Social Politics 2021 Volume 00 Number 0

"Distant Toleration": The Politics of Solidarity Work among Turkish and Syrian Women in Southern Turkey

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This article examines the politics of solidarity with and among refugee women in Turkey's southern borderlands. Drawing on ethnographic research in Hatay, we focus on Syrian- and Turkish-led women's organizations, whose solidarity work contextually entangles organized acts of care and support with social hierarchies, tensions, and mutual distance. These gendered social spaces complicate the scholarly critiques of depoliticization in refugee assistance by governmental and civil society organizations, and the charity–solidarity distinction on which such critiques often rely. They require a rethinking of solidarity with refugee women beyond the terms of right-based political activism.

"There is no solidarity here!" Nermin told us impatiently as we chatted over coffee about the state of Syrian refugees and their relations with locals in Turkey.[1] It was a hot summer day in 2019, and we were hiding from the sun in the serene courtyard of a café converted from an old townhouse in Antakya, the capital city of Turkey's border province Hatay, which currently hosts an estimated 400,000 of the 3.6 million Syrians who have fled the war to settle in Turkey since 2011.[2] Nermin is a local Antakyan of Arab descent in her early forties, and by the time of our conversation she had been involved in socialist feminist movements for over ten years.[3] Explaining what she meant by the "lack of solidarity" concerning the place of Syrians in feminist politics, she continued:

> There is no platform in Antakya for Syrian and local women to bond. They may be brought together through projects funded by the UN [United Nations] and the EU [European Union] for migrant integration. But each group socializes among themselves and never mingles. While we, feminists, expect to lead a struggle with them, Syrian

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socpol: Social Politics, Summer 2021 pp. 1–24
doi:10.1093/sp/jxab013

> women's organizations try to remain invisible to avoid trouble with locals or state agents. I wouldn't call this solidarity or social cohesion. At best, it is distant toleration in the form of mutual noninterference.

The tensions over what it means to support Syrian women in southern Turkey resonate with broader debates concerning solidarity as political commitment, moral appeal, and social relatedness. Rooted in the European industrial workers' movement (Stjernø 2005), class-based understandings of solidarity denote "the need to fight the social fragmentation created by the development of capitalism through the establishment of relationships of trust and mutuality" (Gill 2009, 667). As a "socialist affect" that "manifests intersubjectively and collectively through embodied actions and alliances" (Schwenkel 2013, 252), solidarity here implies a collective struggle for equal rights and social justice on the basis of common interests (Molé 2012). Feminist activists often problematize the sexist attributes of working-class solidarity, but many draw on the political legacies of socialist models (Mohanty 2003) while contemplating an ideal non-kin sisterhood or "maternal citizenship" (Dygert 2017) against neoliberal structures of patriarchy (Rai 2018). Intersectional feminists likewise conceptualize solidarity as "the voluntary coordination of action," support, and resistance by bonding differentially positioned social groups "on an equal footing" (Einwohner et al. 2019, 4).

When extended to "the suffering other" in contexts of displacement, however, solidarity becomes a moral—rather than an overtly ideological—concern whose conditions of possibility are the very hierarchies that it aims to address. This paradox reflects broader problems of humanitarianism that scholars have identified while studying the increasing role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in assisting refugees. Oriented toward alleviating the suffering of vulnerable groups via emergency aid, development assistance, and relief efforts, humanitarian responses to mass displacement are often driven by a feeling of compassion rather than entitlement (Ticktin 2016). They invoke a discourse of "emergency" that conceals the historical and structural forces behind the "crises" of global migration (Agier 2011) and rely on gendered and racialized ideas of deservingness that maintain inequalities between citizens and noncitizens (Fassin 2011). Depoliticized and dehistoricized in this way, some argue, solidarity with migrants represents a "[civic duty] that does not require any kind of legal commitment" (Serntedakis 2017, 85) and risks turning refugees into rightless subjects of humanitarian care, charity, and flexible labor.

Aware of these challenges, politically motivated refugee-rights activists in European countries struck by the migrant "crisis" debate the complicity of solidarity initiatives in perpetuating humanitarian logic and related social inequalities (Rozakou 2016). They mobilize the concept to raise the political awareness of volunteers (Theodossopoulos 2020), acknowledge the social tensions of egalitarianism (Rakopoulos 2016), and repoliticize the refugee

question beyond liberal discourses of "common humanity" that maintain the hierarchies between providers and recipients of care (Siapera 2019). To distinguish their political work from "the extra-state modes of social assistance such as humanitarianism, charity, and philanthropy" (Cabot 2016, 160), social justice activists emphasize the need for the engaged parties to form mutuality and a right-based action against different forms of oppression.

However, the common critiques of depoliticization in migrant solidarity initiatives cannot fully explain the forces that obstruct durable citizen–refugee interaction in the restricted civic spaces of the Middle East where most displaced Syrians reside today. The failures of allyship that Nermin describes as "distant toleration" derive not merely from the prevalence of humanitarian approaches over political (e.g., socialist) solidarity but also from the context-specific needs and circumstances of displacement that produce and obscure the political potential of Syrian women's community-building efforts in southern Turkey. This article illustrates the underlying forces of such failures by focusing on different conceptions and distancing effects of solidarity with Syrian refugee women in Hatay, where we conducted joint fieldwork for six months in 2019.[4] Countering the tendency in scholarship and activism on refugees to pit rights-based advocacy against needs-based action, we put into conversation the politically and socially motivated articulations of solidarity adopted, respectively, by citizen-run feminist groups and Syrian women's organizations in Hatay.

