

A CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO MIGRATION THROUGH
BODIES: VAN AS A SUPERDIVERSE CITY

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submitted by **BURCU ATEŞ** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of **Doctor of Philosophy in Architecture, Middle East Technical University** by,

Prof. Dr. Halil Kalıpçılar
Dean, Graduate School of **Natural and Applied Sciences**

Prof. Dr. F. C  n   Bil  el
Head of the Department, **Architecture**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hacer Ela Aral
Supervisor, **Architecture, METU**

Prof. Dr. G  ven Arif Sarg  n
Co-Supervisor, **Architecture, METU**

Examining Committee Members:

Prof. Dr.   nci Basa
Architecture, METU

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hacer Ela Aral
Architecture, METU

Prof. Dr. Pelin Tan
Cinema and Television, Batman University

Assist. Prof. Dr. Deniz Altay Kaya
City and Regional Planning,   ankaya University

Assist. Prof. Dr. Besim Can Z  rh
Sociology, METU

Date: 10.11.2023



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

Name Last name : Burcu Ateş

Signature :

ABSTRACT

A CRITICAL INQUIRY INTO MIGRATION THROUGH BODIES: VAN AS A SUPERDIVERSE CITY

Ateş, Burcu
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Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Hacer Ela Aral
Co-Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Güven Arif Sargin

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Departing from conceptualising superdiversity in an urban context contested with diverse forms, motivations and actors of migration, this thesis aims to develop a socio-spatial analysis of how difference makes and takes place in Van. The urban landscapes of Van have been significantly diversified through the migration of human and non-human agents over its history. The thesis shows that urbanisation can no longer be understood only through material and physical change but also through the transformations in the urban culture. Due to the constant mobility of people as well as ideas, labour, and goods, it operates more at a biopolitical level informed by embodied socio-spatial practices of different social agents. Thus, the thesis adopts a cross-scalar approach, merging conditions of the urban and the body. It represents a methodological focus informed by feminist scholarship for urban research. The methodology is built upon a twofold structure based on archival and ethnographic analysis. The former includes analysis of the data reached via literature review and digital archives. For the latter, fieldwork was conducted in Van, which embraced encounters with different social agents such as transnational and internally displaced migrants, governmental and non-governmental institutes, and locals. Based on the socio-spatial narratives of these actors, the thesis shows that intersecting migration histories make not only the personal histories of people but of the city as well. This is proven with the collective urban narrative of Van, which is

woven based on the conceptualisation of bodyscapes by tracing the socio-spatial practices of dwelling, labour and rituals as found in the narratives of fieldwork participants. The thesis ultimately proposes that beyond employing a traditional analysis informed by a single socio-spatial condition, a situated and embodied analysis should be followed to critically understand the everyday social realities of contemporary cities.

Keywords: Migration, Superdiversity, Bodyscape, Collective Urban Narrative, Van



ÖZ

BEDENLER ÜZERİNDEN GÖÇ ÜZERİNE ELEŞTİREL BİR SORGULAMA: SÜPERÇEŞİTLİ BİR KENT OLARAK VAN

Ateş, Burcu

Doktora, Mimarlık

Tez Yöneticisi: Doç. Dr. Hacer Ela Aral

Ortak Tez Yöneticisi: Prof. Dr. Güven Arif Sargın

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Bu araştırma, kentsel bir bağlamda göçün farklı biçimleri, motivasyonları ve aktörleriyle oluşan süperçeşitliliği kavramsallaştırarak Van'da farklılığın nasıl oluştuğuna ve gerçekleştiğine dair sosyo-mekânsal bir yaklaşım sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Van'ın kentsel peyzajları kentin tarihi boyunca insan ve insan dışı aktörlerin göçü yoluyla önemli ölçüde çeşitlenmiştir. Tez, kentleşmenin sadece maddi ve fiziksel değişimle değil, aynı zamanda kent kültüründeki dönüşümlerle de anlaşılabilceğini göstermektedir. Kentleşme artık insanların yanı sıra fikirlerin, emeğin ve malların sürekli hareketliliği nedeniyle farklı sosyal aktörlerin sosyo-mekânsal pratikleri aracılığıyla biyopolitik bir düzeyde meydana gelmektedir. Bu nedenle tez, kentsel ve bedensel koşulları birleştiren ölçekler arası bir yaklaşım benimsemektedir. Feminist yöntemlere dayalı araştırma metodolojisi arşiv çalışması ve etnografik analiz olarak iki yönlü bir yapı üzerine inşa edilmiştir. İlki kapsamında literatür taraması ve dijital arşivler aracılığıyla ulaşılan veriler analiz edilmiş, ikincisi kapsamında ise ulusötesinde ve ülke içinde yerinden edilmiş göçmenler, resmi kurumlar, sivil toplum kuruluşları ve yerel halk gibi farklı sosyal aktörlerle karşılaşmaları içeren bir saha çalışması yapılmıştır. Bu aktörlerin sosyo-mekânsal anlatılarını odağına alan tez, kesişen göç tarihlerinin sadece insanların kişisel tarihlerini değil, aynı zamanda kentin de tarihini oluşturduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu durum, saha çalışması katılımcılarının anlatılarında yer alan konut, emek ve

ritüellere dair sosyo-mekânsal pratiklerin izini sürerek, beden uzamlarının kavramsallaştırılması yoluyla örülen Van'ın kolektif kent anlatısı ile kanıtlanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak tez, günümüz kentlerinin tek bir sosyo-mekânsal koşul üzerinden geliştirilen geleneksel analizlerin ötesinde, gündelik sosyal gerçeklikleri anlamaya yönelik konumlandırılmış ve bedenle ilişkilendirilmiş bir analiz üzerinden anlaşılabilirliğini öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göç, Süperçeşitlilik, Beden Uzamları, Kolektif Kent Anlatısı, Van





*Seeing Van, 2021.
A Kurdish woman standing on the top of Van Fortress, viewing the city.*

*to my beloved mother
and
my dear Xaves*

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PREFACE

WRITING AS A *CRITICAL SPATIAL PRACTICE*

For the intellectual, the task, I believe, is explicitly to universalise the crisis, to give greater human scope to what a particular race or nation suffered, to associate that experience with the sufferings of others.¹

I believe that the contextual dynamics of the geographies in which we are born and live greatly influence how we situate ourselves as beings-in-the-world, how we think, how we make and do, yet, and how we act and appear. Living in Turkey, a geography of difference with diverse peoples, cultures, languages, and beliefs inhabiting, as well as corruption, conflicts, and struggles, instilled within me a predisposition toward critical thinking since early childhood. The dichotomy between the oppressed and the oppressor has always been a central issue. For me – and possibly from the perspective of those who share comparable sentiments – ‘dynamics of power’ has been a concept that I tried to understand even during the early years of my childhood, as it has led to how we maintain our ‘everyday life’.

Studying architecture strengthened my critical thinking/acting and scaled it up during my graduate studies in architecture and urbanism, where I found myself in a position to question the political dynamics behind the (social) production of (public) space.²

¹ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), p. 44.

² I am particularly grateful to my professors and peers in Turkey, Austria, Canada, and Germany, thanks to all we have deeply exchanged around many issues, among which I should list ‘social and political production of the space’, ‘critique of urbanisation’, ‘spatial justice’, ‘everyday life and urban culture’, ‘critical spatial practices’, ‘situated knowledge’ and ‘urban ethnography’. During those get-togethers we have co-produced a critical/post-critical positioning in and beyond the academic environment. In that context, several graduate courses and seminars have mentored me and guided my intellectual path as an engaged researcher: “Socio-cultural Themes in Urban Architecture” and “Critical Theories on Urban Architecture” by Prof. Dr. Güven Arif Sargin, as leading courses in this trajectory, on Marxist politics of space and the analysis of production of space and the urban; “Advanced Architectural Research” by Prof. Dr. Ayşen Savaş on developing an architectural/urban research based on the constant interaction between ‘history, theory and criticism’; “New Tendencies in Planning Thought” and “Space Concepts and Organization in the New Age” by Prof. Dr. İlhan Tekeli on multifaceted dimensions of urbanism and the ethical role of the urbanist; “Urban Politics” by Ruşen Keleş on global planning policies, “International Urban Studies Perspectives on Public Space” and “Urban Studies and Planning Theory” by Prof. Dr. Sabine Knierbein on inter/trans/post disciplinary urban research of everyday life and urban culture by means of situated, reflexive and

It has been a targeted endeavour to grasp the unequal distribution of power in cities, particularly at the sites of marginality where socio-spatial injustice deliberately occupies people's everyday lives. As an extra-curricular engagement beyond the conventional boundaries of academia, among many other collective actions, three years of involvement in the 'right to the shelter' and the 'right to the city' movements called my greater attention towards enquiring about socio-political tensions behind injustice from a community-based perspective. Being engaged in the daily life and social movements in *gecekond* neighbourhoods (squatter housings) inhabited by internal migrants moved from rural areas of inner Anatolia, I discovered ethnographic inquiries into socio-spatial analysis in a highly contested urban territory while embodying socio-spatial injustice and its reflections at an everyday scale in situ.

After these experiences, my intention to cultivate *care-ful*, inclusive, and just environments further intensified. Subsequently, my academic and professional positioning grew in the way of researching about and working with and for other local communities in both urban and rural environments. Among others, this includes challenging experiences such as establishing contacts with guerrilla gardeners while exploring the concept of 'spatial impromptu', which calls for an insurgent publicness and public space; engaging with inhabitants and local initiatives of *İşçi Blokları* (Workers' Blocks) Neighbourhood for more than two years as part of a participatory urban design project which involved playing with several creative methods and tools including urban gaming; encountering with nomadic life with mobile pastoralists of the Taurus Mountains, Munzur Mountains and Pindos Mountains who have been, for centuries, on the move across diverse landscapes with their 'home' and livestock to sustain and flourish bio-cultural diversity. Path by path, these experiences have been woven as an intellectual and embodied practice within which I have been probing into the relational realm of socio-politics of spaces, scapes, and cultures.

context-sensitive ethnographic methodologies and "Concepts and critique of the production of space" by Prof. Dr. Rob Shields together with Prof. Dr. Sabine Knirbein and Prof. Dr. Elke Krasny on performative analysis of urban culture and social production of space.

This research as well finds itself in that endeavour. For this thesis, I conducted research at the intersection of urban studies and migration studies in a broader political context where an ambivalent set of political discourses towards ‘foreigners’ (or ‘strangers’) have occupied the public everyday agenda. In this context, the refugee question remains a controversial issue in the society. I should make a clear exception here and must leave the city where this research was shaped, Van, out of the atmosphere of hatred against migrants and refugees. During my fieldwork in Van, several times, I could hardly contain my astonishment against the solidarity-based stories I heard while drinking *çay* with friends, having my dinner in a *lokanta* or waiting for the *muhtar* to become available while they were listening to their neighbours’ problems and requests.

I remember asking myself about the possible historical trajectory of those solidarily built oral excerpts and their role in contributing to the transformation of the urban culture of Van. Each time I heard more, my feelings got encouraged, that it was more than what I heard that moment at that place. Throughout my fieldwork, I intentionally followed this immediate, intuitive feeling, and during informal talks or interviews, I started asking more questions about the historicity of migration in, around and via Van. Both reflections of the fieldwork participants and following those, my further archival research on the history of this city showed me how ‘superdiverse’ Van has been since early antiquity, performing a rhizome of ‘collective memory’. This is when Van for this research appeared and positioned more than a case study or even a ‘site’ of the fieldwork. *It re-appeared as the research itself, providing the spatio-temporality of migrations through diverse ‘scapes, actors, and narratives, allowing for tracing the urban form and culture of a contested place.*

I consider this research both within and beyond an academic endeavour that is part of a wider praxis implying the writing as a “critical spatial practice”. It is highly embedded in feminist scholarship, which explores the entry of situatedness and site-specificity to the writing of criticism, history, and theory, where the writer reflects on their subject positions in relation to the on-site engagements in the research context. The research then becomes a “site-writing”, as Jane Rendell coined:

I am interested in constructing an architecture of art criticism – in how writing operates to reflect one set of relations while producing another... From the close-up to the glance, from the caress to the accidental brush, *Site-Writing* draws on spaces as they are remembered, dreamed, and imagined, as well as observed, in order to take into account the critic's position in relation to work and challenge criticism as a form of knowledge with a singular and static point of view located in the here and now.³

This thesis, from the very first contacts and explorations to fielding and writing, was about challenging my thoughts and actions, pushing my boundaries more and more, adding several perspectives into the research towards subverting static, singular, and linear thoughts and co-building a rhizomatic 'line of flight'. It was a process of constant learning and unlearning, making the research trajectory full of complexity. This has been reflected in whom I read, whom I talked with, and whom I listened to. Diversity was the keyword.

I am well encouraged to build this thesis upon the existing scholarly, and for some cases, both academic and activist, a bunch of inspiring work done by several women, most of whom were trained as an architect, yet in the meantime have been affiliated with various interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work on politics, culture, and space. Some of the works that I mentioned below brilliantly weaves together the concepts of migration, body, and city within a feminist architectural practice, and all of them guided me generously and inspiringly in building my positionality: "*Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space*" (2007) by Doina Petrescu; "*Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism*" (2010) by Jane Rendell; "*Public Space and Relational Perspectives: New Challenges for Architecture and Planning*" (2015) by Sabine Knierbein and Chiara Tornaghi; "*Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*" (2016) by Setha Low; "*Diasporic Agencies: Mapping the City Otherwise*" (2016) by Nishat Awan; "*Dwelling Encounters: Migration, Diversity and Ambivalence in an Istanbul Neighbourhood*" (2017) by Kristen Biehl; "*Mapping Syrian Migration: Migrant Spaces in Ankara*" (2018) by

³ Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing The Architecture of Art Criticism* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2010), p. 18.

Ela Alanyalı Aral; “Making Home(s) in Displacement: Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice” (2021) by Hilde Heynen et al.

I am thankful that these works and even more on a similar trajectory exist and I hope that this thesis will as well find its place within this realm.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

DGMM: Directorate General of Migration Management

IDP: Internally Displaced Person

IOM: International Organization for Migration

LFIP: The Law on Foreigners and International Protection

NGO: Non-governmental Organisation

PMM: Presidency of Migration Management

TOKİ: Housing Development Administration (*Toplu Konut İdaresi*)

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The architect's only option is to find a course for revolutionary praxis outside the traditional boundaries of [her/]his field.⁴



Figure 1-1 It is all about drinking tea together. Photograph by the author, captured in May 2022.

This thesis is about going *out*⁵ home⁶, going beyond borders into the field. I thought I knew well that working in the field is “by its very nature an ambitious, optimistic, very personal effort to woo over indifferent strangers through a series of bumbling steps”⁷. It is about mobilising one’s ‘ex-situ’ world accompanied by pre-assumptions, anticipations, and beliefs in a new world. Yet, the critical point is to decolonise existing pre-assumptions, anticipations, and beliefs to be deconstructed

⁴ Joan Ockman, *Architecture, Criticism, Ideology* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1985). [emphasise by the author]

⁵ Selda Tuncer, ‘Dışarı Çıkmak: Özelden Kamusal Feminist Bir Saha Hikayesi’, *Moment Journal*, 2.2 (2015), 30–58.

⁶ It was literally as such as the core of the fieldwork coincided with the late phases of Covid-19 pandemic.

⁷ Nita Kumar, *Friends, Brothers, and Informants: Fieldwork Memoirs of Banaras* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 1.

‘in situ’. Only then can ‘unlearning’ step in, which I believe is necessary for feminist urban research, and a constant cyclicity between learning and unlearning can begin. Indeed, the field includes sentiments as well. Without any personal engagement -this includes socio-cultural or ideological affiliations- with the ‘field’ -from the content to the context- one could hardly *be* there.

As Nita Kumar denotes, fieldwork is a “brash, awkward, hit-and-run encounter of one sensibility with others”⁸. This short but effective statement implicitly suggests that the field, as does everyday life, encompasses conflict, unpredictability, and appropriation. The field then ceases to be a geographical reference and becomes a place where everyday habits, rhythms, actors, and encounters among human and non-human entities appear. This is why I preferably and intentionally conceptualise being in the field as an emancipatory socio-spatial practice and, even further, as a means of (un)learning necessary for constructing an emancipatory design practice and culture.⁹ At each attempt at fielding, the research turned out to be more complicated, with more spaces and actors, and therefore, narratives and stories were involved. Tracing the socio-spatial impacts of different migrations in the city at multiple scales required gathering a variety of knowledge through bodies.

Structuring a complex research subject like this requires meticulous consideration of the arrangement and interconnectedness of concepts, which was undoubtedly one of the most challenging aspects of doing it. With this in mind, I intended to structure an elaborated introduction to the thesis in a way that offers guidance for building relational research at the intersection of urban studies and migration studies. This includes discussing the major themes, concepts, and perspectives to provide a foundation for further exploration.

⁸ Kumar, p. 2.

⁹ Burcu Ateş, ‘Sahadan Notlar: “100. Yıl’ı Yeniden Düşünmek” Proje Süreci Üzerine’, *Dosya*, 48, 2022, p. 34.

1.1 Bodies affected: A feminist urban research

This thesis is about excavating deep into the superdiversity¹⁰ of Van that has shaped the urban culture and everyday life of this city¹¹. The underlining claim of the thesis posits that the urban characteristics of Van, among different scales of macro to micro, have been significantly diversified through the migration of human and non-human agents, including forced migrations and displacements over its history. With that, the central focus of the thesis is tracing the migration-driven (micro) urbanisation of a city in the eastern borderscapes of Turkey, a ‘situated’ and ‘embodied’ tracing informed by protocols of feminist methodologies applied in spatial and urban studies. Thus, the research is eagerly based on the everyday knowledge of actors of superdiversity, including different forms of locality and migrant experience.

Feminist urban research is not only about the research itself but also about the researcher and other actors in the field. For instance, as a researcher engaged with various interdisciplinary and intersectional research environments, this thesis has caringly supported my academic trajectory as an ‘affective’ researcher. In Baruch Spinoza’s theory, affect appears in “affections of the body as by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished aided or restrained and at the same time”¹². On the other hand, in their seminal book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari transformed Spinoza’s theory into a collective and social dimension of action. They emphasise that affect is not an

¹⁰ Spelling the word ‘superdiversity’ with or without a hyphen has been a divergence in variety of publications. The author of the concept Steven Vertovec and Fran Meissner propagate that hyphen-less version to keep the emphasis on the diversity, without misrepresentation of the concept as “as ‘more’ (ethnic) diversity”. Agreeing on this positioning, I prefer writing the term as ‘superdiversity’ as well. Steven Vertovec, *Superdiversity: Migration and Social Complexity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), pp. 50–51.

¹¹ When I say Van, I generally and without any further remark, talk about the administrative city centre of Van today.

¹² Amy M. Schmitter, ‘Spinoza and Emotions’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2021 <<https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=emotions-17th18th>> [accessed 12 May 2023].

individual phenomenon, but it operates at a social level, circulating between bodies, between the body and the environment, and between the body and the social field.¹³

I extend this interpretation that the ‘body’ is not a stable entity, being neither an object nor a substance, but a set of relations that is constantly reconfigured and reorganised. As Tihomir Viderman and Sabine Knierbein point out, affect is “how difference is sensed bodily, and how it is constituted, negotiated and mobilised as part of social practices and cultural processes at places of everyday life.”¹⁴ In light of this argument, the trajectory of this thesis contends that it has been provoking and, at the same time, highly pedagogical to conceptualise urban fieldwork and research as an ecosystem of embodied relationships among diverse affected bodies.

Here, I would double Nishat Awan and Aya Musmar in thinking with Sara Ahmed that “affect circulates between subjects, objects, and their environments and accrues value over time”¹⁵ and quote Ahmed’s words: “It is the very failure of affect to be located in a subject or object that allows it to generate the surfaces of collective bodies.”¹⁶ Inspired by Ahmed’s conceptualisation of ‘affect’, while writing this introduction, I am thinking¹⁷ about how my body, being a site of affective encounters and potentialities, has transformed within the course of the journey of this thesis. It is, for sure, a transformation at interconnected levels, inviting me to challenge the

¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹⁴ Tihomir Viderman and Sabine Knierbein, ‘Correction to: Affective Urbanism: Towards Inclusive Design Praxis’, *Urban Design International*, 25.2 (2020), 192–202 (p. 193).

¹⁵ Nishat Awan and Aya Musmar, ‘Affective Witnessing: [Trans]Posing the Western/Muslim Divide to Document Refugee Spaces’, in *Architectural Affects after Deleuze and Guattari*, ed. by Marko Jobst and Hélène Frichot (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2021), p. 165.

¹⁶ Sara Ahmed, ‘Affective Economies’, *Social Text*, 22.2 (2004), 117–39 (p. 128).

¹⁷ I find it quite stimulating to question the ‘temporal’ dimension of writing. The reader usually follows the text as if, from the first word to the last, it was produced within the linearity of time. Yet, this is often not the case. The socio-mental process of writing naturally often is not aligned with the orders of sections listed in the table of contents which, thus, presents a pseudo-order, an ‘imaginary’ and ‘ideal’ reading experience poor in representing the situated and embodied qualities of writing. In feminist methodologies, co-producing knowledge, analysing, and writing occur at a relational level, within a ‘cyclicity’ where time has “qualitative characteristics that do not correspond to the abstract quantity of the clock and its montage (time is money)”. Hence, cyclicity in feminist writing means challenging the linear fashion of time that focuses on “progressiveness, irreversibility and quantifiability”. It emphasises repetition, recurrence, and continuity and suggests that events and experiences in the present are shaped by patterns that have been repeated in the past and that they are connected to larger patterns and cycles.

linearity of time and be self-reflexive throughout numerous cycles of the research. This cyclicity leads to the deconstruction and reconstruction of the research process and entails the continual re-evaluation of the frameworks that shape the research design. In this thesis, based on the feminist research approaches, the methodological perspective was not conceived at a later stage; it has always *been* there from the beginning, evolving alongside the theoretical conceptualisations in the form of a relational set that I'll present in the next section. As Mary Maynard presents in 'Feminist Issues in Data Analysis', for feminist researchers, the research suggests a holistic process marked with conceptual queries as well as ideas informing analysis and interpretation that are very much dependent on the overall trajectory; therefore, those methodological actions exist from the outset of the research till the later stages, rather than being reserved for the end.¹⁸

As a feminist urban research, this thesis advocates for blurring the distance between theory and the method. With a well-established history in epistemology, this perspective raises inquiries about the nature of 'data' and the definition of what is considered 'scientific'. In contrast to the perspectives developed by positivist epistemologies, feminist methodologies acknowledge the significance of the 'personal', the 'ordinary' and the 'everyday' as valid forms of 'data' and 'knowledge' in scientific research. Furthermore, the method is considered beyond a form of data collection. Theory, method, and the researcher's worldview all contribute to shaping the research through a complex and reflexive relationship.¹⁹ Departing from there, feminist scholarship encompasses beyond the studies focusing predominantly on femininity, gendered representations, or research conducted by women about women. It extends beyond these areas while also covering them when necessary. Feminist scholarship, therefore, pursues situated knowledge by 'constant observation' and 'listening to the stories of others' and encourages researchers to investigate socio-spatial realities within people's own integrity and context beyond

¹⁸ Mary Maynard, 'Feminist Issues in Data Analysis', in *The Handbook of Data Analysis*, ed. by Melissa Hardy and Alan Bryman (London: Sage Publications, 2004), pp. 131–46 (p. 132).

¹⁹ Nükhet Sirman, 'Sunuş', in *Türkiye'de Feminist Yöntem*, ed. by Emine Erdoğan and Nehir Gündoğdu (İstanbul: Metis, 2019), p. 10.

what the literature teaches us.²⁰ In her article ‘The Knowledge of the Body and the Presence of History-Toward a Feminist Architecture’, Deborah Fausch echoes the intellectual confusion that resulted in the interchangeable use of ‘feminine’ and ‘feminist’:²¹

Perhaps there are some positions to which women have a historical, if not an inherent connection, some aspects of human life that are distorted or depreciated in Western culture, some cases in which these distortions have been historically linked to a hatred of the feminine. Clearly, one such area is our relationship to the body -to the female body, but also to the bodily in general: the concrete, the material, the empirical, the “brute fact” the “dumb object” - terms which register the fear, contempt, and hatred in Western culture of “mere matter”.

To take this course is to claim, not that the feminine is bodily, but that the bodily is feminist- not that a concern with the body is a guarantee of nonoppressive attitudes, but that a nonoppressive attitude would include a regard for the bodily.²²

Connecting this to the trajectory of the thesis, I further argue that feminist urban research is beyond merely defining and applying methods or collecting and analysing data. It is also about valuing the ‘bodily’ knowledge and, following that, recognising ‘how we think’ and ‘how we act’ in the given cyclicity of time, allowing researchers to ‘embody’ the processes, yet at the same time, to learn and unlearn from the process. I would like to share a short excerpt from my experience: Before this research, my mental image of Van was constructed with crumbs of information authored by my friends and family that “it is ‘too’ far”, “it has a ‘sea-like’ huge lake in an impressive nature”, “it has delicious breakfasts”, “it hosts a considerable percentage of Kurdish population”, “but once many Armenians were living there” and so on. Over the last couple of years, some new information was added to this collection; as in mass and alternative media sources, Van has been reported with

²⁰ Gökçe Bayrakçıken Tüzel, ‘Feminist Bir Doktora Tezi Yazmak’, in *Méthodos: Kuram ve Yöntem Kenarından*, ed. by Dilek Hatatoğlu and Gökçe Ertuğrul (İstanbul: Anahtar Kitaplar, 2009), pp. 527–47.

²¹ In her foreword to “Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space”, Doina Petrescu talks about why they chose using the adjective ‘feminine’ in inverted commas in the poster of the conference “Alterities”: “The use of inverted commas indicated that we no longer speaking of ‘woman’ and her spatial practices within a theory of dichotomy and a dream of unity, but more within a heterogeneous spectrum of ‘feminine’ coming under a theory of alterity”.

²² Deborah Fausch, ‘The Knowledge of the Body and the Presence of History-Toward a Feminist Architecture’, in *Architecture and Feminism*, ed. by Debra Coleman, Elizabeth Danze, and Carol Henderson (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996), pp. 38–59 (p. 39).

incoming transnational migrants and how they ‘illegally’ passed the border to seek asylum in Turkey or to transit to another country.

These fragments of information have been both validated and simultaneously deconstructed, only to be reconstructed again in the field. This process involved an iterative approach that has continuously shaped and re-shaped the research findings. I had a mental image of fieldwork before I went Van and agreed with Kumar that “I would know magically what to do once I got into the field, that nothing could be fixed or laid down in advance”²³. Yet, it all started with the hesitation and apprehension of being and conducting research in an unfamiliar environment. While this initial timidity and fear of *being*, on top of researching about, somewhere that my body was not used to was gradually replaced with embodying the city, I felt tranquillity since my body was getting less recognisable as that of a ‘stranger’. In those moments, adopting a less conspicuous presence was a deliberate tactic. I thought having a less bold appearance would make it easier for me to navigate and inhabit the spaces of the city, allowing me to engage with the city more seamlessly. I will provide a more detailed account of the fieldwork in Chapter 3; however, I would shortly quote Kumar here that it is all about “who you are, where you go, and how you choose to deal with what you encounter”²⁴. These altogether shape and define the nature of the fieldwork experience.

1.2 From the city to the bodies: A cross-scalar approach

Van is one of the most populated cities in Eastern Anatolia. It is located on the eastern borderscapes of Turkey, adjacent to cities in Iran. Throughout its history, the city has witnessed a multitude of arrivals and departures, resulting in population changes driven by diverse forms of mobility, including internal and transnational migrations. To illustrate, after the deportation of Armenians in the last years of the Ottoman Empire, the modernisation project of Turkey led to various socio-spatial policies that

²³ Kumar, p. 2.

²⁴ Kumar.

resulted in the resettlement of different communities in the larger provincial area of Van. For instance, the relocation of more than thirteen thousand people of Turkish origin from Russia in 1927 is only one of those cases. In the late 1980s, the city received a high number of internally displaced people after the forced evacuation of Kurdish villages. Considering the migration issue today, the eastern border region, particularly the border that runs through Van province, has been an entry point for refugees from various countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Syria, Somalia, and Georgia for decades.

The socio-demographic presence of Van exhibits a significant heterogeneity today, with diverse settled ethnic communities including Kurds, Turks, Persians (*Acemler*), Romas, and Armenians whose population in Van presently is not substantial; however, we know that there are still Armenian individuals residing in the city yet having had to conceal their identity for generations.²⁵ In addition, more recently, transnational migrants, majorly from Afghanistan, Iran, Syria and Iraq, have resided in the city. This demographic composition is even richer when considering the Christian missionary communities that established three Protestant churches in the city centre. Some of the members of these missionary communities are also people forcibly displaced by religious persecution in their home countries, and one of them is connected to a small South Korean missionary group in the city. We should also not skip domestic migrants who moved to the city for educational or vocational reasons; I mean university students, academicians, governmental officers, security forces, investors, and national and international humanitarian aid workers.

The continuous influx of people to Van has not only shaped the socio-demographic structure of the city but also had a significant impact on its spatial structure. The urbanisation history of Van shows that migration-driven population changes have profoundly impacted the city's urban form and spaces. As a result of diverse arrivals and departures, the city centre was rebuilt almost from scratch at the beginning of the last century. Over the last decades, new peripheral neighbourhoods emerged as a

²⁵ Burcu Ateş, 'The Spatial Language of Migration: Too Many Titles, How Many Appearances?', *Routed Magazine*, 2021 <<https://www.routedmagazine.com/spatial-language-migration>> [accessed 25 November 2022].

response to the rise in migration-led populations. This urban change in Van has been the focus of several studies. In this respect, various forms of migration in Van attracted rising attention in academia. Amongst them, only a few explore migration flows in the city from a spatial perspective, most of which incidentally deal with city and space. The majority of these studies either draw their word upon the resettlement of various ethnic communities in Van in the late Ottoman or early and mid-Republican periods²⁶, present the urban history of the city by focusing majorly on a single ethnic or national community²⁷ or build a socio-spatial critique based on the urban poverty in relation to peripheral settlements of internally displaced people²⁸.

In order to grasp the research trend, I conducted a preliminary exercise by mapping existing related studies in doctoral programmes of architecture and city and regional planning by using the online database of the Turkish Council of Higher Education, entitled National Thesis Centre. A content-based search was performed by searching doctoral theses that include the terms 'göç' (migration), 'mülteci' (immigrant), and 'sığınmacı' (asylum-seeker) in their abstracts. The results revealed a diverse range of studies on migration, covering both domestic and transnational migration aspects. In a nutshell, while the studies in PhD in Architecture mostly centralise the issue around the use of built environments and housing and shelter problems, the ones in PhD in City and Regional Planning more particularly problematise the subject around social adaptation and everyday life. The geographic scope of the searched collection of graduate studies encompasses cities such as Aleppo, Ankara, Berlin, Hatay, İstanbul, İzmir and Konya. Interestingly, there have been no doctoral or

²⁶ Nevzat Ağcakaya, '1960 Sonrası Van'da İskan Politikaları: Dönerdere Örneği', in *Dünya'da Van: Nüfus, Etnisite, Tarih ve Toplum*, ed. by Ercan Çağlayan (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019); Mehmet Bayram Bilik, 'Van'ın Değişen Yüzleri: Kentte Demografik Dönüşümler ve Küresünniler', ed. by Ercan Çağlayan (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019); Eyüp Toprak, 'Van'da Kırgız Göçü Ulupamir Köyü', in *Van'da Göç Hareketleri* (İstanbul: Hiper Yayın, 2019); Sevim Şahin, 'Van'ın Demografik Dönüşümünde Küresünnilerin Aidiyeti' (İstanbul: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2020).

²⁷ Anahide Ter Minassian, 'Van 1915', in *Armenian Van/Vasporakan*, ed. by Richard G Hovannisian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2000); Özge Biner, *Türkiye'de Mültecilik: İltica, Geçicilik ve Yasallık 'Van Uydu Şehir Örneği'*, trans. by Ezgi Çakmak (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2016).

²⁸ Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız and Faruk Alaeddinoğlu, 'Göç ve Yoksulluk: Van Kenti Örneği', in *Van Kent Araştırmaları*, ed. by Suvat Parin (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık, 2016); Reşat Açıkgöz, 'Van'da Zorunlu Göç, Yoksulluk ve Kente Uyum', in *Dünya'da Van: Nüfus, Etnisite, Tarih ve Toplum*, ed. by Ercan Çağlayan (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019).

master's theses conducted specifically on migration in Van as part of the mentioned graduate programmes. This, together with the finding above, highlights a research gap in the socio-spatial analysis of migration in the context of Van and presents an opportunity for further scholarly exploration in this area²⁹.

At a conceptual level, all these studies embrace singularity in terms of both spatiality and temporality, as well as diversity. They usually overlook the multidimensionality of the communities under study, which results in a monochromatic representation of their spaces, timeframes, and identities, putting multiple dimensions of the story aside while categorising migrants according to their ethnicity and race. However, I would like to explore the socio-spatial traces of (forced)³⁰ migration with the lens of 'superdiversity'³¹ as introduced by Steven Vertovec, and by that to include multiple elements of diversity to the research: Different spatial forms and references related to the migration captured within and beyond the fieldwork; different temporalities informing us about how migration affected Van where the history "deeply marked in human, material and temporal form"³², (as such it goes beyond to be a background information and allows for inclusion of various timeframes at a necessary level); and different identities to critically question the ethnic and racial categorisations by taking into account of "differential immigration statuses and their concomitant entitlements and restrictions of rights, divergent labour market experiences, discrete

²⁹ It is noteworthy that there have been only two doctoral theses submitted to doctoral programs in architecture specifically focused on Van, with one completed in 2022 and another in 2019 and a doctoral thesis was completed in 2017 within a doctoral program in city and regional planning, sequentially shedding light on post-earthquake urban transformation, affordable housing and local development policies.

³⁰ I intentionally leave the word "forced" in brackets. At the beginning of my research, I attended various lectures and invited course programmes on migration, almost all of which were kicked-off with the argument that "every migration is a form of forced migration". Not only because of wars or disasters, but all other forms of human mobility are in some way 'forced', either for economic reasons or for climate change or for being in search of 'better living conditions' in general. Therefore, whenever I write 'migration', it refers to forced migration.

³¹ Steven Vertovec, 'Superdiversity and Its Implications', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30.6 (2007), 1024–54 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701599465>>.

³² Kristen Sarah Biehl, 'Dwelling Encounters: Migration, Diversity and Ambivalence in an Istanbul Neighbourhood' (University of Oxford, 2017), p. 44.

gender and age profiles, patterns of spatial distribution, and mixed local area responses by service providers and residents”³³.

I thereby would extend the narrowly focused socio-spatial analysis and explore the intersectional dialogue between urbanisation, migration, and bodies. With this intention, I aim to map the migration-driven urbanisation dynamics in Van at a finer scale by analysing the bodyscapes in their relationship with urban landscapes. As Ela Alanyalı Aral puts, in that context, “mapping is an employed as an agent which relates and communicates information”:

Information on place renders a wide range of visualisations from geographical statistics to analysis in architectural and urban design professions. On the other hand, the ‘placeless’ type of use of maps and mapping denotes proximities and interrelationships of concepts or themes abstracted from spatial connotations.³⁴

From this critical perspective, adopting an approach based on superdiversity shall facilitate mapping the intricate relationship between migration and urbanisation by tracing the situated and embodied ways of understanding everyday realities. Thus, this approach can exhibit the “micro-practices”³⁵ to shed light on the socio-spatiality of migrations in Van.

The concept of superdiversity, with its site-specific approach, emphasises the importance of opening up discussions around everyday intersectionality and placing the ‘migrant experience’³⁶ at the core. When considering migration as a spatio-temporal process, understanding ‘experience’ through the ways they are “handled in cultural terms, embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas, and institutional forms” is of critical importance to explore.³⁷ Therefore, instead of focusing on the causes of

³³ Vertovec, ‘Superdiversity and Its Implications’, p. 1025.

³⁴ Ela Alanyalı Aral, ‘Introduction’, in *Mapping Syrian Migration: Migrant Spaces in Ankara* (Ankara: Middle East Technical University Faculty of Architecture, 2018), p. 8.

³⁵ Constantin Petcou and Doina Petrescu, ‘Acting Spaces: Transversal Notes, on-the-Ground Observations and Concrete Questions for Us All’, in *Urban-Act: Practices, Groups, Networks, Workspaces, Organisations, Tools, Methods, Projets, Data & Texts*, 2007, pp. 131–46.

³⁶ Russell King, ‘Theories and Typologies of Migration: An Overview and a Primer’, in *Willy Brandt Series of Working Papers in International Migration and Ethnic Relations*, ed. by Erica Righard (Malmö, 2012), p. 25.

³⁷ Selda Tuncer, ‘Going Public: Women’s Experience of Everyday Urban Public Space in Ankara Across Generations Between the 1950s and the 1980s’, 2014, p. 15.

migration³⁸, this thesis mainly emphasises the lived experiences of migrants as they engage with the locality and the ways that they perceive and make sense of these experiences in a spatial context.

In this regard, I am inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's seminal work on the analysis of space through bodies in *Phenomenology of Perception* and his later work *Signs*.³⁹ For instance, his conceptualisation of 'intercorporeality' propounds that the experience of space is not limited to a purely subjective or purely objective standpoint but comprises a synthesis of both.⁴⁰ Intercorporeality emerges as an alternative way of understanding the space from the embodied engagement with the world and involves a dynamic interplay between our subjective bodily experiences and the objective spatial structures that we encounter since, according to him, we can share and extend our experiences through bodies. It thereby reflects the idea that our experience of space is always situated and emerges from the ongoing relationship between our "lived bodies" and the environment. He then posits that "I am not in space and time, nor do I conceive space and time; I belong to them, my body combines with them and includes them".⁴¹ Based on this conceptualisation, by examining how bodies inhabit space, I seek to gain a deeper understanding of the relation between migration and migrant experience at an intercorporeal level.

Undoubtedly, a bodily inquiry in understanding migration-driven urbanisation requires a broader and relational epistemological and methodological perspective, pinning the city with all scales and agencies. For David Harvey, this corresponds to an approach beyond the demarcations of disciplines.

Clearly, the city cannot be conceptualised in terms of our present disciplinary structures. Yet there is very little sign of an emerging interdisciplinary framework for thinking, let alone theorising, about the city. Sociologists, economists,

³⁸ King, p. 25.

³⁹ Merleau Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1962).

⁴⁰ Martin Pulido, "An Entirely Different Kind of Synthesis": Reflections on Merleau-Ponty's Analysis of Space in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, *Aporia*, 20.1 (2010), p. 29.

⁴¹ Ponty, p. 162.

geographers, architects, city planners, and so on, all appear to plough lonely furrows and to live in their own confined conceptual worlds.⁴²

This calls for dealing with urbanisation from a transdisciplinary perspective, for instance, by excavating and disclosing the sociological and anthropological aspects of urban change, letting different scales and origins of knowledge, including ‘everyday knowledge’, be involved in the debate. I would double here the proposition of Hilde Heynen when she wrote in ‘Space as Receptor, Instrument or Stage: Notes on the Interaction Between Spatial and Social Constellations’ that “the only chance to develop a convincing theoretical apparatus lies in an interdisciplinary approach that would build upon the insights and methods developed within these different disciplines”. What she pinned with the phrase “theoretical apparatus” points to a probe into the relation between space and culture “to make sense of the relation between spatial configurations of the built environment on the one hand and social/cultural patterns on the other”.⁴³ Furthermore, in ‘Ulusalçılık: Söylencesel ve İdeolojik Bir Araçsallaştırma [Nationalism: A Mythical and Ideological Instrumentalisation]’ Güven Arif Sargın states that it is ‘political’ to choose which ‘knowledge sources’ to follow and how to represent them:

The question of what constitutes ‘knowledge’ regarding architectural space, what the ‘knowledge sources’ are at the moment of its production, and how they are represented is, according to Lefebvre, a political choice. He suggests that the ‘knowledge bases and their representations’ concerning the making/use of space, conceptual propositions, or perceptual practices require an understanding of the complexity of ‘myth’ and ‘ideology’.⁴⁴

However, the dominant approach of doing research on urbanisation and urban transformation focuses on macro or mezzo analysis, mainly referring to the ‘urban form’ or ‘urban development strategies’, distancing themselves from other sources of knowledge and everyday narratives. It is unlikely for these researches to analyse the socio-spatial practices of people in understanding the situated forms of

⁴² David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2009), p. 22.

⁴³ Hilde Heynen, ‘Space as Receptor, Instrument or Stage: Notes on the Interaction Between Spatial and Social Constellations’, *International Planning Studies*, 18.3–4 (2013), 342–57 (pp. 342–43).

⁴⁴ Güven Arif Sargın, ‘Ulusalçılık: Söylencesel ve İdeolojik Bir Araçsallaştırma’, *Tarih ve Toplum*, 2009.

urbanisation, for instance, the one happening at a micro-level, which I interpret as ‘micro-urbanisation’. For Heynen, the technocratic practices of professionals from ‘spatial disciplines’ (architecture, urban design, and planning) mark space as an “instrument” ignorant of how individuals and groups inhabit the space and co-produce symbolic meanings to it.⁴⁵ She, in return, proposed a model which she entitled “space as a stage”, “allowing for further fine-tuning in the gradual rapprochement between the ‘spatial disciplines’ (architecture, urban design and planning) and social sciences (sociology, geography and anthropology)”:

Such an interdisciplinary approach is indeed dearly needed since more and more it becomes clear that a sustainable development of the built environment should not only rest upon technological and disciplinary insights from the spatial disciplines, but should also take into account the manifold ways that people deal with how the built environment conditions their behaviour. Addressing space as stage also allows for a more encompassing understanding of the notion of ‘spatial quality’: it would imply that this quality is on the one hand intrinsic to specific spatial constellations (hence adequately assessed from an architectural or urban design point of view), while, on the other hand, the full realisation of its ‘promesse de bonheur’ would rely upon the way it favours and stimulates the unfolding of socially desirable effects.⁴⁶

The conventional scholarly works on urbanisation and urban transformation widely produce knowledge on urban agglomeration and its results as the formation of peripheries, urban sprawls, and informal housing solutions in their relation to industrialisation and change in workspaces, domestic migration, urban poverty⁴⁷ and rural-urban dichotomy. These studies address the extent of the ‘built-up’ areas through “conscious, systematised, and planned action concerning a certain section or totality of a town”⁴⁸ by adopting a development-focused approach to understanding the urbanisation trends. However, the term urbanisation is often used loosely, referring to the changes in the land use for specific areas either in the city centre or, more often, in the peripheral areas to become ‘urbanised’ while being parcelled, sold, and developed for a new urban land-use such as housing, retail, or leisure. In this context, ‘change’ is caused mainly by population change due to

⁴⁵ Heynen, p. 354.

⁴⁶ Heynen, p. 354.

⁴⁷ Or “poverty in turn” (*nöbetleşe yoksulluk*) as worded by Oğuz Işık and Melih Pınarcıoğlu.

⁴⁸ Ruşen Keleş, *Kentleşme Politikası* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1996).

migration from rural to urban areas and manifests itself roughly with the change in the urban development dynamics and macro form of cities.

