013b, 2013c). Organizations collaborating with UNHCR utilize their criteria, as two informants from Gaziantep and Edirne explain:

> We use UNHCR's vulnerability criteria; we examine disability, the number, and ages of children, elderly member, widowed women or men, child workers. This system requires gathering demographic data and assignment of points. Then we record data not manually but by a computer program to form a bell-shaped curve for assessing vulnerable refugees.
>
> We assess vulnerable refugees at our office by filling detailed forms grounded on our field personnel's interview records. It is tough to make a decision. For me, the most vulnerable groups are pregnant women, women with children, LGBTI. Yet, thinking about the cold now, coal is what is needed the most. Those without enough coal for heating are the most vulnerable.

Second, the Emergency Social Safety Net Program (ESSN) is a European Union-funded project that is implemented by the Turkish Ministry of Family

and Social Policies, the Turkish Red Crescent and United Nations World Food Program (ESSN 2017). It was initiated in 2016 for providing cash assistance to the neediest urban Syrian refugees. ESSN's vulnerability criteria are limited to 'a single female', 'a single parent with no other adults in the household', 'an elderly head with no other adults in the household', 'a disabled person in the family', 'having more than three children' and 'family has 2 or more dependents (children, elderly and disabled) for every 1 adult (between 18 and 59), or 3 or more dependents for every 2 adults' (Kizilay 2017). The local actors utilizing ESSN criteria, however, know that some vulnerabilities cannot be resolved with this system of cash assistance, as an informant stated in 2017:

> The most disadvantageous ones are women with children, children without parents as unaccompanied children, elderly, disabled. Our Kizilaykart project came out of the principle of social integration because a hungry person cannot respond to education. Yet, we often find ourselves in other roles, such as advocacy for unregistered, IDless refugees who may not access to hospitals although it is their legal right. We provide translator services for them. Someone pointed out 13-18 Syrian children living in caves and referred the case to the related ministry. Sometimes they put disabled children with other children in state orphanages which results in their escape. Of course, they would try to escape.

Third, some humanitarian actors also develop their own organizational criteria for the assessment of Syrian refugees' vulnerabilities by focusing on the local circumstances. Yet, again, these local actors discern Syrian refugees' dynamic vulnerabilities, which refers to the fact that vulnerabilities are dynamic; they may emerge, disappear and change shape and nature as a response to the changing context of social actors that may not translate into a set of fixed criteria, as two informants from Hatay and Gaziantep, respectively, stated in 2015 and 2017:

> We utilize a point assignment system; aid goes to those with 9 points. In humanitarian aid, we search for some continuity; the point is not handing aid and running away. We are always in the field for house visits to identify vulnerable groups, such as women, women with children, those with low-income status, and those who have not received aid.
>
> Once doctors were the upper class in Syria, then they had to form illegal clinics. Weeks ago, police closed them, and doctors became the most disadvantageous group now …. People, 16-26-year-old ones, cannot access any services, social life, or any income source. While younger children can go to school, for these refugees, the only option is working as an apprentice. Maybe the alternative to work is a crime by joining local gangs or forming their own. Disabled people are the most disadvantageous: some needed a wheelchair so that could not go out for two years. We avoided sampling and attempted to reach all neighborhoods to reach these groups. We give them 'emergency situation code'.

Numerically represented, empirically recorded and internationally justified vulnerability criteria seem to provide a more technical, standardized and

transparent assessment of vulnerabilities at first glance (see UNHCR 2013b, 2013c for point attribution). Yet, quantifying vulnerabilities creates the distinction between those who meet the proper minimum score and those who are just below it. The former is declared as 'vulnerable' while the latter is presumed not-so-vulnerable.