Within this framework, we first examine the discourses and practices of solidarity undertaken by two influential socialist feminist organizations in Antakya: Mor Dayanışma (Solidarity in Purple) and Kadın Emeği Derneği (Organization for Women's Labor). We show how Turkish feminist groups assess the political possibilities of solidarity in terms of the ideological grounds and collective effects of cross-communal (Turkish–Syrian) interactions in the region against the backdrop of a history of ongoing state oppression based on class, ethnoreligious identity, and gender. Operating in a restricted field of civil society where the government and affiliated institutions hold a monopoly on assisting refugees and quell dissident voices, these groups strive unsuccessfully to incorporate Syrian women into their vision of advocacy with a feminist and antigovernment stance. While challenging the depoliticizing tendencies of humanitarian and faith-based initiatives from a (women's) right-based stance, citizen-run feminist groups tend to dismiss the political significance of Syrian women's social sites of solidarity that emerge at Turkey's national margins despite the constraints of limited access to rights and resources.

What does solidarity look like when practiced among refugee women who embody the dominant images of victimhood? Can their organized acts of care for each other offer new political avenues to overcome the effects of distant toleration even if these acts do not uphold the ideals of gender equality, social justice, or intercommunal alliance underpinning rights-based frameworks of

solidarity? To address these questions, the second part of this article focuses on the solidarity work of two Syrian-led women's organizations with different outlooks and resources: Fulukah Hurriyah (Boat of Freedom), a formally recognized institution that organizes humanitarian aid and handicraft workshops specifically for Antakya's refugee women who lost their spouses in the Syrian war; and El-Nisa Suria (Syrian Women), which operates independently and unofficially in Hatay's border town of Reyhanlı, providing religious and cultural courses and other forms of support to Syrian women of different age groups. Despite the differences in their mission, status, and daily operation, both organizations engage in gendered activities of social solidarity that pragmatically combine humanitarian, charitable, and developmentalist models of care.

Their hybrid orientation does not automatically render the forms of agency and solidarity enacted by Syrian women through these organizations any less political. The women involved may not engage in right-based contentious politics (such as the antideportation protests in Europe) on which scholars have recently focused to show refugees' political agency and the patterns of migrant–citizen solidarity (Ataç et al. 2016; Kirchoff 2020; Mensink 2019). However, as Asef Bayat notes in analyzing subalterns' ways of doing politics under Middle Eastern authoritarianisms, Syrian women's everyday solidarity manifests "[their] power of presence—the ability to assert collective will in spite of all odds, by circumventing constraints, utilizing what exists, and discovering new spaces . . . to make oneself heard, seen, felt, and realized" (2013, 102). The political labor in this context of solidarity is much more latent, ephemeral, and hierarchical. Backgrounding explicit ideology and characterized by aspirations for self-sufficiency, such labor resides in Syrian women's organized efforts to transform their uneven conditions of living into the very ground for connecting with one another in displacement.[5] It is through these informal, asymmetric, and intracommunal connections that Syrian women can access otherwise restricted resources and realize themselves as active participants of public life and economy in Turkey where they are often cast as (burdensome) victims.

Taken together, the distinct approaches to supporting refugee women in Hatay show that how solidarity is produced and construed in a given context is not fixed in advance and must be analyzed through the local conditions and politics of its enactment. When deployed under the constraints of protracted precarity, legal violence, and authoritarian restrictions (Kıvılcım 2016), the struggle to secure a livelihood through need-based practices of everyday solidarity can be just as influential as organized social/oppositional movements in creating self-sustaining forms of civic engagement. The recognition of such contextuality troubles the primacy of legal status and citizenship as the prerequisite for political participation in Turkey. Ultimately, a relational analysis of these distinct approaches compels a rethinking of solidarity with refugee

women as embedded in the social fabric where the scholarly divides between charity and solidarity dissolve.

The Role of Civil Society in Assisting Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Unlike groups involved in solidarity work in European countries that have seen an increased migrant presence in the past decade, such groups in Turkey operate in a restricted field. Under the rule of an increasingly authoritarian government, Syrians have legal access to healthcare, education, and work permits (Baban et al. 2021). Yet their temporary protection status perpetuates uncertainty by minimizing the support that displaced Syrians receive from international refugee agencies and independent organizations in Turkey.[6]

Although Turkey has received mass arrivals from neighboring countries since the 1990s, the question of refugees and undocumented migrants has remained marginal in government discourse and civil society until recently. Except for a small number of urban pro-migrant organizations concerned with asylum seekers waiting for resettlement in a third country (İkizoğlu Erensu 2016), political groups often limited their activities to redressing the social injustices toward differentially positioned Turkish citizens (Parla 2019). Women's organizations and feminist groups were no exception and have largely neglected the experiences of refugee and migrant women in their politics of solidarity.

The mass displacement of Syrians into Turkey and the EU and UN endowments for their resettlement have pushed government agencies and civil society actors to adjust their mandates to include refugees in a more explicit manner. In the initial years of the conflict (2011–2014), Turkish authorities adopted an open border policy and mobilized resources to distribute emergency aid to Syrians who were cast as temporary "guests" (Dağtaş 2017). This attitude has contributed to the isolation of Syrians from Turkish citizens and reproduced the image of refugee victimhood, especially for Syrian women who have been more active than men in seeking aid-based help (Özden and Ramadan 2019, 17).

As the Syrian presence in the country became a long-term reality and European powers applied pressure to prevent refugee movement further west, Turkey formalized its impromptu temporary protection regime in 2014 and closed its southern borders in 2015. Accompanied by the widening of donor priorities, these developments entailed a new emphasis on social cohesion between Syrian and Turkish groups and gave rise to Syrian-led associations with diverse agendas.[7] Fulukah Hurriyah and El-Nisa Suria were among these associations. However, in tandem with an authoritarian turn in Turkish politics, both humanitarian and social cohesion work in the realm of refugee assistance came under strict state control and suppression in the following years (Aras and Duman 2019, 480). Especially after the attempted military coup of 2016, independent organizations and political groups, including those working with

Syrians, have faced increased policing, security measures, and unlawful closures through emergency decrees (Tuğal 2016; Yılmaz and Turner 2019).