The literature on urbanisation in Turkey often conceptualises urbanisation in terms of development as well. As Ruşen Keleş mentions,

urbanisation is a phenomenon of population accumulation that results in an increase in the number of cities and the growth of today's cities in parallel with industrialisation and economic development, creates an increasing rate of organisation, division of labour and specialisation in the social structure, and leads to changes in human behaviour and relations associated with cities.⁴⁹

In line with this interpretation, İlhan Tekeli describes urbanisation processes in Turkey in five stages, which show us the impact of migrations over cities at varying intensities⁵⁰. The first stage claims that urbanisation, which increases with migration, is a preventable displacement. The second stage involves mechanic analogies around “the countryside pushes, the city pulls” that would control the uninterrupted drive of urbanisation, which could not be foreseen in the first stage and, in a way, strengthen the rural-urban dichotomy. According to Tekeli, the third stage produced the rhetoric of the ‘urban bourgeoisie’ that considers urbanisation through the cultural transformation of those who came to the city. While the fourth stage treats urbanisation as the inevitable end of a country undergoing a development experiment within the framework of market mechanisms, the fifth stage attempts to situate urbanisation within the fundamental processes of underdeveloped capitalism.

The conceptualisation of different forms of migration and its cultural, economic, and socio-spatial impacts have always been at the centre of the debates on urbanisation in Turkey. Yet, I would go further that it is no longer predominantly centred on the relationship between rural and urban populations or on the resulting urban change in the built environment and larger settlements. Instead, the focus has shifted towards superdiversity, which has re-shaped the urban culture and everyday spaces within cities, inviting us to think about actions and events at the micro-scale. Growing

⁴⁹ Keleş, p. 19. (translation by the author)

⁵⁰ İlhan Tekeli, ‘Türkiye’de Kentleşme Dinamiğinin Kavranışı Üzerine’, in *Türkiye’de Kentleşme Yazıları* (Ankara: Turhan Kitabevi, 1982), pp. 327–46.

studies about cultural theories on urbanisation explore “the mutually formative relations between materiality and social relations in conflictive and creative processes of urbanisation”⁵¹. In this context, feminist scholarship on ‘embodied space’ offers a productive theoretical and methodological conceptualisation “for researching relationships between material urban form and everyday life”⁵². For instance, Setha Low’s seminal works on how culture is spatialised and vice versa, how space is culturally produced could be of utmost influence in exploring the concept of ‘micro-urbanisation’.

In her ethnographic work, Low analyses the socio-cultural production of space as it encompasses various factors, such as social, economic, ideological, and technological influences, that contribute to or aim to bring about the physical construction of the built environment.⁵³ For her, social construction refers to the process of spatial transformations driven by people’s social interactions, conversations, memories, emotions, imaginings, and the utilisation or absence thereof, shaping places, scenes, and actions that convey specific meanings.⁵⁴ Departing from this anthropological analysis, Low has conceptualised ‘embodied space’ as “a model for interweaving social production and construction of space through a feminist focus on corporality and subjectivity”⁵⁵. Spatialising culture, hence, involves multiple processes defined by “social production, social construction, embodiment, and discursive practices” centred around the body as a “primary site of signification” in defining a “mobile spatial field”, which Low borrowed from Nancy Munn.

The person as a mobile spatial field—a spatiotemporal unit with feelings, thoughts, preferences, and intentions as well as out-of-awareness cultural beliefs and practices—who creates space as a potentiality for social relations, giving it meaning, form, and ultimately through the patterning of everyday movements, produces place

⁵¹ Angelika Gabauer and others, ‘Care , Uncare and the City’, in *Care and the City: Encounters with Urban Studies*, ed. by Angelika Gabauer and others (New York: Routledge, 2022), p. 12.

⁵² Viderman and Knierbein, p. 195.

⁵³ Setha Low, ‘Spatializing Culture: An Engaged Anthropological Approach to Space and Place (2014)’, *The People, Place, and Space Reader*, 2014, p. 35.

⁵⁴ Setha Low, ‘Spatializing Culture: An Engaged Anthropological Approach to Space and Place (2014)’, p. 35.

⁵⁵ Viderman and Knierbein, p. 195.

and landscape. The social construction of space is accorded material expression as a person/spatiotemporal unit, while social production is understood as both the practices of the person/spatiotemporal unit and global and collective forces.⁵⁶

1.3 Researching urban culture with bodies: A relational set

The concept of 'body' has long been integrated into the studies centred around discussions on space, urban and everyday life, particularly after rising feminist ideas that have been influential both in academia and on the street. The second wave of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s has played a vital role in challenging and transforming research and knowledge production on and about space, enriching our understanding of the complex relationships between gender, bodies, spaces, and cities. It also highlighted power dynamics rooted in the supremacy of mind over body or universal facts over personal and sentimental experience, in terms of not only how space is affected by and affecting women but also all other marginalised groups.

I share a similar interest in understanding the complicated relation between space and body. Within this thesis, my focus is to integrate body to be able to analyse different scales of migration-driven urbanisation in Van. Based on this deep-seated interest, this thesis is built on the following research question: *In what ways can we investigate the urban landscapes that have been significantly impacted by socio-cultural changes resulting from different forms of migration?* While proposing this question, the need to uncover what 'socio-cultural change' means for this study deliberately appeared; thus, I attempt to uncover 'bodily' aspects of such a change by asking: *How could we refer to 'body' in understanding the transformation of the urban landscapes of a contested city?* From these two departing questions, I arrive at the overarching question that has guided this research: *How could we trace the urban culture of Van diversified by migrant bodyscapes?*

My fieldwork in Van was very inspirational, indeed guiding, in constructing, while also constantly de- & re-constructing, the research questions. As I get deeper into

⁵⁶ Setha Low, 'Spatializing Culture: An Engaged Anthropological Approach to Space and Place (2014)', p. 35.

both history and the present everyday life of the city, I learned what I should follow and ask and how I should act critically. I will elaborate on this further throughout later chapters while mapping the ‘field’ and the ‘fieldwork,’ yet I should briefly note how I deal with the research questions throughout the time. The trajectory of the thesis initiated with an analysis of the settlement preferences of various migrant communities based on their ethnicity and race. However, this approach conditioned a categorisation over groups, which I indeed oppose and refrain from adopting. When I realised this prejudice, I started to ask questions about the urban co-existence of migrants with diverse backgrounds shaped by nationality, ethnicity, race, class, gender, age, migration motivation, legal status, employment, etc. Consequently, my focus shifted towards understanding the formation of migration-driven superdiversity in Van by tracing the stories and narratives in the city and, from there, understanding how diverse bodyscapes that are both affected by and affect the urban landscapes of Van have been forming the urban culture of the city.

The research questions and objectives of the thesis are built upon a ‘relational set’ evolved around my intellectual and bodily engagement with the research, drawing upon historical, theoretical, and critical elements that I observe, explore, and (un)learn throughout and beyond the fieldwork. By incorporating these diverse ingredients, the research aims to create a multifaceted and dynamic framework that can engage with the complexity and richness of the superdiversity of Van. I call it a ‘relational set’ representing a non-hierarchical, non-linear, and de-centralised form of connectivity. It aptly captures the trajectory and tectonics of this thesis; this research cannot stem from a single argument or hypothesis, but rather, it has always tended to generate more and more interconnected arguments in a way to ‘map’ the connections.⁵⁷

The mapping below (Figure 1-2) shows four primarily interconnected arguments, several supporting concepts, and multiple ways of connecting those arguments and concepts, which have mobilised the relational thinking of this research overall. The

⁵⁷ ... and to enable creation of more connections as this text will be re-produced again and again while being read.

arguments I proposed within this mapping do not represent a necessarily ‘logical’ sequence or a single reading. On the other hand, I refer to them to weave the questions and concepts around urban(isation), migration, and bodies. Each argument encapsulates a small network of claims, concepts, and clues for doing the research. The prominent feature of the whole set is that none of the networks are detached from each other; that they, and thus, their associated instances, are connected to one another. In the following parts, I will briefly introduce them:

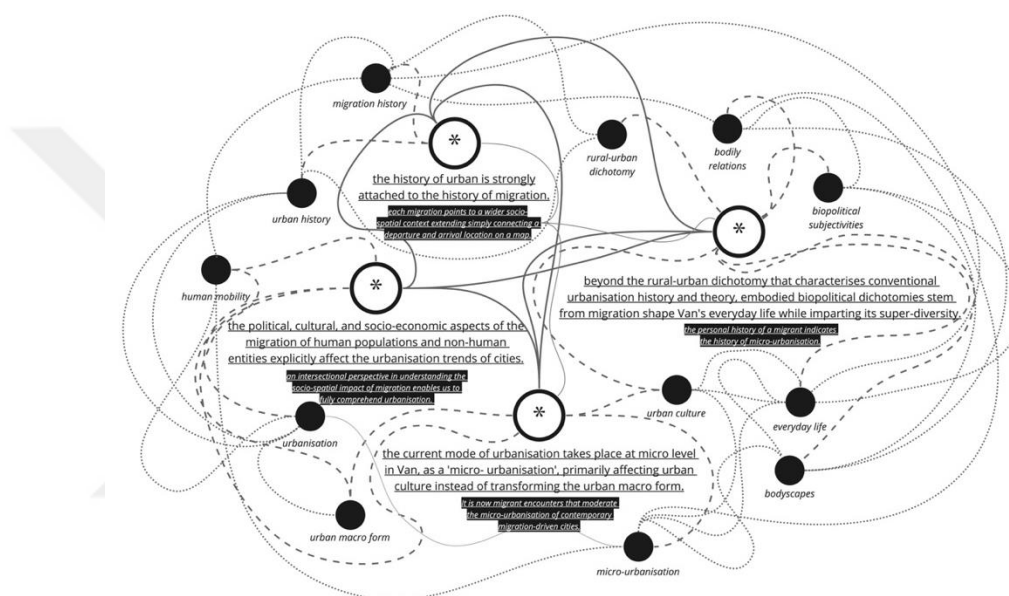


Figure 1-2 A relational set that maps the migration-driven superdiversity in Van.

The urban history of Van has been strongly linked to the history of migrations that affected the city.

Given the impact of migration on cities, the existence and growth of cities are often influenced by different forms of human as well as non-human (labour, ideas, media, goods, etc.) mobility. Most of the scholarly work on this topic focuses on how cities unevenly developed after industrialisation and relevantly triggered migration of people from so-called less-developed lands to more-developed, thus urbanised, areas. Within this topic, there is an ongoing debate linked to criticisms of (post)capitalism and neoliberalism, which have created extreme socio-economic

conditions in vulnerable geographies, resulting in the mobilisation of cheap labour in those sites. While this perspective has predominantly explored the effects of migration on urbanisation through flows from rural to urban areas, such a limited consideration fails to fully comprehend the ways in which migration has impacted the socio-spatial and cultural dimensions of cities. Indeed, the multifaceted impacts of migration on cities extend not only to the modern era of industrialisation and its aftermath but also to pre-modern periods. Since the existence of the first civilisations, cities developed in response to the rising population and the movement of people, capital, labour, beliefs, ideas, and information on a global scale. In light of these debates, we could interpret cities by conceptualising migration and its associated notions to understand how cities function as a socio-spatial response to various forms and scales of flows. However, as Saskia Sassen asserts in the context of migrations in the modern era, each flow “points to a larger context marked by mostly extreme conditions that can be outlined, or at least made visible” and that “the city and regional levels are frequently embedded in a larger set of dynamics”.⁵⁸ Most of the flows we have witnessed today have been triggered and occurred beyond the “chain migration”⁵⁹ stemming from household decisions. They occur at various levels, attempting to re-shape cities and their spaces accordingly at changing scales. *Each migration points to a wider socio-political context that extends simply connecting a departure and arrival location on a map.*

The political, cultural, and socio-economic aspects of migrations explicitly affect the urbanisation trends.

Human and non-human migration at various scales plays a significant role in driving urban transformation and development to accommodate the needs of new residents in cities. This holds particular relevance to the trajectory of urban development in

⁵⁸ Saskia Sassen, ‘Three Emergent Migrations: An Epochal Change’, *The SUR File on Migration and Human Rights*, 2016, 29–41 (p. 30).

⁵⁹ Sassen, p. 50.

Turkey; as Tolga Levent argues, it is exceedingly challenging to separate the history of urbanisation in Turkey from the migration movements.⁶⁰ This aspect is particularly noteworthy in Van, where we can observe how the arrival and departure of different civilisations and communities throughout history have been closely intertwined with the rise and fall of the city. As in the widespread related literature, the urbanisation processes in Turkey are often associated with the phenomenon of migration caused by the transformation in rural areas. Yet, a more intersectional perspective may differentiate our understanding of the relationship between migration and urbanisation. Questioning the superdiversity within the migration could allow us to picture it in terms of different dimensions of migration, including departure and arrival location, motivation, demographic characteristics, socio-cultural and economic background, work life and legal status. For instance, while Van received thousands of migrants from the villages in close vicinity or from smaller neighbour cities that can be considered as a rural to urban migration, the flows of the late 1980s showed a discrete characteristic marked with displacement of the Kurdish population as a result of forced evacuation of the villages due to so-called security measures of the time. The socio-political dimension of this forced displacement led to a massive flow of the Kurdish population to the Van city centre and its adjacent administrative units. The population of the city dramatically grew to 500.000 from 153.000 between 1985 and 1996.⁶¹ Consequently, new informal settlements emerged in the city, which corresponds today to around seven peripheral neighbourhoods.⁶² *An intersectional perspective in understanding the socio-spatial drivers and impact of migration enables us to comprehend urbanisation fully.*

⁶⁰ Tolga Levent, 'A New Challenge for Urban Planning in Turkey: Socio-Spatial Impacts of Forced Migration', *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 26.2 (2019), 115–34 (p. 118) <<https://doi.org/10.18778/1231-1952.26.2.06>>.

⁶¹ Ahmet Özer, 'Sosyoekonomik Yapı, Göç ve Kentleşme Bağlamında Yerel Yönetimler (ve Van Örneği)', in *Van Kent Sempozyumu* (Van: TMMOB Van İl Koordinasyon Kurulu, 2009), p. 67.

⁶² Kamuran Sami, 'Zoraki/Zorunlu Göçün Yarattığı Kentsel, Kültürel ve Mekansal Bellek Yıkımı: Van Kenti Toplumsal Ferasetin Neresinde?', in *Van Kent Sempozyumu* (Van: TMMOB Van İl Koordinasyon Kurulu, 2009), p. 28.

Beyond the rural-urban dichotomy that characterises conventional urbanisation history and theory, embodied biopolitical dichotomies stemming from migration shape Van's everyday life while imparting its superdiversity.

Vertovec posits that “Diversification entails a fundamental mode of social transformation”⁶³. I depart from this statement and further question how superdiversity brings urban transformation, which cuts across economic, political, social, and cultural fields at cross-scales. As one of the main claims of this thesis that intertwines its conceptual and methodological positioning, I argue that urban transformation could no longer be attributed to only material and physical change impacting macro and mezzo urban scales, yet it operates more at a biopolitical level informed by embodied socio-spatial struggles, encounters, confrontations, and appropriations. When I point to the “micro” urban scale here, I mainly address the socio-spatial practices informing ‘dwelling’, ‘labour’ and ‘rituals’ of “those who live in the hustle and bustle of everyday life” and often “those who fit into a life pattern imposed on them by others”.⁶⁴ Constantin Petcou and his friends discussed operationalising the space for new forms of (co)existence and collectivity in-between the “biopolitical diagram” and “political diagonal”⁶⁵ with Antonio Negri. Regarding this interpretation, when I refer to ‘biopolitical level’, I am referring to an intersectional field of scales; as Negri puts it, among “small-scale biopolitical spaces where ‘ordinary’ inhabitants can meet and re-shape everyday life” and “a biopolitical space, like the city, is a space of mixture, of encounter, and above all of intellectual, political and ethical expression”.⁶⁶

⁶³ Vertovec, *Superdiversity: Migration and Social Complexity*, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Antonio Negri and others, ‘What Makes a Biopolitical Space? A Discussion with Toni Negri’, trans. by Bernard Schütze and Nicole Klein, *Eurozine*, 31.4 (2007), p. 18.

⁶⁵ Negri describes ‘biopolitical diagram’ as “the space in which the re-production of organised life (social, political) in all its dimensions is controlled, captured” and ‘political diagonal’ “the relation that one has with these power relations, and which one cannot but have.” For more information, see Negri and others, p. 18.

⁶⁶ Negri and others, pp. 18–29.

In light of this, I propound that we can explore the socio-spatial constructs of migration-driven contemporary city via de-constructing and tracing the biopolitical dichotomies between the ‘stranger’ and the ‘local’, the ‘irregular’ and ‘regular’, the ‘temporary’ and ‘permanent’, and finally (in)between ‘disappearance’ and ‘appearance’ which for Hannah Arendt is “the necessary condition for essential processes that go on inside the living organism”⁶⁷. For Arendt, how one appears is the condition to life process⁶⁸, hinting at the biopolitics of urban culture and life and referring to an intersectional perspective in understanding the change at a scale. As described by Pelin Tan, these categories also point to ‘biopolitical subjectivities’ that determine the conditions of survival, inclusion, or exclusion in urban life while influencing the undermining of the living habitat system.⁶⁹ They create spaces of deterritorialisation that “simultaneously define complementary, sedentary reterritorisations” or a “nomad(ic) space”⁷⁰ that exists in-between appearance and disappearance.

This calls for applying the “lens of subjectivity” to investigate further the practices, experiences, and struggles of migrants to surmount the prevailing perceptions of migration as an outcome or result of ‘objective’ elements like variations in wages or ‘structural’ influences like the growth of capitalism that leads to the demise of subsistence economies.⁷¹ According to Stephan Scheel et al., in contrast to the conceptualisation of migration as a dependent variable stemming from objective ‘factors’ or the perception of migrants as isolated individual “rational-choice actors”, an emphasis on the subjectivity of migrants could highlight the personal and subjective aspect of the migration process. In this line of flight, I agree that the actions, encounters, and challenges of migrants should not be analysed separately from the discussions, actions, tools, regulations, and institutions that establish specific manifestations of human movement as ‘migration’, consequently

⁶⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, Inc., 1971), p. 27.

⁶⁸ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 27.

⁶⁹ Pelin Tan, ‘A Genealogy of Nomadic Space’, in *Archipelago of Protocols*, ed. by Aristide Antonas (Barcelona: dpr-barcelona, 2016), p. 208.

⁷⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 54.

⁷¹ Maribel Casas-Cortes and others, ‘New Keywords: Migration and Borders’, *Cultural Studies*, 29.1 (2015), 55–87 (p. 83) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2014.891630>>.

categorising certain individuals as ‘migrants’ while excluding others.⁷² Furthermore, labelling subjects of migration as ‘refugees’, ‘illegal migrants’ or ‘irregular migrants’ is not representative of the ‘difference’. These titles delimit the multiplicity of the migrant experience and, therefore, do not reflect on the everyday social reality triggered by superdiversity. In the context of even more increasing superdiversity of Van over the last decades, migrant subjectivities have co-produced the everyday life of that city by revealing new socio-spatial relations in terms of the formation of dwelling, labour and rituals while challenging the representations of spatial and bodily experiences of migration embedded in the urban landscapes of the city.

This reproduction also resembles a temporal dimension in a way that analysing and overlaying the micro (co-)existences in the city, for instance, that of (auto)biographical narratives of diverse biopolitical subjectivities, could let us overview socio-spatial repetitions, conflicts, tactics, and appropriations that occur in the city, all of which are indicators of socio-spatial signification. While migration flows, when understanding them beyond mobility from one location to another, point to a larger context than it is often perceived, each flow illustrates a micro context as well, marked by bodies and bodyscapes. Drawing inspiration from Sassen’s perspective on “the migrant as an indicator of a history in the making”⁷³, we can further expand our argument on biopolitical dichotomies to suggest that not only the history of migration but also of the migrant her/himself marks a spatio-temporal track in the cities. *The personal history of a migrant makes the history of urbanisation.*

The current mode of urbanisation takes place as micro-urbanisation, primarily affecting urban culture beyond only transforming the urban macro form.

⁷² Casas-Cortes and others, p. 84.

⁷³ Sassen, p. 30.

The shift from a developmental to a cultural perspective in urban studies is not a mere epistemological shift; it is indeed a consequence of how cities and their spaces have been co-produced and at which scales the ‘urbanisation’ contemporarily takes place. As I outlined above, one of my main arguments in this thesis stays in the query of how and through which migrations Van as a border city has been transformed, particularly in terms of urbanisation trends. Given that migration is highly associated with ‘diversity’ in terms of various social, cultural, political, and biopolitical aspects, I argue that this diversity has been productive in transforming the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of lived space. In Van, the massive urban change manifested by the emergence of huge peripheries and informal settlements detached from the centre or relocation of the city centre is no longer dominant in the agenda of urbanisation. Yet, I argue that urbanisation in the city hovers at a micro-level, at the dimension of most concrete and symbolic, and this points to an exploration among scales of bodies and the urban. This is indeed conceptually and methodologically demanding. Combined with the ‘spatial turn’ in cultural studies, analysis of micro-urbanisation calls for ethnographic investigations in urban research.

Changing debates on culture in the field of architecture and urban studies have informed “culturally specific approaches to spatial theory and urban research”⁷⁴. This perspective exists in the acknowledgement of the relationship between ‘culture’ and spaces “where shared meanings are negotiated, constructed, and re-constructed”⁷⁵. As Sabine Knierbein draws upon, culturally specific approaches in urban research intend to move beyond the conceptual limitations of culture that either picture it from within “high artistic culture” or associate it with “ethnicity, nationality or religious difference, leaving other differences (class, gender, age, education, etc.) hidden from view”⁷⁶. Indeed, ‘urban culture’ offers a comprehensive thematic as well as methodical reflection to thoroughly address and understand the contemporary

⁷⁴ Sabine Knierbein, ‘Stadtkultur. Eine Postdisziplinäre Positionierung in Der Stadtforschung’, in *Positionen Der Urbanistik I. Stadtkultur Und Methoden Der Stadtforschung*, ed. by Oliver Frey and Florian Koch (Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2011), p. 81.

⁷⁵ Michael Ian Borer, ‘The Location of Culture: The Urban Culturalist Perspective’, *City & Community*, 5.2 (2006), 173–97 (p. 173).

⁷⁶ Sabine Knierbein, ‘Critique of Everyday Life in the 21st Century Lived Space and Capitalist Urbanization’ (Vienna University of Technology, 2020), p. 7.

phenomena and challenges of urbanisation.⁷⁷ Adding the migration-driven dynamics such as mobility and associated socio-demographic change in the cities, it becomes even more imperative that urban research should be tailored to changing social constructs by “acting as a medium between concrete micro-sociology and abstract macro-theory”⁷⁸.

As David Harvey puts it, “the city is manifestly a complicated thing”⁷⁹. I, therefore, argue that spatial and urban studies that understand the city as a spatiotemporal and socio-political process could bridge macro and micro, global and local, concrete and abstract and, therefore, delve more into the complex world of the cities. The city is a (co-)production of materiality but also knowledge and overall meaning.⁸⁰ In this regard, I argue for a cross-scalar approach in analysing the urban culture of Van, providing a mapping expanding from bodyscapes to urban landscapes linked to socio-spatial narratives and everyday realities marked by micro-urbanisation dynamics of the city. This cross-scalar research approach exhibits an understanding that challenges the “traditional linear emblematisation in old dichotomies” and maps urban culture at the biopolitical level mentioned above.

In Van, “like a rhizome, the cultural texture has burrowed deep”, and it “unconsciously guides” the city.⁸¹ Powerful socio-cultural representations in various forms, such as the tectonics of the built environment, historical monuments, spaces of gathering and confrontation, signboards and posters on the façades of buildings, the languages one hears while walking on the streets, songs, stories, and myths all compose the ‘appearance’ of the city at a remarkable diversity. The urban culture of the city has witnessed a series of transformations in the course of time, affected by various arrivals and departures, as well as transits. Decoding the socio-spatial

⁷⁷ Knierbein, ‘Stadtkultur. Eine Postdisziplinäre Positionierung in Der Stadtforschung’, p. 81.

⁷⁸ Knierbein, ‘Critique of Everyday Life in the 21st Century Lived Space and Capitalist Urbanization’, p. 81.

⁷⁹ Harvey, p. 22.

⁸⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991).

⁸¹ Rolf Lindner, ‘The Cultural Texture of the City’, in *ESF-LiU Conference “Cities and Media: Cultural Perspectives on Urban Identities in a Mediatized World”* (Vadstena: European Science Foundation, 2006), p. 53.

reflections of evolving cultural representations in the city could enable us to grasp the “character of the city”⁸² by tracing its material and immaterial artefacts. This refers to deciphering the biopolitical relations, experiences, and patterns of the embodied space co-produced through everyday practices informed by dwelling, labour, and rituals. What about encounters? The condition to appearance and disappearance of biopolitical subjectivities is the encounter amongst. Sara Ahmed calls these encounters “strange encounters” settled in “the gesture of recognising the one that we do not know, the one that is different from us”. *It is now migrant encounters that moderate the micro-urbanisation of contemporary migration-driven cities like Van.*

1.4 Tracing superdiversity: A migrant city

Why did I do this research in and about Van? My interest in understanding the migration phenomenon and its socio-spatial impact on urban landscapes led me to seek out potential urban sites where I could witness the profound influence of migration in everyday reality and, at the same time, where I could ‘easily’ engage myself with the ‘field’ and get involved in the ‘ecosystem’. After rounds of debates with my close circles experienced in working within the migration context and a final discussion with my supervisors, I was convinced that I should research Van. There are several reasons behind this decision.

Firstly, Van, as a city situated at the eastern border of Turkey, has been experiencing a distinct pattern of migration compared to other cities receiving international migration flows. Unlike the case of the south-eastern border, which is addressed by many academic research and humanitarian-aid-oriented projects referring to the Syrian case⁸³, Van presents a unique context that warrants specific attention and

⁸² Gerald D. Suttles, ‘The Cumulative Texture of Local Urban Culture’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 90.2 (1984), 283–304 (p. 288) <<https://doi.org/10.1086/228080>>.

⁸³ M. Murat Erdoğan, ‘Kopuş’tan ‘Uyum’a Kent Mültecileri- Suriyeli Mülteciler ve Belediyelerin Süreç Yönetimi: İstanbul Örneği, 2017; Murat Erdoğan, ‘Türkiye’deki Suriyeli Mülteciler’, 2019, 0–25 <www.kas.de>; Ayşecan Terzioğlu, ‘The Banality of Evil and the Normalization of the Discriminatory Discourses against Syrians in Turkey’, 4.2 (2017), 34–47; Levent.

analysis. In the context of the south-eastern border of Turkey, the migration pattern is characterised by a significant influx of Syrians who have been treated under a ‘temporary protection’ policy. However, the flow in Van is more complex, involving a flow of ‘irregular migration’ accompanied by smuggling activities. This aspect of migration in Van also highlights complicated border relations, including the dynamics of capital flow based on smuggling and informal urban economies.⁸⁴

Secondly, the eastern border of Turkey, thus, Van hosts migration of people from different countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Syria, Somali and Georgia. Van also witnessed migration of internally displaced persons from villages and smaller provinces. This diversity provides an opportunity to observe and explore everyday encounters and interactions at a more complicated level. For intersectional research, such a setting is better to observe how different arrivals to the city deal with public life and how they appear or disappear. This socio-cultural context in Van provides a rich and relevant setting for intersectional research on migration and superdiversity.

Thirdly, Van has been relatively neglected in academic research, particularly in the context of migration studies and urban studies and has received limited humanitarian aid services. The city’s potential as a research site and its specific needs related to migration have not been adequately explored. To address this gap, I conducted a comprehensive search using the National Thesis Centre, the online database of the Turkish Council of Higher Education, to identify doctoral and master theses specifically focused on Van. The search results indicate a limited number of doctoral theses related to Van.⁸⁵ Specifically, one doctoral thesis in Sociology examines the transition of legal status of Iranian refugees to asylum-seekers.⁸⁶ In the field of Architecture, two doctoral theses focus on the urban transformation from

⁸⁴ Orhan Deniz, ‘Mülteci Hareketleri Açısından Van Kentinin Durumu ve Kentteki Mültecilerin Demografik Profili’, *Doğu Coğrafya Dergisi*, 14.22 (2009), p. 195 <<http://e-dergi.atauni.edu.tr/atauniddc/article/view/1021006946>>.

⁸⁵ The master theses in Architecture about Van predominantly concentrate on two main areas: the study of traditional houses in Van and the design of housing structures following the earthquake.

⁸⁶ Hasan Hüseyin Tekin, ‘Türkiye Van İli Örneğinde Mültecilik Statüsüne Geçiş Sürecinde İranlı Sığınmacılar Üzerine Sosyolojik Bir İnceleme’ (Hacettepe University, 2005).

seismicity⁸⁷ and low-income housing⁸⁸. Additionally, one doctoral thesis in City and Regional Planning explores urban development policies in Van⁸⁹, while one in Landscape Architecture addresses the visual aspects of the city.⁹⁰

The entire process of my research in Van, from the first ideas and conceptualisation of the research to the fieldwork and socio-spatial analysis, can be seen as a sort of mapping. In this thesis, mapping exists with ‘tracing’. As it will be boldly emphasised throughout the thesis, the act of ‘tracing’ has been crucial in finding the difference ‘situated’ in the everyday reality. While tracing has been employed to reveal the situated and embodied forms of living in/with diversity, mapping has been referred to gather the ‘traces’ together, mostly in the form of narratives, to be able to present the ‘collective urban narrative of Van’ in the context of migration. As in many other contexts, urban culture in Van is “variable, relative and situated”⁹¹, as well as ‘diversified’. This thesis aims at ‘mapping’ this diversity by taking it as a main ‘activity’, necessary for ‘understanding’ the depicted geographical and conceptual context, not as a final artefact. Mapping is indeed a translation, and following Walter Benjamin’s conceptualisation, it cannot convey the full meaning of the original source but could find the intended effect within, thereby, could only echo it.⁹² Being aware of the things that might be lost in translation, I aim at mapping the socio-spatiality of the superdiversity in Van through bodies to be able to keep the complexity of the meaning. Inspired by Awan’s provokingly inspirational questions

⁸⁷ Cafer Giyik, ‘Van İlinin Depremselliği, Van Merkez ve Erciş İlçesinin Kentsel Dönüşümü ve Yeniden Yapılanması’ (İstanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, 2022).

⁸⁸ Mustafa Gülen, ‘Dar Gelirliler İçin Toplu Konut Üretiminde Mimari Tasarım Süreci ve Kullanıcının Rolü Üzerine Bir Model Önerisi Van Kenti Örneği’ (Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University, 2019).

⁸⁹ Gülçinay Başdoğan, ‘Türkiye’de Kalkınma Politika ve Yatırımları İçinde Kültür Eksenli Yatırımların Analizi: Avrupa Birliği, Merkezi ve Yerel Yönetim Yatırımları Açısından Van Örneği’ (Yıldız Teknik University, 2017).

⁹⁰ Feran Aşur, ‘Van Kenti ve Çevresin Kıyı Alanlarında Yerleşim Uygunluğu Değerlendirmesi: Görsel Analiz Yaklaşımları’ (Çukurova University, 2017).

⁹¹ Albena Yaneva, ‘Introduction: City, Culture and Society Special Issue (Vol. 3 - Issue 2), 2012: Traceable Cities’, *City, Culture and Society*, 3.2 (2012), p. 87.

⁹² Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 76.

of “How do you draw time?” and “How do you draw relations?”⁹³ to imply “mapping otherwise”, I ask: How could we map difference and diversity?

1.5 The structure of the thesis

The structure of the thesis is built upon six chapters complementing each other to excavate the migration-driven superdiversity of Van through socio-spatial traces. In Chapter 2, entitled ‘Understanding Migration Through the Body and the Urban’, I will question the relation between space, city, migration, and bodies. In doing so, I will first present how migration studies have developed in connection to spatial and urban studies. Therefore, I will provide an overview of the evolution of the research field from the cultural turn to the spatial turn. In tracing this theoretical and methodological trajectory, my aim is to build a conceptual context that shows how I will employ the notion of superdiversity as a theoretical and methodological framework by visiting feminist concepts of intersectionality and interdisciplinarity. This will be supported by how ‘bodies are involved’ in this line of flight. For that, I will employ the ‘bodyscapes’ concept as a critical framework to interrelate the bodily, the spatial and the diverse that tangibly and intangibly affect the urban culture of Van. I am interested in exploring how we can assess the operative capacity of human bodies to better grasp the dynamics of superdiversity in complex urban landscapes shaped by various migration patterns. I suggest that by shifting our focus towards the role of bodies in the study of superdiversity driven by migration, we can enhance our socio-spatial analysis with a ‘finer scale’. Thus, I will explore embodied spatial analysis in understanding how space participates in (co-)production and transformation of urban culture that could allow us to delve into the interpretations and significance assigned to specific spaces and places. The chapter will continue by providing a socio-political context of the migrations of modern Turkey since the building of the Republic. I will then explore the formation of the nation-state in relation to the concept of body-nation, which has been developed as a biopolitical

⁹³ Nishat Awan, *Diasporic Agencies: Mapping the City Otherwise* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 3.

instrument to socio-spatially announce the ones to stay ‘inside’ and the ones to leave ‘outside’. Within this discussion, I will provide the historical evolution of the political framework binding the status and conditions of foreigners in Turkey, which deliberately posits migrants as biopolitical subjectivities according to different social categorisations. From there, I will deepen the discussion by digging into the politics of space in spatialising migrations, which often conclude with displacement. I will illustrate this by exploring different forms of spatial responses to ‘solve’ the displacement of migrants and asylum-seekers, namely camps, local settlements, and urban settlements. I will also provide a reflection on these sheltering responses in the context of Turkey, such as the ‘satellite city’ regulation, which has assigned Van as such, at least since 2016. The chapter will end with a conceptual discussion on the biopolitics of living with superdiversity. I will present how assigning legal status and, in link to it, the bureaucracy has been utilised as a biopolitical instrument to control the everyday life of foreigners, particularly migrants.

In Chapter 3, entitled ‘Situating the Contested Field/work’, I will present how I have situated (in) the field. Therefore, the chapter will explore what fieldwork is and what it means for this research. Before detailing the fieldwork experience, I will briefly map the twofold analysis that I have employed throughout the research to provide a methodological context. The first one is the archival work, where I referred to the obtained by means of a literature review, including books, articles, reports, travel accounts, and memoirs; the visual data such as maps, gravures and photos via online sources such as digital archives and social media and the statistical data. The second is the ethnographic analysis informed by feminist research approaches. As part of that, I will intentionally refer to my embodied experience and changing and reflective positionality throughout the fieldwork. In connection to feminist research approaches, I will deliberately refer to my field notes and employ them as inserted excerpts to show how my bodily engagement with the field has changed over time. I will present the four cycles of the fieldwork in Van, where I experienced changing forms of researching, including travelling, sightseeing, reading, writing, walking, talking, chatting, hanging out, listening, audio-recording, journaling, celebrating, collecting, photographing, and mapping. For the first cycle, I will narrate how I

explored Van as a domestic tourist while sightseeing around. For the second cycle, I will present how I situated my body in the field as an urban researcher, where walking appeared as the main research technique to ‘know through the body’ and to navigate my body in a new spatial context when ‘re-scaling’ my everyday patterns. In this phase, I will also detail how I reached the participants of the fieldwork in a way to form the ‘fieldwork ecosystem’ and how I conducted the interviews. In the third cycle, I will present participating in the cultural events in the city connected to the *Newroz*. This part will also include spontaneous encounters in the city, namely the Christian Protestant community in Van. For the fourth cycle, I will elaborate on how I wrapped up the fieldwork by contacting more actors. The chapter will end by illustrating how this urban ethnography was constructed between the field and the body.

In Chapter 4, entitled ‘Van Across Diverse Migrations and Narratives’, I will deepen the political and socio-spatial history of Van in the context of migrations. Throughout the chapter, I will present the historical account of the city of Van by examining a range of different migrations and displacements from ancient times to the medieval period, with a particular focus on the modern era. I will present the processes of urban development in old and modern Van by consulting various scholarly works and archival sources involving examination of literature and archives from Turkish, Kurdish, and Armenian sources, which have proven to be highly informative in narrating the life and history of old Van through visual materials such as photographs, engravings, maps, texts, and personal accounts. The chapter will start with a depiction of the topographical qualities of the city that have been re-produced in the memories of former inhabitants of it. I will elaborate on Van as a contested urban landscape by emphasising the urban changes starting from the 20th century with the events of 1915 and then as part of the nation-state building. This will include a socio-spatial analysis of the modern urban planning processes marked with four periods until 1918, between 1918-1985, between 1985-2011 and 2011 onwards. The chapter will end with visiting ‘other’ narratives about the recent urbanisation history of Van, voiced by the inhabitants of the city. For that, I will refer to the related parts of the interviews where people were commenting about the urban

history of the city by particularly emphasising the diversity of the city connected to the migrations.

In Chapter 5, entitled 'In-between Making and Taking Place Towards a Collective Urban Narrative of Van', I will present how diversity is accommodated in everyday life, manifesting in the manner in which space is perceived and used by the people with varied cultural, spatial, and temporal backgrounds, as well as in the spatial encounters of those on the margins. While doing so, I will employ the socio-spatial analysis I conducted based on the fieldwork data, including the interviews and my observations. My aim is to construct a 'collective urban narrative' of Van influenced by migrations and to reflect upon the superdiversity of the city. For that, I will refer to the stories, memories, references, and interpretations of the fieldwork participants as the social agents in making and taking place. During fieldwork, I collected various unique stories and memories that contributed to a 'collective urban narrative'. These narratives showcased how the diverse people of Van, together yet unconsciously, played a crucial role in making the city through their movements and the places they created, either temporarily or permanently. My experience revealed that it is not only about making places but also about 'taking place' involved in the tactics for interacting with the city and in the practices of adapting to a new local context. Towards the construction of a collective narrative, I will present how bodies engaged in dwelling, labour, and ritual as three main aspects of ordinary everyday life. Firstly, I will elaborate on how I consider dwelling as the condition of making of the bodyscapes. Secondly, I will present how I consider labour as the condition of re-territorialisation of the bodyscapes. Thirdly, I will show how I consider rituals as the condition of localisation of the bodyscapes. Through employing this tripartite, my aim is to conceptualise bodyscapes in the formation of difference with socio-spatial practices of dwelling, labour and rituals as found in the narratives of fieldwork participants. The chapter will end with marking the tectonics of 'weaving' diverse narratives together.

In Chapter 6, I will re-visit the relational set of the thesis and reflect upon the main arguments I introduced in Chapter 1. With that, I will summarise the findings of the

research and put forward how diverse biopolitical subjectivities in Van are involved in the formation and transformation of the urban culture of Van, which I conceptualise as micro-urbanisation. Therefore, in this concluding chapter, I will put forward why we need to adopt new ‘lenses’ for understanding today’s cities, where inhabitants are constantly mobile in response to new processes of urbanisation that we could not analyse through a single socio-spatial condition. This is why I will elaborate on the originality of this research around its cross-scalar socio-spatial approach, merging conditions of the urban and the body and benefitting from the in-between. While doing so, I will re-visit the three main perspectives that have guided the research: the feminist perspective in social sciences, the culturalist perspective in urban studies and the diversity perspective in migration studies. The chapter will accordingly reflect on its novel contributions to an interdisciplinary field of knowledge composed of urban studies and migration studies. The chapter will end with the presentation of limitations of the study, motivations for further related research and the final words on the implications of the research.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING MIGRATION THROUGH THE BODY AND THE URBAN⁹⁴

Indeed, ... bodyscape, is inhabited by, as well as inhabiting, the space of the nation and the landscape. As a result, [bodyscape] is not simply in the present (in the here or the now); in so far as it has multiple histories and unimaginable futures, it is worked upon, and indeed, it is worked towards.⁹⁵



Figure 2-1 Tracing in-between. Collage by the author, with photographs captured in May 2022.

For Arendt, understanding is “an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality”⁹⁶. From a ‘diversity-oriented’ perspective, I argue that attempting to research migration in a contested urban context intrinsically emphasises ‘understanding’ as the primary action and, therefore, the verb. I elaborate on this further in the course of this chapter,

⁹⁴ The reader can accompany my critical writing in this chapter as an effort following the feminist trajectory on theorising embodiment: Jane Gallop, *Thininking through the Body* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, *Thinking Through the Skin*, 2001; Emma Bond, *Writing Migration through the Body*, *Writing Migration through the Body*, 2018.

⁹⁵ Ahmed and Stacey, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Hannah Arendt, ‘Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)’, in *Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books), pp. 307–8.

yet to put it briefly, adopting a diversity-oriented approach in this research mostly means seeking migrant experiences and their spatial traces in the research context. This also points to being open to unsettled situations and encounters through which cycles of learning and unlearning, or in Arendt's terms, "constant change and variation",⁹⁷ will manifest throughout the research.

When the migrant experience is conceptualised at the core of an urban migration study, the body itself appears as the main source of inspiration or, more profoundly, 'a mobile site of meaning'. For Arendt, "the result of understanding is meaning", and "we originate [meaning] in the very process of living insofar as we try to reconcile ourselves to what we do and what we suffer"⁹⁸. This echoes in this thesis as understanding the bodily manifestations of migrants in their transborder⁹⁹ action towards finding socio-spatial attachments in a new settlement. Here, I consider migration as "a movement that carries meaning"¹⁰⁰ in its capacity to configure the social and cultural representations of the body. Such representations of the body are far beyond simply depicting the physical movement; as Emma Bond mentioned in *Writing Migration through Body*, they indeed enable the conditions for structuring "border-crossing flows of ideas, images, memories, languages and culture", manifesting body as a "dynamic archive" offering "a regenerative site" transformed through encounters and movements.¹⁰¹

In understanding the body, I am thinking with Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey that the [body] is "linked to both its temporal and spatial dimensions"¹⁰². Not only through its skin that is wrinkled and creased temporally or expanded and contracted spatially but also through the 'scapes' it manifests in relation to mobility and cultural flows. Here, adopting 'scapes' as a conceptual departure could link how bodies move

⁹⁷ Arendt, 'Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)', p. 308.

⁹⁸ Arendt, 'Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)', p. 309.

⁹⁹ By using the term 'transborder', I mean transpassing of both the national borders and the borders inside the nation. This is because in Van, as I mentioned earlier, there is no single form of migration that limits itself with the transnational flows.

¹⁰⁰ Bond, p. 4.

¹⁰¹ Bond, p. 4.