The concept not-so-vulnerable is the inverted version of Derek Sellman's celebrated notion of 'more than ordinarily vulnerable' (2005). Sellman suggests the 'more than ordinarily vulnerable' notion of replacing the 'vulnerable patient' category in health sector, since the latter presumes some patients are not vulnerable at all, even though all patients are vulnerable. My conceptualization of not-so-vulnerable refugees refers to those who are left out of the vulnerability frameworks, since some refugees are declared as 'vulnerable' based on some quantifiable, preset criteria, which recognize the not-so-vulnerable refugees as vulnerable, but insufficiently so. It takes one less family member for a crowded family to be coded not 'vulnerable' but 'not-so-vulnerable' sometimes. In this sense, non-so-vulnerable refugees' situation nails the problem about academics' preconceived notions and policymakers' preset categories of vulnerability.

Another problem with a preconceived quantifiable notion of refugee vulnerability is that, howsoever comprehensive these criteria get, they eschew some complicated, locally visible vulnerabilities. My informants' aforementioned accounts reveal how criteria-based approaches to vulnerability may not recognize some actually lived vulnerabilities, as in the case of refugees who do not have coal, who live in caves or who are in the limbo of being 16–26 years old. Such actually observed vulnerabilities that do not fit the preexisting criteria frustrate my informants. They hopelessly attempt for resolution through their personal or professional networks, even though they know such interventions would backlash, as in the case of disabled refugee children placed in state orphanages and escape from bullies.

Handling Vulnerability by Vulnerable Themselves: Syrians' Organizations' Accounts In 2016, Syrian refugees initiated their own official associations and collaborated with other humanitarian organizations. Their partnership exposed Syrians' NGOs to various local ethnonationalist, religio-political and patriarchal ideologies as well as to various humanitarian assistance modes ranging from 'capacity building'-oriented global humanitarianism to 'social risk'-oriented securitization discourses and from feminist 'consciousness raising' to Islamic conservative 'values education' practices. Still, amid these currents, Syrians' NGOs have developed a problem-solving approach employing self-victimizing dramatic narratives on vulnerability. This situation is due to the conditions under which they operate, as one of my informants from İzmir put very straightforwardly in 2016:

> Other associations are also working on refugees; yet, we are different. They are the ones who are counting the beaten while we are the ones who are beaten.

> They are working on as much as we do though. When we have a demand, we cannot raise our voice since we would lose it all. We are foreigners.

Formed initially as generic associations and then specialized into different groups, Syrians' NGOs have a realistic depiction. Their struggle is one for dignity, as a Syrian informant from Şanlıurfa puts clearly:

> We are not connected to anyone via politics …. We teach Syrian women handcrafts, tailoring, Turkish. It is not to make someone bring food to women; it is not to receive aid or alms from people. We are working for ourselves.

Syrian NGOs also have a sense of 'layered' forms of vulnerability, as two of my informants from two different Syrian NGOs in Gaziantep explained in 2017, who are 'vulnerable' among women and girls:

> Here we have three groups of women: first, certified, strong woman without jobs and they do not have a good life in Turkey. Such as engineer women. Second, those who are uneducated but living in their houses. For them, we offer help to support their children if they can work so that they can find better jobs. A third group is disabled women who are discriminated against in their own community even in their own family.
>
> Girls from poor families, or alone, or have one parent, a father maybe, are in the worst situation. They had finished the high school and were going to enroll in college in Syria. Then they come here. Now if they learn Turkish and attend Turkish colleges, their self-esteem boosts. Among them, some girls have never been here or in Syria …. Their family did not let them go out first due to the war and then feeling unsafe in another country. Contacting with parents earn their trust was our way. They searched us and then sent their daughters. First, when they did not allow, we arranged transportation by bus and hired a teacher for the bus as well. Now even when they are late, they do not get anxious. We educate girls; gain families' trust, then aid comes.

These Syrian NGOs' accounts of vulnerability do not rely on preset biologically or socially essentializing vulnerability categories; they are careful assessments linking pre- and post-migration processes, derived from first-hand knowledge and daring to point out underlying structural reasons. Refugee women are vulnerable not because of sex or gender roles but, when regulations do not permit it, there is no childcare and they face social stigma in the home and host communities. A young girl cannot go to school in case of mistrust of education institutions and when feeling unsafe in the host community. Thus, Syrian NGOs have the potential to actually recognize the existing vulnerabilities free from frameworks with preset categories of policymakers and preconceived notions of academics.