The ensuing political climate has laid the groundwork for an already empowered Muslim civil society to form a "faithful alliance" (Danış and Nazlı 2019) with Turkish state institutions in governing the lives of displaced Syrians (Memişoğlu and Ilgıt 2017).[8] State-sponsored faith groups continue to receive official support and play key roles in managing social problems experienced by refugee communities (Jacoby et al. 2019). But their language of solidarity with Syrians, like that employed by the government, does not treat them as right-bearing political subjects. Instead, faith-based organizations invoke an affective discourse of religious kinship and hospitality that fuses a rooted paternalistic state tradition with neoliberal reformulations of Islamic patronage (Carpi and Şenoğuz 2019).

Reduced in this context to government-regulated "humanitarian assistance and charitable activities" (Danış and Nazlı 2019, 145), solidarity with Syrians represents a contested field. Mirroring the academic and political debates in Europe, critical scholars differentiate the right-based solidarity initiatives from the need-based charity groups in the realm of refugee assistance in Turkey (Mackreath and Sağnıç 2017). In "mainstreaming the needs based understanding of civil society," Sunata and Tosun (2019, 688) note, refugee-related NGOs (NGO-Rs) act as a bridge between the state and private capital. The social field within which NGO-Rs operate contrasts with "political society"—that is, the site of state coercion, active citizenship, and political dissent (Aras and Duman 2019, 479) and therefore of "true" solidarity.

The rigid distinctions between civil society and political society crumble, however, as local feminists negotiate the social priorities of Syrian women in their cross-communal solidarity work. These priorities confirm feminist conceptualizations of private mores as always already political (Tronto 1994), while also pushing the boundaries of politics to address social hierarchies among allied women at the local level. Furthermore, the tendency of critical scholarship to frame the emergent phenomenon of Syrian-led NGOs as an *extension* of Turkey's Islam-oriented neoliberal humanitarian field overlooks how Syrian women exert political agency without government support in a context where their access to (active) citizenship is limited. As we show below, the conditions of displacement under authoritarian pressures on civil society render everyday sociality and immediate needs vital components of political life, often troubling the local feminist equations of solidarity with symmetric coalitions toward shared goals, collective action, and more rights.

Feminist Responses to the Syrian Displacement in Hatay

The challenges surrounding migrant solidarity networks are common to the urban centers and border provinces where most of Turkey's Syrian

population resides today. Yet they take a particular form in Hatay partly due to its local minority populations' troubled history vis-à-vis the Turkish state and Islamist movements. Prior to the Syrian displacement, the Arabophone citizens of Hatay largely comprised Alawis (approximately one-third of the province's population), Sunni residents of its border towns and villages (more than 100,000), and Orthodox Christians (a few thousand); all of these groups had religious and socioeconomic ties across the border. The concerns of local citizens over the sudden shift in this ethnoreligious composition with the recent Syrian arrivals evoke a longer history of state efforts to Turkify and Sunnify the region since Hatay's annexation (Duman 2016).

Our long-term Alawi interlocutors in the region particularly highlight the sectarian/ideological animosity in describing their tensions with Syrian newcomers against the backdrop of state-induced anti-Alawi rhetoric. They tend to cast Sunni Arabs and Turkmens who constitute the majority of these recent arrivals as "religiously conservative," "oppressive to women," and "connected to Islamist fighters who resisted the Assad regime back in Syria." The fault line with Syrians in Hatay, then, is less about Turkish–Arab distinction as in other parts of Turkey and more about ideological (socialist versus conservative) positions that map onto sectarian (e.g., Alawi–Sunni) or secular–Islamist divides.

Given these structural limitations and ethnoreligious dynamics, very few citizen-led initiatives in Hatay express solidarity with Syrians as their main mission; when they do, these indications often imply aspirations for a politically engaged alliance against state power or other forms of oppression. Such aspirations appear unlikely to become reality especially for Hatay's socialist feminist activists. To explain the limits of political solidarity with refugees on the ground, these activists not only cite the broader problems of humanitarian or corporate appropriation of solidarity but also express concerns over the tendency of existing projects to organize solidarity events around highly gendered and apolitical activities (such as cooking, childrearing, and handicrafts) or the religious (Islamist) discourse that underpins the more durable citizen–refugee networks. Consider, for instance, the cases of Mor Dayanışma (MD) and Kadın Emeği Derneği (KED), two local feminist organizations operating in Antakya to fight capitalist and patriarchal violence against women.[9]

Having emerged from distinct political factions within the Marxist movement prevalent among Hatay's Alawi circles, MD and KED are run by self-declared independent feminist women. Yet in explaining the nuances of their own organizations, these women refer to the political ties that some members in each have to different socialist parties and, in the case of KED, the Kurdish movement. Formed as a collective around a feminist journal in 2007, KED has more than 250 active members in the industrial cities in southern Turkey, where the Kurdish and Alawi populations are concentrated.

Although MD was founded more recently (in 2016) as a women's solidarity network, the nationwide distribution of its active members follows a similar

pattern. Numbering nearly sixty in Hatay, the MD membership largely comprises young professional women some of whom work in the local chapters of I/NGO-Rs. The two groups collaborate with each other and with other feminists across the country to organize large-scale events (such as the International Women's Day celebrations) or to promote platforms (such as "Women for Women's Human Rights"). They operate within a formal institutional framework to "keep relations with the state simple" at the legal level and claim to follow a horizontal model in line with feminist principles of solidarity.

MD's office is a one-story house in an Alawi-dominated area adjacent to Antakya. In their off-hours, women meet there regularly to discuss politics and future events and socialize on an old couch in its small yard. The relations with visitors in this space are friendly and casual; and in our case at least, visitors were called by their first names and felt comfortable enough to help themselves to tea even in their first visits. In a similar effort to erase power-laden distance between women who use this space, MD members prefer not to use the term "employee" for their housekeeper, Esin, a fifty-year-old woman dressed in clothing typical of a rural region who poured our tea and silently sat with us in the yard during our conversation. One active member of the network, Seda, described Esin's role: "She takes care of the house and the kitchen for us, and we take care of her when necessary. Ours is a mutual relationship!"