¹⁰² Ahmed and Stacey, p. 2.

not only in terms of spatiotemporal relocation in their physical structure but also of the relocation of “ideas, images, memories, languages and culture” that they carry along. The concept of ‘scapes’ coined by Arjun Appadurai helps illuminate the processes behind global mobilities, not limited to the mobility of human populations but also of non-human entities such as images, information, capital, and ideas.¹⁰³ It pertains to the processes in which cultural, social, and economic flows and mechanisms are structured and arranged across diverse scales of space and time. In developing this concept, Appadurai terms such distinct ‘scapes’ as ethnoscapescapes, mediascapescapes, technoscapescapes, financescapescapes and ideoscapescapes and below, he marks the reason behind using the common suffix ‘scape’:

to indicate first of all that these are not objectively given relations which look the same from same angle of vision¹⁰⁴, but rather that they are deeply perspectival constructs, infected very much by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities as well as sub-national groupings and movements (whether religious, political or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups such as villages, neighbourhoods and families.¹⁰⁵

According to Appadurai, these various perspectival sets of landscapes provide a range of “multiple worlds” that are shaped by the particular historical and cultural imaginations of people and groups located across the world.¹⁰⁶ In this thesis, I refer to the concept of ‘scapes’ to deepen our understanding of the spatial configurations of the body in the context of migration, in understanding how the experiential and representational character of bodies is involved in and affects the urban culture of Van. Although scapes may be composed of various unique elements, as I referred to above, what they have in common is that they are not fixed or static in their neither material nor immaterial form. Since the concept emphasises the importance of understanding cultural and social processes as dynamic and evolving, this perspective can be particularly useful in understanding the urban culture of Van,

¹⁰³ Arjun Appadurai, ‘Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7.2 (1990), 295–310.

¹⁰⁴ Implying here Yoga Sutra 4.15: “Although the same objects may be perceived by different minds, they are perceived in different ways, because those minds manifested differently.”

¹⁰⁵ Appadurai, p. 296.

¹⁰⁶ Appadurai, pp. 296–97.

which is shaped by a wide range of cultural, economic, and political forces that are constantly in flux. Referring to the concept of scapes, therefore, substitutes traditional geographical thinking in socio-cultural analysis, as it deals with the inclusion of “situated production of specific localities” in the debates around transborder cultural flows.¹⁰⁷

Since the dictionary meaning of scape includes ‘scene’ or ‘view’, the term itself leads us expediently to think about plurality, marking how people experience and understand their own world(s). As I referred to earlier in the introduction, for Arendt, ‘spectating’ is the condition to ‘appearance’; that any ‘actor’ needs a spectator to exist; “everything that is meant to be perceived by somebody”, therefore ‘plurality’ is the condition of the life.¹⁰⁸ This also points to a relationality among multiple appearances in creating the “public realm”. Arendt’s plurality is distinctive in enabling the space of appearance to be highly contingent “in producing intentional spatial arrangements made of bodies and appearances for communicating”¹⁰⁹. In the context of tracing migration-driven superdiversity, conceptualisations of ‘plurality’ could lead us to understand bodies as they are, in and inhabiting the space, yet always together with ‘how they inhabit’, giving clues about the ‘spatiality of bodies’; their tangible and intangible, material and immaterial ‘extension’ in space, within a relational context. In this regard, I argue that bodyscapes manifest to what extent and how bodies exist in relation to others, in-between the “realms” of the private and public, crosscutting the political.

Recalling that migration is “a lived, bodily experience”¹¹⁰, I contend understanding bodyscapes, highlighting the relational lived experiences of migrants in manifesting their own localities, is crucial to understanding the micro-urbanisation in Van. My baseline argument informing this chapter and the relational set of this thesis is that

¹⁰⁷ Noel B. Salazar, ‘Scapes’, in *Theory in Social and Cultural Anthropology: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Reece Jon McGee and Richard L. Warms (California: Sage Publications, 2013), p. 753.

¹⁰⁸ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁹ Bernard Debarbieux, ‘Hannah Arendt’s Spatial Thinking: An Introduction’, *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 5.4 (2017), 351–67 (p. 356).

¹¹⁰ Anne Marie Fortier, ‘The Politics of Scaling, Timing and Embodying: Rethinking the “New Europe”’, *Mobilities*, 1.3 (2006), 313–31 (p. 325).

bodies constantly have the potential to create their own scapes in continuous processes of movement and interaction with their environment, affected by and affecting the cultural urban landscapes they inhabit. Bond posits that bodyscapes are structured socially; they are intersubjective, emphasising that bodies are not always controlled by the subjects themselves but also by the agency of others:

For although the body provides the potential for expressing subjective agency, it also poses a limit to that same agency through the perceptive gaze of the other, which can assign meaning and narrative without the knowledge or consent of the subject.¹¹¹

The debate on bodyscapes not only implies a theoretical discussion, but it also points to a methodological perspective within which the ‘personal’ is recognised as data. It finds its value as well in the research. Many feminist researchers from various disciplines, including spatial designs, centred their work around the discussions on the body; some of them associate it with querying the ‘other’ or some with women’s spatial practice or their (dis)appearance in the public space or the professional field; some with ‘everydayness’ and some with ‘commons’ or with intersectionality. Building upon this accumulation, in this thesis, I, too, prioritise embodied and situated knowledge by playing with its cross-scales, dwelling between the scale of the body and the scale of the city. Referring to Awan’s argument in *Mapping Otherwise: Imagining Other Possibilities and Other Futures*, my intention is about “representing the space experienced by the [migrant] [bodies] whose lives span different cultures, spaces, and times”¹¹² while digging into bodily and spatial relations attributed by various meanings, values, symbols, and images. This also implies using “corporeality” to further our understanding of the socio-spatial narrative of migration, inviting “identities, emotions, memories and imaginings” as well as “self-representations” to the research and, therefore to represent bodies as “individual sites of signification”.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Bond, p. 3.

¹¹² Nishat Awan, ‘Mapping Otherwise : Imagining Other Possibilities and Other Futures’, in *Feminist Futures of Spatial Practice: Materialisms, Activism, Dialogues, Pedagogies*, ed. by Meike Schalk, Thérèse Kristiansson, and Ramia Mazé (AADR/ Spurbuchverlag, 2017), p. 33. (Emphasise by the author.)

¹¹³ Bond, pp. 1–5.

2.1 Living with superdiversity¹¹⁴: From cultural to spatial turn

The capacity to live with difference is, in my view, the coming question of the 21st century.¹¹⁵

The Spatial Turn is still ongoing and has not yet reached into the mainstream of most academic disciplines. Its future expansion, however, has the potential to be one of the most significant intellectual and political developments of the twenty-first century.¹¹⁶

Migration has long been studied by various disciplines, such as sociology, political science, anthropology, geography, law, economics, planning, urban studies, and architecture. The more it involves the interest of various fields, the more research has been conducted as part of interdisciplinary and intersectional efforts. As a result, sub-fields such as refugee studies, diaspora studies, multicultural studies, race studies, and diversity studies increasingly expand together with topics such as migration policy, data analysis, gender and migration and urbanisation and migration. This diversity is not only reflected in the topics researched under migration but also in how researches have been developed theoretically and methodologically.¹¹⁷

It is widely recognised that the first study on migration was authored by Ernst Ravenstein in 1885, which built the foundations of the scholarship on internal migration. However, it was after the 1930s that migration research accelerated as a social scientific inquiry where urbanisation appeared as the key phenomenon responsible for this turn:

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, not only did U.S. and Western European urban areas grow rapidly, but also the percentage of the population of the various nations living in urban areas (urbanisation) grew rapidly. Urban growth and urbanisation were fuelled by rural-to-urban migration. Issues of

¹¹⁴ Here, I am highly inspired by: Ash Amin, 'Ethnicity and the Multicultural City: Living with Diversity', *Environment and Planning A*, 34.6 (2002), 959–80.

¹¹⁵ Stuart Hall, 'Culture, Community, Nation', *Cultural Studies*, 7 (2006), p. 361.

¹¹⁶ Edward Soja, 'Taking Space Personally', in *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Barney Warf and Santa Arias (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p. 12.

¹¹⁷ Peter Scholten, Asya Pisarevskaya, and Nathan Levy, 'An Introduction to Migration Studies: The Rise and Coming of Age of a Research Field', in *An Introduction to Migration Studies: The Rise and Coming of Age of a Research Field*, ed. by Peter Scholten (Rotterdam: Springer, 2022), p. 4.

rural depopulation and the adjustments of rural-to-urban migrants to life in the city were prominent.¹¹⁸

Later on, the field was widened with the new debates aligned with the key agendas of the period, such as assimilation, which led to two wider shifts and approaches to the study of migration: “International migration in the light of post-war economic dynamics” and “study of ethnic and race relations” induced by the civil rights movements of the 1970s.¹¹⁹ In this academic context, until the 1990s, the quantitative research approaches dominated migration studies, with a heavy reliance on demographic data.¹²⁰

The ‘cultural turn’¹²¹, associated with the ‘qualitative turn’, appeared in the 1990s, and it is linked to the research efforts utilising qualitative approaches, informing a shift from migration per se to migrants.¹²² This shift did not subvert the existing theories about the root causes of migration, but it most notably enriched our “understanding of the migrant experience”¹²³ towards a wider perception of migration with the subjective processes that follow it. With this shift, migration started to be mapped into two categories: the migration process itself and the post-migration process.¹²⁴ Unlike earlier écoles adopting political and economic perspectives to analyse the effect of migration on the labour market or legislative frameworks, the cultural turn has acknowledged that migrants bring their cultural practices composed of languages, traditions, and ways of living with them, which can reciprocally influence both the migrants and the host community.

This conceptual turn inherently supported the shift to a more local level and diversity-oriented research in the field. Therefore, the ‘local turn’¹²⁵ led to analysis

¹¹⁸ Michael J. Greenwood and Gary L. Hunt, *The Early History of Migration Research*, *International Regional Science Review*, 2003, xxvi, p. 3 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0160017602238983>>.

¹¹⁹ Scholten, Pisarevskaya, and Levy, p. 12.

¹²⁰ Scholten, Pisarevskaya, and Levy, p. 15.

¹²¹ King.

¹²² Scholten, Pisarevskaya, and Levy, p. 16.

¹²³ King, p. 25.

¹²⁴ Silvia Pedraza-Bailey, ‘Immigration Research : A Conceptual Map’, *Social Science History*, 14.1 (1990), 43–67.

¹²⁵ Ricard Zapata-Barrero, Tiziana Caponio, and Peter Scholten, ‘Theorizing the “Local Turn” in a Multi-Level Governance Framework of Analysis: A Case Study in Immigrant Policies’, *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 83.2 (2017), 241–46.

of how migration-related diversities take shape in particular local settings such as cities, settlements, and neighbourhoods “in ways that cannot be understood from the traditional notion of distinct national models”¹²⁶. The studies that adopted this approach problematised how local governments respond to growing interculturalism in their superdiverse local societies, focusing on migration policies, diversity, and integration in their comparative analysis of cities.¹²⁷

The initial studies on migration were mostly interested in the subjects of mobility and in what forms these subjects move from one place to another. Yet, with the emerging research interest in other social structures linked to meanings, values, symbols, and other mainly non-economic concepts¹²⁸, guiding questions shifted as well, from ‘who and what’ to ‘how and why’. Delving into the personal histories of migrants to capture the motivations and reasons behind the migration, ways of mobilisation, attachment to new life conditions and tactics of domesticating living environments have become salient aspects of migration research. This remarkably sparks spatial thinking in migration studies, prompting how space is involved in migration with its multidimensional aspects. As a result, research outputs hosting subjective experiences of migrants and constructs of migrant identity started to be acknowledged and encouraged in academic works.

In this evolving context, anthropologist Steven Vertovec developed the concept of “superdiversity”¹²⁹ to capture the social complexity of migration-related diversities.¹³⁰ The concept represents a line of thought that supports a better description of “various, often interdependent, contemporary and emergent modes and forms of social complexity”¹³¹. Superdiversity suggests going “beyond static categorisations, ... towards a better understanding of the contingency, spatial

¹²⁶ Scholten, Pisarevskaya, and Levy, p. 17.

¹²⁷ Zapata-Barrero, Caponio, and Scholten, p. 3.

¹²⁸ Herbert J. Gans, ‘Some Problems of and Futures for Urban Sociology: Toward a Sociology of Settlements’, *City and Community*, 8.3 (2009), p. 216.

¹²⁹ Vertovec, ‘Super-Diversity and Its Implications’.

¹³⁰ Scholten, Pisarevskaya, and Levy, p. 18.

¹³¹ Vertovec, *Superdiversity: Migration and Social Complexity*, p. 9.

specificity and complex conjunctures of multiplying axes of difference”¹³². This calls for moving beyond ‘ethnicity’ when analysing the diversity of social structures; therefore, the prefix ‘super’ does not serve to bold the ethnic richness of a place.

Increasingly complex categories of social “difference” have significant impacts across scales, from entire societies to individual identities. While diversification is often met with simplifying stereotypes, threat narratives, and expressions of antagonism, super-diversity encourages a perspective on difference as comprising multiple social processes, flexible collective meanings, and overlapping personal and group identities. A superdiversity approach encourages the re-evaluation and recognition of social categories as multidimensional, unfixed, and porous as opposed to views based on hardened, one-dimensional thinking about groups.¹³³

Thinking about the social complexity of today’s cities and societies, migration, among other social ambiguities, stands as the major impulse of ‘complex societies’ where “people participate in multiple, more or less discrepant, universes of discourse; they construct different, partial and simultaneous worlds in which they move; their cultural construction of reality springs not from one source and is not of one piece.”¹³⁴ Here, Vertovec explains social complexity through the social and political functioning of societies by means of different social structures that lead to the stratification of differentiated groups.¹³⁵

As I have emphasised earlier to detail the arguments that feed into the relational set of this thesis, migration is the driving factor of diversity, on the other hand, of socio-cultural complexity in contemporary cities. It is vital to study diversity if we are to comprehend in-depth how contemporary cities are transforming and how different scales are responding to this transformation at their own unique levels. “Change is rapid, and our capacity to adapt has had difficulty keeping up. The world is much more diverse on multiple dimensions and at many levels, typified by the salience of differences and their dynamic intersections”¹³⁶.

¹³² Mette Louise Berg and Nando Sigona, ‘Ethnography, Diversity and Urban Space’, *Identities*, 20.4 (2013), p. 350.

¹³³ Vertovec, *Superdiversity: Migration and Social Complexity*.

¹³⁴ Fredrik Barth, ‘The Analysis of Culture in Complex Societies’, *Ethnos*, 54.3–4 (1989), p. 132.

¹³⁵ Vertovec, *Superdiversity: Migration and Social Complexity*, p. 169.

¹³⁶ James M. Jones and John F. Dovidio, ‘Change, Challenge, and Prospects for a Diversity Paradigm in Social Psychology’, *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 12.1 (2018), 7–56 (p. 45).

In its all implications, the concept of superdiversity triggers us to think about the ‘co-existences’ in a given place, uncovering the hidden, invisible and visible everyday stories of inhabitants with differentiated collective narratives. It is, therefore, more than describing diversity as a result of current migration flows. On the other hand, it is manifested through multiple and interwoven layers of socio-cultural structure, as does historical cities where we can map and track spatial and built reflections of the cultures which had actively shaped the urban landscapes over the history, by not basically being stacked on top of each other, but rather getting in quite or bold interaction with the existing urban structure of former periods.

In that sense, as Aleksandra Grzymala-Kazłowska and Jenny Phillimore stated, superdiversity moves beyond the concept of ‘multiculturalism’, as with each new migration flow, a new layer of complexity is added consequently, with interactions among the new arrivals and existing diverse populations.¹³⁷ Superdiversity, therefore, poses studying not only new migrants but instead the mix of individuals: “old and new international migrants, native established populations and resident minorities”.¹³⁸ Although the initial proposition by Vertovec is to acknowledge the multidimensional shifts in migration patterns¹³⁹, in its later adaptations by various disciplines, including sociology and urban planning, the concept is more and more instrumentalised to develop new ways of recognising the socio-cultural complexities and looking at the interactions and encounters at different levels or urban life.

As Nancy Foner and her friends put it, superdiversity is not the equivalent of intergroup relations, and such settings do not always produce affirmative relations; tension and conflict may always emerge across the dimensions of difference.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, everyday interactions in diversified spaces can exhibit power discrepancies in revealing the inequalities regarding access to certain rights and opportunities.

¹³⁷ Aleksandra Grzymala-Kazłowska and Jenny Phillimore, ‘Introduction: Rethinking Integration. New Perspectives on Adaptation and Settlement in the Era of Super-Diversity’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44.2 (2018), p. 183.

¹³⁸ Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore, p. 183.

¹³⁹ Fran Meissner and Steven Vertovec, ‘Comparing Super-Diversity’, 38.4 (2015), 541–55 (p. 541).

¹⁴⁰ Nancy Foner, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and Philip Kasinitz, ‘Introduction: Super-Diversity in Everyday Life’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42.1 (2019), p. 9.

Therefore, without romanticising the concept, I argue, as Sofya Aptekar does, that it is crucial to investigate superdiversity critically within everyday realities, as it may go hand in hand with inequality.¹⁴¹

This means that being open to a wide range of social categories in superdiverse urban spaces must be combined with a clear-eyed focus on and understanding of macro patterns of stratification. Super-diversity is a descriptive concept that draws attention to the multiplicity of intersecting social categories in global cities. It helps scholars move away from traditional analyses of race, class, and gender inequalities towards investigations of emergent categories and the lived everyday complexity on the scale of urban places.¹⁴²

On the other hand, this points out how some individuals or groups are highly apparent in public life while some others remain seated in their private and semi-public spaces consisting of close-circle relations. Here, analysing social complexity remains incomplete when spatial relations are not exhibited and anchored with urban complexity. I, therefore, add the spatial dimension as a vertical layer to the complexity of superdiversity. It crosscuts the initial proposition coined by Vertovec, which is opened up as “gender, race, religion, class, age, language, migration history, purpose and channel, legal categories, entitlements, labour market access, length of residence, modes of transnationalism, local configurations of diversity and responses to immigration”.

Space matters considerably in how social relations and everyday realities come to being “not for the simplistic and overly used reason that everything happens in space, but because where things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen”¹⁴³. For instance, depending upon how people act changeably in private and public spaces, everyday relations may tactically be illusioned, which, according to Gill Valentine, points to a “clear gap ... between individuals’ values and practices in

¹⁴¹ Sofya Aptekar, ‘Super-Diversity as a Methodological Lens : Re- Centring Power and Inequality’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42.1 (2017), 53–70 (p. 67).

¹⁴² Aptekar, p. 67.

¹⁴³ Barney Warf and Santa Arias, *Introduction: The Reinsertion of Space into the Social Sciences and Humanities*, ed. by Barney Warf and Santa Arias, *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p. 1.

public space”¹⁴⁴. This remarkably points to the less apparent or hidden structures of inequality in the transition of values from private to public space¹⁴⁵ and, thus, calls for deeper analysis into the life trajectories of people.

As mentioned before, given the growing migration-driven diversity in cities, instrumentalising the concept of superdiversity could reveal the multidimensional variables of migrants. However, there is still a limited understanding of how superdiversity intersects with spatial dynamics in urban contexts.¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, space intrinsically includes diversity. While along with superdiversity, the emphasis gets to be on ‘intersections’ highlighting diverse life trajectories and migration motives of people rather than categorising them according to their ethnicity, religion, gender or class, space has become more involved in the migration research as it started to be recognised “in shaping social encounters” between people of different backgrounds in everyday life and be explored in terms of “different kinds and levels of engagement”.¹⁴⁷ I follow the contribution of Edward Soja in social sciences and humanities and interpret this as a ‘spatial turn’ in migration studies:

¹⁴⁴ Gill Valentine, ‘Living with Difference: Reflections on Geographies of Encounter’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 32.3 (2008), p. 330 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0309133308089372>>.

¹⁴⁵ Pierre Bourdieu asks, “How can we not feel anxious about making private worlds public, revealing confidential statements made in the context of a relationship based on a trust that can only be established between two individuals? . . . Above all, we had to protect them from the dangers of misinterpretation”. Bourdieu et al. as cited in Ben Gidley, ‘Landscapes of Belonging, Portraits of Life: Researching Everyday Multiculture in an Inner City Estate’, *Identities*, 20.4 (2013), 361–76 (p. 362).

¹⁴⁶ Within this limited context, there are several valuable contributions to spatial and urban studies centring around superdiversity and its implications in cities: Amin; Burak Pak and Bruno Meeus, ‘Project Arrivée: Counter-Mapping Super-Diversity in Brussels and Ghent with Architecture Students’, *Proceedings of the International Conference on Education and Research in Computer Aided Architectural Design in Europe*, 1 (2015), 369–78 <<https://doi.org/10.52842/conf.ecaade.2015.1.369>>; Grzymala-Kazłowska and Phillimore; Susanne Wessendorf, *The Ethos of Mixing, Commonplace Diversity: Social Relations in a Super-Diverse Context*, 2014; Susanne Wessendorf, ‘Commonplace Diversity and the “Ethos of Mixing”: Perceptions of Difference in a London Neighbourhood’, *Identities*, 20.4 (2013), 407–22; Aptekar; Paul Mepschen, ‘A Discourse of Displacement: Super-Diversity, Urban Citizenship, and the Politics of Autochthony in Amsterdam’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42.1 (2019); Asya Pisarevskaya, Peter Scholten, and Zeynep Kaşlı, ‘Classifying the Diversity of Urban Diversities: An Inductive Analysis of European Cities’, *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 23.2 (2022), 655–77 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-021-00851-z>>; Kristen Sarah Biehl, ‘Spatializing Diversities, Diversifying Spaces: Housing Experiences and Home Space Perceptions in a Migrant Hub of Istanbul’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38.4 (2015), 596–607.

¹⁴⁷ Kristen Sarah Biehl, ‘A Dwelling Lens: Migration, Diversity and Boundary-Making in an Istanbul Neighbourhood’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 43.12 (2019), 2236–54 (pp. 2236–37).

I put space first, before seeing things historically or socially, or as essentially political or economic or cultural, or shaped by class, race, gender, sexual preference; or screened through discourse, linguistics, psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism, or any other specialised disposition. I try to see the world through all these perceptive lenses, but the primary focus is insistently spatial, informed, motivated, and inspired by a critical spatial perspective.¹⁴⁸

The references to spatial turn can be found in the scholarship of ‘politics of space’, notably belonging to the late 1960s¹⁴⁹ and onwards, provoking the foundations of Marxist thinking by proposing an analysis of space as a (im)material matter of capitalist commodification. Following the associated intellectual trajectory paved by Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and David Harvey, who, through differentiated theoretical frameworks, claim that space must be considered as ‘social’, even ‘ideological’, ‘subjective’, and with its reflection on time, Soja persisted that spatial thinking could neither be limited to the social nor to the time. He rather proposes a triangulation where social structure, time, and space position at an interconnected level where “each of which contingently structures and is structured by the others”¹⁵⁰.

... the insistence that no social or cultural phenomenon can be torn from its spatial context, that geography is not some subordinate afterthought to history in the construction of social life, that no meaningful understanding of how human beings produce and reproduce their worlds can be achieved without invoking a sense that the social, the temporal, the intellectual, and the personal are inescapably always and everywhere also the spatial.¹⁵¹

Soja furthermore underlines that advocating for spatiality does not mean being against historical interpretation, nor that it is to replace historical determination; on the other hand, including space in the political, social, or cultural could balance the spatial and temporal imaginations.¹⁵² Indeed, his understanding of spatiality is away from contingent definitions of space and place and acknowledges the body in the

¹⁴⁸ Edward Soja, ‘Taking Space Personally’, p. 11.

¹⁴⁹ The initial entry of space in modern social sciences and humanities is decades before 1960s. In 1920s, the scholars of Chicago School of Urban Ecology attempted to integrate spatial thinking to their geographical and sociological analysis yet remained too simplistic in understanding the socio-cultural structures.

¹⁵⁰ Warf and Arias, p. 4.

¹⁵¹ Warf and Arias, p. 7.

¹⁵² Edward Soja, ‘Taking Space Personally’, p. 12.

(co-)production of space and place. Inspired by Anthony Giddens, for him, the spatial topology is linked to a complex geography consisting of various socially constructed and distinct nodal regions nested at multiple scales around the mobile personal spaces of the human body and the relatively stationary communal areas of settlements.¹⁵³ In his seminal theory, he asserts that all traditional dualities come together in ‘Thirdspace’: “subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history”.¹⁵⁴ Rethinking superdiversity with space and spatiality together with bodies allows us to critically hold the promise of understanding “diversification of diversity”¹⁵⁵ by adding spatial practices marked by personal narratives and histories as a variable to deepen the analysis. In line with the scholarship of Soja on space, I argue that incorporating spatial perspective to superdiversity operates at a twofold synchronisation:

The first pertains to the intersectionality of space. Here, I am deliberately winking at the feminist positions dealing with multiple social subjectivities, saving us from delimiting the conclusions as if each person embodies a single identity -often defined by race-, single discriminated position or single vulnerability. Yet, beyond that, my emphasis is more on how space informs, motivates, inspires, connects, distracts, and mobilises diversity in multiple scales, from the urban level, informing us about demographic to political characteristics to the body level where biopolitical subjectivities take place. Superdiversity as a concept, an adjective needs a complement, a signifier; that is, space or place. Nando Sigona asks, “What or who is superdiverse? Is it a neighbourhood, a city, a region, a state, an individual, a

¹⁵³ Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (London and New York: Verso, 1989), p. 8.

¹⁵⁴ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge and Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 56–57 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/215881>>.

¹⁵⁵ Hollinger as cited in Susanne Wessendorf, “‘All the People Speak Bad English’ Communicating across Differences in a Super-Diverse Context’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Superdiversity*, ed. by Angela Creese and Adrian Blackledge (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 58.

community, or society?”¹⁵⁶. I propound that when we are to elaborate our knowledge about superdiversity, our reference intrinsically appears as a spatial one, since beyond being the container of material and immaterial beings, space holds as well as generates potentials for various agencies and scapes informing politics, culture, and socio-economic structures. Without talking about the space itself and critically engaging with the spatial perspective, the descriptive potential of the concept of superdiversity would be unreleased.

The second calls for interdisciplinarity. Involving spatial thinking in this debate could strengthen shifting to a more interdisciplinary level, as spatiality crosscuts so many topics; thus, space could be a means of hybridising various disciplinary subjects interested in the exploration of how diverse arrivals and departures in an urban setting affect social, cultural, economic, political and environmental contexts that “pervade different fields of knowledge, and to bring these contrasting lines of thought into a productive engagement with one another”¹⁵⁷. This indeed resonates with how cities and their spaces¹⁵⁸ are too complex to be processed and analysed through a demarcated set of knowledge, which at least requires being open to perspectives of different disciplines, if not necessarily calls for interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary or post-disciplinary approaches.¹⁵⁹ It is for this reason that in her foreword to *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space*, Petrescu emphasised why they deliberately preferred ‘space’ instead of ‘architecture’ while organising the corresponding intellectual gatherings on “production of a feminism of difference and diversity within the practice of space”, intersecting both academic and activist line of flights.¹⁶⁰ Space offers a more open category, theorised within a transdisciplinary framework, allowing for initiating a feminist approach to architecture. Yet, the understanding of the space has also altered when considering

¹⁵⁶ Rachel Humphris, ‘Intersectionality and Superdiversity: What’s the Difference?’, *IRiS Key Concepts Roundtable Series*, August, 2015.

¹⁵⁷ Warf and Arias, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ For Edward Soja, spatiality has long been synonymous with urban.

¹⁵⁹ David Pinder, ‘Urban Interventions: Art, Politics and Pedagogy’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32.3 (2008), p. 731 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2008.00810.x>>.

¹⁶⁰ Doina Petrescu, ‘From Alterities and Beyond’, in *Altering Practices: Feminist Politics and Poetics of Space*, ed. by Doina Petrescu (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. xii–xx (p. xviii).

the current social conflicts and their geopolitical and territorial reconfigurations. Thus, today, social critical approaches, as well as feminist perspectives on space, are highly concerned with socio-spatial issues around “mobility, nomadism, positioning and situatedness”¹⁶¹ to dig into the spatio-temporal aspects of social complexities and ambiguities.

2.2 Bodies involved: Spatial diversification of diversity

As agreed by many other researchers¹⁶², the concept of superdiversity calls for a methodological shift as well in guiding us on how to deal with mobility-driven diversity in local contexts without unwittingly reproducing the categorisations on people. The common debate on superdiversity underlines the earlier criticisms of conventional migration studies focusing on particular ethnic or national groups while promoting moving beyond the ethno-focal lens and ‘re-tooling’ the concept to rethink “patterns of inequality, prejudice and segregation; gaining a more nuanced understanding of social interactions, cosmopolitanism and creolisation; elaborating theories of mobility; and obfuscating the spurious dualism of transnationalism versus integration”¹⁶³.

In search of diversification of diversity, the methodological proposition of superdiversity, in line with the evolving conceptual interpretations¹⁶⁴ of it among various disciplines and research areas, hosts a considerable potential to articulate the rising momentum of feminist scholarship in social sciences as well as in urban studies and architecture. In criticising the “solid architectural scholarship” that considered “social factors as only marginally interesting”, Heynen mentioned that

¹⁶¹ Petrescu, ‘From Alterities and Beyond’, p. xviii.

¹⁶² For instance, Gidley; Berg and Sigona.

¹⁶³ Meissner and Vertovec, p. 543.

¹⁶⁴ In ‘The Many Meanings of Superdiversity’ published in 2023, Steven Vertovec mapped how the concept of superdiversity has been adapted into different contexts of knowledge since 2007. The term has been ‘diversified’ throughout the time and allowed for a typology of meanings consisted of “a marker of very much diversity”, “a context or backdrop”, “a description of more ethnicity”, “a call to move beyond ethnicity”, “a multidimensional reconfiguration”, “a methodological reassessment”, “a way of addressing emergent social complexities” and “a field of political policy and governance”. Vertovec, *Superdiversity: Migration and Social Complexity*.

although architectural determinism is still dominant, nonetheless, in recent decades, an expanding body of work has transpired, which examines social inquiries from an architectural perspective, or alternatively, architectural inquiries from a social perspective.¹⁶⁵ The increasing influence of feminist and gender studies or the impact of postcolonial theories has engendered a diverse array of investigations that explore the interrelations between space and social forces.¹⁶⁶ For a culturally oriented socio-spatial analysis, this link can be promptly built by bridging superdiversity with intersectionality. Such literature is growing; whereas some scholars critically locate the commonality between both in moving beyond categorisations by implying that they are not polar opposite terms¹⁶⁷ while accusing the former of being ignorant to power inequalities as well as the notion of scale¹⁶⁸, some other attempt to construct a dialogue between the two, which guided the empirical research on the analysis of structural inequality to be more grounded.¹⁶⁹

Mette Louise Berg and Nando Sigona clearly state that while “turn to diversity has entailed a change from focusing on entities, to focusing on relations”, it also alerts us about the “spatial dimensions of the politics of difference” by conceptualising interrelationships among various biopolitical subjectivities.¹⁷⁰ Departing from that, I argue that we could trace the history of this potential conviviality between superdiversity as a methodological register and feminist research by reviewing recognition or so-called ‘reassertion’ of space in social, political and cultural theory. From the 1980s onwards, with the reassertion of space, various topics such as everyday life, spatial practices, appropriation, agency, and human subjectivity, digging into the ‘lived space’, have been embraced and included in studies centring around the analysis of urban and social life.

Everyday thought and behaviour, the unacknowledged preconditions to action, do not simply mirror the world; they constitute it as the outcomes to action. Social

¹⁶⁵ Heynen, p. 343.

¹⁶⁶ Heynen, p. 343.

¹⁶⁷ Humphris.

¹⁶⁸ Berg and Sigona.

¹⁶⁹ Faten Khazaei, ‘Grounds for Dialogue: Intersectionality and Superdiversity’, *Tijdschrift Voor Genderstudies*, 21.1 (2018), 7–25.

¹⁷⁰ Berg and Sigona, p. 348.

structures and relations are thus reproduced, and hence simultaneously changed, by the people who make them; individuals are both produced by, and producers of, history and geography. Given this logic, space could no longer be seen simply as a backdrop against which life unfolds sequentially, but rather, intimately tied to lived experience.¹⁷¹

Building upon the insights of Berg and Sigona, who emphasise the role of space in finding out the relational aspects to understand the difference, a spatial perspective becomes essential in unpacking the intricate connections between superdiversity, everyday life, and urban culture. At that point, I employed ‘bodyscapes’ as a critical framework to interrelate the bodily, the spatial, and the diverse that tangibly and intangibly affect the urban culture of Van. My query is about how we could analyse the operative potential that bodies hold to understand mechanisms of superdiversity in a contested urban landscape that has witnessed different forms of migration. I propound that turning our direction to bodies when investigating into migration-driven superdiversity could transform our socio-spatial analysis at a more ‘fine-grained’ scale, through which we become available to probe into the meanings attributed to space and place.

On the other hand, an embodied spatial analysis enables us to ‘trace’ personal biographies or ‘trajectories’ which map “embodied spaces of individuals and collectives that take on social, ritual, cultural and political dimensions”¹⁷². The preference for using ‘trace’ as a verb is noteworthy here. In ‘The indeterminate mapping of the common’, Doina Petrescu explores tracing as an act of mapping the commons and from there, she stresses the sharp difference between tracking and tracing, positing that tracking includes control, allowing for “locative mapping”. Tracing, on the other hand, is embodied, seeks a mapping out of a shared experience that both “analyses traces and leaves traces”. In her words, “we trace in order to make the flows more fluid, the city smoother and appropriable”.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Warf and Arias, p. 4.

¹⁷² Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 107.

¹⁷³ Doina Petrescu, ‘The Indeterminate Mapping of the Common’, *Field: A Free Journal of Architecture*, 1.1 (2007), 88–96 (p. 94).

The conceptual framework of this initiative is fuelled by the idea of approaching bodies, space, and their interrelations culturally. Yet, before exploring it, I find it necessary to define what a body is; that would ease our conceptual and methodological navigation. Above all, in Western thought, the conceptual presence of the body has long been conditioned to the mind. The pure intelligence has been considered as the highest version of the Being.¹⁷⁴ With the radical spirit of the 1960s and 1970s, simultaneously with the reassertion of space in critical social theory, rising feminist theories challenged how the body is perceived in the intellectual scene, widely associated today with crediting the importance of the body to demonstrate “the inescapability of embodiment as a differential and fluid construct, the site of potential, rather than as a fixed given”¹⁷⁵.

On the same trajectory, in ‘Bodies-Cities’, Grosz pins twofold characteristics of the body; one is the biology of the physical body, which corresponds to “a concrete, material, animate organisation of flesh, organs, nerves, and skeletal structure”. However, it is not adequate to prescribe what body is merely through biological definitions:

The body is, so to speak, organically, biologically ‘incomplete’; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities that require social triggering, ordering, and long-term ‘administration’.¹⁷⁶

For Grosz, the body evolves into a distinctly human body when aligning itself with the shape and space of the psyche. It is this corporeal manifestation that establishes the boundaries “of both experience and subjectivity only through the involvement of the m(other) and, ultimately, the Other (the language and rule-governed social order)”.¹⁷⁷ Body, therefore, appears as a being in relation to the space and scape, within and beyond its physical borders or the liminality of its skin.

¹⁷⁴ Janet Price and Margrit Schildrick, ‘Openings on the Body: A Critical Introduction’, in *Feminist Theory And The Body: A Reader*, ed. by Janet Price and Margrit Schildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ Price and Schildrick, p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Bodies–Cities’, in *Feminist Theory And The Body: A Reader*, ed. by Janet Price and Margrit Schildrick (New York, 1999), p. 382.

¹⁷⁷ Grosz, ‘Bodies–Cities’, p. 382.

As Setha Low does when developing her seminal theory on “embodied space”, I so aim at imparting often neglected bodies in spatial analysis.¹⁷⁸ Such an inquiry needs to understand bodies as biological entities also with political connotations and as a lived space with its social agency, hinting at the reunion of space and body in the dual assets of bodies, both material and representational. Bodyscapes, at that point, deal with the ways of presence and engaging with the world as well as with the space at a micro-scale, also with the spatiality that bodies dare to extend in changing forms and modes of movement and mobility. This widens our perspective towards space and a spatial analysis adopting a cross-scalar identity.

The conceptual lens that views space as always embodied offers a different approach to the ethnography of space and place by considering human and nonhuman “bodies” as simultaneous spaces as well as producers and products of space.

I take sister concepts of “intercorporeality” and “intercorporeal spatiality”, which we can find in Merlau-Ponty’s later works, as a point of departure for my ‘line of flight’ towards elaborating the bodyscapes from a perspective on subjectivity. His exploration of “body-image” and “bodily experience” is inspirational in that sense. The concept of intercorporeality is built upon the traditional dichotomy between mind and body, asserting that our lived experiences are inseparably connected to the world and other embodied beings. “The body has its world, and that objects or space may be present to our knowledge but not to our body.” Aligned with this perspective, Grosz also emphasises that corporeality can be interpreted as the tangible manifestation of subjectivity, whereby the subordinate element in the dichotomy can be elevated to its rightful position at the core of the dominant element, namely the mind.¹⁷⁹

Merlau-Ponty’s subversion of the mind-body dichotomy made him arrive at another key argument of his that “our body is in space, or in time”; “it inhabits space and time”.¹⁸⁰ Aligned with Martin Heidegger’s *Dasein*, he argued that our perception and understanding of the world are not solely products of a detached mind but are

¹⁷⁸ Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, p. 94.

¹⁷⁹ Grosz, ‘Bodies–Cities’, p. 381.

¹⁸⁰ Ponty, p. 161.

grounded in our embodied experiences. This further leads to “intercorporeality” or “carnal intersubjectivity,” which posits that our being is not just an individual, isolated activity but a relational and reciprocal engagement with the world and others. Our body is not just an object among other objects but is a “lived body”, a subjectivity that is continually intertwined with the subjectivities of others.

At a political level, intercorporeality resonates in Arendt’s intersubjectivity concept, hinting at her prominent idea of “plurality” as a condition for ‘being’ on the earth, what we can find in Merleau-Ponty at a phenomenological level that we exist in relation to others. Yet, in Arendt’s scholarship, intersubjectivity is tightly bound to political action. Power emerges only when people come together for action and disappears when they disperse and abandon each other for whatever reason. In *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity*, Sophie Loidolt argues that based on a twofold perspective, Arendt unveils a novel and politically oriented approach to grasping the essential import of intersubjectivity in the interdependent shaping of the self, the world, and fellow beings. Firstly, it is noteworthy that she accords great significance to live speech, which encompasses bodies themselves as well as bodily appearance and is not solely limited to linguistic expression. Secondly, her perspective on actualised plurality is not viewed from an external standpoint but rather from the very in-between space that arises during interaction.¹⁸¹

This demonstrates the active role that bodies play in the generation and transmission of intersubjective meanings and symbols is a clear indication of their intercorporeal nature. It is within this bodily exchange that the origins of social existence can be traced: “face-to-face, body-to-body, seen-seer to seer-seen”¹⁸², or in Arendt’s terminology, actor-to-spectator to spectator-to-actor. Arendt’s understanding of intersubjectivity complements Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of physical experiences and resonates deeply with the idea of plurality and the interdependent shaping of the

¹⁸¹ Sophie Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality: Hannah Arendt on Political Intersubjectivity* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 160.

¹⁸² Nick Crossley, ‘Body Techniques, Agency and Intercorporeality: On Goffman’s Relations in Public’, *Sociology*, 29.1 (1995), 133–49 (p. 145).

self, the world, and other beings, which aligns with Merleau-Ponty's view of bodies as continually intertwined with the subjectivities of others. Highlighting the significance of lived experiences and bodily appearance in understanding intersubjectivity, Arendt directs her focus on political action and the emergence of power through collective engagement, while Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of body and motility deepens the comprehension of spatial and temporal embeddedness.

Merleau-Ponty's bodily analysis claims that movement (in his own terminology, 'motility') actively embodies space-time, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of how bodies interact with and shape their environment. He argues that by examining the physical entity in movement, a more thorough comprehension of its spatial and temporal occupancy can be achieved. Movement is not merely a passive response to the external environment; it actively embraces and embodies space-time, revealing its fundamental essence, which often remains concealed in mundane circumstances.¹⁸³ Indeed, in her proposal for an embodied spatial analysis, Low as well employed concepts of movement, mobility and, finally, 'trajectory' that "includes individual place-making, new modes of circulation and conflicts that are political as well as personal inscribed in the materiality of the site"¹⁸⁴. In order to conceive of space, it is imperative that our bodies are first immersed in it, providing us with the initial framework of transpositions, equivalents, and identifications, which convert space into an objective system. This process enables us to have an experiential understanding of bodies, opening the possibility of an 'in itself'. Initially, the meaning of all significances is generated in the domain of represented space through movement, which is the primary sphere.¹⁸⁵

Intercorporeality transcends traditional conceptions of diversity by recognising the interconnected and mutual quality of human existence. It asserts that our physical beings are not isolated entities but rather engaged in a continual dance of interactions with others and the environment. Intercorporeality is essentially influenced by body

¹⁸³ Ponty, p. 117.

¹⁸⁴ Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, p. 95.

¹⁸⁵ Ponty, p. 164.

techniques coined by Marcel Mauss, which are practically carried out through physical movements, gestures, and comportment. These practices act as visible manifestations of the subjective states, intentions, and emotions of social agents. Such a perspective allows us to explore how embodied practices and interactions shape the urban culture within superdiversity as our bodies become sites of encounter, negotiation, and the performance of cultural practices. I thereby argue that analysing bodyscapes affords us the opportunity to surpass abstract portrayals of diversity and excavate the experiential realities and interactions of individuals and communities within urban landscapes.

The examination of the operative potential of bodies in shaping superdiversity illuminates the intricacies and dynamics of urban existence in a manner that conventional diversity frameworks may disregard. However, with a wink to Arendt, Low states that the body is “a location for speaking and acting on the world”.¹⁸⁶ While conceptualising bodyscapes, we need to consider “the various representations of bodies at multiple scales from bodies as landscapes, bodies moving through space or individual body differences tend to idealise societal norms”¹⁸⁷. Bodyscapes, therefore, offers a comprehensive outlook on the emergence of urban culture from the embodied interactions, encounters, and coexistence of heterogeneous groups in the micro-urbanisation of the city. It is certainly about “what the body does in the social world, how it works to construct and reproduce that world, how it acts”.¹⁸⁸

As marked by Low, conceptualising diversity through an embodied spatial analysis is closely linked to developing an understanding of urban culture. Spatialising explorations on culture so diversity facilitates a notable form of engagement because spatial analysis of urban culture “offers people and their communities a way to understand the everyday places where they live, work, shop, and socialise”¹⁸⁹. Methodologically, this calls for engaged spatial research blended with ethnographic tools; “a fine-grained, ethnographic understanding of the diversification of diversity

¹⁸⁶ Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, p. 94.

¹⁸⁷ Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, p. 98.

¹⁸⁸ Crossley, p. 147.

¹⁸⁹ Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, p. 34.

as lived experience helps us understand when, where, how, why and for whom some differences come to make a difference.”¹⁹⁰ Indeed, there is a critical need for a more comprehensive understanding of how space itself influences and shapes the dynamics of diversity on the ground.