Ignored Vulnerables: Vulnerables beyond Categorical Assessments So far, I have discussed how local humanitarian actors' vulnerability assessment is informed by their national, religious, gendered ideologies and how they carve out some groups as vulnerable and rank the rest. Local humanitarian

actors' maps of vulnerabilities also have a blank space: vulnerabilities that do not count or ignored vulnerabilities. These are known but ignored vulnerabilities, since they do not fit into our preset categories and preconceived notions. They are like blank spaces on a map; they are marked as white patches therefore they are known, but they are marked as white to be left alone.

Some forms of vulnerability are ignored when local humanitarian actors know about them but do not see them as 'proper' ones, as my informant from a faith-based NGO exemplifies: 'We went to NGOs workshop and noticed that their agenda is about preferences [sexual orientation]. This is an issue only for a tiny portion of our group [Syrians].' Alternatively, some forms of vulnerability are known and recognized by local humanitarian actors who, however, feel humbled, since they are also aware how structural reasons underlying such vulnerabilities and how intervention mechanisms at hand cannot resolve them:

> In the identification of the disadvantageous groups, international NGOs utilize definite ranks. They say, women and children. Yet, which women and children are at stake here? Disabled women? A woman whose husband died in Syria or in prison here? A woman who is suffering from Alzheimer's? Those women are invisible. For instance Armenians here, they hide themselves here. Children without any ID were born in here so that they have any ID from Syria or here. In the labor market, dentists and doctors are now unqualified workers since they are forbidden from working. The unqualified workers in Syria still live the same life in Turkey. Syrian male workers cannot improve themselves; therefore, employers direct to women and children as workers. Then you face abuse of women. Women working at the sweatshops face abuse and rape. Then, they do not have a clinic to go since here the state hospitals do not allow abortion after rape. Wealthier Syrians could go through this; they go to private clinics in Istanbul. Poor women are left alone. Thus they visit underground clinics where doctors have limited tools. There are attempts to forbid such clinics due to raised mortality among women. The problem of child labor can not be resolved by forbidding it … when some families are surviving owing to their working children.

The above excerpt from my interview with an NGO worker in Gaziantep in 2017 indicates that the unquantifiable refugee vulnerabilities that cannot be resolved by cash assistance or psycho-social support programmes. They are unaddressable; thus, they do not count. For instance, they know that the state's assisted-living facilities will reject refugees with Alzheimer's Disease on linguistic grounds. Refugee women with a husband in prison will not get aid, as the husband is alive and as he is in jail. The pregnant refugee will not have an abortion due to the de facto abortion ban in state hospitals. Working children will not go back to school with cash assistance as the sole providers of the family and when the schooling system changes every six months.

Syrian refugee men are often seen as invulnerable owing to nationalist or religious hegemonic masculinity accounts, as I discussed above. Yet, usually, their particular vulnerabilities do not count as well: it is invisible that Syrian adult men take the deadly sea path when attempting to migrate to Europe while they direct the women and children to land border. It is invisible that Syrian adult men often face the stigma of 'cowardice' and criminalization in the press. It is invisible that Syrian men experience a severe masculinity crisis due to the reversal of family dynamics when some simply cannot find a job yet their wives, daughters and sisters can. My Syrian informant from Şanlıurfa explains the situation:

> My son's psychology is not well; he could not find a job. My husband says that 'once ten people were working for me; now I will work for someone? No way!' It is challenging for him now. Yet, I was a teacher in Syria; now I work at a tailor's shop for 10 lira per 100 pieces.

Vulnerabilities of children who were born in Turkey do not count. These children do not have any identification card from Syria or Turkey except their birth card from the state hospitals. The children that are born outside the hospitals cannot receive a birth card at all. The lack of documentation results in their ineligibility for registration at migration management offices and their receiving the Temporary Protection ID, which will result in their ineligibility for school or health services in the future.