The same desire to bond with other women on equal terms also characterizes the rhetoric and action of socialist feminists in Hatay regarding refugee women. "We wanted to give the message that our doors are wide open to our Syrian sisters and that we stand with them," Seda noted in describing their solidarity events intended to initiate ties with Syrian women. The "open doors" metaphor here implied some degree of toleration given that these events differed significantly from the political agendas and social interests of MD's individual feminist members, and instead focused on housewives' daytime activities, such as bulgur salad parties, afternoon coffee meetings, or breakfast gatherings. The regular MD and KED events, in contrast, are more politically charged and include conferences, workshops, press releases, night rallies, and protests on women's rights and gendered labor as well as book discussion clubs held in the evenings to accommodate members' work schedules.

Other feminist groups have endeavored to reconcile their political concerns with the social needs of Syrian women by incorporating both in their mixed activities. Consider the daylong events for the UN-created International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 2017 that were organized by a collaborative platform called Antakya Kadın Dayanışması (Antakya Women's Solidarity). Besides the film screening and consciousness-raising panels on women's rights, these events featured collective meals and exhibited Syrian women's handicrafts for sale to the district's largely Alawi residents. One KED member, Eylem, described these occasions as proving feminists'

genuine desire to reach Syrian women and the possibility for bringing both sides together despite their sectarian differences.

Nevertheless, underpinning the execution of these events has been a deep sense of failure to ensure their long-term sustainability and transformation into political solidarity. Indeed, the attempts of both KED and MD to foster connection with refugee women have not gone beyond a few "get-togethers" that have remained transient. Some approached this problem self-reflexively and criticized feminists' late arrival on the scene of refugee solidarity. Others found fault in the prevalence of aid-based and anti-feminist structures in civil society formation and religious conservatism in Turkey that determine the very terms of rapprochement between local feminists and Syrian women. In the following statement, KED member Didem encapsulates these different attitudes and explains how her understanding of solidarity differs from that of Syrian women:

> Our work as a feminist organization is ultimately a struggle for freedom. Yet refugee women often find our conversations about rape, domestic violence, and patriarchy irrelevant or alienating. I believe it is because their needs are more material at this point. We try to offer them a safe place where they can socialize. But we cannot buy coal for them or help with their financial needs unlike the government-backed NGOs. Even though we, as feminists, care about the issue, our abilities are limited. So everybody minds their own business.

Didem highlights a structural rift between the needs and desires of feminists and those of Syrian women, underlying the incompatibility that she perceives to exist between two different visions of solidarity: one explicitly political, and the other inconsequentially social. Some feminists, such as MD member Nurten, find these two visions irreconcilable. She describes a solidarity event that she tried to organize:

> We belong to two different worlds. When I asked Syrian women what they'd prefer to do for the event, they said they wanted a picnic. Yes, we ought to prioritize what women want for themselves. But how are we to challenge the structural forms of violence that we all go through as women through a picnic?

Many other feminists approach the small-scale social events that initiate interpersonal bonds strategically: as a means to actualize future political alliances rather than as solidarity acts in and of themselves.

Despite these nuances, the dominant feminist perspective in Hatay is troubled by the problem of equality and that of politics. As evident in MD's rhetoric about transcommunal sisterhood, feminist aspirations to reciprocal relations with Syrians are premised on the condition that they all share a common political goal against a common oppressor (i.e., the masculinist state and

patriarchal structures). The conditional nature of solidarity here does not necessarily neglect women's existing differences across class, status, and nationality—as is underscored by intersectional feminist calls for recognizing the mutually constitutive systems of oppression while addressing the problems of gendered displacement (Carastathis et al. 2018). Rather, feminist solidarity situates its politics in the very question of how to overcome these differences to ensure collective emancipation (Einwohner et al. 2019). Invoking feminist formulations of "the reflective solidarity of strangers" (Dean 1996), recent migrant activism in Europe likewise frames the recognition of intersectional inequalities as generative of communicative action between refugees and local activists (Siim and Meret 2021).

The problem of equality vis-à-vis Syrian refugee women here, however, is not the discrepancy between the ideal (gender equality) and the real (hierarchies of difference), but that the ideal is not necessarily shared by these new political actors nor does it correspond to their situated needs. Furthermore, when the existing differences between Syrian and Turkish women produce tensions, our feminist interlocutors consider such conflict as a threat to the future possibilities of solidarity and maintain their distance. Echoing Nermin's account of "distant toleration," they resort to noninterference—everybody minding their own business—as the most viable formula for coexistence. Such an attitude obscures the transformative capacity of the ordinary, unequal, and often conflictual social relations characterizing Syrian-led civil society practice that our feminist interlocutors dismiss as apolitical.

Solidarity in/through Distance

In the face of the conditional solidarity offered by Turkish feminists, Syrian women take it upon themselves to build a social world of their own. As legal routes to opposition (e.g., strikes, electoral politics, or protests) are foreclosed even for citizen-run groups such as MD and KED, everyday acts of solidarity become critical avenues for Syrian women to publicly voice their concerns. During our fieldwork, we engaged with two initiatives that exemplify this trend and organize their work around Syrian women's material needs. In emphasizing women's socioeconomic empowerment, these initiatives differ from the women's branches of political parties, socialist groups, or the *dawah* movement preaching Islam in the Middle East and North Africa, all of which approach Syrian women's concerns as ancillary to their ideological agendas. Yet their women-centric attitude does not necessarily align with the local feminist concerns of building horizontal alliances toward collective emancipation. It is the conditions of their displacement that connect Syrian women in these two organizations to each other and to local citizens, and that politicize their social position. As displacement interrupts and refigures the relations of interdependence between the providers and recipients of care in such social

contexts, the needs- or aid-based socioeconomic activities appear as sustainable models of endurance and empowerment and thus, the *basis* for—rather than the means to—solidarity in the eyes of our Syrian interlocutors.