This opens new discussions about the socio-spatial transformation of urban culture, how bodies act, react, interact, appear, and disappear in the city, and how space participates in these interactions by being used, co-opted, adapted, appropriated, altered and sustained. The embodied references of spatial relationships also contribute to the discussion of how the bodies have become to (dis)appear through legal, political, economic, and cultural definitions and how this affects embodied encounters in daily life. Since migration is “a lived, bodily experience”, it encompasses “encounters with place, people, food, smells, local customs, sounds, move through the body and gives rise to bodily sensations together with emotive responses”.¹⁹¹ In Bond’s words, the body in this context appears on the one hand as the “primary site of signification being operative as a liminal, multifaceted and generative space” and on the other hand as “a mutable, reactive, expressive and dynamic archive of memories and imprints from other times and spaces”.¹⁹²

What does this conceptualisation say about cities? And about the connection between cities and bodies? And if such a city is a ‘memory-city’ like Van that has a long history of migration, displacement, and bodies in mobility, creating “mobile spatial fields” as a symbolic convergence of connections that arise from the interplay between corporeal agents and terrestrial domains”¹⁹³? The city is the site for the body’s cultural as well as political and social manifestation and satiation, for its transformations by the existence and actions of others, as well as by representations, appropriations and perceptions characterised with topographical elements and the built environment. The body-city interplay, therefore, is located in bodies’

¹⁹⁰ Berg and Sigona, p. 356.

¹⁹¹ Fortier, p. 325.

¹⁹² Bond, pp. 1–11.

¹⁹³ Nancy Munn, ‘Excluded Spaces: The Figure in the Australian Aboriginal Land- scape’, *Critical Inquiry*, 22. 3 (1996), 446–465 as cited in Setha Low, ‘Spatializing Culture: An Engaged Anthropological Approach to Space and Place (2014)’, p. 101.

entanglement with the material and visual culture of cities while also in their capabilities of deconstructing and reproducing them, “where the body is representationally re-explored, transformed, contested, reinscribed”.

In turn, the body (as a cultural product) transforms reinscribes the urban landscape according to its changing (demographic) needs, extending the limits of the city ever towards the countryside that borders it. As a hinge between the population and the individual, the body, its distribution, habits, alignments, pleasures, norms, and ideals are the ostensive object of governmental regulation, and the city is both a mode for regulation and administration of subjects but also an urban space in turn reinscribed by the particularities of its occupation and use.¹⁹⁴.

The words above by Grosz draw upon the biopolitical tension rooted in the body-city interplay. Not that this interplay creates another dichotomy, but rather, it demonstrates the interplay shaped by power. The bodies are the unique possibility for the exercise of biopolitics. The city, in this context, is the site for the execution of the bureaucracy to categorise, group and punish bodies. Yet, alternatively and inherently, the city is the site of possibilities for bodies to speak, act and appear. Migration and forced displacement, in this dilemma, appear as another level of possibility, signifying both the tense and the diverse, which often exist together.

2.3 From ‘of our descent’ to ‘our guests’: Migrations in modern Turkey

Van is one of the most diverse cities in Turkey, not because its demography is characterised by multiple transnational migrants of different national and racial identities, but mostly because of the diversification in migrants’ migration patterns, educational backgrounds, legal statuses, lengths of residence, socio-economic backgrounds, and ways of engaging with the city. We should add the layered histories of migration to create a commonality with the newcomers and so-called ‘locals’ or ‘natives’, most of whom also have a migration history themselves or at least in their families. Susanne Wessendorf describes this as “commonplace

¹⁹⁴ Grosz, ‘Bodies–Cities’, p. 386.

diversity”¹⁹⁵ while illustrating a similar situation within a neighbourhood in London called Hackney where diversity is ‘normalised’, as Richard Sennett narrates how “during the course of an ordinary walk”,¹⁹⁶ experiencing diversity has become so ordinary. In order to be able to fully understand the socio-spatial transformation in the urban culture of Van marked by changing positionalities of migrants in everyday life, I will briefly the history of migrations in Turkey, through which Van has considerably affected and been affected.

“What is less well known is that Turkey has long been a country of immigration and asylum”.¹⁹⁷ These words of Kemal Kirişçi are particularly evident when even only delving into the urbanisation history of Van, where migrations have played a central role in shaping its trajectory. The deeper I get into the history of this city, the more I realise how the migrations of human populations and nonhuman entities make history. Zooming out to a broader national context, the last century alone illustrates how migration flows have exerted a profound influence on the structure and character of the society in Turkey.¹⁹⁸

A concise investigation into the migratory history of Anatolia and Mesopotamia, a region abundant in geography and comprising an array of diverse cultures, religions, myths, and stories, highlights that it is indeed a history of numerous migrations. Throughout history, Anatolia has been a crucible of diverse populations, constantly shaping and re-forming its cultural landscape. As stated by scholars such as Murat Erdoğan and Ayhan Kaya, migration has been a propelling force since the early days of the Ottoman Empire up to the establishment of modern Turkey. The movement of individuals across Anatolia’s immense topography has considerably influenced its

¹⁹⁵ Wessendorf, ‘Commonplace Diversity and the “Ethos of Mixing”’: Perceptions of Difference in a London Neighbourhood’; Wessendorf, *The Ethos of Mixing*.

¹⁹⁶ Richard Sennett (2010) as cited in Wessendorf, *The Ethos of Mixing*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁷ Kemal Kirişçi, ‘Turkey: A Transformation from Emigration to Immigration’, 2003 <<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/turkey-transformation-emigration-immigration>> [accessed 24 January 2021].

¹⁹⁸ Ahmet İçduygu and Damla B. Aksel, ‘Turkish Migration Policies: A Critical Historical Retrospective’, *Perceptions*, 18.3 (2013), 167–90 (p. 168).

transformation and development over the centuries, leaving an indeluctable imprint on its societal structure and historical account.¹⁹⁹

When analysing the characteristics of the migration flows from and to Turkey, we should note that unlike conventional migration centres defined by the arrival or departure of global mobilities, the country has long become a new kind of migration centre by hosting both immigration and emigration patterns as well as transit flows of many asylum-seekers.²⁰⁰ The history of massive migrations in Turkey dates back to the early history of the republic. Considering the migrations after the foundation of the Turkish Republic, we could investigate into two major patterns of flows²⁰¹: Migration waves of Turkish origins from the beginning of the Republic till the end of the 1990s and influx of non-Turkish origins from the early 1980s onwards.

The first major migration pattern represents the idealisation of the nation-state, where people of Turkish origin and Islamic faith were called to join the national borders. As Kemal Kirişçi and Ayselin Yıldız mentioned, following Eric Hobsbawm's argument that "nations don't construct states but rather that states construct nations", the establishment of a nation-state within the borders of Turkey rose upon the exercise of power to define the national identity in terms of clarifying the ones within the internal self, while announcing other bodies to stay external.²⁰² Indeed, inspired by Arendt's archaeology of totalitarianism to develop a critique of biopolitics, we

¹⁹⁹ Ayhan Kaya and Murat Erdoğan, *Türkiye'nin Göç Tarihi* (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2016), pp. 3–4.

²⁰⁰ Kemal Kirişçi, 'Turkey: A Country of Transition from Emigration to Immigration', *Mediterranean Politics*, 12.1 (2007), 91–97.

²⁰¹ Beyond further mentioned major migration patterns, Turkey witnessed other relatively smaller-scale transnational flows such as White Russians, who were granted temporary protection in Turkey in 1922, Jewish and German academics in the 1930s, the victims of World War II and those fleeing the Soviet bloc during the Cold War. For more information, see Kemal Kirişçi and Ayselin Yıldız, 'Turkey's Asylum Policies over the Last Century: Continuity, Change and Contradictions', *Turkish Studies*, 2023, 1–28.

²⁰² Kemal Kirişçi and Ayselin Yıldız, 'Turkey's Asylum Policies over the Last Century: Continuity, Change and Contradictions', *Turkish Studies*, 24.3–4 (2023), p. 525.

could interpret nation-state as “body²⁰³-state” or “body-nation”²⁰⁴ which ‘labours’ on individual bodies to form ‘the political body’. For that, the ‘bodies’ should be purified, sanitised, and become free from all illnesses to avoid the appearance of any anomalies in the totality. This deep-seated nationalistic strategy is rooted in the biopolitical dichotomy of ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ and has characterised the century-long policies in terms of migration, settlement, and development. Roxanne Doty goes further on this topic:

Patterns of inclusion and exclusion, the fixing of unity and diversity, which alternatively distinguish the internal from the external are the result of numerous and multifaceted practices, including practices identified with the concept of the state. They are the result of practices that work to fix unity on the inside and that shift diversity, disruptions, and dangers to the outside.²⁰⁵

Nevertheless, during the early years of the Republic of Turkey, Westernisation was a dominant ideology in developing a modern country; thus, the actions of the state focused on modernisation efforts to transform Turkey into a ‘civilised’ nation-state. In the political programme of the state, urbanisation played a significant role since becoming more and more ‘urban’ was considered crucial towards achieving societal progress and development. This top-down vision of urbanism resulted in the mobilisation of millions of people, through which they have consequently densely concentrated in urban centres.

At the start of World War I, around 16 million people were inhabiting today’s Turkey, approximately 19% of which consisted of minority groups, including “3 million non-Muslims were 1.5 million Rums, 1.2 million Armenians, 128,000 Jews and 176,000 non-Rum and non-Armenian Christians”²⁰⁶. As I will mention more

²⁰³ In the fifth book of “The Republic”, Plato presents his vision of an ideal State by describing it a metaphorical human organism, based on a tripartite structure: the head (ruler class), the body (warrior class) and the limbs (working class). In mediaeval ages, an Anglo-Norman cleric, diplomat, and philosopher John of Salisbury moved this analogy further and assigned roles/positions to each body part and organ, e.g. “the heart is occupied by the senate” or “the duties of the ears, eyes and mouth are claimed by the judges and governors of the provinces”.

²⁰⁴ Andreas Musolff, *Metaphor, Nation and Holocaust: The Concept of the Body Politic* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2010).

²⁰⁵ Roxanne Lynn Doty, ‘Immigration and National Identity: Constructing the Nation’, *Review of International Studies*, 22.3 (1996), p. 239.

²⁰⁶ İçduygu and Aksel, p. 171.

deeply throughout the following chapter, most of the Armenian population was deported in the events of 1915. Yet, the first regulation issued as part of the deep-seated nation-state policy of modern Turkey is the Convention concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations annexed to the Treaty of Lausanne signed in 1923. The execution of mobility exchange was strengthened with the establishment of the Ministry of Population Exchange, Development and Settlement in 1923 and conducted with the higher motivation of building a racially homogeneous nation-state.

Forced displacement and population exchange between Turkey and Greece resulted in the resettlement of around 1 million Greeks from Turkey and 500,000 Turks from Greece, altering the demographics of both countries.²⁰⁷ The irony is that although the mainstream nationalistic historiography intentionally preferred referring to the resettled community as Turks, it was still the religious identity that formed a commonality among those migrants (*mübadil*). Indeed, the ethnicity and language of those people were diversified with non-Turkish speakers such as the ones from Albania or Macedonia.²⁰⁸ The historical two-way immigration and emigration circulation in Turkey had a profound impact on the country's societal composition. Though not only at a demographic but also at a socio-spatial level, the reflections of this exchange were felt. Before the population exchange, the Greek inhabitants were mostly engaged in agriculture, trade, and maritime endeavours. Upon their departure, these domains and professions were frequently abandoned or underutilised as the arriving populace, primarily from rural regions of Greece, lacked the expertise or means to sustain these pursuits. This change had a significant impact on the land use of these regions.

That period saw not only the forced population exchange with Greece but also the immigration from the Balkan region, mainly from 1923 to 1989. This mobility was characterised by three types of flows of Turkish origins: The first represents the

²⁰⁷ Levent, p. 120.

²⁰⁸ Elçin Macar, 'Yunanistan'dan Anadolu'ya Göç: Nüfus Mübadelesi', in *Türkiye'nin Göç Tarihi: 14. Yüzyıl'dan 21. Yüzyıl'a Türkiye'ye Göçler*, ed. by Murat Erdoğan and Ayhan Kaya (İstanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2015), pp. 185–86.

immigrations from Romania from 1923 to 1949, due to which around 19,865 households, corresponding to 79,287 people moved to the cities in Turkey, where they had their relatives or knew about former immigrants. The second flow was from Yugoslavia and Macedonia, which ended up with the resettlement of 305,158 people, mostly in the western Thrace of Turkey. In order to be able to meet the shelter needs of those migrants (*muhacir*), around 14,494 houses were constructed. The last mobility from the Balkans to Turkey was from Bulgaria, which occurred in four waves. Because of those waves in the periods of 1925-1949, 1949-1951, 1968-1979 and 1989, more than 1.3 million people immigrated, mostly to the rural parts of Turkey, except the last wave.²⁰⁹ Over time, the non-Muslim population in the country significantly declined, decreasing from 19% in 1914 to just 3% in 1927. Subsequently, this number further dwindled to nearly 1%, representing approximately 225,000 people.²¹⁰ On the other hand, the resettlement of the abovementioned people from the Balkans in urban areas led to the emergence of ethnic migrant enclaves, such as Balkan neighbourhoods in Edirne, Kırklareli and İstanbul.

In short, as a consequence of the deep-rooted state strategy of ‘Turkification’ of the nation-state, many people were voluntarily or involuntarily forced to leave the countries they had been living in for generations. At a policy level, this systemic ethnic homogenisation was executed with reference to three main legislative frameworks: 1926 Settlement Law No. 885, 1934 Settlement Law No. 2510, and 2006 Settlement Law No. 5543. Whereas the 1926 Settlement Law was the first to give the definition of who can be treated as a migrant within the national borders of Turkey²¹¹, the law issued in 1934 has been more powerful in determining the national

²⁰⁹ Levent, p. 120.

²¹⁰ Ahmet İcduygu, ‘Den Nationalstaat Errichten Und Bewahren, Auch in Der Globalisierten Welt: Der Politische Hintergrund Internationaler Migration in Die Türkei’, in *Facetten Internationaler Migration in Die Türkei: Gesellschaftliche Rahmenbedingungen Und Persönliche Lebenswelten*, ed. by Barbara Pusch and Tomas Wilkoszewski (İstanbul: Orient- Institut, 2008), p. 10.

²¹¹ According to this law dated August 1, 1926, various activities were to be carried out which were to utmost homogenise the social structure and control the mobility of low mainstream populations such as settling nomadic tribes and all nomads within the country; villagers who needed to be relocated due to health conditions; villagers deprived of transportation in mountainous and forested areas, to suitable and appropriate places; the congregation of certain villages around suitable centres;

ideals of population landscape through settlement, and because of that, it has been assessed as “the principal text that defined the cornerstones of the nation-building process”²¹² by many migration scholars.

For several decades, the 1934 Settlement Law stood as the sole pivotal document that provided a distinct definition of refugees as individuals who entered the country on a temporary basis without any intention of settling permanently. Furthermore, this legislation reserved the opportunity for local integration solely for those individuals who possessed the right to settle.²¹³ Regarding the resettlement of people of Turkish descent and culture, the law commands that if immigrants request settlement, they shall settle in the lands allocated by the state; yet if not, they could stay wherever they wanted. According to İlhan Tekeli, the majority of the immigrants asked for resettlement aid and as a result, between 1923 and 1949, the families were given lands suitable for cultivation with a house either built for them or owned by the state.²¹⁴ I found this importance attributed to families and family houses remarkably critical when having a lens of subjectivity. The idea of the nation-state (or, more accurately put, of body-state) is tightly bound to the notion of family as the modern micro institution, showing us the biopolitics of migration in terms of re-production, regulation, and resettlement of bodies, as well as division, distribution and forced handover of the land. This is echoed in Arendt’s ideas on (bio)politics, labour as one of the three fundamental human activities, representing all biological processes of the body, and nationalism:

The organic theories of nationalism, especially in its Central European version, all rest on an identification of the nation and the relationships between its members with

and the removal of suspected spies from the borders. Accordingly, among those who want to settle within the Republic of Turkey for the purpose of coming individually or in groups from abroad, those who are not part of Turkish culture, those in the contagious period of syphilis, excluding military and political crimes, those who are convicted of murder, anarchists, spies, etc., would be removed from the country. Anyone other than those who had been expelled could be settled in places according to the decisions taken by the government. Pomaks, Bosniaks, and Tatars were considered part of Turkish culture, and the requests regarding the acceptance of the Albanian families who had previously come to Turkey and been registered, as well as those left abroad, would also be fulfilled.

²¹² İçduygu and Aksel, p. 170.

²¹³ Kirişçi and Yıldız, ‘Turkey’s Asylum Policies over the Last Century: Continuity, Change and Contradictions’, p. 535.

²¹⁴ İlhan Tekeli, ‘Involuntary Displacement and the Problem of Resettlement in Turkey from the Ottoman Empire to the Present’, *Center for Migration Studies*, 11.4 (1994), 202–26 (p. 217).

the family and family relationships. Because society becomes the substitute for the family, “blood and soil” is supposed to rule the relationships between its members; homogeneity of population and its rootedness in the soil of a given territory become the requisites for the nation-state everywhere. However, while this development undoubtedly mitigated cruelty and misery, it hardly influenced the process of expropriation and world alienation, since collective ownership, strictly speaking, is a contradiction in terms.²¹⁵

However, I have my doubts about the “mitigation of cruelty and misery”. Although the objectives of the 1934 Settlement Law were presented as a nationwide solution to four pressing concerns identified as “population, immigration, nomadism, and land issues”, at a more strategical level, the legislation aimed to establish the superiority of Turkish ethnicity and culture throughout the nation, specifically aimed at the extensive dismantling of Kurdish communities residing in the eastern and south-eastern regions of the country. Ramazan Öztan further highlights the deeper intentions of the nation-state with this purposeful legislation:

Many scholars have correctly identified the continuities in demographic policies since the late Ottoman era, framing the Settlement Law not as a departure from the norm, but rather as an ultimate expression of Turkish nationalism long in the making... The Kemalists sought to transform Anatolia by seeking to dilute the Kurdish majority in the East through the settlement of Muslim immigrants from the Balkans. Make no mistake, the Settlement Law (1934) indeed illustrated Ankara’s belief in demographic engineering to build ‘a well-populated and homogeneous state’. Seeking to turn Turkey into a country ‘speaking one language, thinking in the same way and sharing similar sentiments’, the law spelled out ‘belonging.’²¹⁶

Tekeli as well emphasised how the 1934 Settlement Law was regulated with the motivation of instrumentalising space to re-order the demographic and, therefore, the political based on the collective identity structure of the country. Prior to the law, many people with Kurdish identity were already transferred to allocated regions for “administrative, military, and social purposes, and the land and other real estate of those transferred was taken over by the treasury”.²¹⁷ With the 1934 Settlement Law,

²¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Second (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 257.

²¹⁶ Ramazan Hakkı Öztan, ‘Settlement Law of 1934: Turkish Nationalism in the Age of Revisionism’, *Journal of Migration History*, 6.1 (2020), p. 83.

²¹⁷ Tekeli, ‘Involuntary Displacement and the Problem of Resettlement in Turkey from the Ottoman Empire to the Present’, p. 218.

the spatial injustice²¹⁸ accelerated within a governmental programme, dividing the country into three regions with respect to a resettlement policy. In the first region, there was a concerted effort to augment the population of Turkish culture in areas of Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia, where people predominantly belong to Kurdish identity. This was achieved via the settlement of immigrants from the former provinces of the Ottoman Empire who had not received any resettlement assistance. The second region was earmarked for individuals who were expected to embrace the Turkish culture and subsequently relocated. The third region, however, was reserved for evacuation on grounds of hygiene, economy, culture, military, and security and was deemed unsuitable for future settlement. The population in these areas was to be relocated to either the first or second regions, contingent on their allegiance to Turkish culture.²¹⁹

The migration strategies propagated by the 1934 Settlement Law still echoed throughout the period from 1950 to 1980. As I mentioned above, while international migrations continued from the Balkans, the country also experienced domestic migrations from rural to urban areas, which resulted in intensive urbanisation and economic instability, together with the rise in the unemployment rate. In the midst of the socio-economic unrest, the present-day nation of Turkey underwent a significant event, where a notable number of Turkish and Muslim populace migrated to foreign lands, marked by a migration driven by labour, primarily to the European and other 'developed' nations. It corresponded to that period when Turkey signed two key international legal frameworks on global migrations, the 1951 UN Convention with the option of geographical limitation and the 1967 Protocol, which guided the status of refugees and asylum seekers. Turkey thereby showed an eagerness to be integrated into the international migration regimes.

²¹⁸ According to Tekeli, "twenty-five thousand eight hundred thirty-one people from 5,074 households were transferred from the provinces of Tunceli, Erzincan, Bitlis, Siirt, Van, Bingöl, Diyarbakır, Ağrı, Muş, Erzurum, Elazığ, Sivas, Malatya, Mardin, and Çoruh to Western Anatolia". Tekeli, 'Involuntary Displacement and the Problem of Resettlement in Turkey from the Ottoman Empire to the Present', p. 218.

²¹⁹ Tekeli, 'Involuntary Displacement and the Problem of Resettlement in Turkey from the Ottoman Empire to the Present', p. 218.

Within the second major migration pattern, in the 1980s, new immigration waves emerged as the increasing numbers of non-Turks, the ones without “common descent and culture”,²²⁰ moved to or passed by Turkey. In the eastern region, the rigorous and excessively severe political policies of Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq, specifically towards marginalised communities, in addition to the humanitarian insecurity stemming from the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf crisis, impelled individuals to immigrate to Turkey with the purpose of seeking asylum. To illustrate, the regime change in Iran in 1979, coupled with the Iraq-Iran War, ultimately resulted in a notable influx of individuals seeking asylum from these nations into Turkey. Consequently, between 1980 and 1991, almost 1.5 million, mostly regime opponents as well as Iranian Kurds, Bahais, and Jews, had to immigrate to Turkey, who were encouraged by Turkish authorities to move to a third country rather than seeking asylum in the country.²²¹ In addition to Iranian nationals, a substantial surge of nearly five hundred thousand predominantly Kurdish refugees from Iraq in the years 1988 and 1991 was encountered.²²² However, due to security and identity concerns, the Turkish government reluctantly let Kurdish refugees enter Turkey and even took active measures to leverage the international community’s resources to facilitate the swift repatriation of these refugees to Northern Iraq, an initiative that was executed under the auspices of the U.S.-led Operation Provide Comfort.²²³

Furthermore, during the 1980s, as a momentous result of the conflict between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan, the stream of Afghan nationals to Turkey was initiated. In 1982, refugees from Afghanistan who were of Turkic origin and living in Pakistan were allowed to enter Turkey and given permanent residency and citizenship.²²⁴ Following the establishment of the Taliban in the early 1990s and their

²²⁰ İçduygu and Aksel, p. 175; Kirişci and Yıldız, ‘Turkey’s Asylum Policies over the Last Century: Continuity, Change and Contradictions’.

²²¹ Celia Mannaert, *Irregular Migration and Asylum in Turkey Working Paper No. 89, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* (Geneva, 2003), p. 2.

²²² Kirişci, ‘Turkey: A Transformation from Emigration to Immigration’.

²²³ Michel Agier, ‘Between War and City: Towards an Urban Anthropology of Refugee Camps’, 3.3 (2002), 317–41 (p. 319); Kirişci and Yıldız, ‘Turkey’s Asylum Policies over the Last Century: Continuity, Change and Contradictions’, p. 536.

²²⁴ Kirişci and Yıldız, ‘Turkey’s Asylum Policies over the Last Century: Continuity, Change and Contradictions’, p. 535.

continuous amplification of power subsequent to the mid-2000s, the forced migration of Afghans was expedited after the United States occupation in 2001.²²⁵ On the contrary, within the western region, the fragmentation of the Soviet Union and the socialist structures within Eastern Europe instigated the influx of individuals from these countries into Turkey in pursuit of temporary labour prospects.²²⁶ The immigrants of this period until 2011 mostly preferred to settle in the large cities of eastern and south-eastern Turkey, such as Van and Gaziantep, in addition to metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, İzmir, and Ankara.²²⁷

The immigration that occurred in the 1980s was exceptional because it encompassed individuals who did not belong to the Turkish or Muslim community. The increase in foreigners was due to globalisation, which made it easier to transfer people, goods, ideas, and finance. Furthermore, the political unrest and economic transformations experienced in the region over the past 30 years compelled individuals to seek refuge in safer and more developed countries, and Turkey was a passage²²⁸ as if to prove its geopolitical importance. The period following 1980 has been distinguished by the heightened involvement of the Turkish government with migrants living in foreign nations rather than those residing within the borders of Turkey.²²⁹ As Ahmet İçduygu and Damla Aksel assert, the relationship between international migration and the nation-state has consistently posed a difficult challenge, persisting throughout different time periods and geographic locations.²³⁰

While the nation-state is a community that recognises itself as one people sharing one territory and one narrative, international migrants are perceived as transgressors to the founding principle of the nation: emigrants, because they live outside the territory of which they still share the narrative; immigrants, because they are not yet part of the narrative attached to the territory in which they are newcomers.²³¹

²²⁵ Sema Buz and others, *Destination Unknown: Afghans on the Move in Turkey*, 2020, p. 16.

²²⁶ İçduygu and Aksel, p. 176.

²²⁷ Levent, p. 121.

²²⁸ İçduygu and Aksel, pp. 175–76.

²²⁹ Can Ünver, 'Changing Diaspora Politics of Turkey and Public Diplomacy', *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 12.1 (2013), p. 12.

²³⁰ İçduygu and Aksel, p. 178.

²³¹ Philippe Fargues, 'International Migration and the Nation State in Arab Countries', *Middle East Law and Governance*, 5.1-2 (2013), p. 5. as cited in İçduygu and Aksel, p. 178.

On the contrary, in an effort to maintain a prominent position in the global migration sphere, the Turkish government exhibited a pragmatic approach and left the decisions in terms of determining the refugee conditions and settlement status to the UNHCR. As a result of this political move, from the 1980s onwards, most particularly Iranians, but following them, asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Tunisia, as well as Palestinians, benefitted from this regulation.²³² The rise in migration waves in this period ended up with a need for new legislation. In this context, the 1994 Regulation, titled The Procedures and Principles Related to Possible Population Movements and Aliens Arriving in Turkey either as Individuals or in Groups Wishing to Seek Asylum either from Turkey or Requesting Residence Permission in order to Seek Asylum from Another Country was issued to determine the procedures in the events of mass or individual attempts to cross the borders of the country for seeking asylum or to transit to a third country. This included processes for the ones fleeing outside Europe.

In the continuing global trend of mass migrations, particularly throughout the 2000s and onwards, Turkey witnessed even more diverse waves of migrations. Considering this, together with the radically changing political climate of the country after the ruling of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, *AKP*) that has governed the state with rising neo-liberal policies since 2002, we could express that the migration policies that have been instrumentalised after that no longer serve only for the unity of the nation-state but more for the sake of the capital and scales of rant. Although Turkey's migration policies have been undergoing a remarkable transformation since the early 2000s, there seem to be various paradoxical developments about the direction of these changes. For instance, although the government attempted to liberalise migration policies, the 2006 Settlement Law still defines immigration to Turkey through individuals and groups of Turkish descent and culture, which de facto considers other immigrants to be 'illegal' in changing scales. On top of this inconsistent and unstable political atmosphere binding

²³² Kirişçi and Yıldız, 'Turkey's Asylum Policies over the Last Century: Continuity, Change and Contradictions', p. 537.

migration legislations, Turkey's geographical limitation, which concluded that only those fleeing as a consequence of 'events occurring in Europe' can be given refugee status, has restricted the application of the 1951 Convention and the complementary 1967 protocol lifting this limitation. This ongoing decision has led to domestic policy choices triggered by decision-makers' concerns about the costs of full implementation of the Convention without limitation. Thus, 'unique' regulations (e.g., satellite cities) that are barely linked to international migration protocols have been issued.

In that context, Turkey's history of asylum-seeking was re-shaped after 2011. Over the last decades, Syrians have been amongst the greatest in the number that granted temporary protection. Over the last decade, one of the most severe forced displacements has been documented as "the biggest migration flow in late history"²³³ when Syrians fled to Turkey after the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011. Turkey's reaction to the massive influx of Syrian refugees is a noteworthy illustration of the convergence of the global refugee regime's influence, which resulted in a schizophrenia that has operationalised both for temporariness, allowing foreign migrants to access certain services and for keeping the norms of 'nationalising migration state'.

From the start of the mass influx of Syrians in 2015 to 2016, the Turkish government implemented an open-door policy with the false assumption that the Syrian asylum-seekers' stay would be transient and ephemeral. As a result, they have been granted 'temporary protection' which is conditioned to applications within a case of 'mass influx situation'.²³⁴ However, almost a decade-long stay of Syrian refugees in search of safe and stable living conditions proved that the issue is deeper than estimated. Today, these migrants are mostly concentrated in the south-eastern cities of the country, namely Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa and Hatay, and also İstanbul. Other cities

²³³ *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022* (Copenhagen, 2023), p. 3.

²³⁴ Özge Zihnioğlu and Müge Dalkıran, 'From Social Capital to Social Cohesion: Syrian Refugees in Turkey and the Role of NGOs as Intermediaries', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 48.11 (2022), 2455–72 (p. 2461).

hosting a considerable number of Syrians are Adana, Mersin, Kilis, Konya, Bursa, İzmir and Ankara.²³⁵

As a response to the massive influx of asylum-seekers from Syria, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) was adopted in 2013 within the liberation process in the governance of migration. The law stipulates the principles and methodologies concerning the extent and execution of the safeguard to be afforded to foreigners, encompassing those seeking asylum and refugees. According to Meral Açıkgöz and Hakkı Onur Arıner, it introduced an all-encompassing perspective of human rights into Turkey's policies on asylum, which is in contrast to the prior security-focused approach based on fragmentary regulations and administrative instructions and memoranda.²³⁶ Additionally, in 2013, the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) was established, which was later renamed the Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) in 2021. Since September 2018, it has taken over all duties associated with global protection from UNHCR and became the only decision-making body and accountable agency for the execution and coordination of asylum policies in Turkey, including status determination.²³⁷

According to the LFIP, Turkey keeps geographical limitation and does not grant full refugee status to asylum seekers who are migrating due to events occurring outside Europe but rather - grant them another type of status such as 'conditional refugee', 'subsidiary protection', or 'temporary protection' which was then specifically regulated with Temporary Protection Regulation issued in 2014. Thus, a hierarchical and racial categorisation is instituted through bureaucratic means for refugees, which is predicated upon geographic divisions whereby 'difference is represented' and 'otherness is produced' based on the continent of origin.²³⁸ In this system, the other is not explicitly marginalised, for instance, through the language or expressions used,

²³⁵ 'Provincial Breakdown Syrian Refugees in Turkey', *UNHCR Turkey*, 2022 <<https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/90912>> [accessed 25 July 2023].

²³⁶ Meral Açıkgöz and Hakkı Onur Arıner, 'Turkey's New Law on Foreigners and International Protection: An Introduction', *Turkish Migration Studies Group (TurkMiS)*, January, 2014, p. 4.

²³⁷ Kirişçi and Yıldız, 'Turkey's Asylum Policies over the Last Century: Continuity, Change and Contradictions', pp. 534–35.

²³⁸ Uğur Yıldız, *Tracing Asylum Journeys: Transnational Mobility of Non-European Refugees to Canada via Turkey* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 130.

but they are rather exposed to bureaucratic exhaustion, which showed up in a prolonged process of application, registration, evaluation and execution of the final decision, all based on ambiguity and uncertainty. However, the Europe-based asylum-seekers are evaluated as refugees and given free movement and residence across the country.

Despite the considerable amount of media coverage and academic attention devoted to the Syrian refugee question, as previously mentioned, the situation of asylum-seekers in Turkey is not exclusively limited to individuals from Syria, nor is it solely defined by their entry through the country's south-eastern border. Furthermore, in addition to Syrian asylum-seekers, Turkey has also functioned as a destination and transit point for Afghan²³⁹ refugees since the 1980s, who arrived through the eastern border neighbouring Iran. According to the report by the Mixed Migration Centre, entitled *Destination Unknown: Afghans on the move in Turkey*, in 2018, Turkey witnessed a significant surge in the number of arrivals that were deemed irregular (e.g. those lacking legal documentation), among which the largest group comprised of Afghan nationals. Moving on to the year 2019, the volume of Afghan nationals arriving in Turkey doubled, thereby making them again the foremost national group of newly arrived individuals.²⁴⁰

The Afghan population is not only a significant issue in Turkey but also constitutes the world's most protracted displaced and dispossessed population under the mandate of the UNHCR.²⁴¹ The report's findings indicate that the majority of Afghans surveyed in Turkey are young males who arrived in an irregular manner. For male migrants, it is the violence, lack of economic opportunities, and lack of access to rights in Afghanistan as the primary reasons for migration. Women, on the other hand, embarked on migration journeys due to domestic violence, sexual abuse, verbal and physical threats, and forced marriages. The report further suggests that

²³⁹ Afghan refugees represent different ethnic groups; among them mostly Pashtuns, Uzbeks, Persians and Hazaras.

²⁴⁰ Buz and others, p. 8.

²⁴¹ Buz and others, p. 6.

the main reasons for coming to Turkey are expectations of family reunification, easy and fast access to asylum, economic opportunities, and better living standards.²⁴²



Figure 2-2 Migration on the eastern border of Turkey. Photograph from the personal archive of Orhan Deniz, Van 100. Yıl University.

Furthermore, the current figures from the UNHCR show that over 6.5 million Syrians have been forced to migrate.²⁴³ By June 2023, approximately 3.6 million Syrian refugees had settled in Turkey. When additionally considering over 300.000 international protection status holders, asylum-seekers of other nationalities and stateless persons, the result shows the highest refugee population all over the world.²⁴⁴ To put it in detail, as of February 2023, in terms of refugees, there are 10.244 Iran nationals and 8.384 Afghan nationals currently residing in Turkey, while 135.445 Afghan nationals, 132.166 Iraq nationals and 15.135 Iran nationals are seeking asylum in the country.²⁴⁵ According to the *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022* report by UNHCR, Syrians (6,5 million), together with refugees from Afghanistan (5,7 million) and Ukraine (5,7 million), cover 52% of all refugees and other people in need of international protection. Before the outbreak of

²⁴² Buz and others, p. 6.

²⁴³ *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022*, p. 3.

²⁴⁴ *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2022*, p. 2; UNCHR, *UNHCR Türkiye Operational Update June 2023*, 2023, p. 1.

²⁴⁵ UNHCR, *UNHCR Türkiye Factsheet February 2023*, 2023, p. 1
<<https://www.unhcr.org/tr/en/factsheets-and-dashboards>>.

the Ukraine-Russia war, Venezuela, South Sudan, and Myanmar were on the list together with Syrians (6,8 million) and Afghans (2,7 million), constituting the top five international displacement situations in 2021 all over the world.

Following what I outlined above, the current legislative framework binding the governance of migration is mainly based on two main beforementioned documents: The Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) issued in 2013 and the Temporary Protection Regulation issued in 2014. The former defines the scope and conditions for international protection under the status of ‘refugee’, ‘conditional refugee’ and ‘subsidiary protection’, which can be granted to migrants except Syrian nationals, such as people with nationality from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somali, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and other countries. On the other hand, the latter grants Syrians temporary protection, defined by the PMM as a “practical and complementary” solution in the event of a mass flow, implemented in “the framework of *non-refoulment* of States without loss of time with individual status”.²⁴⁶

However, this could not avoid the political and social consequences triggered by the uncertainty in the legal status of Syrians. The ambiguity even strengthened when particularly Syrian nationals were called ‘guests’ as part of everyday political discourse, which has been widely used as part of mass communication as well. As Özge Biner and Cavidan Soykan argue, the temporary regime of protection restricts the ability of Syrian temporary protection holders to take action in all aspects related to the process of building a new life. The establishment of rights and status based on temporality at the legal level, coupled with the prevalence of guesthood discourse in daily life as a reflection of this, renders it unfeasible to freely relate to the present time and space inhabited and to construct one’s life without being labelled as ‘the other’.²⁴⁷ Retaining the geographical limitation in order not to identify these people as ‘refugees’ not only affects their lives in terms of their legal status in the country

²⁴⁶ Presidency of Migration Management, ‘Temporary Protection General Information’ <<https://en.goc.gov.tr/general-information2>> [accessed 25 July 2023].

²⁴⁷ Özge Biner and Cavidan Soykan, *"Bize Misafir Dediler. Söyleyiniz, Kimdir Misafir? Var mıdır Kanunda Karşılığı?"*: Suriyeli Mültecilerin Perspektifinden Türkiye’de Yaşam, 2016, p. 9.

but also says a lot about their everyday life, influences the tactics and strategies of ‘living together’²⁴⁸ and, consequently, brings along major rights-based issues, reminding us the striking words of Arendt:

In the first place, we don’t like to be called refugees. We ourselves call each other ‘new commers’ or ‘immigrants’... Yes, we were ‘new commers’ or ‘immigrants’ who had left our country because, one fine day, it no longer suited us to stay, or for purely economic reasons. We wanted to rebuild our lives, that was all.²⁴⁹

...to be uprooted is to have no place in the world, recognised and guaranteed by others.²⁵⁰

2.4 Between politics and space: Spatialising migration

As I mapped briefly above, Anatolia and Mesopotamia have geographies that have been established, shaped, and transformed by different patterns and scales of migrations. Although the Anatolian and Mesopotamian cultures have hosted many migrant communities of different languages, ethnicities, nationalities, and religions throughout history, the massive migration of Syrians and the increasing migration of Afghans brought the refugee question to the front both at a political and social level. Following the changing pattern of the migration flow, which has resulted in the arrival of people without ‘Turkish descent and culture’, the refugee question began to be discussed together with many accompanying issues underlining the ‘difference’ and, critically, the ‘diversity’, such as social cohesion, integration, harmonisation and living together. These discussions have been developed on the one hand in solidarity with asylum seekers as they are seen to be deprived of their fundamental rights in search of safe land and, on the other hand, with the rising hate speech as the asylum seekers (mostly of Syrian and Afghan nationals) are considered to become a threat over the fate of the nation.

²⁴⁸ Nihal Eminoğlu, *Kültürlerarası Şehirler: Sosyal Uyumun Aracı Olarak Kültürlerarası İletişim*, ed. by Gül Tuçaltan (Ankara: SKL International AB Web, 2020), p. 15.

²⁴⁹ Hannah Arendt, ‘We Refugees’, in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. by Ron H. Kohn, Jerome; Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 1943), pp. 264–74 (p. 264).

²⁵⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, Inc., 1973), p. 475.

The overview in the previous section shows us how Turkey as a nation-state has been built upon diverse migrations either forced or encouraged by political frameworks instrumentalising space as a medium of inclusion and exclusion. When examining the settlement policies in Turkey, we could indicate that asylum seekers and refugees, as people outside Turkish descent and culture, have altered the conventional approach to the settlement. Prior to the 1980s, the settlement policy was grounded in kinship, and therefore, the political frameworks were developed to offer ‘adequate’ socio-spatial opportunities to immigrants in order to ensure permanence. However, this approach lost its significance following the arrival of people of non-Turkish origin in search of safe asylum. The beforementioned binding legislations developed afterwards, the resettlement policies of the early 2000s and onwards, have served highly for ‘temporariness’.

Similar to other countries facing mass migrations, in Turkey as well, providing shelter to asylum-seekers and, therefore, provision of appropriate settlements emerged as an urgent need. The options and, thus, the actors of shelter proposals have varied in Turkey. Not only governmental units but proactively national and international NGOs and other civic initiatives have taken part in related actions. In the overall literature, depending on the global trends and local preferences of governments, we could observe three types of refugee sheltering: refugee camps, local settlements, and urban settlements. However, as Özge Biner puts forward, the solutions to the settlement of refugees and asylum-seekers depend not only on the given spatial requirements and limitations but mainly on the political intention and strategy of the host country.²⁵¹

Camps are amongst the most preferred ways of settling displaced people. Throughout various geographies in Asia, the Middle East, Africa and South America, camps have been built as a first-hand humanitarian response to meet the fundamental needs (e.g. security, shelter, food, health care) of refugees and asylum-seekers, generally displaced populations. Although created in a situation of emergency, “refugee camps agglomerate tens of thousands of inhabitants for periods that generally last far

²⁵¹ Biner, p. 26.

beyond the duration of the emergency”.²⁵² Jeff Crisp and Karen Jacobsen argue that the refugee camps are communicated as if to protect displaced persons, yet the issue at hand is mainly about how host governments are hindering the integration of displaced communities in the area, encouraging the easy and organised repatriation of refugees, while gaining worldwide assistance by creating highly visible and tangible refugee settlements.²⁵³

On the other hand, for many cases, camps are utilised as security devices, “secluding in order not to pollute ... ‘the national order of things’”²⁵⁴.²⁵⁵ By belonging nowhere, the presence of refugees challenges the decades-long national myth; in Giorgio Agamben’s words, referring to Arendt:

Bringing to light the difference between birth and nation, the refugee causes the secret presupposition of the political domain-bare life-to appear for an instant within that domain. In this sense, the refugee is truly “the [hu]man of rights”, as Arendt suggests, the first and only real appearance of rights outside the fiction of the citizen that always covers them over. Yet this is precisely what makes the figure of the refugee so hard to define politically.²⁵⁶

The biopolitical in-betweenness of the refugees no doubt has reflected upon the spatiality, as well as the temporality of the camp. Refugee camps are frequently situated at a considerable distance from urban territories and other central areas and are evidently delimited, signifying a clear differentiation between the interior and exterior, or ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’. As Simon Turner puts it, even in scenarios where camps are unbounded and situated within urban areas, the differentiation between the interior and exterior remains.²⁵⁷ Despite being exceptional and indeterminate, it is feasible to comprehend the camp as a spatial practice, as it is “engraved field,

²⁵² Agier, p. 318.

²⁵³ Crisp Jeff and Jacobsen Karen, ‘Refugee Camps Reconsidered’, *Forced Migration Review*, 3, 1998, 27–30 (p. 28).

²⁵⁴ Liisa Malkki, ‘National Geographic : The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity Among Scholars and Refugees’, *Cultural Anthropology*, 7.1 (2016), 24–44.

²⁵⁵ Simon Turner, ‘What Is a Refugee Camp? Explorations of the Limits and Effects of the Camp’, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 29.2 (2016), 139–48 (p. 140).

²⁵⁶ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 131.

²⁵⁷ Turner, p. 141.

etched, layered, and ordered by diverse objects and programs”²⁵⁸. According to Manuel Herz, camps are also “a paradigmatic example of the spatial manifestation of a state of exception that has become permanent”. He goes on:

Alongside a technical conception of the camp as a “machinery” designed to protect victims, which one finds in the documents of the United Nations and its various agencies, notions of “dilemmas” and the “state of exception” dominate the debate about refugee camps among both practitioners and critical theorists.²⁵⁹

The political space of the camp implies it to be exceptional and even ‘abject’²⁶⁰; yet the ambiguity of being displaced resonates at a temporal level as well. The camps are “never meant to remain where they are indeterminable”.²⁶¹ The temporal aspect of the camp is characterised by an indeterminate quality, which leaves refugees in a state of limbo, or, in Agamben’s words, a state of exception that is “essentially a temporal suspension of the state of law, acquires a permanent spatial arrangement that, as such, remains constantly outside the normal state of law”²⁶². It is worth noting that both the individuals who are responsible for the management of the camp and those who inhabit them remain unaware of the duration for which the camp will exist. Furthermore, it is unclear how much time any given refugee will be required to reside in.²⁶³ With those, as Herz points out, the camps have been changeably conceptualised in spatial studies and social studies. Camps are perceived as humanitarian spaces for saving lives, as spaces of control for supervising refugees’ lives, and as spaces of poverty and misery.²⁶⁴ These representations and descriptions of refugee camps can coexist or complement each other. The camp, thus, is a spatial and temporal paradox.