Vulnerabilities of Syrian refugees who want to but cannot register do not count. This configuration can happen in places where the registration of Syrian refugees is closed officially (i.e. Antalya) or unofficially (e.g. western border cities in 2015, south-eastern border cities recently). A recent change in the registration system with a pre-registration appointment and background check requires at least one year of waiting without any access on registration-related rights. Earlier, in 2015, a shift from voluntary to enforced registration resulted in random checks and the encampment of unregistered refugees while, now, unregistered refugees are treated as an issue of security, on the grounds that 'there is no point of remaining unregistered if one does not plan illicit acts' as an informant reveals the state officers' perception.

Vulnerabilities of educated, upper middle-class people from certain occupations such as lawyers, dentists, doctors and teachers do not count. Lawyers and dentists cannot work in Turkey. Dentists and doctors could work in unregistered clinics until recently and channelled to become 'practitioners' despite their specializations in recently opened Refugee Health Centers. Many teachers were employed in the Temporary Education Centers, yet they are closed and students are directed to Turkish schools. Downward mobility of the refugee populations in their host settings is a known fact, as a state official once stated: 'it is not that surprising; that's the way things are.' Yet, the vulnerability of these educated, highly skilled Syrian refugees is also due to intermittent regulations or their lack in 'the way things are'.

Vulnerabilities of some ethno-religious groups do not count. Local actors recognize the reversal of status for some formerly oppressed ethnic groups, such as Turkmens and Kurds, in some places. Yet, I also encountered cases pointing in the other direction, such as Armenians from Syria attempting to pass as Muslims in some provinces, some Roma from Syria attempting to pass as Kurdish, while other Roma were trying to pass as Turkish Roma, and Alevi Turkmen refugees could find shelter from Kurdish and Turkish Alevis in Istanbul.

Finally, there may be Syrian refugees whose vulnerabilities have remained unnoticed, by academics or policymakers. The presence of such vulnerabilities shatters not only our empirical accuracy claims, but also the whole idea of vulnerability assessment and intervention. Those are the vulnerabilities that refugees shout in our faces, but we do not hear them. Therefore, our concern should be about answering not the question of '*which* vulnerabilities are invisible *to us*?', but the question of '*why* are they invisible *to us*?'.

Concluding Remarks

A discussion on the vulnerability of refugees may appear as a marginal one compared to more immediate issues regarding refugees' lives. Few existing academic or policy work on refugees' vulnerabilities avoids critically engaging with the vulnerability notion and attempting to answer the following question: Which vulnerabilities (of refugees) are invisible? This question indicates an empirical accuracy concern and only causes the creation of new taxonomies and categories of vulnerability. Yet, I argue that such a strategy paradoxically does not bring in empirical accuracy, since no limited amount of categorization can actually grasp the existing, changing, disappearing and emerging vulnerabilities of refugees because the refugees' vulnerability experiences are heavily contextual, namely responses to the pre-, during, post-migration processes and contexts in home and host settings. Thus, without discrediting the first one, I suggest changing the question from 'which vulnerabilities are invisible?' to '*why* are some vulnerabilities invisible?'.

The article argues that some vulnerabilities of refugees are invisible *to us*. *Our* attempts to identify preset criteria, to rely on a priori notions and to anticipate predestined trajectories on Syrian refugees' vulnerabilities, in fact, make us blind to their actually lived vulnerabilities. It is not that these vulnerabilities are invisible; it is that our ways of approaching the matter are self-blinding. Furthermore, our blindness comes at a cost: our uncritical accounts of vulnerability create a moral aura around any intervention in the name of addressing refugees' vulnerabilities. In the end, categorically and already vulnerable refugees get exposed to local ideological fault lines with the vulnerability intervention attempts that potentially advance refugees' vulnerabilities.