Fulukah Hurriyah

"Kindness is what unites us" reads the inscription written in Turkish and Arabic below the emblem of Fulukah Hurriyah (FH), a formally recognized NGO that operates from a modern apartment building located in a recently developed part of Antakya where many of the city's middle-class Syrian families live. FH was founded in 2012 by a Syrian businessman from a nearby industrial town, Mersin, who continues to fund the majority of its programs to complement the organization's government and UN subsidies. While the organization has branches in Mersin and Antakya, its women's center has always been in Antakya and is run by Rama, a strong-willed daughter of a wealthy Aleppine family with members spread across Western countries as immigrants and "not refugees," as she pointed out to us.

A university graduate in her late thirties, Rama was employed in the public sector while living in Syria. Like many of her family members, she became part of the elite cadres of the Syrian opposition in the early days of the conflict. The financial and political capital with which her family came to Turkey in 2012 has facilitated Rama's access to Turkish citizenship and her current position as the head of FH's Antakya office. As the third person within the organization's hierarchical structure—after the founder and the general manager of both branches—Rama supervises both male and female personnel. As a team, they plan and organize public events and long-term projects at FH and identify prospective participants for their programs.

Rama and her personnel emphasize that FH is not a place of politics: what drives their work in Turkey is neither an ideology nor revolutionary desires to overthrow an existing regime, two motivations to which many FH members were committed while in Syria. Instead, FH frames its work as recuperative, and dovetails affective and implicitly religious discourses of benevolence with neoliberal imperatives of self-help and entrepreneurialism. FH's women's center, in particular, works with refugee women who lost their spouses in the Syrian war and (in Rama's words) "aims to empower women who do not have any means to be financially independent or to support their children." To that effect, the women's center hires professional Syrian craftspersons to train these women and supports them by exhibiting and selling their handicrafts and artworks as an intermediary agent.

"These crafts are not only a source of potential income for these women," Rama explains. "They also give women something other than the painful memories of loss to occupy their minds so that they heal." Here, Rama defines solidarity as healing through (inter)personal care rather than public political action, connoting both "affective concern (i.e., caring about)" and "practical

work (i.e., caring for)" (Tronto 1994) her Syrian "sisters," as she often calls them. While this explanation obscures the political roots of Syrian women's suffering, it indexes the ambivalences that characterize the tactics of endurance. As Diana Allan (2013) has argued for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, it is not the "major politics" of identity or feminism but the daily struggle to improve material life at the (inter)personal level that creates the space for ties of solidarity among these Syrian women.

Consider the story of Aisha, a forty-year-old Syrian widow who fled to Antakya after she lost her husband in Idlib. Upon arrival to Antakya as an uneducated housewife and mother of five, Aisha suffered severe depression and financial deprivation. FH employees reached Aisha through her Syrian neighbors and offered her alms and psychological support. Acquainted with FH through such support, Aisha agreed to register for jewelry-making classes, where she met other widows who promoted her work in their own circles to help supplement her aid-based income. Aisha's path from the confines of her home in Idlib to Antakya's public life was thus paved slowly with FH activities that amalgamated charitable and developmentalist models of care. In embedding these models within gendered economies of handicraft making, FH has afforded women such as Aisha new social mechanisms to sustain themselves materially in Turkey.

This social ground is nevertheless fraught with contradictions and hierarchies that simultaneously underpin and overshadow the visibility of Syrian women under FH's care. Conservative Sunni Muslims of working- or middle-class backgrounds, these women speak of Rama with respect, gratitude, and admiration. As a strong female leader with social and economic capital, she personifies women's empowerment to them. However, such expressions also indicate a clear hierarchy that obstructs other ways for the Syrian women in FH to speak to visitors about their own experiences. During our visits to the FH offices, we were always kept waiting in the hallway until the personnel signaled permission to enter Rama's professionally decorated office. Speaking to us from behind her wide office table, Rama would usually order the personnel to serve us drinks and bring any material (e.g., brochures or handicrafts) about the organization that she wanted us to see. Rama's manners with us remained formal throughout the weeks that we regularly visited her office, and she never left us alone with the women taking classes at FH.

A feminist local UN official, Aylin, pointed to this formality while telling us about the difficulty she had in accessing "women in need" through FH's women center: "Rama doesn't allow the UN to contact the women under their support without the supervision of her organization." Aylin linked this attitude to Rama's powerful persona and the threat posed to it by the possibility that the women under her care might no longer need FH. Less apparent to Aylin was the mistrust that the UN and citizen-led NGOs have cultivated among Syrians over the years due to their inability to recognize the context-specific needs, concerns, and vulnerabilities of displaced women. As implied

in Nermin's statement in the introduction to this article, the stakes of being publicly visible as potential "troublemakers" are higher for Syrian women given the arbitrariness of state conduct such as the mass deportations that had accelerated around the time of our research. The legal precarity of Syrian refugees both requires political quietism and renders the mediation of power-holder figures with settled status within their closer circles more desirable for access to resources. The flipside of precarity, hierarchy, then has its benefits and followers, and leads to further ambivalences for Syrian-led NGOs in their relationships with local citizens and state authorities.

Despite its leaders' grievances regarding deportations, for instance, FH maintains ties to the Turkish government and UN officials to acquire institutional recognition, nationwide representation, and economic resources. It often invites these formal actors as guests of honor to public events promoting women's artwork produced through FH's programs. After fruitlessly waiting hours for a government official to show up at the ribbon-cutting ceremony to open one such exhibition, Rama asked the only two Turkish women in the audience to cut the ribbon: Aylin, who was there to show personal support as feminist; and one of us. Although the spectacle of solidarity required official recognition and cross-communal interaction for legitimacy, such connection seemed less central to how the women on display related to the space, the event, or the organization. In response to the lack of interest from the "Turkish side" both officially and more informally, Rama's boss, Aida, gestured to her translator to stop translating her opening speech into Turkish. The event, this gesture suggested, no longer needed the Turkish audience to continue.