²⁵⁸ Charlie Hailey, *Camps—Guide to 21st-Century Space* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2009), p. 3 as cited in Turner, p. 141.

²⁵⁹ Manuel Herz, ‘Refugee Camps of the Western Sahara’, *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development*, 4.3 (2013), 365–91 (p. 365) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/hum.2013.0029>>.

²⁶⁰ Irene Costera Meijer and Baukje Prins, ‘How Bodies Come to Matter: An Interview with Judith Butler’, *Signs*, 23.2 (1998), 275–86 <<https://doi.org/10.1086/495251>>.

²⁶¹ Turner, p. 142.

²⁶² Giorgio Agamben, *Means without an End*, trans. by Vincenzo Binetti and CesaTe Casarino (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 38.

²⁶³ Turner, p. 142.

²⁶⁴ Herz, pp. 366–67.

Like camps, local settlements offer so-called ‘temporary’ sites for refugees to become self-sustained until the circumstances that prompted them to flee disappear. The local settlement system, in general, requires a formally organised refugee settlement identified by the host government, mostly located in rural areas. By that, refugees are given a plot (or plots) of land to meet their shelter needs as well as to enable them for agricultural activity.²⁶⁵ Departing from any given settlement and travelling are thereafter merely permitted upon acquisition of a travel permit, which is exclusively granted by the government’s appointed representative within the settlement. Refugees are explicitly prohibited from relocating in a permanent manner from the settlement to which they have been referred, and furthermore, they are impeded from transferring from one settlement to another unless they fulfil certain physical security-related criteria.²⁶⁶

As stated by Gaim Kibreab, the countries that have applied the local settlement approach are among the poorest; for that reason, the local settlement system has been a practical measure for them as this application is managed mainly by international humanitarian support.²⁶⁷ Like camps, since the idea of establishment behind local settlements is based on repatriation, this system does not offer any program for local togetherness. According to the study by Kaiser and her friends, for some refugees, residing in a local settlement provides them with a heightened sense of security compared to living outside of one, as they have no projection about the everyday realities of the host society. Yet, for some of them, living in a town or a city centre is still more attractive, mainly because of the possibility of accessing more opportunities, including the market.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Tania Kaiser, Lucy Hovil, and Zachary Lomo, “*We Are All Stranded Here Together*”: *The Local Settlement System, Freedom of Movement, and Livelihood Opportunities in Arua and Moyo Districts*, *Refugee Law Project Working Paper No. 14* (Kampala, 2005), p. 9.

²⁶⁶ Gaim Kibreab, ‘Local Settlements in Africa: A Misconceived Option?’, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 2.4 (1989), pp. 470–71; Kaiser, Hovil, and Lomo, p. 9; Tania Kaiser, ‘Between a Camp and a Hard Place: Rights, Livelihood and Experiences of the Local Settlement System for Long-Term Refugees in Uganda’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 44.4 (2006), 597–621 (pp. 601–2).

²⁶⁷ Kibreab, p. 470.

²⁶⁸ Kaiser, Hovil, and Lomo, p. 15.

The last common refugee settlement strategy in practice is the urban settlements. The notion of settling refugees in camps was predominant until the end of the 20th century; however, over the last decades, the ‘self-settlement’ strategy has gained in popularity, and the notion of ‘urban refugees’ appeared as the most central issue in migration contexts. The UNHCR introduced the term urban refugees as part of the *Comprehensive Policy on Urban Refugees Report*. By that, the UNHCR initially referred to those who had previously resided in urban areas in their countries of origin and consequently preferred to settle in urban areas in the host countries instead of camps or rural settlements. Subsequently, urban refugees were defined as refugees who selected to dwell in urban spaces outside refugee camps, utilising their own resources.²⁶⁹

Thereby, like for all other urban migrants, city centres attract refugees and internally displaced people due to prompt access to economic resources and opportunities, as well as access to education for their children. However, governments, NGOs, and UNHCR have faced challenges in protecting and finding solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers in urban areas. UNHCR lacked a clear policy on the issue for the first 45 years of its existence, and urban refugees had been short of access to official assistance as provided in camps since available humanitarian aid has been limited and not supplied by official government programs.²⁷⁰ For this reason, it is significant to remark that urban refugees display a more considerable amount of self-support than refugees settled in camps or in rural areas as part of local settlements. Yet, on the other hand, it is worth mentioning that a considerable number of individuals choose to exit camps in order to engage in paid employment and remit funds to their respective families, as financial resources are often scarce in camps; hence, financial inputs can significantly enhance the overall conditions.

²⁶⁹ Didem Danış, *Türkiye’de Kent Mültecileri ve Misafirperverlik, TESEV İyi Yönetişim Tartışmaları*, 2018, p. 2.

²⁷⁰ Karen Jacobsen, ‘Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Urban Areas: A Livelihoods Perspective’, *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 19.3 (2006), 273–86 (p. 277).

Additionally, in urban settlements, displaced people are able to tap into social networks and ethnic enclaves, which facilitate their integration process.²⁷¹ Yet, as Karen Jacobsen explores, this attraction is most of the time beyond socio-economic reasons as refugees living in urban areas feel safer due to the ‘anonymity’ that cities provide.²⁷² It is the need to stay out of a concentrated zone like a camp, which is open to any type and scale of intervention, or in other words, the need to embody the right to be ‘invisible’ just to become ordinary in the commonplace of daily life that makes displaced people feel more secured in urban areas. I will elaborate in the following chapters that migrant experiences equipped with tactics of being ‘appeared’ or ‘disappeared’ in urban landscapes depend a lot on personal and, therefore, political reasons turned to be preferences that determine migrants’ public visibility.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, the presence of migrants can significantly impact cultural and economic life, as well as socio-spatial practices in cities, even in the regions where the quantitative representation of displaced people is at a low level or in other cases, “the displaced move almost invisibly into cities, disappearing among longer-term residents who may share class, language, religious, or other commonalities”.²⁷³ This implies the issues around local ‘integration’, ‘adaptation’ or ‘harmonisation’, to what extent so-called ‘strangers’ are allowed to encounter the local residents of a given urban landscape. However, as experienced in many cases around the world, the political frameworks in force are not always in support, encouragement, or full voluntarism of ‘living together’ due to the beforementioned reasons mostly shaped around protecting national unity. Anita Fábos and Gaim Kibreab further note ‘spatial segregation’ is often preferred by host governments through “state discourses and practices presenting refugees as a threat in terms of state and societal security, competition for limited resources, and the personal safety of citizens”²⁷⁴.

²⁷¹ Jacobsen, p. 276.

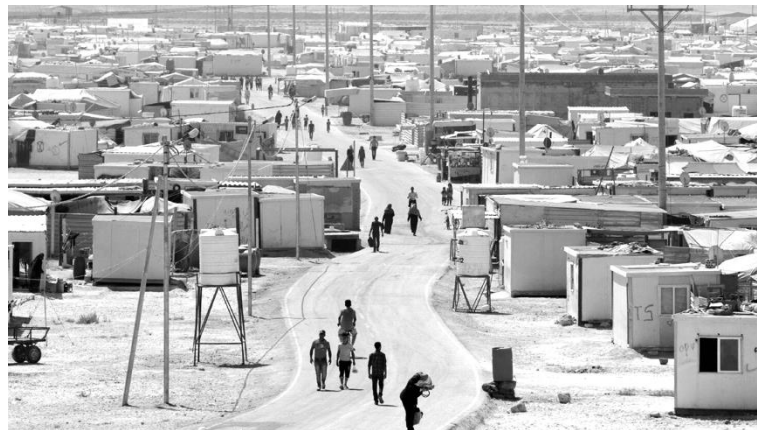
²⁷² Jacobsen, p. 276.

²⁷³ Loren B. Landau, ‘Urban Refugees and IDPs’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. by Elena Fiddian-Qasbiyeh and others, 2014, p. 1.

²⁷⁴ Anita Fábos and Gaim Kibreab, ‘Urban Refugees: Introduction’, *Refuge: Canada’s Journal on Refugees*, 24.1 (2007), 3–10 (p. 4).

... in nearly all developing countries, refugees are received as temporary guests until the conditions that prompted their displacement are eliminated. Once the political conditions that caused displacement cease, refugees are expected to return home regardless of the duration of exile. Spatial segregation of refugees is seen as an important instrument of preventing refugees' integration into host societies by prolonging their refugee status. This strategy is defeated if refugees are settled in urban area, and helps explain why host countries in the South regulate the presence of refugees in urban areas.²⁷⁵

The spatialisation of displacement in Turkey has proceeded in a similar way that has been motivated around treating asylum-seekers as temporary inhabitants or 'guests'. For instance, after witnessing the mass influx of Syrians and accompanied 'open-door' strategy of the government, the immediate response was to build camps as 'temporary accommodation centres', referred to in terms of the shelter unit used, as *çadır kent* (tent-city) and *konteynır kent* (container city) in public discourse. Starting in 2011, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD in Turkish) of the Ministry of Interior, on behalf of the government rapidly built camps in the border cities of south-eastern region, namely in Şanlıurfa, Gaziantep, Hatay, Mardin and Kilis, as well as in Kahramanmaraş, Osmaniye, Adıyaman, Adana and Malatya with the support of intergovernmental agencies and international NGOs.



*Figure 2-3 A refugee camp in Kilis near the Syrian border. Photograph by Tobias Hutzler.*²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ Fábos and Kibreab, p. 3.

²⁷⁶ Giulia D'ettorre, 'Refugee Camps: Planning Approaches', *Architecture & Design*, 2016 <<https://www.meer.com/en/19741-refugee-camps-planning-approaches>> [accessed 18 October 2023].

In the mentioned 10 provinces, 26²⁷⁷ refugee camps were constructed, which hosted over a quarter million Syrians until late 2018, corresponding only to less than 10% of the Syrians under temporary protection.²⁷⁸ These numbers show us that even during the period when camps were still in use, the population of those accommodated a very small number of Syrians, where consequently, the majority of them already became ‘urban refugees’. The figures as of July 2023 show that 65.025 Syrians shelter in 9 temporary accommodation centres (camps) in 7 provinces (Adana, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Osmaniye, Gaziantep, Malatya) while 3.259.994 reside in cities across the country.²⁷⁹ The latter applies to over 300.000 international protection status holders (non-Syrian refugees and asylum-seekers) as well, since they also inhabit scattered different cities.

In this context, a crucial reference in practice regarding the governance of migration settlements in Turkey is a ‘unique’ and ‘extraordinary’ one, called ‘satellite cities’. This practice is based on the article, which reads, “Foreigners seeking asylum in Turkey shall reside only in the places authorised by the Ministry of Interior” within the Law Related to Residence and Travels of Foreign Subjects issued in 1950. This statement then formed the basis of the Regulation on the Procedures and Principles to be Applied to Individual Foreigners Seeking Asylum in Turkey or Requesting Residence Permit from Turkey in order to Seek Asylum in Another Country and Foreigners Arriving to Our Borders for Asylum and Possible Demographic Movements issued in 1994 which as well indicates that “the foreigner whose request is accepted shall be accommodated in a guesthouse or may reside freely in a place to be indicated by the Ministry of Interior”.

²⁷⁷ According to 2016 data of AFAD, these 26 camps were: Sarıçam, Adıyaman, İslahiye 1, İslahiye 2, Karkamış, Nizip 1, Nizip 2, Yayladığı 1, Yayladağı 2, Altınözü 1, Altınözü 2, Apaydın, Kahramanmaraş, Beydağı, Cevdetiye, Midyat, Nusaybin, Akçakale, Harran, Elbeyli, Güveççi, Suruç, Viranşehir, Ceylanpınar, Derik and Öncüpınar.

²⁷⁸ In 2104, the Regulation on the Establishment, Management, Operation, Operation and Supervision of Reception and Accommodation Centres and Removal Centres was issued binding the ‘repatriation centres’ for the accommodation and control of foreigners placed under administrative detention.

²⁷⁹ Presidency of Migration Management, ‘Geçici Koruma’, 2023 <<https://www.goc.gov.tr/gecici-koruma5638>> [accessed 29 July 2023].

According to the asylum procedure in Turkey as stated in the related section of the LFIP, the applications need to be lodged with the Governorates in person, where each foreigner or stateless person is entitled to apply on their own behalf. The application is followed by a registration and interview, after which the applicants shall be issued an International Protection Applicant Identity Document to be used during the assessment period. Applicants may be required to fulfil certain administrative obligations such as relocating to assigned reception and accommodation centres, a specific location, or a ‘particular province’. Although the Law states that the final decision shall be announced utmost within the six months following the date of registration, in practice, the assessment takes almost seven or eight years, and during this long waiting process, the asylum-seekers are required to reside in a designated particular province.²⁸⁰ Upon the final decision made by the PMM on behalf of the Ministry of Interior, for the purposes of ‘maintaining public security and upholding public order’, the PMM reserves the right to compel conditional refugees and subsidiary protection holders to take up residence again in a designated particular province and comply with specified protocols and schedules as prescribed by the authorities.

The term ‘particular province’ referred to in the related articles of the LFIP stands, in fact, for the ‘satellite city’ regulation, through which asylum-seekers, international protection holders and temporary protection holders are obliged to live in one of the provinces designated by the Ministry of Interior. The approach endeavours to exert authority over displaced people to avert urban centres from being inhabited by the vast migration of asylum-seekers, while safeguarding the welfare of the country. Despite that, resettlement of displaced people in satellite cities has been in practice since the beginning of the 2000s, with the rising influx of refugees to the eastern border, the first time the term was used in a legislative framework was in 2010, within the revised version of the Circular No. 57 issued by the General Directorate of Security.

²⁸⁰ Deniz Sert and Uğur Yıldız, “‘To Be or Not to Be’: The Case of Refugees in the Satellite Cities of Turkey”, in *Proceedings of International Human Security Conference on New Challenges, New Perspectives* (İstanbul: CPRS Turkey, 2011), p. 184.

Although the circular mentions that “the place where asylum-seekers shall be transferred is determined by taking into consideration the statistics on the density of satellite provinces and the applicant’s request during the preliminary interview regarding the place where s/he wants to settle and the reason for this”, in practice this depends on the decision of the officers in the Provincial Directorate of Migration Management (PDMM). In terms of individual cases, the criteria for assigning a satellite city generally appear as the country of origin, entry border gate, age, gender, whether s/he has relatives in Turkey and population density of asylum-seekers in target satellite cities, while for the cases of mass influxes, only the latter is considered.²⁸¹ During a focus group interview with officers in one of the leading humanitarian aid NGOs in Van, Necmi, a lawyer from Van who has been working with asylum-seekers since 2015, told me that settlement restrictions in some of the cities, thus the selection of satellite cities, is based on context-specific decisions:

They impose a settlement ban in some provinces so that, for example, there will not be an accumulation of migrants in Istanbul. Because everyone wants to go there for job opportunities. In İzmir, for example, or Çanakkale, they ban so that there are no illegal crossings to Greece. In Antalya they do, for example, so that migrants would not disturb tourists. Those provinces were closed for such reasons. For example, Tunceli was not a satellite province, it is closed too. Bingöl, Muş, Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Rize, for example, these cities are also closed.²⁸²

After being assigned to a satellite city, asylum-seekers, international protection holders and temporary protection holders are expected to settle into a life with many unknowns and several formal procedures that they must follow. For instance, the international protection holders are required to weekly report their presence to the PDMM in the satellite city that they are assigned to. They can access basic services such as health and welfare; however, travelling to other cities requires a formal permit issued by the PDMM. If an asylum seeker leaves her/his satellite city without permission, s/he is subject to a fine. Therefore, a security-based approach comes to the forefront as part of the satellite city regulation, from the initial selection of provinces to be designated as satellite cities to the resettlement process:

²⁸¹ Biner, p. 27.

²⁸² Necmi, Focus Group Interview, 20.08.2021.

As the Ministry of the Interior asserted, the construction of satellite cities aims to protect the asylum seekers and aliens, clearly articulating that the satellite cities has been determined on the principle of security. The designated cities are the so-called unproblematic cities of Turkey in terms of security. Here the question remains: the security of whom against whom. If the security of the asylum seekers and refugees, i.e., our *homines sacri*, is taken into consideration by the sovereign Turkish authority, then who is the threat to their bare lives? Is it the Turkish society? Clearly not...²⁸³

Referring to Agamben's conceptualisation of a "state of exception", Deniz Sert and Uğur Yıldız interpret this practice of satellite cities as state's production of its own *homo sacer* to protect national boundaries via policies of inclusion and exclusion while legalising "the concept of citizenship within the political community –the nation-state".²⁸⁴ Even though the spatial characteristics of satellite cities do not demonstrate any physical barrier limiting the in-settlement mobility of asylum-seekers as in camps, still the everyday life of them is bounded by invisible barriers as if they stay in an 'open camp', built with the administrative regulations (e.g. weekly reporting, staying a maximum of twenty kilometres outside the city) or socio-economic conditions restricting them to access or fairly engaged with the labour market. The long evaluation period of asylum applications, high waiting time within the third-country resettlement procedure, or the continuing uncertainty even after being granted international protection are among the factors that temporally signify the hardships affecting the everyday lives of refugees in the satellite cities. Therefore, like camps, the satellite city as well represents an 'in-between' or 'indeterminate' space, drawing an "ambiguous, grey zone between the inside and the outside, the social condition of being neither fully excluded nor fully recognised"²⁸⁵.

Yet, as highlighted by various scholars, the satellite city is ontologically based on the ideas of temporariness and uncertainty. The migrant experience, in that sense, is shaped around adaptability to changeability, making it hard to settle in space and everyday relations. On the other hand, it is necessary here to note that not only the

²⁸³ Sert and Yıldız, p. 186.

²⁸⁴ Sert and Yıldız, p. 187.

²⁸⁵ William Walters, 'Acts of Demonstration: Mapping the Territory of (Non-)Citizenship', in *Acts of Citizenship*, ed. by Engin F. Isin and Greg M. Nielsen, 2015, pp. 182–206 (pp. 186–87).

satellite city itself but also its functioning mechanism on a policy basis is “inconsistent, arbitrary and spontaneous” depending on the political, social, and economic context of the province and attitude of local actors bounded by the spatial and administrative governance mechanisms of the province.²⁸⁶ Thus, it is crucial to investigate the migrant experience by understanding the political and socio-economic context of each satellite city, together with the tactics that they develop in dealing with political, social and cultural norms. For instance, in terms of the city of Van as a satellite city, this means exploring the migrant experience in terms of the temporal, spatial and cultural characteristics of a border city. Such an exploration shall surely touch upon the geographical positioning of the city, which is defined by natural and human-made borders, keeping the socio-political tension high ‘in the cases of breach of security’.

When it comes to official figures about satellite cities, it is hard to tell the total current number of satellite cities as those statistics are not publicly shared anymore. However, according to the literature on the resettlement of refugees in satellite cities, in 2003, there were 24²⁸⁷ satellite cities; in 2007 27 and between 2008 and 2010 the total number reached 30²⁸⁸. A noteworthy change happened in 2011, following the arrival of Syrians; the number almost doubled, where 51²⁸⁹ satellite cities were identified. According to the most up-to-date studies published in 2020²⁹⁰, the total number of satellite cities increased to 62²⁹¹, which can be “read as the de facto

²⁸⁶ Biner, p. 30.

²⁸⁷ According to UNHCR Turkey, those were: Adana, Afyon, Aksaray, Amasya, Bilecik, Burdur, Çankırı, Çorum, Hatay, Eskişehir, İzmir, Isparta, Karaman, Kastamonu, Kayseri, Kırıkkale, Kırşehir, Konya, Kütahya, Nevşehir, Niğde, Tokat, Antalya and Yozgat. Elizabeth Frantz, *Report on the Situation of Refugees in Turkey: Findings of a Five-Week Exploratory Study December 2002 – January 2003* (Cairo, 2003), p. 18.

²⁸⁸ Biner, pp. 27–28.

²⁸⁹ Sert and Yıldız, p. 184.

²⁹⁰ Medine Derya Canpolat, ‘Harmonisation Process of Afghan Asylum-Seekers: A Case Study of Sivas Satellite City’, *Cappadocia Journal of Area Studies*, 2.2 (2020), 188–215.

²⁹¹ 62 satellite cities are Ağrı, Amasya, Bilecik, Burdur, Çankırı, Çorum, Eskişehir, Gaziantep, Hakkari, Isparta, Kastamonu, Kayseri, Kırşehir, Konya, Kütahya, Nevşehir, Niğde, Sivas, Tokat, Van, Yozgat, Aksaray, Karaman, Kırıkkale, Şırnak, Adana, Afyonkarahisar, Erzurum, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Çanakkale, Bolu, Uşak, Denizli, Yalova, Siirt, Balıkesir, Batman, Şanlıurfa, Kilis, Ardahan, Malatya, Kars, Iğdır, Düzce, Sakarya, Erzincan, Gümüşhane, Bayburt, Mardin, Sinop, Zonguldak, Samsun, Manisa, Karabük, Adıyaman, Elazığ, Giresun, Trabzon, Artvin and Ordu. Özlem Kahya Nizam, ‘Türkiye’de Sığınmacılık ve Uydu Kent Deneyimi’, in 2. *International Davraz Congress* (Isparta: Isparta Süleyman Demirel University, 2014), p. 4091.

removal of the satellite city regulation”²⁹². The list of satellite cities provided within the referred studies shows that Van was not a satellite study until 2008. However, they also demonstrate that with Afyon, Kayseri, and Konya, Van has been among the satellite cities hosting the highest number of asylum seekers, at least until 2016.²⁹³ In terms of Van being one of the most crowded satellite cities, Necmi, the fieldwork participant whom I introduced earlier, stated that Van reached the quota for the number of migrants set by the Governorate in 2016 and was closed to new registrations for 2-3 months that year.²⁹⁴

For years, the rest of the satellite cities hosted considerably low numbers of asylum-seekers, which was part of the macro strategy to disrupt the ‘visibility’ of them in public life, leaving their appearance less recognised by the local actors and preventing them from getting organised by each other. This could also be explained by the security discourse of the state, where the asylum-seekers as ‘strangers’ in practice are declared as ‘others’. This otherness is intentionally built to create and implement biopolitical control mechanisms or, in Foucauldian terms, *dispositifs* comprised of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulations, legislations, and scientific, philosophical, or ethical claims. As I stressed before, in this strategy, ‘the other is not explicitly marginalised’. Rather, *dispositifs* are utilised as finer-scale apparatuses of the biopolitical power for establishing a set of experiences through discursive or non-discursive practices in making others the subjects of these experiences by imposing truths and norms. Thus, it is ensured that biopolitical power strategically takes control of bodies without applying visible violence, but instead through developing power relations in a certain direction, preventing the formation of them when necessary, balancing them and instrumentalising them.

Nevertheless, the growing number of asylum-seekers over the last few years has resulted in the increase of their population in other satellite cities as well, which

²⁹² Uğur Yıldız, p. 127.

²⁹³ Taner Kılıç, ‘Kentlerdeki Mülteciler’, 2013 <<https://www.multeci.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Kentlerdeki-Muleciler-Av.Taner-Kilic-18.09.2013.pdf>> [accessed 1 August 2023]; Biner.

²⁹⁴ Necmi, Focus Group Interview, 20.08.2021.

moved the administrative level of control to a more societal level, ending up in everyday biopolitics. Following the governmental resolution to terminate most of the encampments together with rising asylum applications, whereby camp inhabitants became known as urban refugees as well, the refugee question explicitly ceased to be categorised as an ‘external’ issue in society. As a result of millions of displaced people residing in various cities across all regions of the country, it has turned into an ‘internal’ issue whose implications are now being encountered daily.²⁹⁵

In this context, as stated within the *Content of Temporary Protection Türkiye* by Asylum Information Database, the year 2021 was distinguished by the culmination of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Taliban’s occupation of Afghanistan, resulting in an increase in anti-immigrant speech and strict restrictions on registration and safety. In 2022, a return policy was institutionalised, and anti-immigrant rhetoric was mainstreamed across political, social, and economic domains, resulting from several different factors such as the current economic crisis rendering immigrants as competitors in a labour market or immigrant’s presence viewed as an unnecessary burden on the welfare state. Moreover, mounting anti-government sentiment has prompted heightened criticism of the government’s open-door policy toward refugees. In 2022, both the opposition and the government-initiated campaigns against refugees in an attempt to gain more votes and exhibit their support for the communities that are hosting them in the lead-up to the national and presidential elections in May 2023.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁵ It is necessary to note here that in so-called precautionary measures against any conflict between locals and asylum-seekers, international protection holders and temporary protection holders, in June 2022 the Ministry of Interior has closed 1200 neighbourhoods in certain provinces to foreign nationals seeking address registrations for temporary protection, international protection, and residence permits, as well as changes to their city of residence if they are foreign nationals with residence permits or are under temporary or international protection, with the exception of new-borns and instances of family reunification. With this regulation, the 25% rule repealed and the rate of ‘foreign’ residence in all neighbourhoods on Turkish territory was reduced to 20%.

²⁹⁶ Asylum Information Database, ‘Content of Temporary Protection’, 2023 <<https://asylumineurope.org/reports/country/turkiye/content-temporary-protection/>> [accessed 29 July 2023].

2.5 Epilogue: Biopolitics of living with superdiversity

Lately, the refugee question in Turkey has gained the interest of many fields, including but not limited to history, political science, sociology, anthropology, architecture, and planning. The expansion of the interest has revealed various dimensions of forced migration, which have presented migrants' complicated everyday experiences in Turkey. As I emphasised earlier in this chapter, this implies a series of epistemological and methodological 'shifts' in migration research, through which more proximity with urban studies has been built, that this research is highly inspired. In this interdisciplinary fashion, I also position myself in a challenging intellectual spacing by attempting to trace the contemporary urban culture of a contested urban landscape, Van, through bodyscapes shaping its everyday life.

During the fieldwork, I recognised how legal status affects the space they inhabit, the relations they build and the everyday life they set up. The lives of displaced persons I met in Van, probably in other geographies facing mass migrations as well, were based on dualities and dichotomies. The uncertainty manifested overwhelmingly by unsystematic policies and their inconsistent, arbitrary, and spontaneous execution in settled, exhausting bureaucracy reflected tangibly upon the socio-spatiality of displacement and replacement. After the first key contacts in the second cycle of the fieldwork, I was so touched by this context that I didn't hesitate to write down the short essay 'The spatial language of migration: Too many titles, how many appearances?' published in Routed Magazine.

While drafting that short piece, I was entirely surrounded by the echo of the stories I embodied in Van, both marking past and present, making me understand this vulnerable context along with a sentimental shift from emotions to emotions. Stories are not just narrations; they are potent narratives. For Arendt, they connect the 'personal' and the 'political', or the 'body' and the 'public'. Storytelling for her is

“the act of recognising what is hiding outside the mainstream”²⁹⁷. In that short piece, as an attempt to “theorising from the margins”²⁹⁸, I posed provoking questions to explore “the language of migration along with the spatial embodiment of concepts”:

With just a glance at the International Organisation of Migration’s ‘Glossary on Migration’, one may realise that the very subjects of (forced) migration, whom I would always call ‘refugees’, are referred to in numerous ways, addressing the social and legal status of these displaced persons. The words such as ‘alien’, ‘asylum-seeker’, ‘displaced person’, ‘foreigner’, ‘immigrant’, ‘migrant’, ‘non-national’ and ‘third-country national’, amongst many others, are the ones I frequently hear or read about in various media and academia. Even when defining the term refugee, four different cases are referred to in the Glossary: refugee (1951 Convention), refugee (mandate), refugee (prima facie) and refugee sur place.

Being aware that these particular namings stem from different legal, political, sociological, economic, and cultural perspectives, I am curious about one question: one single person, many attributions, but how many appearances?²⁹⁹

Contributing to my ‘critical spatial practice’, writing this piece was also out of full excitement. It was the richness in the temporality and spatiality of the diversity that enthused me. Yet, recognising how the presence of this diversity is conditioned to a series of political regulations made me once again critically approach power relations existing at all levels, from the national to urban and to the body. Indeed, it has been the execution of biopolitical power where different relations affecting bodies and spaces are regulated to align them according to norms. Therefore, according to Arendt, they are normalised with the assistance of bureaucratic instruments:

As we know from the most social form of government, that is, from bureaucracy (the last stage of government in the nation-state just as one-man rule in benevolent despotism and absolutism was its first), the rule by nobody is not necessarily no-rule; it may indeed, under certain circumstances, even turn out to be one of its crudest and most tyrannical versions. It is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to “normalise” its

²⁹⁷ Virginia Tassinari, Francesca Piredda, and Elisa Bertolotti, ‘Storytelling in Design for Social Innovation and Politics: A Reading through the Lenses of Hannah Arendt’, *Design Journal*, 20 (2017), p. 492.

²⁹⁸ Meera Anandhi, S; Velayudhan, ‘Rethinking Feminist Methodologies’, 45.44/45 (2010), 39–41 (p. 40) <<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>>.

²⁹⁹ Ateş, ‘The Spatial Language of Migration: Too Many Titles, How Many Appearances?’

members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement.³⁰⁰

At a socio-spatial level, migration and forced displacement correspond to “a zone of indistinction between the outside and the inside, the exception and the rule, the licit and the illicit”³⁰¹. This is initiated and fuelled by bureaucratic status mapped in previous sections. Indeed, titles such as ‘international protection holder’ or ‘temporary protection holder’ signify abstract categorisations that have little or no correspondence in everyday life. They also neglect the capacity of the free act, thus the political life of displaced people, which we could interpret as biopolitics of exclusion. As I put forward before, the reasoning for the normalisation of exclusion is established on the implementation of norms and regulations that leave out certain individuals from the political, economic, and social territories. It is noteworthy to mention that these practices and beliefs are enforced by the sovereign countries, chiefly targeting “the aliens and strangers, immigrants and newcomers, refugees and asylum-seekers”, to the advantage of those who are already part of the structure.³⁰²

For Arendt, the essence of a “political life” is in the “action”. In its traditional interpretation, action is conditioned by thinking since “it serves the needs and wants of contemplation in a living body”³⁰³. However, in Arendt’s scholarship, body, with its “appearance” in ensuring the plurality of the world’s public realms, is the scape of the action, where “the political life is enabled with the actions of the limbs, mouth and voice”³⁰⁴. Both Arendt and Foucault posit that the identification and proclamation of ‘anomalies’ is a critical aspect of biopolitics. The process revolves around constructing classifications that serve to organise and group bodies based on their adherence to established social, cultural, political, and economic norms. At that point, as a powerful instrument of biopolitics, the bureaucracy creates biopolitical subjectivities relying on modern dichotomies such as the ‘stranger’ and the ‘local’,

³⁰⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 40.

³⁰¹ Agamben, *Means without an End*, p. 40.

³⁰² Sert and Yıldız, p. 187.

³⁰³ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 16.

³⁰⁴ Adem Yıldırım, ‘Hannah Arendt’te Biyopolitika Düşüncesi’, in *Biyopolitika: Platon’dan Arendt’e Biyopolitika’nın Felsefi Kökenleri* (İstanbul: NotaBene, 2017), pp. 267–98 (p. 275).

the 'irregular' and 'regular', the 'temporary' and 'permanent'. Within the realm of biopolitical subjectivities, individuals are not merely passive subjects who are subject to external power. However, they proactively incorporate and shape the norms, discourses, and practices of biopolitics. Biopolitical subjectivities imply the manners in which individuals comprehend themselves, their bodies, desires, and behaviours in relation to the broader biopolitical mechanisms that regulate life.

Yet, how bureaucracy is that powerful? The idea of biopolitical subjectivities is preoccupied with how authority is exerted over individual bodies and populations in the context of managing life itself. 'Population' is the keyword here. In *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-79*, Foucault delves into biopolitics by tracing how processes informing biological living are included in the political mechanisms, utilising 'anatomopolitics' in dealing with the functioning of the body and its continuity among generations for the sake of life.³⁰⁵ At that point, biopolitics operates to dig into population dynamics, such as birth, death, average age, and demographic distribution.

Arendt also problematised the population in understanding the biopolitical power. According to her, the mechanism of biopolitics is based on the 'modern economy' and thus on the control of the population through statistics. Unlike Foucault, in Arendt's criticism, statistics is explicitly addressed as things are designed, explained, and classified with and by means of numbers. More than that, the laws and norms assigned by the results of 'statistics' are applicable and valid in case of large numbers and long spans of time, which intrinsically ignores the spontaneous actions, events and meanings that constitute history.

The justification of statistics is that deeds and events are rare occurrences in everyday life and in history. Yet the meaningfulness of everyday relationships is disclosed not in everyday life but in rare deeds, just as the significance of a historical period shows itself only in the few events that illuminate it. The application of the law of large numbers and long periods to politics or history signifies nothing less than the wilful obliteration of their very subject matter, and it is a hopeless enterprise

³⁰⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Bio-Politics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, ed. by Michel Senellart, trans. by Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

to search for meaning in politics or significance in history when everything that is not everyday behaviour or automatic trends has been ruled out as immaterial.³⁰⁶

Arendt's critique asserts that statistics functions as an ideological apparatus, disregarding the connections, contexts, and meanings in its analysis of large data sets and mainstream references. As a defining instrument of biopolitics, statistics engenders its own institutions and systems, which, in turn, establish an apolitical and decadent structure relying on the bureaucracy.³⁰⁷ Arendt explicates that behaviours and attitudes are assimilated according to the expectations and demands of bureaucracy, culminating in a loss of the faculty of 'judgment'. As in the case of the Eichmann Trial, the ones who tightly follow bureaucracy are doomed to lose their "inner dialogue" while they function themselves to fulfil what is assigned. The greatest claim of the bureaucracy is that to be a 'good citizen', one has to meet the established obligations. Departing from that, Arendt's inquiry into the contemporary human condition involves an examination of how the established moral subject of the Western Ethos, which has been established since Socrates, could have allowed or even contributed to the significant 'evil' that currently threatens humanity. Specifically, she seeks to understand how this moral subject, who was meant to organise their life according to universal or rational standards and with an autonomous will, could have authorised or participated in the destruction of the 'other'.³⁰⁸

I would like to extend the scope of this debate and incorporate the notion of 'everyday behaviours' as being subject to alienation by the statistical approach. My argument is that the utilisation of statistics and the use of universal references not only raises ethical concerns but also leads to methodological issues. This becomes particularly evident when examining the concept of 'superdiversity'. As a discipline, statistics inherently places little emphasis on differences, instead focusing on capturing similarities and trends. Accordingly, it is incapable of demonstrating

³⁰⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 42–43.

³⁰⁷ Yıldırım, p. 295.

³⁰⁸ Nilgün Toker, 'Hannah Arendt'te Politik Sorumluluk ve Yurttaş Sorumluluğu', *Birikim Yayınları*, 2006 <https://birikimdergisi.com/guncel/1004/hannah-arendt-te-politik-sorumluluk-ve-yurttas-sorumlulugu#.XP_jvy17HfY> [accessed 4 August 2023].

diversity. From this, I recall the arguments I put forward at the outset of this thesis; instead of probing into rigid categorisations and conclusions, tracing and understanding diversity needs a ‘communication³⁰⁹ of difference’, narrating things and events within a more horizontal diagram, as in storytelling when “each time we talk about things that can be experienced only in privacy or intimacy, we bring them out into a sphere where they will assume a kind of reality”³¹⁰. This is necessary to produce the knowledge left out of statistics, of the personal, spontaneous, and contrary.

In light of this positioning, by leading us to find manifold meanings that bodies have created within the constructs of temporality and spatiality, investigating the biopolitics of migration-driven superdiversity taps into the methodological realm outside the one merely defined by numbers and abstract implications. In this thesis, urban ethnography informed by feminist scholarship offers a means to question situated forms of socio-spatiality in a superdiverse context. By that, it is possible to deconstruct the metaphor of body-nation as an embodiment of “the general concept of complex (social) systems in the form of bodies and the metonymy of bodies–persons” when we recognise all instances of a metaphor mapping such as the one between nation and body, are simply repetitions of a universal conceptual unit that lacks any history beyond a chronological sequence of manifestations, which are produced automatically, unconsciously, and spontaneously.³¹¹

In one respect, this spacing allowed by the deconstruction of the metaphor of body-nation could be possible by representing spatiality and embodiment of displacement

³⁰⁹ I would like to recall here the connection between social space and communication in the context of biopower: “The political synthesis of social space is fixed in the space of communication. This is why communications industries have assumed such a central position. They not only organize production on a new scale and impose a new structure adequate to global space, but also make its justification immanent. Power, as it produces, organizes; as it organizes, it speaks and expresses itself as authority. Language, as it communicates, produces commodities but moreover creates subjectivities, puts them in relation, and orders them. The communications industries integrate the imaginary and the symbolic within the biopolitical fabric, not merely putting them at the service of power but actually integrating them into its very functioning.” Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 33.

³¹⁰ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 50.

³¹¹ Musolff, p. 74.

beyond narrating displaced people with their ‘vulnerable’ or ‘bare’ existence. I built my intention upon this critical positioning of neither communicating migrants as abject bodies in a way that over-marginalises their lives nor favouring this life in-between. Yet, I argue that narrating otherwise is possible by critically engaging with the transformative potential of human mobility, together with acknowledging migrants’ ‘capacity to act’ in constructing their own realms in cities. Some scholars³¹² associate this with “autonomous migration”, which detects “a deterritorialising force that is unravelling statist regimes of citizenship and, in some cases, prefiguring new spaces of affinity and community”³¹³. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri discuss “autonomous movement” with its capacity to designate new spaces and residences throughout the journey. It is the “autonomous movement that defines the place proper to the multitude”.³¹⁴

A new geography is established by the multitude as the productive flows of bodies define new rivers and ports. The cities of the earth will become at once great deposits of cooperating humanity and locomotives for circulation, temporary residences and networks of the mass distribution of living humanity.

In their proposition, Hard and Negri value the transformative aspect of transgressing territorial and racial boundaries. At this juncture, the displaced or the nomad is the “postcolonial hero” who destroys the particularisms of the imperial, or, I would go beyond, the body-nations myth. While the exercise of imperial authority results in the segregation of destitute populations and restricts their agency to the confines of subordinate postcolonial nations, the autonomous movement operates by transgressing tangible and intangible borders. I take this potential as a ‘line of flight’ and further this discussion to refer to bodyscapes not only as a singular affective realm but rather with its agency that manifests a scape of mutable, reactive, expressive, and dynamic archive creating a liminal, multifaceted, and generative space. This will lead us to query the micro-urbanisation of Van affected by various

³¹² Néstor Rodríguez, ‘The Battle for the Border: Notes on Autonomous Migration, Transnational Communities, and the State’, *Social Justice*, 23.3 (65) (1996), 21–37; Hardt and Negri; Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, ‘Migration, Detention, Desertion: A Dialogue’, *Borderlands E-Journal*, 2.1 (2003), 1–12; Walters.

³¹³ Walters, p. 184.

³¹⁴ Hardt and Negri, p. 397.

forms of mobility and displacement, as I asked earlier: *How could we trace the urban culture of Van diversified by migrant bodyscapes?*



CHAPTER 3

SITUATING THE CONTESTED FIELD/WORK

Before we speculate, we must live, and life demands that we make use of matter, either with our organs, which are natural tools, or with tools, properly so-called, which are artificial organs. Long before there was a philosophy and a science, the role of intelligence was already that of manufacturing instruments and guiding the actions of our body on surrounding bodies. Science has pushed this labor of intelligence much further, but has not changed its direction.³¹⁵

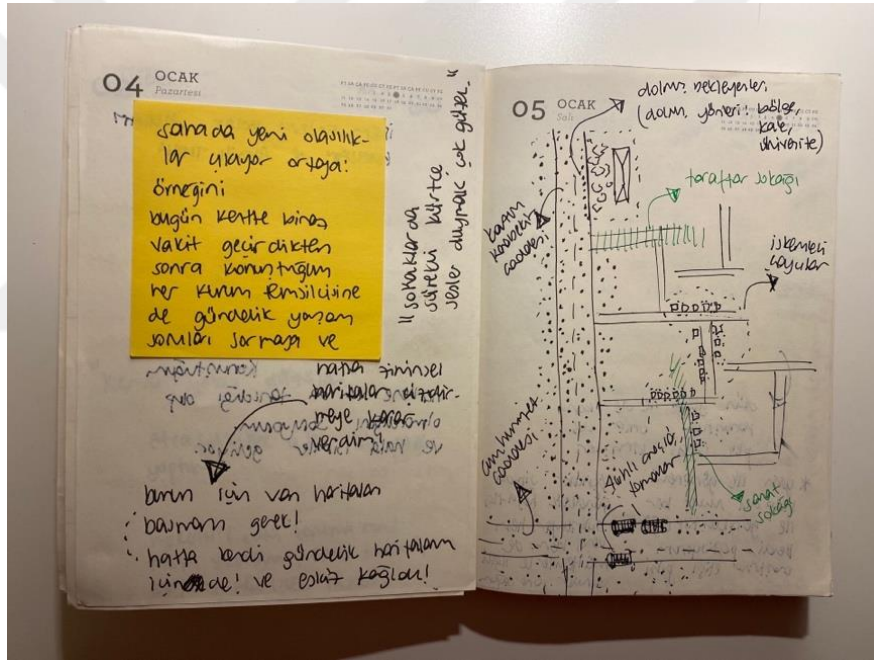


Figure 3-1 An excerpt from the field log. Zooming into researcher's body of work, August 2021.

My notebooks have long been as if part of my body. Over the years, they have become the tools through which I situate myself. This was the case during the fieldwork in Van as well. Referring to Henri Bergson, notebooks re-appeared as “artificial organs” where the logs about spaces, places, people, encounters, feelings,

³¹⁵ Bergson, Henri. *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (New York: Citadel Press, 1992), p. 43 as cited in Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2011), p. 179.

and senses become non-human agents of a socio-spatial practice. As Awan and Musmar do, I think of my fieldwork as providing “a margin that is both uncomfortable and yet a space I choose to work within”, which has transposed across difference “between worlds that would otherwise be unable to apprehend each other”.³¹⁶ Indeed, the fieldwork is about ‘knowing’ the other. It is a practice that requires and provides personal proximity to the ‘field’ and, from there, a practice that is based on the reproduction of the relation between ‘professional distancing’ and ‘personal proximity’ where the technocratic and situated knowledge sets constantly interact.