The first concluding remark of this article is that the problem is not the mis-implementation of the vulnerability notion, but the very implementation

of the notion to the humanitarian context regarding refugees. The vulnerability notion is an already elusive one, yet it translates into selective assistance rather than additional assistance to some segments of the community when it is utilized for refugees. However, our sympathy towards the vulnerability notion and our moralizing approach to vulnerability interventions (for refugees) prevent us from seeing how the moral shield around the notion may actually cause harm, indirectly, by preventing a healthy dose of scepticism towards vulnerability interventions.

The second concluding remark of this article is about our theoretical and policy-oriented engagement with the vulnerability notion regarding refugees. I argued that existing academic work relies on a priori categorizations in theoretically oriented work (e.g. positive or negative, intrinsic or situational, potential or actual vulnerability) or policy-oriented work (e.g. women, children, disabled) that may not help to capture the already existing vulnerabilities of refugees. Thus I suggest finding ways to develop a fresh look at the phenomena, at least at the beginning and during of a research, by following Bakewell's 'policy-irrelevant' research agenda and adding to it the need for theory-irrelevant research agenda as well.

The third concluding remark of the article is about the implementation aspect, namely the deployment of the notion by local humanitarian actors. Empirically, the research could have explored the major macro-political transformations as manifested in the international legal documents, organizations' directives or domestic laws or states' policy documents. Yet, seeing legal and official scripts as transparent and taking them for granted would be misleading. More importantly, it would have ignored the creative potential of local actors in enlivening such abstract principles as 'vulnerability' on the ground.

Following this point, in this article, I tried to show that local humanitarian actors do not merely translate to implement an already definite notion of vulnerability from global humanitarian discourse. Specifically, by examining territorial-nationalist, Islamist, global humanitarianist and Syrians' organizations, I argue that, while all share the idea that Syrian women and children are vulnerable, they differ on which women and children are vulnerable, why they are vulnerable and how to address their vulnerabilities. I tried to show that they sometimes interpret the vulnerability notion, other times misinterpret, occasionally re-manipulate and subvert, frequently re-invent it in light of their political–ideological dispositions about citizenship, religion, ethnicity and gender that are being shaped by and respond to global-, national- and local-level political–ideological currents on refugee issues. In other words, designated vulnerables are destined to become more vulnerable, at least to local fault-lines.

1. My short fieldwork in 2014 was funded by the Campus Research Funding of the Middle East Technical University Northern Cyprus Campus. The project received the Distinguished Young Scientist Award in 2015 from the Science Academy in

Turkey. Without this award, my research and fieldwork in 2015–17 would have been impossible. I am also deeply grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and criticisms that enabled further clarification for the arguments in my work. Before and after all, I am thankful to Erdinç Sözer, whom I still learn from, for being next to me, no matter what.

2. In Turkey, the number of non-Syrian refugees who are registered with UNHCR amounts to 368,230 according to UNHCR as of 30 November 2018; http://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/unhcr-turkey-stats. Obviously, they are no less categorically vulnerable than Syrian refugees, yet this discussion is beyond the scope of my article.
3. These evaluations come directly from the interviews and observations during my fieldwork that provided me with a chance to observe changes in the policies from the local level as it spread to distinct periods in three years. For instance, in summer 2014, Syrian refugees' mobility was unrestricted within Turkey, which made the mass movement of Syrians from south-eastern border cities to western border cities possible in September 2015. Yet, after September 2015, a strict tightening of Syrians' movement was initiated and enforced particularly by security forces that are reported to make random ID checks on Arabic speakers on the street or national bus firms were asked not to provide tickets for Syrians without checking their ID with information about the registration province. By 2017, Syrian refugees that needed to move to a city other than their registration province needed to apply for and receive written permission from the DGMM.
4. Sociological and anthropological work on research methodology already established that the respondents would not always reveal the most accurate opinions in surveys or one-time interviews on sensitive issues in line with social-desirability bias. These issues include racism and xenophobia. Territorial nationalist reaction to Syrian refugees is visible to any follower of social media and any observant field researcher who engages with not only the 'front-stage', but also the 'back-stage' (Goffman 1967), behaviour and accounts of informants on such issues.

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