Turkish feminist critiques in Hatay hold that the NGO-Rs cannot change the political and socioeconomic structures of gender inequality that disproportionately affect refugee women. In this view, NGO-based activism surrounding refugee assistance is driven by Islamic adaptations of neoliberal humanitarianism rather than by a genuine concern with women's rights. It is selective and hierarchical, and therefore hinders both feminist struggle and cross-communal alliance. FH's daily operation presents a case in point: it amalgamates the neoliberal ethos of self-help, the humanitarian emphasis on "kindness" as the basis of togetherness, and vernacularized conceptions of women's empowerment and development. Its hierarchical bureaucratic structure, desired—yet limited—proximity to the government, and financial reliance on economic powerholders runs counter to the egalitarian vision of social justice upheld by our feminist interlocutors.

However, the hierarchized interdependency that the FH activities cultivate among Syrian women entails a different kind of political labor, one that foregrounds immediate needs as the basis of care and support. In response to Shirin Rai's statement that "solidarity is not beneficence" (2018, 14), Ina Kerner underscores the "non-distinguishability of solidarity and charity" in contexts of displacement where political relationships are inherently

asymmetric (2018, 46). This is evident not only in refugee–citizen networks but also in cases of "refugee–refugee solidarity" as Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh has observed in Lebanon's refugee camps (2016, 467; cf. Squire 2018). Rama's relationship with FH's beneficiaries shows that this context-dependent indistinguishability shifts attention from the problems of gender or political inequality to what "empowered" women can do from their existing hierarchical position. In the absence of responsive states and structured asylum mechanisms, socioeconomic hierarchies can form the basis for developing caring relations among differentially situated refugee women for the purposes of redistributing social goods and opportunities. Simultaneously pragmatic and affective, as seen in the case of Aisha, emergent forms of social solidarity constitute "a politics of redress" (Bayat 2013) within which aid-based relief efforts and individual ventures of self-help enable each other. As the following case study illustrates, it also holds that the "self" that needs "help" or "sufficiency" in both neoliberal and developmentalist accounts remains social (rather than individualistic) in Syrian women's solidarity work.

El-Nisa Suria fi Reyhanlı

If FH illustrates how the hierarchies of difference (across gender, class, and status) can produce certain forms of solidarity as much as they exclude, El-Nisa Suria fi Reyhanlı (NSR) points to the reconfiguration of such hierarchies in a more peripheral and collaborative setting of volunteering. NSR operates independently in Reyhanlı, a town located between Antakya and Aleppo and northwest of Turkey's busiest land border post with Syria. Due to its Sunni Arab demographics, Reyhanlı has long had a reputation among the province's residents as a conservative town that is more accommodating of Syrian Muslims and the Syrian regime's Islamist opponents. Indeed, the largest proportion of Syrian residents in Hatay live in Reyhanlı, where they make up more than half the town's population. This demographic composition and the shared religious orientation of its Syrian and former residents have led to a disproportionate concentration of faith-based NGOs in Reyhanlı that target the region's pious Syrian residents. While many activities of these NGOs are gender-segregated, almost none attend to the woman question.

With its focus on Syrian women's immediate needs and solidarity networks, NSR poses an important exception. NSR functions from a third-floor flat in a run-down apartment building. Some of NSR's activities mimic charity-based NGO work, such as the collection and redistribution of donated clothes, dry goods, and furniture as well as giving rent aids to refugee women (most of whom come from Syria's embattled rural areas). In providing Syrian women with sociolegal and educational support and homosocial spaces of community building, however, NSR proves to be more than a charity-based organization. The Quran classes held there teach Arabic literacy to elderly women with no formal education while also appealing to their religious needs

and motivations. Young unmarried Syrian women populate the organization's midsize classroom for courses on women's health, income generation, and self-care, among other topics.

The catalyst for NSR's formation was a Turkish-language course that many of NSR's volunteers attended in Reyhanlı in 2014. Language acquisition is one of the better-funded social cohesion programs offered for Syrians in Turkey. For this group of women, however, the program had the opposite effect: instead of fostering more connection between Syrian and Turkish populations, it brought together and encouraged these Syrian women to address their community's issues on their own terms under the umbrella of a local organization that they themselves formed. Although coming from a lower-class background compared to Rama, the women in charge of NSR are all college educated and were likewise involved in oppositional politics before they came to Turkey. Their commitment is ongoing: a Free Syrian Army flag hangs on the wall in one of their rooms alongside the organization's emblem, event posters, *UN Women* brochures, and women's artwork produced through NSR's activities. NSR's founder, Sumayya, is a forty-seven-year-old English teacher from Idlib and mother of five. She continues to teach English in Reyhanlı's temporary education center for a salary half of what a Turkish teacher with the same qualifications would make.[10] Sumayya describes her participation in NSR's activities as entirely voluntary but also necessary to maintain the Syrian resistance. Despite pressure from her two married children that she join them in Europe (where they have resettled after the conflict), Sumayya prefers to remain in Reyhanlı to be close to her hometown and to her husband, who is an active member of an armed opposition group in northern Syria.

Sumayya's story resonates with other active NSR women volunteers whose ages range between thirty-two and fifty: a pharmacist from Idlib who teaches sewing, a nurse practitioner from Aleppo who teaches about women's health and nutrition, a schoolteacher from Latakia who gives courses on literacy, a former lawyer who offers legal advice on family matters, and a hairdresser who converted a room in the NSR flat into a hair salon where she both teaches and provides styling services to Syrian women. Unlike the craftspersons hired by FH, these women receive no compensation for their time and labor in NSR and in fact recall some instances when they had to pay out of pocket for drinks served in the office. "Turkish women think we receive a lot of government aid, but it's not true" says Sumayya. "We rely on each other to keep the organization active." Transforming Syrian women's daily domestic activities into social and potentially economic capital, the courses offered at NSR provide a shared space for both the instructors and students to improve their living conditions.