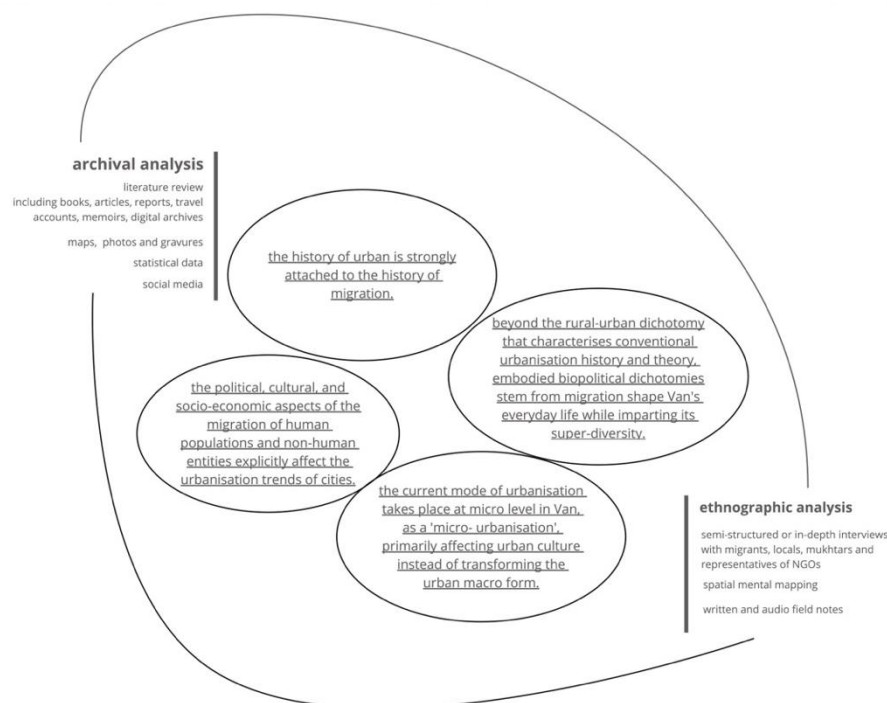


Figure 3-2 The twofold analysis comprising the data set of the research.

I constantly referred to twofold data throughout the research (Figure 3-2): the archival and ethnographic analyses. The archival data consists of multiple layers: I referred to various written sources as part of the literature review, including books, articles, reports, travel accounts, memoirs, and digital archives, which helped me to draw upon the baseline of the research, as well the conceptual and historical

³¹⁶ Awan and Musmar, p. 166.

background of it in terms of exploring the migration phenomenon from a spatial and urban perspective, bridging it with the literature on bodies and bodyscapes to develop a criticism on the current micro-urbanisation dynamics of Van and, of course, to delve into the socio-spatial history of this city, not only from a traditional historical perspective but also from a micro one, acknowledging the biographical and autobiographical data of former and current inhabitants of the city.

I also used many visuals from different sources; this includes maps, graphics, photos and gravures of Van that I found in digital archives such as Houshamadyan³¹⁷, Project Save³¹⁸ and Ovenk³¹⁹, which all serve as an online library and exhibition demonstrating the Armenian presence in Van or Vaspurakan/Vasbouragan and also in Ottoman Archives and Republican Archives of the Republic of Turkey Directorate of State Archives. These sources generously contributed to the research by adding a hidden layer representing the Armenian diaspora that was once tightly linked to Van. In addition to digital archives, I highly benefitted from the rising followership of social media. Even after a quick research on X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook, I found several relevant accounts that serve as an online database about life in Van, with strong coverage of historical accounts of the city. They are powerful visual narrations that convey the urban landscapes and everyday figures in the city (Figure 3-3).

Lastly, I incorporated statistical data from the Turkish Statistical Institute, focusing on variables such as in-migration rate, out-migration rate, net migration rate, and the overall population of Van since the 1980s. Additionally, I consulted the statistical data provided by the Ministry of Interior of Turkey's Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), which included information on the total number of refugees, conditional refugees, subsidiary protection holders, and temporary protection holders. Although these statistical sources did not play a major role in the research,

³¹⁷ <https://www.houshamadyan.org/home.html>

³¹⁸ <https://www.projectsavet.org>

³¹⁹ <https://ovenk.com/>

they provided supplementary information to enhance the understanding of migration patterns and population dynamics in Van.



*Figure 3-3 Photos of Van from online archives of social media channels.*³²⁰

The other main group data I referred to is based on the ethnographic analysis. As I mentioned earlier, throughout the research, I have opted to engage with feminist research approaches both conceptually and methodologically. This informs that the ethnographic analysis is conducted upon a critical positioning that queries the prevention of the positivism on being neutral and detached, advising the researcher to “not to engage with the interviewee, not to display emotions, to ask all questions in the same way and the same order, and not to affect the outcome”.³²¹ The core of this analysis in this research is the fieldwork, attempting to “examine the lived experiences of a community in its natural habitat”,³²² as suggested by the feminist ethnographers. When doing this research with migrants, the spatial reference to the “natural habitat” thereof changes. Often, it is more about appropriating a new habitat,

³²⁰ https://twitter.com/eski_vann, <https://twitter.com/vanlinihathoca>

³²¹ Karen O'Reilly, 'Feminist Ethnography', in *Key Concepts in Ethnography* (London: Sage Publications, 2012) <<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446268308>>; Ann Oakley, 'Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms', in *Doing Feminist Research*, ed. by Helen Roberts (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 31–61.

³²² Sanjukta T. Ghosh, 'Feminist Ethnography', *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, 2016, 1–9 (p. 1).

finding similarities to attach oneself to a new socio-spatial context, or coping with ‘strange encounters’. In the end, feminist ethnography is researching about ‘others’:

Following Said and other postcolonial theorists, feminist scholars contested ethnography’s claim to produce authentic, empirical, and “real” knowledge, asserting that knowledge and representations of the third world were replete with gross inaccuracies and stereotypes such as the presumed cultural, intellectual, and artistic inferiority of this “other”.³²³

The ethnographic work includes yet more conventional research methods, such as interviews, as well as a more salient and ‘controversial’ one; autoethnographic³²⁴ narratives. I used the latter as part of my attempt to ‘read’, ‘understand’ and ‘describe’ Van in the light of my first encounters with it, which refers to times when I was eagerly strolling around while struggling to settle myself in the city among diverse positionings of mine; a sightseer, a researcher, an architect, a woman.³²⁵ Most notably, for this chapter, I felt (self-)encouraged enough to write autoethnographic narratives about the city I have bodily and mentally engaged with for the last couple of years.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method, marking both the “process and the product” of writing retrospectively and selectively about “epiphanies”; in other words, manifestations of thoughts, emotions and actions of the researcher that exist before, during and after the research.³²⁶ Attempting to write urban autoethnographic narratives challenged my limits of being a feminist urban researcher, both on the field and at my desk, gradually pushing me to ask more questions about positioning multiple ‘selves’ of mine and therefore making me feel more and more grounded in

³²³ Ghosh, p. 3.

³²⁴ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E Adams, and Arthur P Bochner, ‘Autoethnography: An Overview’, *Historical Social Research*, 36.4 (2011), 273–90; Tessa Muncey, ‘Doing Autoethnography’, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 4.1 (2005), 1–12; Sarah Wall, ‘Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography’, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 7.1 (2008), 20–33; elke, emerald, and Lorelei Carpenter, ‘Autoethnography: Is My Own Story Narrative Research?’, in *Narrative Research in Practice: Stories from the Field*, ed. by Richard Dwyer, Ian Davis, and Elke Emerald (Singapore: Springer, 2017), pp. 27–46; Leyla Bektaş, ‘Bir Güvenlikli Site Hikâyesi: Gündelik Hayatın Dönüşümüne Otoetnografik Yaklaşım’, *Fe Dergi Feminist Ele*, 8.2 (2016), 46–61; Çağdaş Ceyhan, Züleyha Özbaş Anbarlı, and Nalan Ova, ‘Zamanın İzinde Kenti Deneyimlemek: Kent ve Bellek Üzerine Oto-Etnografik Bakışlar’, *Moment Journal*, 4.1 (2017), 92–114.

³²⁵ I not only within this chapter wrote autoethnographic narratives, but also along with the flow of whole thesis; e.g. one can find them also in Chapter 1, 4 and 5 as embedded excerpts.

³²⁶ Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, pp. 273–75.

the research. Another challenge was to adapt this method to the research of spatial studies and utilise it as a medium of ‘site analysis’ in understanding the particular context of the research. This effort overall is empowered and tried to be evidenced by my textual and audio field notes and interview excerpts.

3.1 Embodying the ‘field’: An urban ethnography in Van

site is a place to practise in/on/with, and field is a place to learn from/in ... ‘To site’ implies definitive moves, an author(s) and of course specificity. ‘To field’ is more contingent, responsive, and depends on flowing, pervasive conditions, clouds, indeterminate edges.³²⁷

When I found myself eager to do an urban ethnography³²⁸ informed by feminist scholarship, organising fieldwork had already been at the centre of my thesis. I conducted the fieldwork in Van in July 2020, August 2021, March 2022, and May 2022. Within the intertwined cycles of the research, I experienced various forms of engaging with the ‘field’ in terms of spatial and social attachment to the diverse scapes of Van (Figure 3-4). As I briefly mentioned earlier, this engagement was fuelled by changing forms of researching, including travelling, sightseeing, reading, writing, walking, talking, chatting, hanging out, listening, audio-recording, journaling, celebrating, collecting, photographing, and mapping.

³²⁷ Jane Rendell, ‘Working (through) the Field : /’, in *Architecture and Field/Work*, ed. by Suzanne Ewing and others (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 172.

³²⁸ Urban ethnography delves into how urban inhabitants “make sense of their daily social worlds, navigate surrounding communities, and manage the broader forces that structure the urban experience”. It emphasises in-depth fieldwork with participants and focuses on interactions and institutions that defines urban space, whether public streets, neighbourhood groups, or community events. Urban ethnography views ‘communities’ with their spatial reference. Theoretical perspectives have typically leaned toward social construction and interaction, envisioning urban life as an accumulation of repeated and ritualised encounters. In this research, I employed urban ethnography to be able understand how space participates in the formation and re-formation of urban culture and how urban culture have been spatialised, through tracing narratives of diverse social agents where meanings, symbols and memories have been embedded. For more information, please see Forrest Stuart, ‘Urban Ethnography’, *Sociology*, 2021 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780199756384-0256>>.

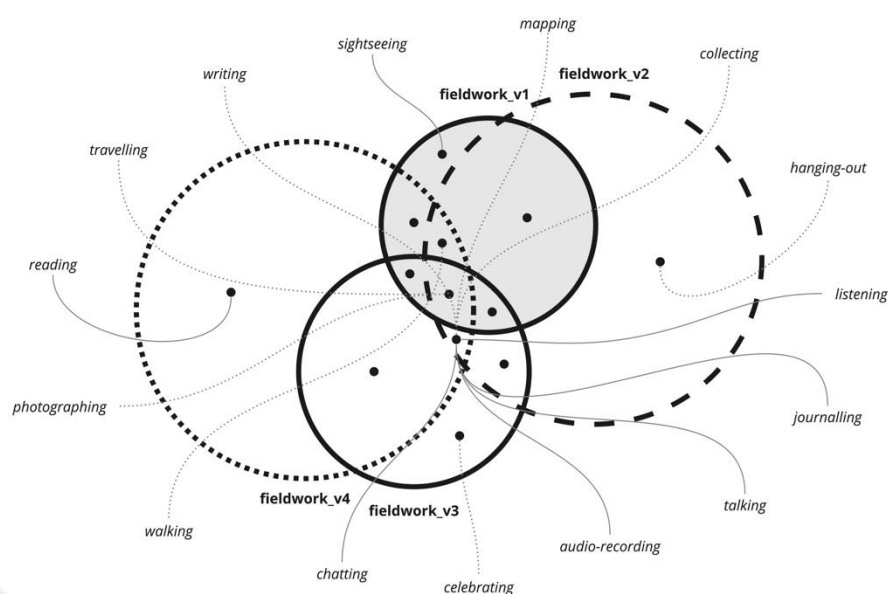


Figure 3-4 Cycles of the fieldwork.

Given that my mental and emotional state was also changing as being affected by the field and the thesis trajectory in general, these engagements were not only intellectual but they also influenced by my changing mental and emotional state, adding layers of complexity to my research. I, therefore, propound that those ‘micro-practices’ occurred in the urban landscapes in Van, those ‘ordinary’ practices, assemble the primary data set of the research, composing the migration-driven urban ethnography in Van. It is because, recalling Ash Amin’s “microcultures” and “micropublics”, diversity

falls on everyday lived experiences and local negotiations of difference, on microcultures of place through which abstract rights and obligations, together with local structures and resources, meaningfully interact with distinctive individual and interpersonal experiences.³²⁹

In her afterword to *Architecture and Field/work*, Jane Rendell was in conversation with one of the editors of the book, Suzanne Ewing, and she asked her the difference between the ‘site’ and the ‘field’. Her response was tied to the proposal that the site is the place to ‘practice’ while the field is the place to ‘learn’. Furthering this, my proposal is that the ‘field’ not only signifies a spatial reference or a place but also

³²⁹ Amin, p. 967.

suggests a ‘verb’, an action, or ‘fielding’. As I wrote in *Sahadan Notlar: “100. Yıl’ı Yeniden Düşünmek” Proje Süreci Üzerine* [Notes from the Fieldwork: On the Trajectory of “Rethink 100. Yıl” Project], the field transforms from being merely a geographic reference to becoming a space where the everyday dynamics, rhythms, actors, and intricate interrelations in the context come to the forefront.³³⁰ Consequently, I have conceptualised being in the field as an emancipatory practice and, by daring to go even further, as an essential learning and unlearning space for constructing an emancipatory spatial design culture. With that, I would extend Ewing’s proposition of the field as a “place to learn” and suggest that fielding is the constant exchange of learning and unlearning. I would support that by putting forward the fieldwork as “(un)learning by embodying”³³¹.

The fieldwork provided me with several encounters with diverse inhabitants of Van, such as migrants from Afghanistan, Iran, and Syria, as well as ‘locals’ of the city and representatives of governmental and non-governmental organisations. These encounters allowed me to cherish the different voices that appeared or disappeared within the city. Each encounter prompted me to reflect on my own positionality, which ranged from being an “absolute outsider and moderate insider” to being “sparingly distant and carefully intimate” or “excessively critical and medium engaged”. This fluid positionality enabled me to approach writing as a ‘critical spatial practice’, active writing “that constructs as well as traces the sites of the relation between critic and work”.³³² “The focus on the preposition here allows a direct connection to be made between the positional and the relational.”³³³ Supporting this idea of writing as a critical spatial practice, I applied several associated research techniques and tools throughout the fieldwork. These included engaging in walks to develop a spatial and embodied understanding of the city, immersing myself in the rhythm of everyday life, and becoming less strange as an

³³⁰ Ateş, ‘Sahadan Notlar: “100. Yıl’ı Yeniden Düşünmek” Proje Süreci Üzerine’, p. 34.

³³¹ Burcu Ateş and Çağla Caner Yüksel, ‘Learning by Embodying: Body as a Basic Design Studio Material’, in *Materiart: Architectural Design Research and Technology*, ed. by Gülsün Merin Abbas and others (Lisbon: Caleidoscopio, 2022), pp. 493–513.

³³² Jane Rendell and others, *Critical Architecture*, Critical Architecture, 2007, p. 151 <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203945667>>.

³³³ Rendell and others, p. 152.

outsider body. I had informal conversations with city inhabitants to gain insights into the key themes of urban life and explore multiple perspectives. Furthermore, interviews with participants in the fieldwork provided a deeper understanding of the migration phenomenon and its socio-spatial implications in the city. Additionally, I kept written and audio field notes to capture immediate reflections, memorable encounters, and interpretations, as well as to record quick ideas and observations. All these inputs served as a means to map socio-spatial relations and experiences within a cross-scalar approach from the body to the urban and raise questions for further exploration.

I would intentionally not call this fieldwork a merely ‘methodological’ process. As I argued before, conducting feminist research challenges the researcher to become more and more open to changing positionalities, as well as to query so-called scientific categorisations during research. Thus, the fieldwork is about engaging with the instances of traditional dichotomies of thinking and doing, contemplation and action, theory and method. In Figure 3-4, I aimed to provide a representation of my intellectual cycles, as complex as the research itself, affected by my mental and physical mobility throughout the research. This methodologically means that doing research on the field is by nature an open process, and I preferably keep that as much as unfixed to celebrate what the field offers me.

3.2 Locating the ‘field’: Where and how did I ‘work’?

I set off from Ankara to Van. When it comes to fieldwork, I always get excited, wondering what it will add to me or what I will take from it. As always, no ‘plan’ can be fully planned. So, I said, “Plans unfold on the road.” I believe that the encounters will shape this field according to the necessary flows. In the past few months, I’ve been asking everyone I’ve talked to or met if they know anyone in Van, trying to increase the number of my contacts in the city even before I arrive. In this second part of my fieldwork, I think the first days will be spent in free exploration because first, I need to understand how to understand this city to

find out how to approach it. Therefore, in the first days, I want to wander the streets of the city without the pressure of ‘data collection’, to notice its spaces, and to start getting used to people’s faces. (August 7th, 2021)

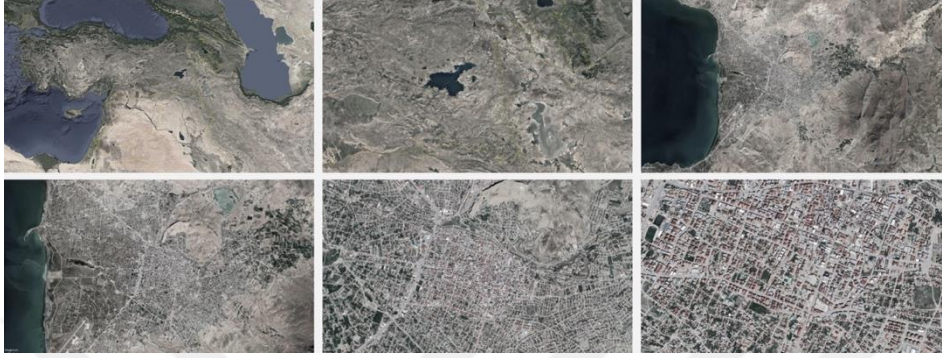


Figure 3-5 Approaching Van via aerial maps. A collage by the author, with exports from Google Earth.

Landing in Van, I was already very much amazed by the mountainous view. It was not only due to my personal admiration of mountains but also seeing how they spatially define what the centre of Van is about. To my observation, the city centre of Van is a place that is defined by four high elevations: the Rock (Van Fortress), the Rock of Toprakkale, the Rock of Çavuştepe and the Mount Erek. The locals call the Rock a ‘Castle’, yet the mass formation of this structure, which looked so nature-made, did not seem to me like the castle-type buildings I know. This is why I did not hide my surprise when I first saw it. Then came the bewilderment of the lake. The urban settlements of Van had no direct spatial connection with it. Yet, when looking to the east from Maraş Avenue or Melen Avenue, one could view the Rock and only imagine the lake behind it.

From the airport, which is located in Edremit, one should take the road from İpekyolu Avenue, which cuts off the city from almost north to south, connecting Edremit, the resort town, and İpekyolu, the central town. To the northwest, it further passes towards Tuşba, where the university is located. In my field log, I wrote:

İpekyolu Avenue sharply separates the city. It is felt as if there is a wall between the old Van and the new city. In a way, it is like a historical and

cultural separation, like the segregation of one history from another. (August 12th, 2021)



Figure 3-6 Approaching Van via author's journey. A collage by the author, with the photographs from the fieldwork.

After maybe fifteen minutes of riding on İpekyolu Avenue towards the north, one should turn rightwards for Maraş (Kazım Karabekir)³³⁴ Avenue. After passing by Kurtuluş Park and reach the little square in front of the Conforium Hotel, defined by the intersection of Sıhke Avenue and Maraş Avenue, this is where the so-called city centre, in my view, starts. There you can start feeling the rhythm of the city. This is also where the 'field' of this study appears geographically. The spatial reference of the field then expands to the urban area between Sıhke Avenue and İki Nisan Boulevard, intersecting with the hinterland of Cumhuriyet Avenue, including Maraş Avenue (Figure 3-7). As I will explore in Chapter 4, most of this urban area, which is today attributed as the 'city centre' by the inhabitants of the city, is settled on the former territory of *Aygestan* (*Bağlar* or garden district) consisting of one or two-storey mudbrick houses populated mostly by Turks, Kurds, and Armenians. Yet, with several transformations triggered by migrations, the centre today is composed of apartment blocks as housing units and offices, as well as many hotels, restaurants, cafes, and shops on the street or in passages and bazaars.

³³⁴ Although the name of the Street now officially is Kazım Karabekir Boulevard, the locals call it Maraş or Maraş Avenue, as it was until 1970s.

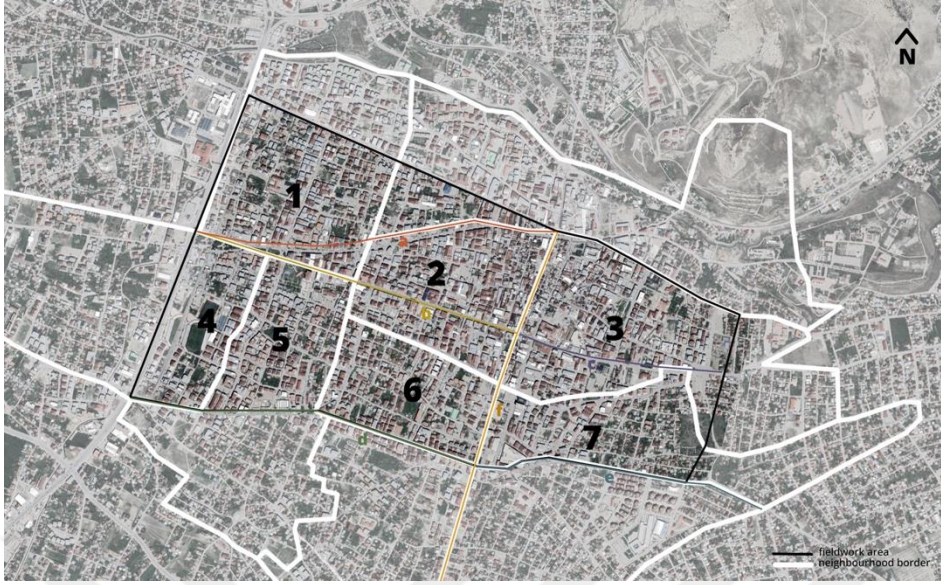


Figure 3-7 Neighbourhoods of İpekyolu, the city centre of Van and spatial borders of the field. 1: Ali Paşa, 2: Bahçıvan, 3: Şerefiye, 4: Halil Ağa, 5: Hafiziye, 6: Cumhuriyet, 7: Serhat. a: Sıhke Avenue, b: Kazım Karabekir (Maraş) Avenue, c: Mareşal Fevzi Çakmak Avenue, d: İki Nisan Boulevard, e: Mount Ereğ Avenue, f: Cumhuriyet Avenue. A map by the author, with export from Google Earth.

When I go to a new city, there's always an image that forms in my mind about that place. I wonder what it resembles the most or which of the places I know. The less similarity I find, the more exciting it is. This was the case with my first visit to Van. In a discursive and representational sense, there was far more expression in me about the city than I had thought. My childhood town, Aliğa, a district of İzmir which is trying to 'grow' more every day, was also shaped by migrations. Even in the 20-household apartment block where I grew up, there was great diversity. Some of the families were 'immigrants' displaced from their homes in the Balkans and resettled there; in other words, they were 'muhacirs'. Some of them had ancestors who were Greek; they had migrated from the Greek Islands and settled in Aliğa. Some of them were 'yörük', and thanks to my professional engagements today, I understand that their mobility was hindered for multiple political, socio-economic and environmental reasons, and they had to 'settle' in Aliğa. Some came from various cities in the East, and although I didn't know much about the reason back then, I now

*understand that some of them were affected by forced evacuations of villages in the 1990s; they were our neighbours from Van and Ağrı. Others from the East had migrated from Erzurum and Kars. When I recalled those days of my childhood, I ironically felt lucky - not only because I knew I grew up in an environment that provided a context for me to understand what ‘**difference**’ is but also because I felt less of a ‘stranger’ than I thought when travelling to Van today. (July 7th, 2020)*



Figure 3-8 Fieldwork, cycle 1, July 2020. A collage by the author, with the photographs from the fieldwork.

In the first cycle of the fieldwork, I was a domestic tourist in Van. It was also when the COVID-19 pandemic was restricting all aspects of social life, but I still had to travel to Van and start engaging with the city. Therefore, I should mention that from the first cycle to the last, the fieldwork of this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic conditions, which intensely affected the first two cycles. In this initial stage of the fieldwork, without having any agenda connected to so-called ‘data collection’, I visited the tourist places and landmarks that any traveller would see on her/his trip in Van. The tour, as expected, started with a visit to the Van Fortress. When we were climbing the stairs, I remembered small Roma kids accompanying us; they were ‘local guides’ who could tell the history of the Rock in

several languages, including Japanese. On top of the Rock, one could enjoy the view of the plain lands and the city centre towards the mountains on the one side and of the lake on the other. This is when I realised how large the lake is; that's why people of Van call it 'sea'. The next stop was the Akdamar Island via Edremit and Gevaş. On the small ferry from Gevaş to Akdamar, I was told the legend of the island between the Armenian girl, the daughter of the monk, and the Kurd shepherd and then how the island and the church located there are still symbolically important for the Armenian diaspora. Besides sightseeing, this first encounter with the city provided me with the first contacts with the city and engaging with their 'ordinary' daily life in Kültür Sokak with pubs and cafes, which I got to know later on that it is one of the 'boutique streets' projected by the local government, in parks and also in Edremit coast. The informal talks that occurred those days enabled me to start asking 'situated' questions about the city, grounded me in the context and guided me to 'where and what to look for'.

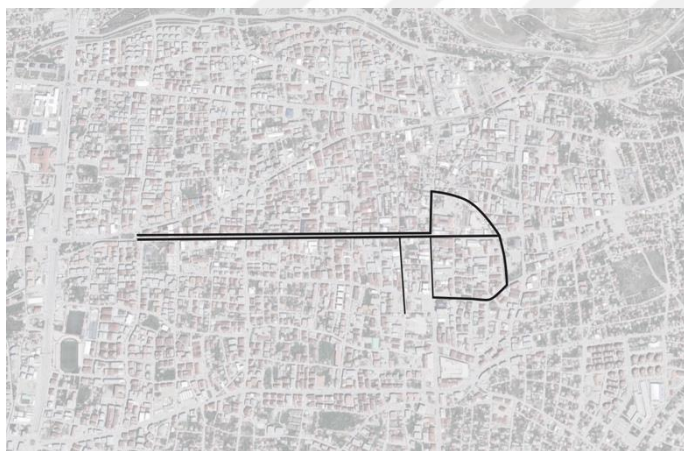


Figure 3-9 Map the walk! This autoethnographic map shows to what spatial extent my body was present while walking in the city centre of Van during the first cycle of the fieldwork.

In this part of the fieldwork, the 'scientific' part aside, this time, I am experiencing the city as a researcher, a female researcher. Each day, my body feels less foreign. I believe this is not only due to my growing familiarity but also because I feel safe in public spaces. When I talked to researchers who come from other cities,

especially from the ‘west’, to conduct research here, they expressed similar feelings. (August 15th, 2021)



Figure 3-10 Fieldwork, cycle 2, August 2021. A collage by the author, with the photographs from the fieldwork.

In the second cycle of the fieldwork, I was an urban researcher in Van. My overall strategy during this cycle was to contact as many (diversity of) people as I could, to talk with them, to listen to them and to hang out with them while ‘collecting’ data. My intention was to have the largest pool of information recorded³³⁵ so that I could capture the largest diversity represented in the research. Therefore, I should note that my aim was not to have a ‘representative’ mapping of the socio-spatial impact of the migration-driven superdiversity in Van but rather to embrace an ‘illustrative’ approach supported by the narratives and stories of diverse social agents taking place in Van. As Paola Piscitelli emphasises, “getting in touch with the widest possible number of subjects playing different roles [in a superdiverse migration context] was crucial to unravel the intricate ramifications of the assemblage that they form”.³³⁶

Before heading from Ankara to Van, I conducted desktop research to identify different social agents active in the making and re-making of this city in the context

³³⁵ My notebooks were the sincere accompany of especially this cycle where I inserted each new information I received about the city at each little moments of enlightenment and also my personal observations.

³³⁶ Paola Piscitelli, *Mobile Urbanity: Translocal Traders and City in Southern Africa* (Roma and Milano: Planum Publisher, 2018), p. XV <<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1850gxd>>. (emphasis by the author)

of migration, thus, the people and institutions that could be participants of my fieldwork. While doing so, I referred to four means of source in reaching out to the participants of the fieldwork. Online engine search for especially finding out NGOs and local authorities, online call for support in the Facebook Group called *Göç Araştırmacıları Platformu* [The Platform of Migration Researchers]³³⁷, online call for support via Instagram stories³³⁸ and directly contacting relevant people from my social circles. The last two then turned into a ‘snowball sampling’, a method of identifying and selecting participants for research based on referrals from people who are initial participants and/or so-called gate-openers. This method also helped me co-build the ‘fieldwork ecosystem’ (Figure 3-11).

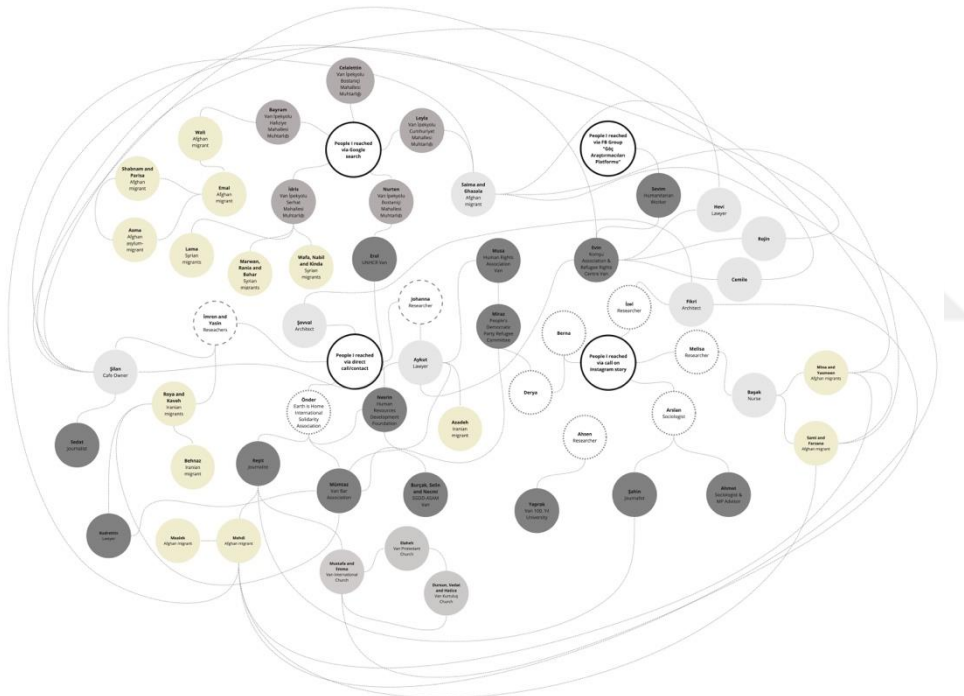


Figure 3-11 The fieldwork ecosystem.

Subsequently, snowball sampling brought the identification of the first local contacts in Van. Those were the people from NGOs or other civic and political organisations whom I contacted within the first days of the second cycle of the fieldwork. The snowball sampling grew more after those encounters, with the new suggestions about

³³⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1714193008816225/>.

³³⁸ I posted those Instagram stories on August 4th, 2021.

other social agents such as representatives of local authorities and other civic organisations, journalists, and migrants living in the city.

During the first days of this cycle, my initial research strategy was to walk as much as I could. In that sense, walking appeared as an ethnographic tool to investigate the making and taking place in the city. It was, therefore, “fieldwork on the foot,” as coined by Jo Lee and Tim Ingold. For them, walking neither only “yields an experience of embodiment” nor is it only “a technique of participation”. In addition to both, “the ethnographer’s pedestrian movements and those of the people she or he is with are grounded in shared circumstances”.³³⁹ Different rhythms, styles and routes of walking cultivate different spatial meanings and experiences.³⁴⁰ For my research, walking corresponds to two socio-spatial connotations.

The first is about ‘getting to know’ the city, not through the mind, but through the body. Therefore, before using it as a research technique to collect more data about the city, as architects usually do as part of our site visits and analysis, I walked to ‘ground’ my body or, in Amanda Coffey’s terms, “locating the self”³⁴¹ in the spaces of Van, to “know through the body”³⁴², so that I became more open to new encounters and what field offered to me. For that, during the initial days of this cycle, I walked without having any targets and basically strolled around the city centre. The second connotation was about trans-scalar spatial embodiment. During the course of the fieldwork, I realised that bodies, as mobile archives, carry not only memories, knowledge, or feelings but also the ‘scales’ of those with them. In my first days in Van, I felt the need to ‘re-scaling’ my everyday patterns, embodying the scale of the city while still knowing the one I am familiar with from Ankara (Figure 3-12).

³³⁹ Jo Lee and Tim Ingold, ‘Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing’, in *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology*, ed. by Simon Coleman and Peter Collins (Oxon and New York: Berg, 2006), p. 67 <<https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474214148>>.

³⁴⁰ Biehl, ‘Dwelling Encounters: Migration, Diversity and Ambivalence in an Istanbul Neighbourhood’, p. 25.

³⁴¹ Amanda Coffey, *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1999) <<https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857020048>>.

³⁴² Mark Johnson, ‘Knowing through the Body’, *Philosophical Psychology*, 4.1 (1991), 3–18 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089108573009>>.

Walking, in that sense, facilitated my bodily adaptation to the urban landscapes of Van.



Figure 3-12 Researcher's embodied scale between Ankara and Van. A collage by the author, with exports from Google Earth.

The following research strategy in the field was to initially meet the representatives of related NGOs and other civic and political organisations to explore the migration context in the city. For that, I met humanitarian workers, social workers, lawyers, journalists and activists from the Human Rights Association, Association for Solidarity with Asylum-Seekers and Migrants, Human Resource Development Foundation, Komşu Association, People's Democracy Party Refugee Commission and Van Bar Association Migration and Asylum Commission. In that context, throughout all cycles of the fieldwork, I interviewed 10 people over 8 meetings where I followed semi-structured in-depth interviews except for one focus group interview with three humanitarian workers, a group consisting of two women and a man. All of the interviews in this part took between 45 and 75 minutes and took place in the offices of each organisation. The socio-cultural background of those participants was there. In addition to age, gender, and occupation, most of them, being so-called 'locals' of the city, had a forced displacement history in their families. In addition, some of the interviewees introduced me to the transnational migrants; thus, they played a gate-opener role as well.

One of the key moments of this cycle was when I decided to meet *muhtars*. Following a random call to İrfan, the *muhtar* of Serhat Neighbourhood, where I was informed that it had hosted Afghan and Syrian migrants, I easily arranged the interview for the following day. The neighbourhood was on the other side of Mount Ereğ Avenue, as expected, with a view of the mount from its streets. The streets were

narrow, defined by one or two-storey detached family houses with large gardens. When I met İrfan in *muhtarlık* (mukhtar's office), he was having constant calls from his neighbours and also from the municipality about the ongoing urban transformation around the neighbourhood. The next 'mega' project of the municipality was about re-structuring the northern façade of Mount Erek Avenue to demolish the one or two-storey houses and build multi-storey and multi-function buildings along the avenue. Yet, İrfan told me that his neighbourhood was among the few that still kept the 'rural' characteristic, which he was so fine about. He helped me a lot in meeting with Afghan and Syrian migrants who have been living in the Serhat Neighbourhood for at least seven years back then. He accompanied me to their houses and facilitated the first conversations with them. In the end, I met three families who fled from Aleppo to Van. After this encounter with *muhtar* İrfan, I started reaching out to other relevant *muhtars* in the city centre. Within this cycle of fieldwork, I managed to contact Lale, the *muhtar* of the Cumhuriyet Neighbourhood, who introduced me to an Afghan family.

During this cycle, with the referral of locals, representatives of NGOs, *muhtars* and migrants, I met 8 migrants from Afghanistan, 7 migrants from Syria and 3 migrants from Iran over 9 interviews, including semi-structured in-depth, dyadic and focus group interviews.³⁴³ All of the interviews in this part took between 30 to 75 minutes. The reason behind conducting different types of interviews was not my preference but what the temporal context offered. As for most of the interviews, I was invited to the domestic space; I had to follow the in-house rules so as not to cause any inconvenience or to make any member of the family feel uncomfortable. When adding the COVID-19 pandemic measures into the context, I was utmost careful in showing my presence at their homes. Therefore, I left them the decision to participate in the interview as a whole family with few members or only with a single representative. Being a woman, in that sense, made accessing them and conducting an interview in their own personal space easier. They all volunteered to join, and except for two families, all others allowed me to audio record the interview.

³⁴³ All of the transnational migrants I interviewed were registered to the PMM.

For days, the news has been covering the illegal crossing of male migrants from Afghanistan through the Van border. I also observed that hate speech on social media is increasing. Most recently, yesterday, I heard about the incidents in the neighbourhood where Syrians live in Altındağ, Ankara. These days, when the agenda on migration and the border is so intense, my family and friends are curiously asking about the situation in Van. Daily life here continues as usual. According to the interviewees, migrants do not want to be visible in public spaces these days. The reason is the measures taken by the security forces. Although the situation is not so critical for registered migrants, undocumented migrants are either sent to removal centres or deported as soon as they are caught due to the increased security measures in recent days. However, socially, there is no tension or aggression in the local community. (August 11th, 2021)

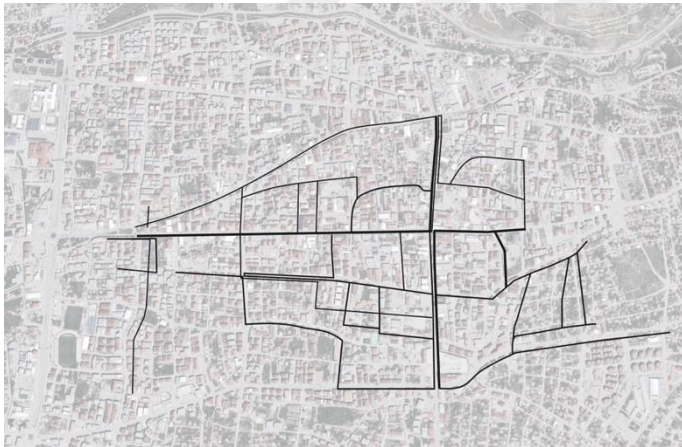


Figure 3-13 Map the walk! This autoethnographic map shows to what spatial extent my body was present while walking in the city centre of Van during the second cycle of the fieldwork.

New possibilities are emerging in the field. Interviews and witnesses that were never planned can be so influential that they can change the trajectory of the research. This excites me as it reveals various relatively tacit stories in this city. (March 23th, 2022)



Figure 3-14 Fieldwork, cycle 3, March 2022. A collage by the author, with the photographs from the fieldwork.

In the third cycle of the fieldwork, I was a witness in Van. The temporality of the fieldwork was purposeful. Many of the people I interviewed in the previous sections of the fieldwork repeatedly mentioned how Van was crowded by both the Iranian and Kurdish communities during *Newroz*. Thus, I did not want to miss this opportunity to experience the city when it is full of occasions connected to *Newroz*. In line with that, my research strategy during that cycle was not focused on interviews but more on participatory observation of the urban life in the city when its ordinary rhythm is socio-culturally interrupted.

It was March, and the cold was hitting Van. On the day of *Newroz*, it was slowly snowing. The Atatürk Park near the Fortress was hosting the *Newroz* gathering of Kurds. Since the park was located on the west side of İpekyolu Street, the celebrations of *Newroz* could not be felt in the new centre of the city. Maybe one could see the call for the event on some billboards. On the other hand, in the city centre, Iranian visitors (or as I will call them in Chapter 5, ‘recreational migrants’) were enjoying the Shopping Fest. The three weeks connected to *Newroz* is the most favourable period of the year for tradespeople in Van. As that time of the year is an official holiday in Iran, thousands of people of Iran visit the city. The density of these visits has been so intense that before the COVID-19 outbreak, the hotels in the city had become inadequate in meeting the accommodation demands. I was even told that many Iranian visitors stayed in parks, and some were invited to the homes of local

people after the call of the governor. That was not the case when I was there in March 2022, yet the visibility of Iranians was still high, particularly in shops on the streets or in shopping centres. I was once again surprised at the crowdedness of this city, even in such cold weather. Maraş Avenue and Cumhuriyet Avenue were full of people.

This part was not all about *Newroz* and connected occasions but also about unexpected encounters. In the previous cycle of the fieldwork, some of the interviewees mentioned the existence of a Christian Protestant community in Van. However, I was so focused on meeting the migrants, locals, and officers of governmental and civic organisations that I could not make any effort to visit churches. As I did not plan any interviews for this cycle, I felt it was convenient to discover this aspect of the urban culture of the city. During these visits, I co-facilitated the conversations with Johanna Ollier, a PhD candidate at the School of Political Studies at the University of Grenoble Alpes whose research is also settled in the borderscapes of Van.



Figure 3-15 Van Protestant Church, with Newroz altar on the right. A collage by the author, with the photographs captured in March 2022.

Our first stop in that sense was Van International Church, located at the centre of the city close to Maraş Avenue, where we met the Pasteur, the church officer (also his wife) and Pasteur's assistant. Mustafa, the Pasteur from Van, told us that together with Emma, the church officer from South Korea, that they established the church in 2016 and built the facility in 2019. When we asked him about the church community, he said there are around 200 people participating in the service, which is held in Farsi and Turkish. Regarding the national profile of the community, he mentioned that almost 80% of them are people who had to flee from Iran, and the rest are from the

locals of Van. Although the church communities were not the primary socio-spatial source for this research, I found it so relevant in creating ‘microcultures’ where difference utmost occurs, as emphasised by Ash Amin.

So, when Emma told us that there are two more Christian Protestant churches in the city, I wanted to visit them both. Subsequently, we visited the Church of Van, run by Iranian migrants, located close to the intersection of İki Nisan Boulevard and Cumhuriyet Avenue. Unlike the new multi-storey block-type facility of the Van International Church, the building of the Church of Van was an old one of two storeys made of stone (Figure 3-15). There, we had a chance to talk with Elaheh, the assistant (and son) of the Pasteur. He told us that the church was founded as a result of the collective request of Iranian asylum-seekers in Van who had to flee from Iran when the Christian community in the country got caught, and their rituals were prohibited. Therefore, most of the members of the community are Iranians, but Elaheh mentioned a few Afghan, Kurd and Turkish people who joined their service.

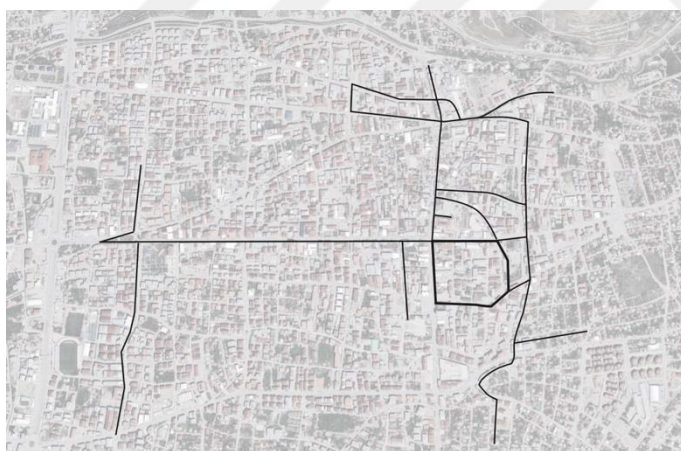


Figure 3-16 Map the walk! This autoethnographic map shows to what spatial extent my body was present while walking in the city centre of Van during the second cycle of the fieldwork.