Like the Syrian-led community centers in Istanbul (Sunata and Tosun 2019, 695), NSR also offers new socializing spaces for volunteers to bond over their gendered, religious, and racialized subject position in Turkey as displaced women. Through its compliance with the Islamic principles of public

sociability, NSR's hairdressing services provide a safe space where women can comfortably remove their hijabs for haircuts and makeup application, services that are challenging for them to get in Hatay because most women's hairdressers there have male apprentices. During NSR's commensal events for Islamic holidays, women exchange knowledge about mundane matters such as bureaucratic hurdles, discounts in local stores, childrearing, matchmaking, and marital problems. Although reminiscent of women's socialization patterns back in Syria, such conversations highlight problems specific to being "Syrian in Turkey," prompting women to take more active roles in addressing them for one another. Some volunteer for NSR, but many respond in more ordinary ways that entangle solidarity with charity: they raise funds to cover someone's unpaid bills; pay the school costs of another's children; or donate food, clothes, or furniture to the deprived. Through the social network they establish in NSR, women also learn about prospective job opportunities—information that benefits them more than the content of the courses they take.[11] "If we don't reclaim our former routines and create a decent life for ourselves, some of us may end up as the second wives of older Turkish men," Sumayya notes, referring to a phenomenon widespread in Reyhanlı since 2011.

Sumayya, like Rama, repeatedly described the purpose of the organization as Syrian women's "self-empowerment," exemplified in part by the dedication of the volunteer teachers. In some respects, this phrase expressed her familiarity with the popular language of women's rights organizations and their global involvement in both neoliberal and developmentalist programs of micro-entrepreneurialism (see, for instance, Karim 2011). With migration regimes globally endorsing these programs and marking refugee women as "strategic humanitarian partners" (Olivius 2016, 278), any women's organization—but especially the unofficial refugee-led ones such as NSR—needed this language to obtain legibility and support from potential donors.

However, as Gal et al. (2015) have recently argued regarding feminist NGOs in Uganda and India, the vernacularization of transnational discourses on women's empowerment entails more than their mere circulation as universal concepts with set meanings. As a situated activity, the process of translation inevitably reframes and generates; it "changes what is taken up, making it into something new" (Gal et al. 2015, 611). In the case of NSR, the citationality of translation links women's empowerment to context-specific ideas of self-sufficiency. Positioning the displaced subject as both the provider and the recipient of care, "women's empowerment" here aims to invert the dominant public view of refugees as "always in need" and thus "a burden to the host society." This desire takes "shared precariousness" (Squire 2018, 11) in the face of communal and institutional hostility as a starting point for social solidarity. Unevenly distributed among different members of this migrant community, such precariousness posits a collective political position beyond intention and action and separates our Syrian interlocutors from their Turkish neighbors.

It comes as no surprise, then, that neither FH nor NSR frames its solidarity work fundamentally as building ties with local residents or other social groups. Instead, both organizations seek to construct the public image of Syrian women as active social agents with political will and communal autonomy. In fact, the distance Syrian women put between themselves and Turkish citizens is the condition of possibility for the emergence of such agency and the ensuing modes of solidarity. Nevertheless, the pursuit of self-sufficiency through discursive or social distancing gains value in its recognition that social relations across differences matter. Syrian women animate their desire for self-sufficiency precisely because their social and material needs are considered a burden by ordinary Turkish citizens and politically inconsequential by potential allies in local activist circles.

Where then can one place the transient forms of sociality and power that characterize the work of FH and NSR within feminist debates over solidarity? Does this work's emphasis on immediate needs rather than long-term rights, self-sufficiency rather than political coalitions, and social hierarchies rather than equality render such work outside the bounds of political society and thus, as Nermin claims, outside the bounds of solidarity? The cases of FH and NSR suggest otherwise. Produced under the conditions of displacement and interrupted reciprocation in Hatay, Syrian women's social bonds and moral practices of endurance reveal the context-bound nature of solidarity and its political agency. When authoritarian states impose severe restrictions on the civic engagement of citizens and noncitizens alike, everyday practices of kin-making (e.g., via shared resources, aid, or sociality) constitute a most viable enabling strategy for the disenfranchised to build a self-sustaining community for "a decent life." Not only do these acts of solidarity transform refugee women into active participants of social and economic life, but they also manifest a collective autonomous presence in public beyond the contours of citizenship and the gendered portrayals of refugee victimhood.

Rethinking the Solidarity–Charity Dichotomy

With human displacement now a central political concern and met in many parts of the world with fortified borders and authoritarian governments, it is now more important than ever to critically interrogate what constitutes solidarity with migrants. This has indeed been a troubling question over the past decade for a diverse array of civil society actors that include professional humanitarian agencies, faith-based initiatives, and social justice activists. Examining the responses of these various actors to the global migrant crisis, critical scholars have problematized the compassionate politics of emergency actions for obfuscating both the structural forces of displacement and the long-term rights-based solutions to the suffering of racialized and gendered refugee populations (Fassin 2011; Ticktin 2016).

Hatay's socialist–feminist activists express similar concerns about the depoliticization of solidarity in social initiatives assisting Syrian refugees in Turkey. Some participate in aid-driven social programs for the sake of initiating connections with Syrian women. Yet many, like Nermin, consider these programs unsustainable for achieving women's emancipation and refrain from calling them "solidarity." Indeed, the forms of assistance undertaken by many refugee-led women's organizations do not uphold the political ideals of equality or social justice, nor do they include voicing an identity for more rights for women or Syrians. Yet the charity–solidarity dichotomy that saturates the academic and public discourses on depoliticization falls short of explaining the political labor involved in Syrian women's efforts to address the material needs of their own community. These efforts are certainly shaped by, but also irreducible to, the neoliberal ideologies of volunteerism, humanitarian relief, and development assistance. They entail more intricate layers of relatedness than are allowed by the rights- and status-based politics of identity underpinning the prevailing models of solidarity in Turkey and Europe.

These layers require us to recognize solidarity's socially embedded modalities at the local level and their potential to refigure politics in subtle but significant ways. Indebted to the Durkheimian and Maussian formulations of mutual interdependence and hierarchies of reciprocity, anthropological work has already shown that the politics of solidarity with migrants are vested in existing value systems in the specific cultural contexts of their deployment—specifically, those concerning the moral obligations toward kin, guests, and neighbors (Rozakou 2016) and their spatio-racial, religious, and gendered ramifications (Solana 2019). Seen in this light, everyday solidarity can be understood as imbued with—rather than antithetical to—social hierarchies and conflict, with the capacity to redraw the contours of civic engagement (Karagiannis 2007).

Contemporary acts and discourses of solidarity with Syrians in Hatay likewise draw on pre-existing relations among these various groups against the backdrop of Turkey's citizenship regimes. Although bound to the formal structures of humanitarian care within institutional NGO contexts, the solidarity work offered by Syrian-led organizations derives its political force from the extent to which Syrian women can assimilate it into the local vernaculars of gendered social relations with religious implications, often troubling the political sensibilities of our feminist interlocutors. These vernaculars—ephemeral, contradictory, and hierarchical as they might be—provide important cultural resources for displaced women to emplace themselves materially and to establish moral equivalence with the hosting community. In many instances, it is not through voluntary resolve to form horizontal alliances with one another or Turkish women, but through pragmatic concerns or mutual distance that commonalities are formed or disavowed and conflicts are managed to allow life at the local level to continue.

The potential significance of quotidian solidarity acts under authoritarian regimes then rests precisely on their implicit critique of the standing terms of the political and the refusal to limit politics to the actions of and reactions to (inter)national regimes of governance. This is particularly significant given that these institutional regimes appear as the primary actors, causes, and addressees of change concerning the experiences of displaced peoples in much of the scholarship and activism surrounding migration. In attending to the contextuality of solidarity with and among Syrian women in Turkey, one may better recognize the political force of socially embedded acts of care forged in distance and displacement to create new forms of collective presence that transcend the charity–solidarity distinction.

Notes

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1. All personal names are pseudonyms; and all translations are ours.
2. Divided along ethnoreligious and class lines, Hatay's Syrian residents are concentrated in Antakya, where they number approximately 109,000, and make up 30 percent of the city's population; and in the border districts such as Reyhanlı (approximately 115,000), where they have established family and economic ties with local residents.
3. Annexed from French Mandate Syria in 1939, Hatay has historically been home to the highest proportion of Arabophone citizens in Turkey.
4. Since 2010 both authors have conducted ethnographic research in the region for their own separate projects on questions of displacement, minoritization, and religious difference (Dağtaş 2020; Can 2019). For this project, we interacted with nine organizations to examine refugee women's context-specific needs, agency, and overall place within

Turkish civil society. The organizations included women branches of mainstream political parties, Islamist women's charity and mosque groups, local chapters of humanitarian organizations, Syrian-led women's associations, and Turkish feminist groups. We conducted semi-structured focus group and one-on-one interviews with ifty-five women affiliated with these organizations as leaders, volunteers, and beneficiaries (these positions were not always mutually exclusive). The research in these settings provides a background for our analysis. However, we limit this article's focus to independent local feminist and Syrian women's groups that deploy the concept of solidarity to describe their work with refugee women.

5. Our focus on such efforts aligns with the longstanding insight of feminist theory that informal social norms of care are central to formal political rights and social policy (Mahon and Robinson 2011; Tronto 1994). Adopting an ethnographic lens, we further insist on the need to locate women's political agency beyond the terrain of state laws and collective resistance, and within the everyday practices of community building, endurance, and emplacement vis-à-vis prevailing power formations (Postero and Elinoff 2019).
6. Given Turkey's partial commitment to the UN's 1951 Refugee Convention, which limits legal protection only to asylum seekers coming from the member states of the European Council, displaced Syrians in Turkey do not qualify for refugee status. Syrian Turkmens, spouses of Turkish citizens, and some Syrian professionals with financial means have gained citizenship without receiving official refugee status (Mannix and Antara 2018). However, the path to permanent legal status is still inaccessible to the majority of Syrians currently residing in Turkey.
7. According to the Turkish Civil Code (no 4271, chapter 93), only citizens or foreigners with residency permits can found or be members of civil society organizations. Organizations founded in Turkey by eligible Syrians are regulated as "Turkish" rather than as "foreign." Recent studies report that nearly all the 200 Syrian-led NGOs in Istanbul specialize in psychosocial support, language education, and transportation and employment assistance rather than in rights-based activism (Sunata and Salih 2019, 692). The introduction of new government regulations in 2016 required Syrian organizations in Turkey to cooperate with government-endorsed NGOs, limiting their authorized activities to aid or service provision (Özden and Oula 2019, 28).
8. Muslim civil society has proliferated in the first decade of the pro-Islamic neoliberal government of the Justice and Development Party (2002–2012; Walton 2017) and gained significance in providing social services as auxiliary state agents in matters of family, economic (in)security, and education (Akkan 2018).
9. These organizations differ from Turkish-led feminist networks that focus more squarely on women in displacement (Sunata and Salih 2019, 693) and on the suffering and political struggles of Yazidi and Kurdish Syrian women (Özden and Oula 2019, 28). Such initiatives are few in

Turkey and to our knowledge do not exist in Hatay. As the only political organizations that mobilize gendered idioms of solidarity in Hatay while also attempting to connect with Syrian women, MD and KED offer insights into ambivalences of feminist solidarity with migrants in Turkey.

10. Regulated by the Turkish Ministry of Education, temporary education centers cater only to Syrian children, follow a modified Syrian curriculum, and hire Syrian teachers who instruct in Arabic language (Çelik and İçduygu 2019).
11. See Özden and Oula (2019, 49) for more on this link between economic empowerment and socialization in other Turkish cities.

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to all organizations who participated in this research and to Antiochian feminists and Syrian refugee women who shared their thoughts, experiences, and feelings about solidarity in Hatay. For their generous comments on the earlier drafts of this article, the authors also wish to thank Columba Gonzalez Duarte, Alejandra González Jiménez, Ashley Lebner, Jennifer Liu, Adrienne Lo, Timo Makori, Andrew Paruch, Paul Silverstein, Vivian Solana, and Aslı Zengin. Thanks also to the editors and anonymous reviewers of *Social Politics* who further advanced the article's interventions. Research and writing of this article have been supported by University of Waterloo, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Nantes Institute for Advanced Study, and the Collegium de Lyon.

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