In the final phase of my fieldwork, I'm now enjoying the pleasure of walking from one place to another without using a map. I even recently gave directions to someone. I have my favourite café, lokantas with food I like, and an increasing number of familiar faces. Knowing this city's

story, along with the stories of those who inhabit it, is bringing me closer to understanding Van.
(May 17th, 2022)

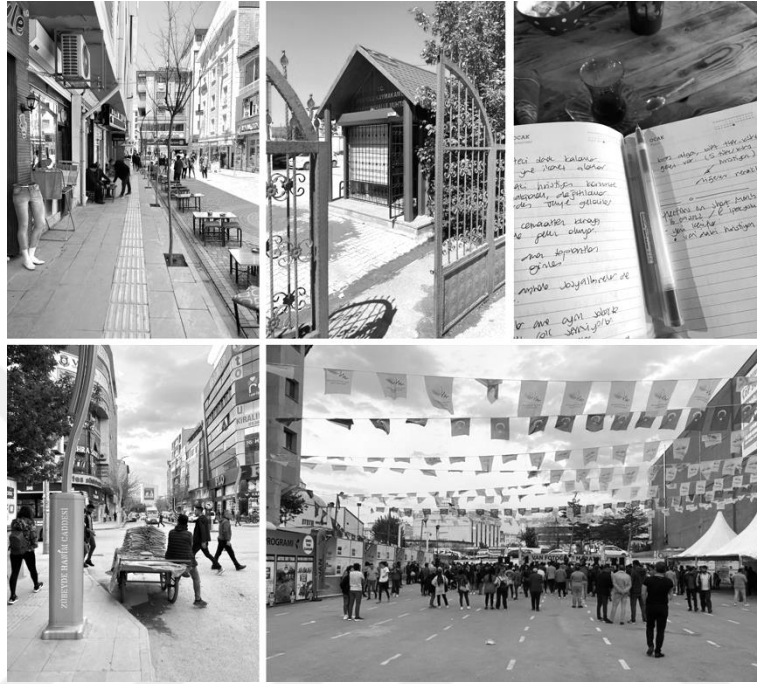


Figure 3-17 Fieldwork, cycle 4, May 2022. A collage by the author, with the photographs from the fieldwork.

In the fourth and last cycle of the fieldwork, I was a temporary dweller in Van. It was already two years that I had engaged with this city so closely. With several ups and downs throughout the entire fieldwork, I was close to what I was looking for in this city. In search of the socio-spatial traces of superdiversity in the city, my strategy was to meet as many of the migrants as I could within the limits of my fieldwork. Therefore, I again referred to *muhtars* who could guide me to reach migrants inhabiting their neighbourhood. First, I met Cemal, the *muhtar* of Bostaniçi Neighbourhood, which was established following the mass influx of Kurdish internally displaced people to the Van city centre. Cemal himself has the migration history in his biography, as does almost every person I met in this city. Although his narrative was so helpful for me in understanding the dynamics of making the city when it was expanding in population in the 1990s, as he stated that there is no

remarkable number of transnational migrants living in Bostaniçi, I turned my focus again to more central neighbourhoods.

This was how I met Baki, the *muhtar* of Hafiziye Neighbourhood attached to both Maraş Avenue and İki Nisan Boulevard. His story was highly inspirational for me, starting from how and why they migrated to Van city centre from Gürpınar to his previous professional life in close contact with the UNHCR and, therefore, asylum-seekers on the one hand and with tourism and border trade on the other and finally to his current work as a *muhtar* enabling him knowing all the transnational migrants in his neighbourhood. As other *muhtars* did, he introduced me to migrants in Hafiziye. He was Wali, a migrant from Afghanistan who then introduced me to other migrants from his country. With that and other encounters in this phase of the fieldwork, I interviewed 5 migrants from Afghanistan and a migrant from Iran, and each interview took around 40-60 minutes.

In addition to those semi-structured interviews, together with Johanna, we visited the third church of the city, Van Kurtuluş Church. There, we met the Pasteur, Vedat, the church officer (and Pasteur's wife), Hatice and Dursun, the assistant of the Pasteur. The church is located near Beşyol, in a single flat of an old apartment building, and it was founded in 2011. Dursun's family migrated from Iran to Van in 1917 because of the political regime, and Vedat and Hatice's personal biographies were connected to internal displacement. Unlike the other two churches, Van Kurtuluş Church only served in Turkish as the community consisted of so-called locals of the city, including people of Turkish and Kurdish origin. These unexpected, and in a way strange, encounters with the authorities of three Protestant churches in the city showed me how 'spaces of the other' exist in the city and how they are all connected to migration, displacement, and, in turn, 'difference'.

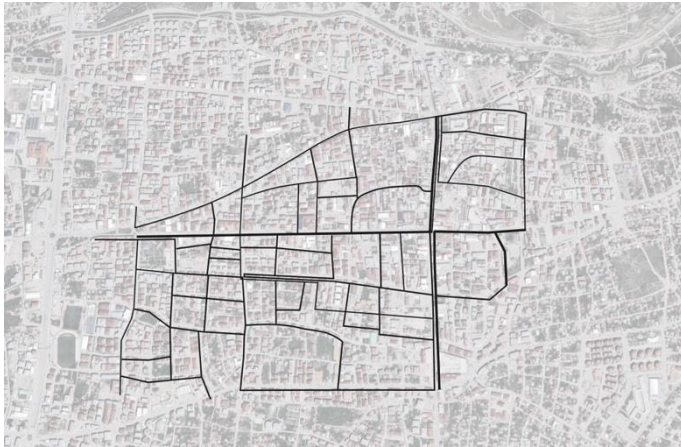


Figure 3-18 Map the walk! This autoethnographic map shows to what spatial extent my body was present while walking in the city centre of Van during the second cycle of the fieldwork.

3.1 Epilogue: In between the ‘field’ and the ‘body’

The construction and production of self and identity occurs both during and after fieldwork. In writing, remembering and representing our fieldwork experiences, we are involved in processes of self presentation and identity construction. In considering and exploring the intimate relations between the field, significant others and the private self we are able to understand the processes of fieldwork as practical, intellectual and emotional accomplishments.³⁴⁴

It is the tectonics of fieldwork that the researcher finds the meaning, loses it, and finds it again in other sources of knowledge. Indeed, fieldwork is “a personal, emotional and identity work”³⁴⁵. I further this that it is as well a cross-scalar work, where the knowledge is co-produced while the researcher is locating her/himself in the field while locating the field itself, most of the time in a context that she/he is stranger to. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, fieldwork is about the constant exchange between learning and unlearning, and now, after mapping the urban ethnography in Van, I would add that it is also an exchange among different scales of operation of the urban and of the body. My underlining argument here is that the field of urban ethnography could be co-constructed within the visible, invisible and hidden borders of the bodyscapes, not only of the researcher but also

³⁴⁴ Coffey, p. 1.

³⁴⁵ Coffey, p. 1.

of all the bodies that participate in the research through different levels of engagement.

Based on the anthropological tradition of inhabiting and writing about the fieldwork, I used ethnographic methods to build an urban ethnography in a contested urban landscape shaped by migrations and displacement. This covered several types of interviews, including more structured ones and absolutely informal talks. I deliberately avoided applying specific categorisations for the interviewees according to different ‘groups’ of participants or, in other words, standardising the interviewees. Rather, I followed several socio-spatial criteria, such as the rhythm of the moment, the flow of the talk, the degree of immediate connection built between me and the interviewee(s) and the spatial setting of the interview. In that way, I trusted the bodily relations co-created at that time and space.

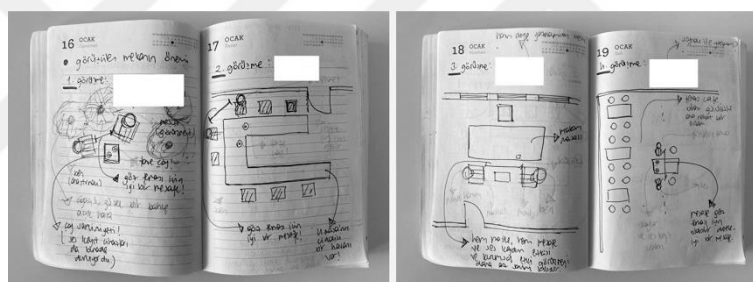


Figure 3-19 The spatiality of the interviews. *Zooming into the researcher's body of work, August 2021.*

The fieldwork in Van cherished different voices appearing or disappearing in the city, which highly affected my changing and reflective positionality in the field; ‘objective and subjective’ or ‘distant and intimate’. This allowed writing the field as a ‘critical spatial practice’; active writing “that constructs as well as traces the sites of the relation between critic and work³⁴⁶. The focus on the preposition here enabled a connection to be made between the positional and the relational. Inspired by this idea of writing as a critical spatial practice, not only the writing of the ‘field’ but also fielding as a critical spatial practice was based on “a way of interacting with

³⁴⁶ Rendell and others, p. 151.

...people, time, place and circumstance”³⁴⁷. While doing so, I benefitted from feminist research, which urged me to be open to and refer to different knowledge that exists in the diverse urban landscape of Van. This is why I traced the existence of different social agents in the city, whose story would make the ‘collective urban narrative’ of Van more diverse in the context of migration.



³⁴⁷ Jérémie Michael Gowan, ‘Field/Work Practice: Introduction’, in *Architecture and Field/Work*, ed. by Suzanne Ewing and others (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 8.

CHAPTER 4

VAN ACROSS DIVERSE MIGRATIONS AND NARRATIVES

Van in this world, paradise in the next.³⁴⁸



Figure 4-1 Springing Van. Photograph by the author, captured in May 2022.

Van surprises me more and more at each turn I attempt to understand its socio-cultural diversity. As an urban researcher curious about how cities are affected by hosting various fluxes of human populations, I am deeply impressed with the constant mobilities over time, to, from and through Van. This continuous movement brings a palpable change in the urban characteristics of the city through plentiful arrivals and departures. Among numerous wars and conflicts it has hosted, Van is a city of diverse mobilities of diverse groups, being a site of both internally and internationally displaced populations since antiquity. This has attributed multiple meanings to the city, marked with changing feelings and emotions.

Anahide Ter Minassian, a French historian of Armenian origin, stated, “Only a few cities have a history as rich and ancient as that of Van. At the turn of the twentieth

³⁴⁸ The legendary beauty of the basin of Van has inspired a famous Armenian saying: “Van in This World; Paradise in the Next.”

century, Van, by its cumulative history, was a city of memory”.³⁴⁹ Although today we cannot experience that city referred to as the site of rich memories and identities which had represented themselves explicitly through various elements of urban landscapes such as public and civic buildings, structures, open spaces, gardens, water channels, etc., it is still necessary to deepen in the such history of richness to be able to start thinking about what Van tells us today.

Until its demolishment in 1915, the ‘old Van’ was probably one of the most attractive cities of the East, being dear to various civilisations in the course of the time. Established at a strategically important location between Anatolia and the Middle East and settled in a fertile basin hosting vast lands surrounded by high mountains and plateaus and fed by rivers and springs, Van has always been under the spotlight of different empires and states as part of the power struggles in the region. Here, we should add Van Lake, the largest lake in Turkey, and the mild climate it provides as one of the primary reasons why Van has been preferred as a settlement area throughout history.

Van has been a city of 'transition' since the early periods of its history, hosting migration-driven population changes many times. The gorgeous landscapes of the city were (and are still for some of them) home to people of diverse cultures, including Armenians, Azeris, Chaldeans, Circassians, Jews, Kurds, Lazs, Nestorians, Persians, Romas, Turks (including Seljukids and Ottomans), Uzbeks and Yezidis. Many of these people were forced to move either from or to Van mainly due to wars, and the resulted changes in the power dynamics in the region until the early 20th century and afterwards due to nation-state-oriented resettlement policies as part of the Turkification project of the modern government and also the evacuation of Kurdish villages in the 1980s. These forced mobilities and their socio-spatial reflections in the history of Van are shortly re-read and mapped throughout this chapter.

³⁴⁹ Anahide Ter Minassian, ‘The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, in *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan*, ed. by Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2000), p. 172.

After all, the modern Van today is located on the eastern border of Turkey, with neighbouring towns and villages of Iran. In addition to that, Van occupies a critical geopolitical position in the region, located 80 km west of Iran, 130 km north of Iraq and 170 km northeast of Syria. The borderline between Van and Iran is 454 km, accommodating rough landscapes with mountains. Yet there are also locations where the border passes through river valleys and plains in the east-west direction. These particular locations, being natural passages, allow for Turkey's most important border gates to open to the East.³⁵⁰ Beyond functioning as official border gates, such natural passages have also been the entry locations for many refugees from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Syria, Somalia, and Georgia for decades.³⁵¹ Considering this diversity and even more due to not only transnational migrations mentioned above but also the internal ones, Van is a “superdiverse” city with a great variety of social experiences and practices of both migrant and non-migrant groups.³⁵²

The modern Van as a superdiverse city will be conceptualised throughout the next chapters. Nevertheless, it is necessary to elaborate here on the ‘temporality’ of superdiversity, implying multiple pasts and futures of the urban landscapes and bodyscapes while understanding today’s Van.³⁵³ With various arrivals to and departures from the city, Van has been as such from antiquity, or in other words, ‘a city of memory’ with a truly rich history. I, therefore, argue that the history of Van should be read and grasped beyond merely providing a necessary background knowledge of the context. It should rather be re-read by critically displaying the manifold mobilities over the layered history of the city and their socio-spatial reflections that evoke multiple memories.

³⁵⁰ Orhan Deniz and Ali Fuat Doğu, ‘Türkiye-İran Sınırı: Sınırın Coğrafi Durumu ve Sınır Köylerimizin Sosyo-Ekonomik Yapıları’, *Doğu Coğrafya Dergisi*, 13.19 (2011), 49–72 (p. 52).

³⁵¹ Ateş, ‘The Spatial Language of Migration: Too Many Titles, How Many Appearances?’

³⁵² Steven Vertovec, ‘Introduction: New Directions in the Anthropology of Migration and Multiculturalism’, in *Anthropology of Migration and Multiculturalism*, ed. by Steven Vertovec (New York: Routledge, 2010) <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315875972>>.

³⁵³ Biehl, ‘Dwelling Encounters: Migration, Diversity and Ambivalence in an Istanbul Neighbourhood’; Biehl, ‘A Dwelling Lens: Migration, Diversity and Boundary-Making in an Istanbul Neighbourhood’.



Figure 4-2 From the Rock to the Ereğ. Photograph by the author, captured in August 2021.

Throughout this chapter, I intend to narrate the history of the city of Van by investigating diverse migrations and displacements from antiquity to the Middle Ages and particularly to the modern era. I aim to trace the processual urban change in old Van and its dynamics to interpret its current state carefully. In doing so, I applied a multifaceted approach as informed by the relational set of the thesis. While writing this chapter, I referred to various literature and archives, which allowed me to build an overarching conceptualisation in understanding the diversity of Van. This endeavour included analysis of the literature and archives by Turkish and Kurdish sources as well as Armenian ones, which are indeed considerably successful in documenting life in old Van through photos, gravures, maps, texts, and memoirs.³⁵⁴ This noteworthy archiving effort is most probably an unconditioned consequence of maintaining a longing life from the diaspora, acknowledgement of which within this thesis is crucial for recalling the decolonial positioning adopted throughout the research. In the light of such archives, I try to map Van's urban history by including the diverse voices of many others.

³⁵⁴ Among those archives, the most referred are: Houshamadyan, houshamadyan.org; Project Save, projectsave.org and Ovenk, ovenk.org. There are also considerable number of social media accounts that regularly share old photos, gravures, maps, postcards, journal covers from old Van (e.g. @eski_vann, twitter.com/eski_vann; ESKİ resimlerle VAN, www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100048841856401; Arevmedyan Hayastan 2, https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100070882851588). See "References" for the full list of archival sources.

The chapter also welcomes information on the current state of the city, including some necessary analysis of its socio-demographic structure, urban macro form and urbanisation dynamics. The current land-use maps and official statistical data obtained from related governmental bodies highly informed the writing of this chapter. For this part, I also superimposed urban spatial information by using several archival sources and satellite maps to track the urban transformation of Van in decades, even in centuries. This deepened my attempt at ‘reading the context’ by adding a spatial layer to it, facilitating the possible reader graphically to better envision Van as a ‘city of memory’. Maps in this context go beyond their common counterparts and accommodate new meanings by representing more than the geographical and topological qualities of an earth piece, indeed by exhibiting “layered histories”³⁵⁵ deeply affected by the mobility of human populations.

4.1 Striking topographies

I would stand on top of a cliff with my back to the Varak and would watch the gigantic panorama: the western side. From the right the horizon is divided by the St. Krikor church and towards the west the caravans of the Agrbi hills with their bride and groom peaks reaching the seaside. From the left side, the Shoushantsi Mountains and the St. Khach (cross) hills separated from the Shoushantsi Mountains by a small valley, also touching the sea side. This sight comprised a large arch encompassing not only the field but also the Aykesdan of Van which from afar looked like a monotonous giant emerald. Through the green and the mirror-like blue of the sea emerged the historical fortress of Van. To the west was the wide lake with its four islands and the surrounding mountains; the southern mountain range with its evergreen forests and Artos and Arnos peaks, almost always cover in snow; and the north-eastern side with the majestic Sipan with its white peak, enveloped in clouds. To the west of the lake the misty Nemrut and Grgur were barely outlined, whose detailed and enchanting description is passed to us through Srvantsdiant’s work.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Within her doctoral research, Kristen Sarah Biehl interprets the urban change in Kumkapı through examining temporalities of migration. There she takes into account multiple pasts and futures, or in other words “layered histories” in understanding what happens to dwellings in urban spaces highly affected by migration driven population changes. Biehl, ‘Dwelling Encounters: Migration, Diversity and Ambivalence in an Istanbul Neighbourhood’, pp. 44–63.

³⁵⁶ Yeramian Hampartsum, *Monument* (Alexandria, 1929), p. 12, as cited in Tork Dalalyan, ‘Kaza of Van-Geography’, 2012 <<https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-van/kaza-of-van/locale/geography.html>> [accessed 4 December 2022].



Figure 4-3 A panorama of Van in the 19th century. The gravure can be found in the travel accounts of Henry Binder, dated 1887.

The words quoted above belong to a five-year-old. To Hampartsum Yeramian, one of the old-time inhabitants of Van. He lost his sight when he was eleven, yet his early childhood memory of the “fairy tale” topography of Van was still vivid while he was writing the first volume of his monograph, *Monument*.³⁵⁷ He recalled his visual memories with the imageries from Van’s urban landscapes accorded with its impressive nature. There topography unlocks ‘transits of memory’, enlivening moments subject to those memories as far as the body in presence allows for it, reproducing the spaces in which those memories took place, hence enabling re-attachment to the place again and again.

Memory is not the true record of past events but a kind of text which is worked upon in the creation of meaning. Identities are continually crafted and recrafted out of our memory, rather than being fixed by ‘real’ course of past events.³⁵⁸

My reading of the history of Van convinced me that reviewing the topographic values of this city is crucial in understanding its history and, therefore, its processual urban change. As art historian Jale Erzen argues, it is insufficient, yet impossible, to think of Van merely within its urban borders.³⁵⁹ Van finds its unique personality in its topography with the enviable composition of the silhouette of its mountains; vast plains blanketed with clouds, water resources underneath and damp breezes that

³⁵⁷ Dalalyan.

³⁵⁸ Julian Thomas, *Time, Culture and Identity: An Interpretive Archaeology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

³⁵⁹ Jale Erzen, ‘Van: Mimari, Kültür, Doğa’, *Mimarlık*, 317, 2004 <<http://www.mimarlikdergisi.com/index.cfm?sayfa=mimarlik&DergiSayi=29&RecID=434#>>.

gently caress your skin.³⁶⁰ For Van, much more than any other ordinary city, topography means more than what it conventionally signifies.

Here, I would intentionally refer to a ‘topographical’ review by articulating the ‘topography’ beyond its conventional usage, which considers it to be physical land only. I agree with the understanding that reads topography as relational, offering possibilities for integrated diversity.³⁶¹ As David Leatherbarrow elaborates in *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture*, despite being certainly physical, topography represents multiple and diverse performances of everyday life, displaying enactments of the past, but also the ones still occurring and may ravel out in the future.³⁶² Therefore, my argument includes a topographical review of memories as well, as topography contains bits of the past based on activities in everyday life.

Thus, here I suggest a brief topographical review of Van, marking its capacity for the “temporal unfolding”³⁶³ of past and present. My intention at that point is to expand the topographical reading of Van from listing the physical elements of its unique geography or “introducing to the reader the region”.³⁶⁴ It is, on the other hand, much more about “raising significance through topography” and ensuring that it is reciprocated by the reader. With this, I wish the reader to embody her/his reading throughout this text and connect with the context.

³⁶⁰ Erzen.

³⁶¹ David Leatherbarrow, *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 12.

³⁶² Leatherbarrow, *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture*, p. 13.

³⁶³ Leatherbarrow, *Topographical Stories: Studies in Landscape and Architecture*, p. 13.

³⁶⁴ Mkrtitch Khrimian (1820-1907), an Armenian priest from Van and editor of the monthly periodical *Artzvi Vaspurakan*, developed the idea of raising significance of Armenia through topography, by “reactivation of an inherited past”. Khrimian’s essential idea thus is not to introduce the region to reader, but to redirect attention and discuss the future of it “through the memory of a past reconstructed with the aid of visual sites from the present”. In doing so, he pictured Armenia as ancient, holy, and fertile, while revitalising its sites of memory. Dzovinar Derderian, ‘Mapping the Fatherland: Artzvi Vaspurakan’s Reforms through the Memory of the Past’, 2014 <<https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-van/kaza-of-van/miscellaneous-articles.html>> [accessed 10 December 2022].

On top of that, as I mentioned earlier, enabling a “temporal unfolding” is essential in exhibiting multiple pasts and futures of Van to x-ray the layered histories of it fully and thus to be able to understand what has happened/is happening in this city as a result of migration driven population changes. I believe that understanding and inscribing topography as such prepares us to explore the historical, socio-spatial and political aspects of the context more deeply, where the land meets the memory, in our case, in the city of Van. As Ludwig Wittgenstein puts it, as if to make philosophy, we should travel from one place to another while learning the topographical aspects of a city:

I am trying to conduct you on tours in a certain country. I will try to show that the philosophical difficulties . . . arise because we find ourselves in a strange town and do not know our way about. So we must learn the topography by going from one place in the town to another, and from there to another, and so on. And one must do this so often that one knows one’s way, either immediately or pretty soon after looking around a bit, wherever one may be set down.³⁶⁵

The philosophy of comprehending a city requires embodied learning, travelling from one side to the other, getting to know places of memories, meeting its people, and feeling its nature. The Armenian locals of Van honoured the legendary nature with widespread authentic proverbs, such as “Heaven in the sky, Van on earth”.³⁶⁶ This is because Van is distinctively characterised by its marvellous landscape³⁶⁷: a topography of snow-capped high mountains, rocky cliffs, Turkey’s largest, Van Lake (Figure 4-4) - or Van ‘See’ as locals call it-, abundant plains fed by rivers and diverse communities cultivating both highlands and lowlands by means of their traditional

³⁶⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Wittgenstein’s Lectures on the Philosophy of Mathematics* Cambridge 1939, ed. by Cora Diamond (Hassocks: Harvester, 1976), p. 44 as cited in J. E. Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 41.

³⁶⁶ Yeramian Hampartsum, *Monument*, Vol. A (Alexandria, 1929), p. 12 as cited in Dalalyan.

³⁶⁷ Here I use the term landscape ‘culturally’, referring to the concept called ‘cultural landscapes’ which does not distinct physical and environmental elements of a landscape from its cultural, social, and economic dimensions. In other words, it provides an understanding of landscape by taking the human activities into the account. As “we are concerned with the . . . interrelation of . . . cultures and site, as expressed in the various landscapes of the world.” For more information on this, see Carl O. Sauer, *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, ed. by John Lieghly (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969); William M. Denevan and Kent Mathewson, *Carl Sauer on Culture and Landscape* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009).

cultural practices including mobile pastoralism and traditional agriculture, as well as their religious, spiritual and cultural rituals.

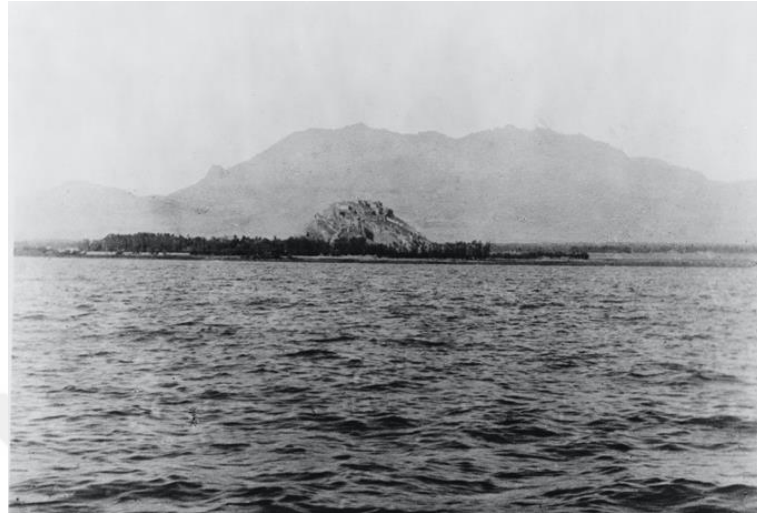


Figure 4-4 Van Lake and the Akdamar Island, 1923.³⁶⁸ Mount Ereğ is in the background.
Photograph by Vartan A. Hampikian.

And it is the distinct topography of Van in the region that has attracted mobility to and from the city throughout history. The words of Armenian-Egyptian architect and archaeologist Nairy Hampikian agree on how the unique topography of Van characterised its history:

[Van]... is a naturally fortified area. For this reason, it was chosen by the kings of Urartu as their central locus in the ninth century B.C. Since then, the area has been actively inhabited. As the heartland of Urartu, an integral territory of the Ervanduni, Artashesian, Arshakuni, and Artsruni Armenian kingdoms, and the battlefield for Urartian, Assyrian, Armenian, Roman, Sasanid, Arab, Byzantine, Seljuk, Mongol, Turkmen, Persian, and Ottoman armies, among others, the Vaspurakan region bears layers of memory, just as it bears geological layers of relief, a result of the ever-struggling tectonic plates, always moving, to rearrange the shape of this part of the earth.³⁶⁹ (emphasis by the author)

The mountains of Van surround the lake, and so does the city, like a natural amphitheatre, and that is the reason why it was preferred as a strategic location for

³⁶⁸ Vartan A. Hampikian, 'General View of Mount Varak, City and Fort of Van from Lake Van', 1923 <<https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3c30938/>> [accessed 11 December 2022].

³⁶⁹ Nairy Hampikian, 'The Architectural Heritage of Vaspurakan and the Preservation of Memory Layers', in *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan*, ed. by Richard G Hovannisian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2000), p. 87.

many empires in history. Indeed, the city is enveloped by mountains from all directions: From the north by the slopes of Mount Süphan - the second-highest volcano in Turkey; from the west by Nemrut Crater; from the east, Mount Ereğ (Figure 4-5), the foothills of which touches Van city centre today and from the south by Mount Artos – a dormant volcano part of the Southeastern Taurus Mountains.



Figure 4-5 Mount Ereğ, 1901.³⁷⁰ A view from Toprakale. Photograph found in the travel accounts of H.F.B. Lynch, dated 1901.

Among these mountains, a few more words are due about Mount Ereğ, as one can easily feel its presence while walking on the streets of Van, giving vistas towards the east. In modern Van, the mount stands as a natural periphery, limiting the sprawl of the city to the eastern direction. The foothills of it today host neighbourhoods like Hacibekir (*Xaçort*), Karşıyaka, Yeni and Bostaniçi, established after the forced evacuation of Kurdish villages in the 1980s. However, until 1915, those skirts were home to Armenian peasants and pilgrims (Figure 4-6). Thus, with its physical appearance and its values and meanings, Mount Ereğ³⁷¹ has embodied symbolic importance, particularly for the Armenian diaspora. The mount accommodated several Armenian monasteries and churches, including Varakavank (*Yedi Kilise*), Upper Varak Monastery, Garmravor Holy Virgin Monastery (Figure 4-7) and Saint

³⁷⁰ H.F.B. Lynch, *Armenia: Travels and Studies* (London and New York: Longmans, Green, and co., 1901), II, p. 113.

³⁷¹ In Armenian literature, Mount Ereğ is called Mount Varak or Varag.

Krikor Monastery (Figure 4-8).³⁷² Among those, the topography of the Varakavank was marked as “a holy site revered and venerated by all of Vasbouragan – a stately site that captivated the spirit and the mind”³⁷³, while the site of Garmravor Holy Virgin Monastery was known for “the beautiful views it offered of Lake Van, Aykesdan, and the Sipan, Ardos, and Nemrut mountains”³⁷⁴.

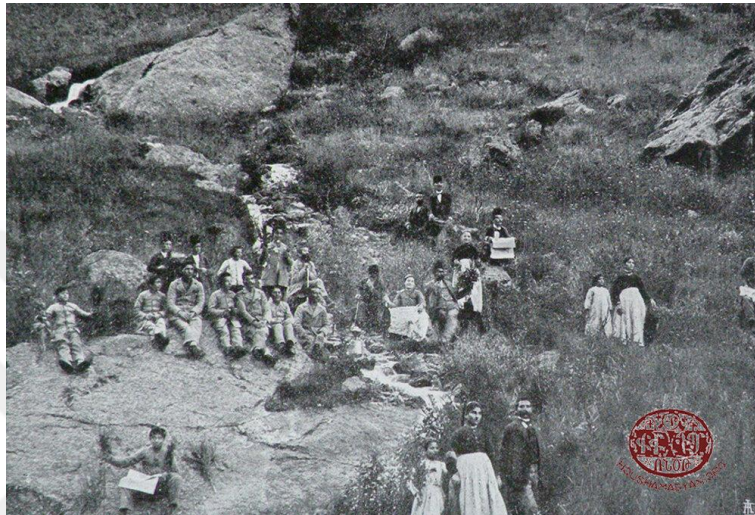


Figure 4-6 A group of pilgrims near the Varak Monastery, 1905.³⁷⁵ Photograph from ‘Keghuni’, an Armenian illustrated journal.

The natural setting of this majestic topography creates, on the one hand, a poetic, on the other hand, an epic atmosphere. Thus, the unique nature of Van impressed not only emperors but also many travellers, authors, and artists. Kevork Sherents, an Armenian intellectual and a native of Van, generously used his words to express his amazement by the charming topography felt from Garmravor Holy Virgin Monastery located on top of a small plateau on the flanks Mount Ereğ:

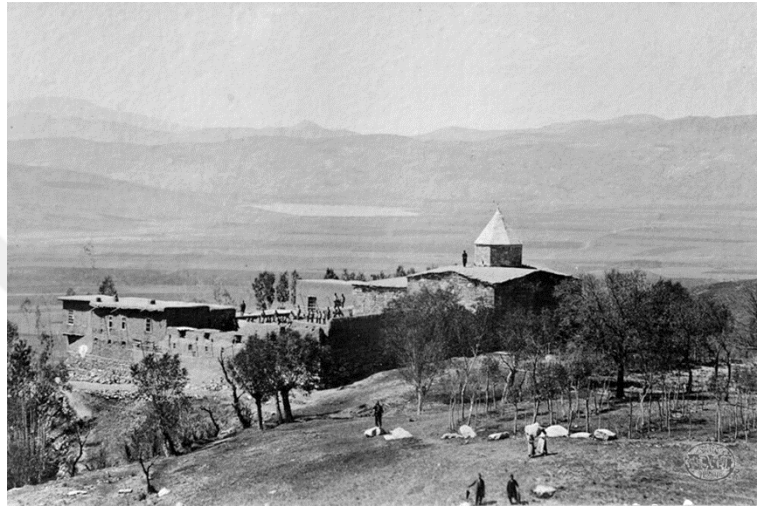
³⁷² Derderian.

³⁷³ Kevork Sherents, *Srpavayrer: Deghakroutyun Vasbouragani-Vana Nahanki Klkhavor Yegeghetsyats, Vanoreyits yev Ousoumnaranats* [Holy Sites: Geography of the Most Significant Churches, Monasteries, and Educational Institutions of Van-Vasbouragan] (Tbilisi, 1902), p. 59 as cited in Tatoyan, ‘Churches and Monasteries of Van-Dosb’.

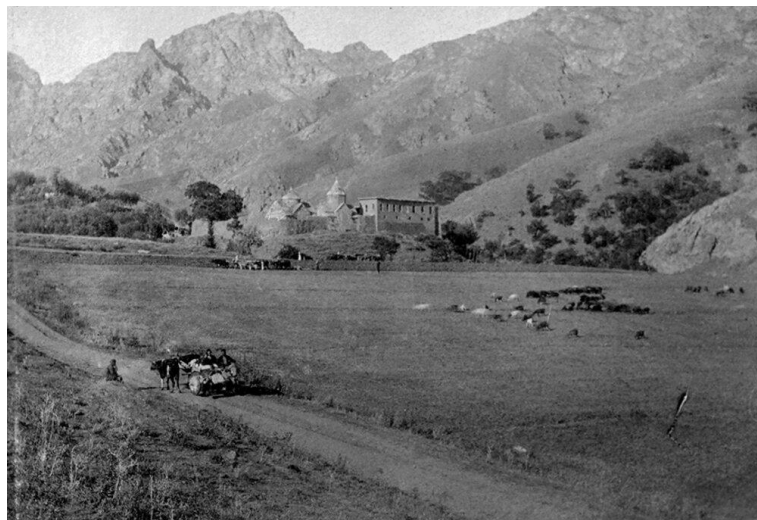
³⁷⁴ Yervand Lalayan, ‘Vasbouragan. Nshanavor Vanker’ [Vasbouragan. Renowned Monasteries] in *Azkakgragan Hantes* [Ethnographic Review] (Tbilisi, 1911), Book XXI, p. 59 as cited in Tatoyan, ‘Churches and Monasteries of Van-Dosb’.

³⁷⁵ The high-resolution version can be found in Robert Tatoyan, ‘Churches and Monasteries of Van-Dosb’, 2018 <<https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-van/kaza-of-van/religion/churches-and-monasteries-3.html>> [accessed 11 December 2022].

To the east, sloping down at a terrifying angle, spread the perennially verdant and green meadows of the giant Tsiatrnous Mountain (part of the Varak Mountain), dotted with colourful flowers. To the north, south, and west, the view stretched to great distances, all the way to the boundless horizons surrounding the Lake of Van on three sides. A single glance in that direction is sufficient to spot the districts and their notable villages that lie to the west, in the vast valley of Van and Aykesdan, which appears as an elegant queen in this vastness, a fort-city with its wide avenues.³⁷⁶



*Figure 4-7 Garmavor Holy Virgin Monastery.*³⁷⁷ Photograph from Bedros Yeghiayian collection.



*Figure 4-8 St Krikor Monastery.*³⁷⁸ Photograph from Bedros Yeghiayian collection.

³⁷⁶ Sherents, p. 50 as cited in Tatoyan, 'Churches and Monasteries of Van-Dosb'.

³⁷⁷ The high-resolution version can be found in Tatoyan, 'Churches and Monasteries of Van-Dosb'.

³⁷⁸ The high-resolution version can be found in Tatoyan, 'Churches and Monasteries of Van-Dosb'.

It was not only the mountains and highlands but also the limited area of lowlands which have characterised the topography of Van as distinct and unique (Figure 4-9). The abundant plains of Van, covering 15% of the total land area, offer perfect pastures for the livestock (cattle, sheep and goats) and crop yield (barley, wheat, rye, etc.).³⁷⁹ These plains, like any other land on the earth, are fed by rivers, streams and springs given birth by mountains and volcanos. Among them, the spring of water close to Gürpınar stemming from Mount Başet (part of the Artos Mountains) is of greater significance as it is the source of the historical Menua Canal (Figure 4-10), called today as ‘Şamram Kanalı’ (Semiramis Canal) or Şamiram Su (River of Semiramis), the most featured construction of the Urartian period.³⁸⁰

An almost 3000-year-old canal is still used today as an effective irrigation system for agricultural lands and also for domestic use. It carries fresh water for 50 kilometres from the Gürpınar plain to the Van plain (Figure 4-11). Thus, many settlements along the channel benefit from exuberant water, transforming their lands into orchards. For instance, Edremit, the closest town of Van to the city centre, today has one of the ‘greenest’ lands of Van, and they serve as recreational public spaces for weekend leisure use. The boundary of gardens in Edremit is defined by the direction of the Semiramis Canal.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ Richard Hewsén, ‘Van in This World, Paradise in the Next’, in *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan*, ed. by Richard G Hovannisian (Cos: Mazda Publishers, 2000), pp. 13–42 (p. 15).

³⁸⁰ Zeynep Timür and Şevket Alp, ‘Peyzaj Mimarlığı Açısından Tarihi Minua (Şamram) Sulama Kanalının Tahribat Nedenleri ve Çözüm Önerileri’, *Peyzaj Araştırmaları ve Uygulamaları Dergisi*, 3.1 (2021), 39–47; Yasemin Kuşlu and Üstün Şahin, ‘Water Structures in Anatolia from Past to Present’, *Journal of Applied Sciences Research*, 5.12 (2009), 2109–16.

³⁸¹ Ebru Akköprü, ‘Coğrafi Özellikleriyle Van’, in *Dünya’da Van: Nüfus, Etnisite, Tarih ve Toplum*, ed. by Ercan Çağlayan (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019), pp. 19–39 (p. 29).



Figure 4-9 A general view of Van.³⁸² The fertile agricultural lands of Van and Mount Ereğ (Varak in Armenian), located in the southeast of the city, can be seen.

The successful irrigation system in Van was determinative not only in the rural development but also in the shaping of the urban settlement areas. The steppe ecosystem of the city benefitted from the advanced irrigation system, and the result was a ‘garden city’ located a short distance from Van city centre. Until the beginning of the 20th century, the significant part of Van’s urban morphology was the gardens, assembled together in a garden district called ‘Aygestan’ (Figure 4-12, 4-13). Sirak Sarhadian, who spent his childhood in Aygestan, recalls his memories blended with the catchy topography of the district:

Our house was located in Kherani Street, Aygestan, Van’s most beautiful part, abounding in quarters extending on vast territories. Aygestan (In the Armenian language, Aygestan means ‘an area covered with gardens’ or ‘a city of gardens’.) was the characteristic name of that portion of the city since it was covered with endless gardens following each other...Our street began in famous Seghga Avenue, which connected Aygestan with Kaghakamej (fort). Two fast and rich springs ran in the middle of that avenue and at the beginning of our quarter: one of them named Sofi Keahriz (an underground canal) abounded in cold water resembling a stream; the other, known under the name of Mokhri Keahriz, was located at the other end of the street, sloping down towards the gorge called Hankusner. That spring, whose abundance of water made it look like a river, had wonderfully clear, cool and useful water.³⁸³

³⁸² Dalalyan.

³⁸³ Sirak Sarhadian, *My Memoirs* (Yerevan: Research on Armenian Architecture Center, 2005), p. 10.

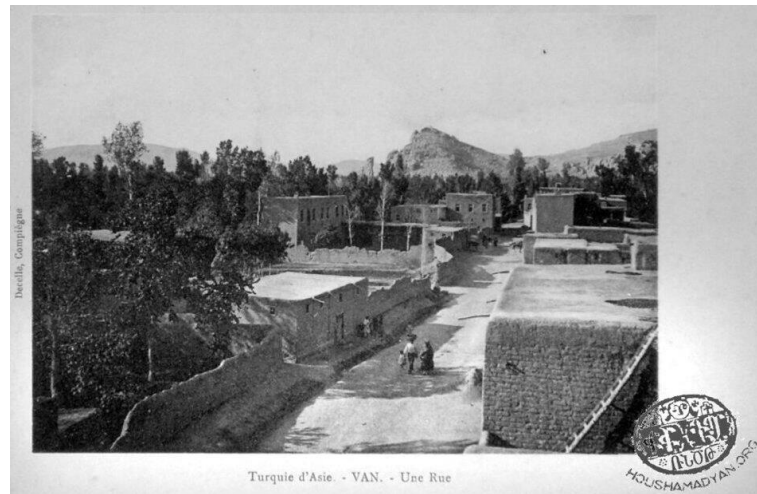


Figure 4-10 Aygestan (Vineyard) or the Garden District of Van until 1915.³⁸⁴ Photograph from Michel Paboudjian's collection.

As Minassian puts it, “Since antiquity, travellers and geographers have been struck by the uniqueness of the site of Van.”³⁸⁵ Amongst them, British traveller and businessperson H.F.B. Lynch, who arranged two excursions to Armenia, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia in 1893 and 1898, recorded his travel logs under two volumes of his famous book *Armenia: Travels and Studies*³⁸⁶. The second volume of this book is dedicated to Lynch’s travel accounts about Van, Bitlis, Muş and Erzurum. Lynch, in his writing, elaborated his narration about those cities by allowing for his sophisticated topographical observations about the geography, climate, people, traditions and politics. In one part, he poetically expressed how he was fascinated by the vivid lands of Van, which made him rank Van and its vicinity as one of the most beautiful natural places in the world:

Not less eloquent an illustration of the decay of the Ottoman Empire was the landscape through which we passed. Mile after mile, the eye ranged across the floor of the alluvial plain to the lower slopes of the great volcano which, with the hills circling towards them, compose a basin like area of vast extent. The fertile soil lies idle, as though the waters had lately receded in the distance some goats and cattle browsed the burnt and scanty grass. Nature alone has made the most of exceptional opportunities and Sipan, with this plain on one flank and the lake of Van upon the other, is worthy to rank among the most beautiful objects in the natural world.

³⁸⁴The high-resolution version can be found in Derderian.

³⁸⁵ Minassian, ‘The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, p. 175.

³⁸⁶ Lynch, II.

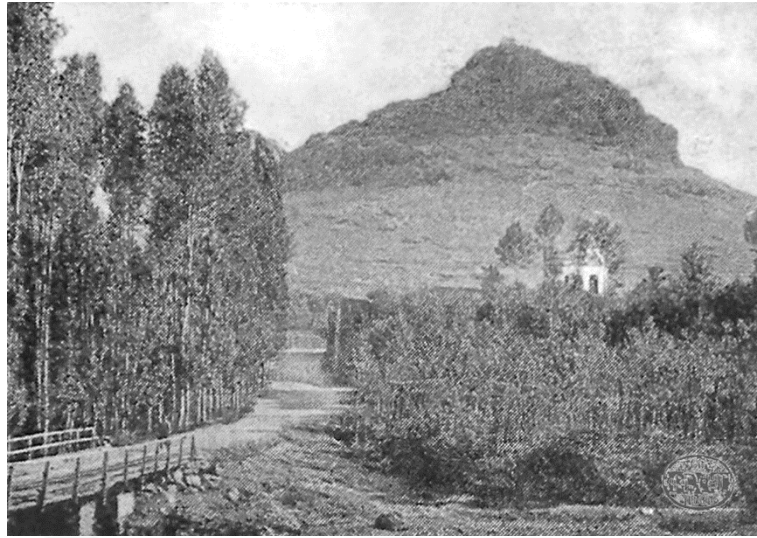


Figure 4-11 Holy Virgin Church of Haygavan in Aygestan.³⁸⁷ Photograph from Yerevan Der Mgrdichian's book entitled *Treasures of Vasbouragan*, dated 1966.

In his travel log, Lynch several times reworded his admiration of the topography of Van (Figure 4-14). For him, this city, together with the great people inhabiting it, had represented a vanished cultural diversity of its remote antiquity; in other words, its layered history had been generously displayed as an architectural, cultural, and urban heritage of all ancestors of it. For that reason, for him, Van is a city of manifold interest with its “beauty of feature and grandeur of surroundings” that can “scarcely have an equal in the world”.³⁸⁸ Yet, after 1915, the topography of Van was massively and severely changed due to the course of events in its entangled history.

Travelling from one side to another, from its majestic mountains to abundant plains, from its immense inland sea to islands, the topography of Van at every turn reminded me that “topography is not terrain, or not just that”. As

the sea is not only a fairly large quantity of unusually salty water but the irritation in a swimmer's throat... Topography is a name for this passive and productive, silent and eloquent milieu.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷ The high-resolution version can be found in Tatoyan, ‘Churches and Monasteries of Van-Dosb’.

³⁸⁸ Lynch, II, p. 116.

³⁸⁹ David Leatherbarrow, *Uncommon Ground: Architecture, Technology, and Topography, Environment and Planning A*, 2000, pp. 209–10.

Being in Van, embodying its soil and air, and encountering many diverse stories that it is still keeping, I am convinced that the topography narrates us more than what we perceive.



Figure 4-12 Panorama of Van.³⁹⁰ A view from the heights of Mount Ereğ towards majestic Mount Siphon. The gravure can be found in the travel accounts of H.F.B. Lynch, dated 1901.

4.2 Entangled histories

[Semiramis] seeing the beauty of the land ... said: "In such a temperate climate and purity of waters and land we must build a city and royal residence, so that we may spend a fourth part of the [year] in Armenia. On the shore of the lake she saw a long hill whose length ran toward the setting sun. To the north it sloped a little, but to the south it looked up sheer to heaven, with a cave in the vertical rock. From it on the south there opened out a wide meadow like a plain, descending from the mountain on the east to the edge of the lake...Here that resolute and lascivious Semiramis, after careful examination, ordered forty-two thousand skilled workers from Assyria and other lands of the empire and six thousand chosen from her most talented craftsmen in wood and stone, bronze and iron, who were most proficient in their skills, to be brought without delay to the desired spot...And thus, by dint of great efforts, within a few years she completed the marvellous [city] with strong walls and bronze gates. She also built inside the city many exquisite palaces, adorned with various stones and colors, of two and three stories, each one turned to the sun where suitable. The sections of the city she divided by beautiful and wide avenues. In the middle of the city she built some charming baths for people's needs, with admirable art. She diverted part of the river through the city to serve every necessity and for the irrigation of the parks and flower gardens...All the regions east, north,

³⁹⁰ Lynch, II, p. 52. The high-resolution version can be found in Dzovinar Derderian, 'Mapping the Fatherland: Artzvi Vaspurakan's Reforms through the Memory of the Past', 2014 <<https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-van/kaza-of-van/miscellaneous-articles.html>> [accessed 10 December 2022].

and south of the city she adorned with villas and with leafy trees that produced varied fruit and foliage. There she planted many fruitful vineyards. The walled city she rendered absolutely splendid and magnificent, settling within a numberless multitude of inhabitants. The summit she surrounded with a wall and erected there a royal palace and some fearsome dungeons, difficult to enter and impossible to escape from...Now on the side of the rock that faces the sun, on which today no one can scratch a line with an iron point [she had carved out] various temples and chambers and treasure houses and wide caverns; no one knows how she formed such wonderful constructions...³⁹¹



Figure 4-13 Citadel of Semiramis in Van.³⁹² This gravure exaggeratively depicting the citadel of Semiramis (today's Kalecik town) is found in the "*L'Arménie*", the travel account of Catholic missionary Eugène Boré, dated 1938.

³⁹¹ Movses Khorenatsi, *Patmutiun Hayots [History of the Armenians]*, eds. Manuk Abeghian and Set Harutiunian (Tiflis: Mnatsakan Martirosiants, 1913; reprinted, Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1981) as cited in Dickran Kouymjian, 'Visual Perceptions of Van Through Travel Accounts', in *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan*, ed. by Richard G. Hovannisian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2000), pp. 153–69 (pp. 153–54).

³⁹² Kouymjian, 'Visual Perceptions of Van Through Travel Accounts', p. 163. The high-resolution version can be found in the digital archive of SALT Research. 'Château de Sémiramis à Van - Castillo



Figure 4-14 Van Fortress represented as what Mkr̥t̥içh Khrimian associates with Semiramis.³⁹³ Khrimian, the editor of the monthly periodical *Artzvi Vaspurakan* (*Eagle of Vaspurakan*), published between 1855-1864, particularly focused on the topography of Van while narrating its history and values and often referred to the city as *Shamiramakert* (carved by Shamiram) when mapping the ancient topography of the city.

de Semiramide en Van - Ermenistan. Van'da Semiramis Kalesi', (2007) <<https://archives.saltresearch.org/handle/123456789/19494>> [accessed 24 November 2022]

³⁹³ Derderian.

This poetic narrative by renowned Armenian historian Movses Khorenatsi impressively depicts ancient Van through a quasi-fictitious story about semi-legendary Assyrian Queen Semiramis who built a royal palace in Van as her summer residence “to protect herself from the unbearable heat of Nineveh”³⁹⁴ and fortified citadel on the site of the ‘rock of Van’ (Figure 4-17, 4-18).³⁹⁵ Some historians and scholars agree that this is also attributed to the foundation of Van. After Shamiramakert, Van of Semiramis, the city has transformed both spatially and symbolically under the rule of various cultures: Urartians, Persians, Medes, Armenians, Romans, Byzantines, Seljuikdes, Mongols, Safavids, Ottomans and modern Turks.

Cave paintings from excavations in the region show that the history of the first human settlements in Van and its vicinity dates back to 15000-8000 BC.³⁹⁶ Yet since our knowledge of those periods is still limited, most historians and scholars consider the 9th century BC, marked by the developments by Urartians, to be the beginning of the first civilisations in and around Van.³⁹⁷ Not only for historians but also for the ‘locals’ of Van, the history of the city starts with the Urartians, and the ‘rock of Van’ or ‘Van Fortress’ as it is called today, is always referred to as the ‘magnificent’ monument belongs to this rich civilisation.³⁹⁸ Erkan Konyar and his friends³⁹⁹, who have been in charge of archaeological excavations in Van since 2010, mention details of the fortress as follows:

The Van Fortress/Tuspa, the capital city of the Urartians, rises on a 100-meter-high conglomerate rocky outcrop on the eastern shore of the Van Lake, measuring 1400 m in length and a varying width of 230-60 m in north-south axis... Every corner of

³⁹⁴ Paolo Cuneo, ‘Etude Sur La Topographie et l’iconographie Historique de La Ville de Van’, in *Armenian Studies*, ed. by Dickran Kouymjian (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1986), pp. 125–84 (p. 128). [Translation from original French to English by online professional translator DeepL]

³⁹⁵ According to Kouymjian, Movses’ quoted text is the earliest description of Van. *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ Mehmet Demirtaş, ‘Tarihsel Süreçte Van Gölü’nün Kent Hayatındaki Yeri’ in *Van: Tarih, Toplum ve Şehir*, ed. by Suvat Parin (İstanbul: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2020), p. 59

³⁹⁷ Among those the following literature can be referred:

³⁹⁸ According to the interviews I conducted with the locals of Van, as part of the fieldworks I held in August 2021 and March-May 2022.

³⁹⁹ The excavation in Van Fortress and old Van has been unfortunately halted in 2019 due to the harmful decision of new local authority in the city, binding the termination of the financial support allocated to the excavation.

the outcrop, which is alone a monument itself, was utilised by the Urartian architects. Royal rock tombs, monumental open air sanctuaries and palaces are the most prominent architectural features of the capital.⁴⁰⁰



Figure 4-15 The "rock" of Van, around 1913.⁴⁰¹ Van Fortress from the south and mud brick houses reveal the typical image of 'old Van'.



Figure 4-16 The Fortress of Van, 1916.⁴⁰² Photograph by Aram Vruyr, from the archives of the History Museum of Armenia in Yerevan.

The region was under the control of Urartians from the middle of the 9th century BC until their collapse in the 6th century BC. The Urartian capital, of which the rock of Van was the centre, was known as Tosp, the ancestral name of today's Tushpa in Van. Over time, the city around the rock started to be called "Van". Robert Hewsen, an American historian with Armenian roots, puts that,

⁴⁰⁰ Erkan Konyar and others, 'Excavations at the Old City, Fortress, and Mound of Van: Work in 2018', *Anatolia Antiqua*, XXVII, 2019, 169–83 (p. 147).

⁴⁰¹ Richard G Hovannisian, 'Armenian Van/Vaspurakan: An Introduction', in *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan*, ed. by Richard G Hovannisian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2000), pp. 1–12 (p. 6).

⁴⁰² The high-resolution versions can be found in Dalalyan.

the name of the fortress and the town at its foot would eventually become Tosp, the Armenian name for the district around the Great Rock, while Biainili, the native name of the kingdom, would give rise to the Armenian name Van for the town, which was sometimes called by both names: Van-Tosp.⁴⁰³

There is a prevalent belief among historians that the name Van has Urartian origins.⁴⁰⁴ According to Paolo Cuneo, an architectural historian and urbanist who provided an overarching reading of Van by exhibiting a visual presentation of the city with detailed textual descriptions, this is because Urartian lands were called the 'Kingdom of Bianili' (later also known as 'Kingdom of Van'). The word 'Bianili' was most likely pronounced as 'Vanili'; hence Van is believed to be derived from this Urartian word.⁴⁰⁵ Over time, the name of the city was transformed by each new culture that dominated it.⁴⁰⁶

Van had a major role in the history of the Urartu, being the capital of this ancient civilisation and remained as “the political centre of the kingdom for two and half centuries, including the period when the royal residence moved to the nearby site of Toprakkale”.⁴⁰⁷ The city was established around Van Fortress and “enjoyed the double advantage of a rocky spur with steep slopes forming a natural rampart and a fertile plain on the edge of the lake”.⁴⁰⁸ Urartians were advanced in architecture; despite great earthquakes and fires, their mud brick buildings survived for centuries. Throughout history, the Urartian Van, at least locationally, remained as the city centre of Van until the major urban planning decision after 1915. Consequently, the city was moved to the east, close to the site of Aygestan (garden district).

⁴⁰³ Hewsen, p. 15.

⁴⁰⁴ There are other beliefs about the origin of Van's name, such as that it comes from Armenian, as Van in Armenian means 'home', 'strong place', 'monastery', or from Alexander the Great who visited the city and was impressed by the 'Vank Monastery'. See, İsmail Mangaltepe, *Seyyahların Gözüyle Van XIX. Yüzyıl* (İstanbul: Kitabevi, 2019), pp. 2–3.

⁴⁰⁵ Cuneo, p. 128.; Hewsen, p. 15.

⁴⁰⁶ Over time, Van (either as a town or as a political and administrative centre representing its region) gained diverse names and their variations with minor pronunciation differences: Shamiramakert, Biaina, Van-Tosp (or Van-Dosp), Thospia-Bouana, Vaspurakan (or Vasbouragan), Baspraknia (or Asprakania or Vasprakania) and Wan.

⁴⁰⁷ Cuneo, p. 129.

⁴⁰⁸ Cuneo, p. 128.

After Urartians, Van had been out of the scene for almost a thousand years as “the centre of gravity on the great plateau” shifted towards the Ararat plain.⁴⁰⁹ During those years, between the 6th and 4th century BC, the Armenian Orontid Dynasty dominated the region as part of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, who adopted an autonomous administrative structure composed of twelve satrapies.⁴¹⁰ The 3rd century BC saw the entry of Armenians to the region, and during the 1st century BC, Van already became the centre of the kingdom of Tigran the Great. Back then, the city was populated mainly by Armenians, as expected. Yet, interesting is that the period also welcomed one of the first refugee groups to Van; many Jewish families were brought from Palestine to Van and offered “peace and prosperity” in the city.⁴¹¹ According to Armenian historian Hakob Manandyan, who referred to Faustus of Byzantium, there were almost 100.000 Jewish families in and around Van:

All this mass of Jews who were taken prisoners and brought out of Armenia had been transferred from Palestine by the Armenian king Tigran the Great after he captured and brought to Armenia in ancient times the high priest of the Jews, Hyrcanus.⁴¹²

Writing history is highly subjective, “as some pasts are more audible than others” and “we need to be alert to whose stories are being told”⁴¹³. According to a block of sources, the Armenian rule majorly dominated Van until the middle of the 5th century, except for the domination of the Seleucid Empire between 200-190 BC ⁴¹⁴, while another source abstained from mentioning centuries-long Armenian rules and skipped those periods while mapping the historical geography of the region.⁴¹⁵ Yet, both sources agree that Van was governed by diverse cultures and their interactions over history. Within this period, the 4th century marked the re-appearance of Van as a centre of gravity in the region again, yet this time, the city was mentioned with

⁴⁰⁹ Hewsen, p. 16.

⁴¹⁰ Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız, ‘XIX. Yüzyılda Van’ın Demografyası’, in *Van Kent Araştırmaları*, ed. by Suvat Parin (İstanbul: Bağlam Yayıncılık, 2016), p. 111.

⁴¹¹ Cuneo, p. 133.

⁴¹² Hakob Manandyan, *Trade and Cities of Armenia in Relation to Ancient World Trade*, trans. by Nina G. Garsoian (Lisbon: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1965), p. 64.

⁴¹³ Barbara Bender, ‘Introduction’, in *Contested Landscapes: Movement, Exile and Place*, ed. by Barbara Bender and Margot Winer (Oxford: Berg, 2001), pp. 4–5.

⁴¹⁴ Hewsen.

⁴¹⁵ Mangaltepe, pp. 5–27.

another mass forced mobility. In 364, Van was attacked by the Sasanid Empire, and during the course of events, the successive emperors “ordered the demolition of several thousands of Armenians and Jews”, which resulted with the deportation of almost 18.000 Jewish and 5.000 Armenian families to Persia.⁴¹⁶

After the Sasanid attacks, the early medieval Van was ruled by Persians for more than two hundred years. At that time, Van was part of ‘Vaspurakan’,⁴¹⁷ a large province consisting of thirty-five districts. It is, however, debated whether this name's origin is Armenian or Persian.

Since this geography dates from the seventh century and reflects the changes that took place after the great Byzantine expansion into central Armenia in 591, it seems that Vaspurakan, which is either an elegant Iranian synonym for ‘Persian’ or a term meaning a royal land, must have been used by the Persians to refer to the bulk of the Armenian lands still retained by Persia.⁴¹⁸

Vaspurakan, on the other hand, is not an old Armenian name. It is a word of Persian origin meaning “principal” or “special,” which first appears in Armenian at the beginning of the seventh century.⁴¹⁹

In due course, this region became known as the “noble land” or “land of princes”—*Vaspurakan*...⁴²⁰

During this period, from the 7th century to the 10th century, Van and its region Vaspurakan were partly under the control of Arabs after they conquered the Persian Empire, and Van again found its place in the mainstream of history as the Arab trade routes from Iran passed through the north of Van Lake to Bitlis (Figure 4-19).⁴²¹

⁴¹⁶ Manandyan, p. 86; Hewsen, p. 17; Cuneo, p. 133. According to Manandyan, those may not reflect the reality, as Faustus “who takes his information from popular tradition, always gives exaggerated and occasionally purely fantastic figures”. However, Manandyan also put that “there is, however, no doubt that Jews and Syrians, ... formed an important part of the urban population of Armenia and played a predominant part in the commercial and industrial life of the country.”

⁴¹⁷ Some of the literature, mostly Armenian digital archives, connote Vaspurakan highly with Van.

⁴¹⁸ Hewsen, p. 17.

⁴¹⁹ Robert W. Thomson, ‘Tovma Artsruni: Historian of Vaspurakan’, in *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan*, ed. by Richard G Hovannisian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2000), p. 58.

⁴²⁰ Hewsen, p. 23.

⁴²¹ Manandyan, p. 156; Hewsen, pp. 23–24.



Figure 4-17 The trade route from Iran to Bitlis via Van.⁴²²

The 10th century hosted a period when Van “undoubtedly experienced a certain growth”⁴²³ under the rule of the Kingdom of Vaspurakan. The city was equipped with new constructions such as an underground aqueduct across the plain to bring water from Mount Erek to the city; a palace on the slopes of Mount Artos enjoying the vista of Mount Süphan and Van Lake; a monastery called Varagavank (*Yedi Kilise*) and a town on the Akdamar Island consisted of a palace, a monastery, streets, gardens, and other places for recreation.⁴²⁴ With all of these and more, Van was “the most beautiful, rich and glorious of all Vaspurakan”⁴²⁵.

Due to the entangled course of events and constant interactions among dynasties and kingdoms of different sizes and cultures operating in the region, Van witnessed diverse sovereignties present in the same historical period. Indeed, during the late 10th century, Vaspurakan was ruled by the Marwanids⁴²⁶, a Kurdish dynasty about which we find no information in most sources on the historical geography of Van.

⁴²² Manandyan, p. 156.

⁴²³ Cuneo, p. 138.

⁴²⁴ Cuneo, pp. 136–38; Hewsen, pp. 27–28.

⁴²⁵ Cuneo, p. 136.

⁴²⁶ Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız, ‘XIX. Yüzyılda Van’ın Demografyası’, p. 111; Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız, ‘Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Van Kentinde Nüfus, Etnisite ve Yerleşme’, in *Dünya’da Van: Nüfus, Etnisite, Tarih ve Toplum*, ed. by Ercan Çağlayan (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019), p. 2019 (p. 42).

At the beginning of the 11th century, Van again experienced a major demographic change in its population. Due to the fight between Armenians and Byzantines, “the Armenian population of Van experienced a significant numerical weakening because the city, as the capital of a region on the eastern edge of the Byzantine Empire, was given to Emperor Basil II between 1004 and 1020.”⁴²⁷ According to the terms having been agreed upon, almost 14000 Armenian families moved to Sivas together with the Armenian king of the period.⁴²⁸ Following this, until the 16th century, Van was successively ruled by Seljukids, Shah-Armens, Mongols, Aq Qoyunlus and Qara Qoyunlus, with the rising dominancy of Turkoman forces in the region. We should also note that in the course of the conflicts between Persians and Ottomans in the 14th century, Van had been ruled by autonomous or semi-autonomous Kurdish *beyliks*.⁴²⁹ The population of the city back then consisted of diverse cultures: Armenians, Kurds, Turks, Persians, Circassians, Arabs, as well as Yezidis, Nestorian and Chaldean Christians and Jews.⁴³⁰

A major political change in the early 16th century occurred because of the “unrelenting war”⁴³¹ between Ottomans and Safavids when the Ottomans started to overrun Van in 1548 for an almost five centuries-long reign in the region. Cuneo states that the Ottomans transformed the ‘Rock’ into one of the most important fortresses of the empire, with alternating possession of the city between the Turks and Kurds⁴³², while Robert Hewsen argues that “because of the large number of Armenians in the province, they were usually well represented in the local administration”⁴³³. On the other hand, for Minassian, old Van was majorly shared by Turks, Kurds, and Armenians, where Turks and Kurds, as the Muslim inhabitants,

⁴²⁷V. Minorsky, ‘Wan’ in *Encyclopidie de Islam*, ed. by M. Th. Houtsma, A. J. Wensinck, E. Levi-Provençal, H. A. R. Gibb and W. Heffening (1934), IV, p. 1179 as cited in Cuneo, p. 138.

⁴²⁸ Hewsen, p. 29.

⁴²⁹ Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız, ‘Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Van Kentinde Nüfus, Etnisite ve Yerleşme’, p. 42.

⁴³⁰ Kouymjian, ‘Visual Perceptions of Van Through Travel Accounts’, p. 157.

⁴³¹ Dickran Kouymjian, ‘Van under Mongol, Turkmen, Persian, and Ottoman Domination’, in *Armenian Van/Vasporakan*, ed. by Richard G Hovannisian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, Inc., 2000), p. 131.

⁴³² Cuneo, p. 139.

⁴³³ Hewsen, pp. 37–39.

monopolised “the military, political, and bureaucratic functions”, and Armenians undertook the role of “producers” (Figure 4-20).⁴³⁴



Figure 4-18 Armenian peasants in Van, working in their fields.⁴³⁵ Photograph from Michel Paboudjian's collection.

In this context, the urban morphology of old Van was defined by the huge fortress lying in the east-west direction, as the city back then was simply attached to it, taking advantage of its both visual and physical power. One of the earliest images depicting Van from the 17th century⁴³⁶ is the miniature from the archives of the Topkapı Palace Museum, illustrating the rock, the fortress, and the settlements inside city walls (Figure 4-21). Back then, the city consisted of several administrative and religious buildings, schools, residences of governmental and military officers, around seven hundred wooden and mud-brick houses across ten neighbourhoods (seven of them of Muslims⁴³⁷ and three of them of Armenians), bazaars, shops, streets, squares, a garden called *Bahçe-i Horhor* and three gates: Tabriz Gate (*Tebriz Gate*) in the east,

⁴³⁴ Minassian, ‘The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, p. 188.

⁴³⁵ The high-resolution version can be found in Derderian.

⁴³⁶ We should note here that the history of Van witnessed several earthquakes (1276, 1441, 2 April 1646, 1648, 1649, 7 March 1701, 13 January 1704, 8 March 1715, 1791). The 1648 earthquake was devastating which destroyed many buildings. See, Dalalyan.

⁴³⁷ Evliya Çelebi counted seven Muslim neighbourhoods in Van of 17th century, yet without explicitly stating the ethnic origin of this Muslim population. We know that there were Kurdish and Turkish neighbourhoods in old Van, as later illustrated by other travellers such as Charles Texier who visited the region around 1842-45.

Middle Gate (*Orta Kapı*) above the south rampart and Harbour Gate (*İskele Kapısı*) in the west.⁴³⁸ The well-known Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi, who lived in the 17th century and visited Van several times, is still the primary source of reference for understanding how Van appeared in the mentioned period. He describes the city as follows:

The city has inner and outer defense walls. The inner ramparts on the western side of the city are high and cut into the cliff, on one side of which is the city...on the other side, outside the walls, is the mighty fortress. On the western side, where the city is, there is a carved cliff like ramparts. On the outer side, toward the plain descends a hill, on which in places (along the ramparts) are two storied towers. Outside the walls ... carved from the natural rock are three gates, the Tabriz gate on the east, the middle gate, and the Iskele or harbour gate to the southwest; to the southeast are farms and gardens. The city and ramparts are pretty much toward the north of the lake. But there is a path from the ramparts to the lake. During sieges ships can come and go.⁴³⁹

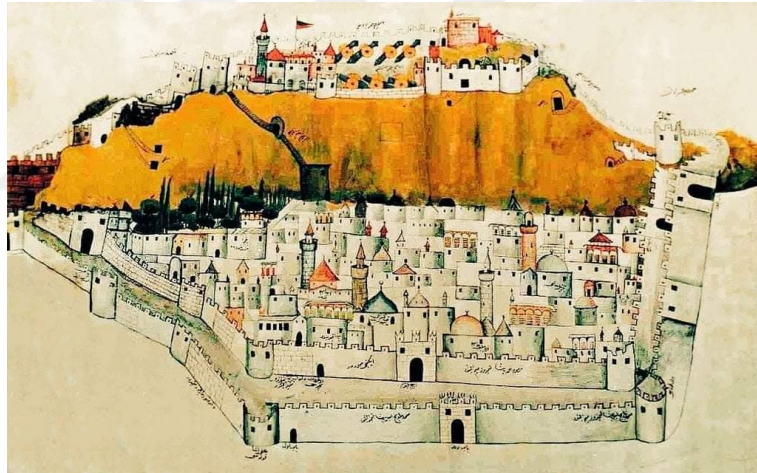


Figure 4-19 *The old city of Van in the 17th century. The miniature is from the archives of Topkapı Palace Museum in İstanbul.*

Reading Çelebi's description with the guidance of the miniature of the city, Van until 1915 when 'old Van' was still present, an extraordinary city having the advantage of a rocky citadel as a natural fortification, of the lake as a climate milder and of its layered history proved by monuments and buildings belong to different civilisations.

⁴³⁸ Erkan Konyar, 'Eski Van'ın Kentsel Fotoğrafı (XVII-XX. Yüzyıl)', in *Van: Tarih, Toplum ve Şehir*, ed. by Suvat Parin (İstanbul: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2020), p. 12.

⁴³⁹ Evliya Çelebi as cited in Kouymjian, 'Visual Perceptions of Van Through Travel Accounts', p. 160.

As we have noted earlier, few cities in the world may have such a long history as Van, entangled with diverse temporalities marking, very roughly, the ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary times together with the transitions among them, as well as the topographical richness including geographical and cultural diversity. I argue that examining the history of urban diversity, with all its abovementioned layers, can allow us to track how differences and temporalities have entangled in shaping diverse landscapes and urban landscapes of the city.⁴⁴⁰ Indeed, such an urban history built upon constant conflict of changing parties over time creates its contested ‘scapes’ perceived, lived, and reproduced in counter ways, even ‘destroyed’ as an attempt to better urbanisation.

4.3 Contested scapes

“Van in This World; Paradise in the Next,” goes the saying. But I would, with Vahan Tekeyan, give Paradise to whoever wants it, and take Van.⁴⁴¹



*Figure 4-20 A group of Armenians in the front and the city of Van in the background.*⁴⁴²
Photograph from Bedros Yeghiayian collection.

⁴⁴⁰ Biehl, ‘Dwelling Encounters: Migration , Diversity and Ambivalence in an Istanbul Neighbourhood’.

⁴⁴¹ James R. Russell, ‘Van and Persistence of Memory’, in *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan*, ed. by Richard G Hovannisian (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2000), p. 56.

⁴⁴² The high-resolution version can be found in Robert Tatoyan, ‘Kaza of Van - Churches and Monasteries’, 2018 <<https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-van/kaza-of-van/religion/churches-and-monasteries-1.html>> [accessed 25 December 2022].

The above words of scholar James R. Russell deeply touch me at every turn. Those have a very powerful tone on the verbal expression of feelings of forced migration, or more specifically of forced departure, resulting in the establishment of a diaspora far from the homeland and thus in setting new meanings and attachments to another cultural scape. The entangled history of Van created its own contested cultural scapes of “silence, abstention, acts of cowardice [and] resistance”, triggering us to track how the daily routines of ‘new’ inhabitants of this city circumnavigate those of former dwellers.⁴⁴³ This well points out the “non-visual aspects of landscape”⁴⁴⁴ in understanding it beyond the “Western-elitist notion”, which emphasises the ‘visual scape’ in which the one being there is detached from the landscape. Yet, as the anthropologist and archaeologist Barbara Bender argues, landscapes are not static, “whether painting or view, movement is required before the correct vantage point is achieved”:

...It ignores the labour that has gone into landscape and obscures the relationships between landscapes – the connections... If, instead of this narrow definition, we broaden the idea of landscape and understand it to be the way in which people – all people – understand and engage with the material world around them, and if we recognise that people’s being-in-the-world is always historically and spatially contingent, it becomes clear that landscapes are always in process, potentially conflicted, untidy and uneasy.⁴⁴⁵

Landscapes have a role in shaping cultures and vice versa, like a palimpsest harbouring elements from different socio-historical layers. Whose culture and beyond that, whose history are we talking about? Do we refer to the people who have lived in the landscape for generations, new minority groups, or should we also consider those who forcedly come to the landscape to leave soon?⁴⁴⁶

I agree that landscapes, by the notion, are “tensioned, always in movement”⁴⁴⁷, either through material or immaterial ways. In a history of diverse conflicts and mobilities,

⁴⁴³ Bender, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁴ Hannes Palang and Gary Fry, ‘Landscape Interfaces: Introduction’, in *Landscape Interfaces: Cultural Heritage in Changing Landscapes*, ed. by Hannes Palang and Gary Fry (Dordrecht: Springer, 2003), p. 1.

⁴⁴⁵ Bender, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁶ Palang and Fry, p. 2.

⁴⁴⁷ Bender, p. 3.

contested scapes contain diverse stories to tell, yet people select the ones to narrate and publicise according to the memories and histories they evoke and the interpretations they weave. In such a context, tension mostly occurs when “the names of propertied men overwrite the presence of unnamed others – not-male, not-white, or simply ‘not-us’ – in the landscape of memory”⁴⁴⁸.

What does the history of Van tell us more about memory and movement, arrivals and mostly departures? Our information on the demography and urban morphology of Van became much more obvious in the 19th century. This means we have more evidence in archives documenting the everyday life and characteristics of old Van with maps and photos as well as texts deciphering the dynamics of the city. The more we increase our knowledge about Van, the more we realise how contested the scapes are. Under the rule of Ottomans, Van was an *eyalet* until 1847, and in that period, following the Russo-Turkish War in 1928, “the last *derebeys* were suppressed, and the *eyalet* of Van was made a *sancak* of the *eyalet* of Erzurum”.⁴⁴⁹ In 1875, after Erzurum broke up, Van became a *vilayet* (Figure 4-23) itself and expanded even more in 1888 with its two sanjaks, nineteen *kazas* (towns) and three hundred *nihayes* (village clusters).⁴⁵⁰

Until the middle of the 19th century, Van was bounded within the city walls, as depicted in the miniature found in the Topkapı Palace archives. One of the most influential works of the mid-19th century in representing old Vas was by Charles Texier, a French savant who visited the city around 1938-1942 and collected his observations under *Description de l'Arménie, la Perse, et la Mésopotamie*. Texier was interested in architecture, and he provided the earliest realistic representations of Van, including three gravures depicting general views from the citadel (Figure 4-24, 4-25, 4-26) and the very first map of the city (Figure 4-27).

⁴⁴⁸ Mary Margaret Steedly, *Hanging Without a Rope: Narrative Experience in Colonial and Postcolonial Karoland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 28.

⁴⁴⁹ Thomas A. Sinclair, *Eastern Turkey: An Architectural and Archaeological Survey* (London: Pindar Press, 1987), I as cited in Hewsén, p. 33.

⁴⁵⁰ Hewsén, p. 33.



Figure 4-22 *The city of Van from the east.*⁴⁵² The gravure depicting the Tabriz Gate was drawn by R. de la Bourdannaie and is found in Texier's travel log



Figure 4-23 *The city of Van from the south.*⁴⁵³ The gravure depicting the Middle Gate was drawn by R. de la Bourdannaie and is found in Texier's travel log.



Figure 4-24 *The city of Van from the north-west.*⁴⁵⁴ The gravure depicting the Harbour Gate was drawn by R. de la Bourdannaie and is found in Texier's travel log.

⁴⁵² The high-resolution version can be found in Dalalyan.

⁴⁵³ The high-resolution version can be found in Dalalyan.

⁴⁵⁴ The high-resolution version can be found in Dalalyan.

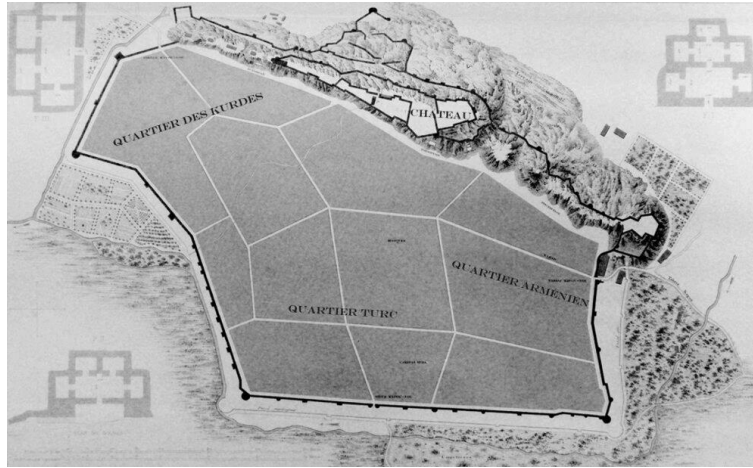


Figure 4-25 The first map of old Van, 1842.⁴⁵⁵ The map is found in Texier's travel log "*Description de l'Arménie, la Perse, et la Mésopotamie*".

Around the middle of the 19th century, with the rising population after the designation of being a *sancak*, then a *vilayet*, Van overflowed its walls and expanded to the east, which majorly transformed the urban macro form of the city. This expansion developed a new suburb called *Aygestan* or *Aykesdan* (*Erkesdar* or *Erkesdara* in the local Armenian dialect and *Bağlar* -the vineyard- in Turkish), which was a 'garden city' attached to the city centre.⁴⁵⁶ Thus, the urban macro form of Van from the 1850s till 1915 consisted of three main parts: The citadel on the top of the great cliff, the old walled inner city called *Kaghakamej* or *Şahesdan* by the locals and the new garden district, *Aygestan*.⁴⁵⁷ At that period, the urban macro form of the city was documented by another traveller of German and French origin, Paul Müller-Simonis. Together with Henri Hyvernats, he arranged a journey across Eastern Anatolia, Caucasia, and Iran, and as part of that, they visited Van in 1888.⁴⁵⁸ This travel resulted in the publication of *Du Caucase au Golfe Persique, à travers l'Arménie, le Kurdistan, et la Mésopotamie* in 1892, which valuably contributed to visual documentation of the city of Van in the late 19th century. The authors published Van's first urban plan, including the garden suburbs of *Aygestan* (Figure 4-28). The plan is

⁴⁵⁵ Dalalyan.

⁴⁵⁶ Lynch, II; Minassian, 'The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century'; Hewsen; Konyar.

⁴⁵⁷ Minassian, 'The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', p. 173; Hewsen, p. 39; Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız, 'Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Van Kentinde Nüfus, Etnisite ve Yerleşme', p. 46; Konyar, p. 29.

⁴⁵⁸ Konyar, p. 29.

detailed enough to inform us about the urban fabric, neighbourhoods, avenues and streets, landmarks, important buildings and routes of water resources.

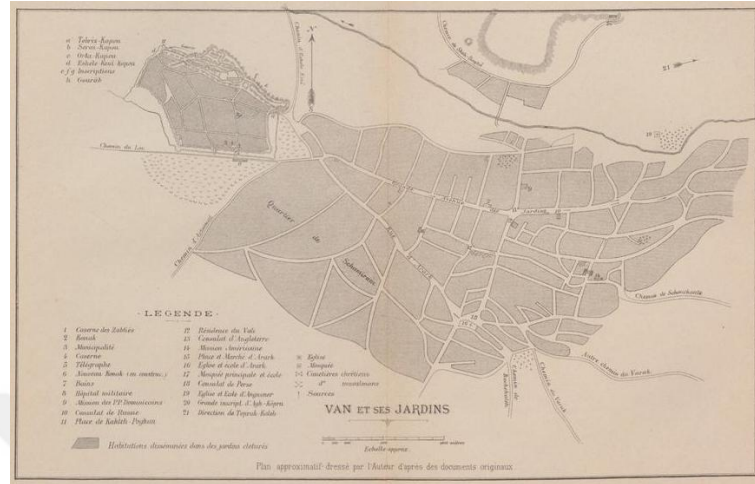


Figure 4-26 The city of Van and its gardens, 1888.⁴⁵⁹ The map is found in travel log of Müller-Simon and Hyvernay, entitled “Du Caucase au Golfe Persique, à travers l'Arménie, le Kurdistan, et la Mésopotamie”.

In the 19th century, the citadel was already functionless in terms of settlement; it was only utilised for military purposes, such as a warehouse and ammunition.⁴⁶⁰ The inner city, *Şahesdan* (Figure 4-29, 4-30), was the centre of the economic, administrative and religious life of the region, with khans, caravanserais, markets, bazaars, artisan workshops, governor's palace (*konak*), central court, police station, post-telegraph office, the Ottoman Bank, tax office, tobacco administration, health office, agricultural administration, schools, churches and mosques, all of which are the institutional instruments of “modernisation and the centralisation of the provincial administration” (Figure 4-31, 4-32).⁴⁶¹ The inner city represents an organic layout with irregular settlements defined by narrow streets and around 5000 mudbrick or wooden houses with jutting balconies adjacent to each other (Figure 4-33). The houses were mostly single-storey or two-storey, covered with a flat roof (Figure 4-34, 4-35).

⁴⁵⁹ Minassian, ‘The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, p. 176.

⁴⁶⁰ Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız, ‘Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Van Kentinde Nüfus, Etnisite ve Yerleşme’, p. 46.

⁴⁶¹ Minassian, ‘The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, pp. 173–74.

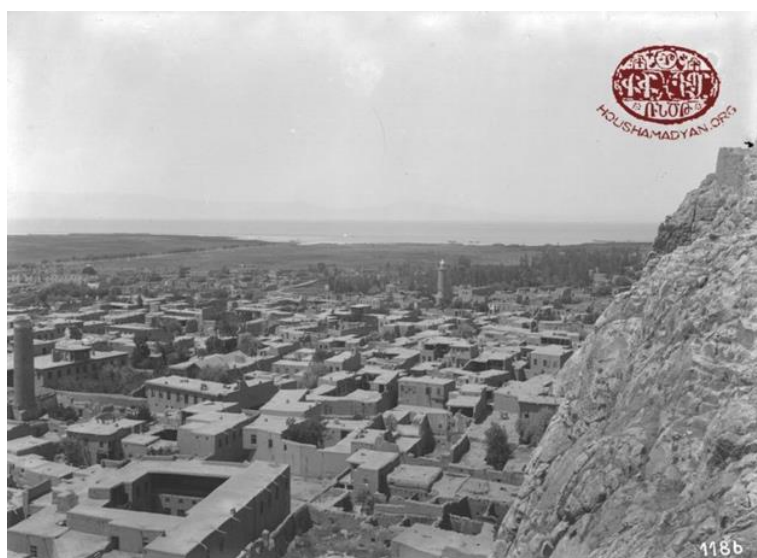


Figure 4-27 The inner city of Van around the late 19th century. Photographs by Aram Vruyr, from the archives of the History Museum of Armenia in Yerevan.



Figure 4-28 Local market in the inner city.⁴⁶² The narrow streets of the inner city, Şahesdan, can be felt in the photo.



Figure 4-29 The government office in the inner city.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶² ‘Cumhuriyet Öncesi Van Fotoğraf Arşivi’, 2022 <<https://vanlinihathoca.com/cumhuriyet-onesi-van-fotograf-arsivi.html>> [accessed 3 January 2023].

⁴⁶³ ‘Cumhuriyet Öncesi Van Fotoğraf Arşivi’.



Figure 4-30 An official building in the inner city.⁴⁶⁴

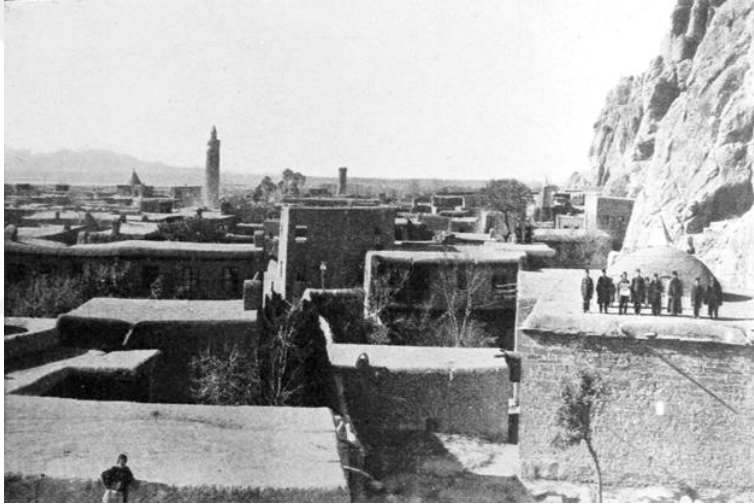


Figure 4-31 Mudbrick houses and narrow streets in old Van. The photo is found in “Armenien Einst und Jetzt”, a book by Carl Friedrich Lehmann-Haupt, a German historian who visited Van in the late 19th century.

⁴⁶⁴ ‘Cumhuriyet Öncesi Van Fotoğraf Arşivi’.

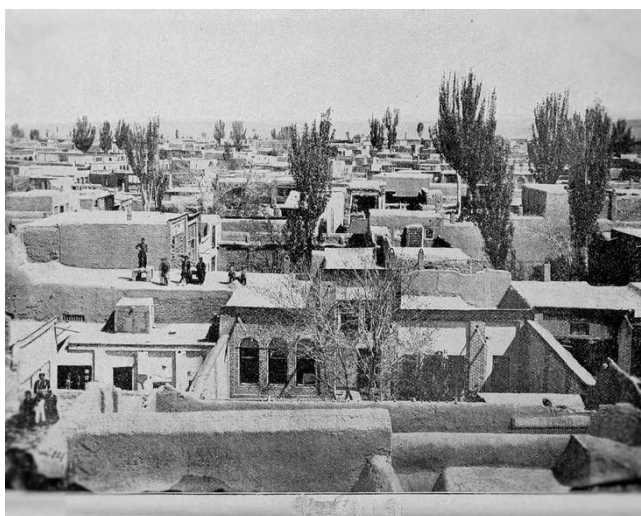


Figure 4-32 Mudbrick houses of old Van. Photograph from the personal archive of Sait Ebinç.



Figure 4-33 A street from old Van.⁴⁶⁵ The rock is visible in the background.

Hampartsum Yeramian, whom I quoted at the beginning of this subchapter, worked as a teacher and director in the inner city of Van between 1874 and 1878 and remembered that the inner city “was divided into narrow and dirty streets and did not have a park or a garden”.⁴⁶⁶ As cited by Tork Dalalyan, Yeramian talks more about everyday life in the city:

It was especially difficult to pass through those streets in the winter season because the snow would accumulate in those streets for 4-5 months, at places reaching till

⁴⁶⁵ ‘Cumhuriyet Öncesi Van Fotoğraf Arşivi’.

⁴⁶⁶ Dalalyan.

the roofs of one-storey buildings. Snow often covered the doors and the windows of these houses, forcing the residents to exit their homes on piles of snow or dig tunnels through it in order to be able to leave their houses and maintain contact with the outside world. According to Yeramian, during the unsightly winter months, people were forced to seek recreation within homes or in the warm but smoky cafes where they got carried away playing backgammon or cards.⁴⁶⁷

Another notable source which illustrated the urban morphology of Van in the 19th century was the work of H.F.B. Lynch. He published a detailed urban plan and several photographs in his travel account, *Armenia: Travels and Studies*. Lynch's urban plan (Figure 4-36) is based on the map published by Müller-Simonis; however, it differentiates from it by pinning more details about *Aygestan* and the demographic structure of the neighbourhoods there. In his words, this map enabled him "to dispense with a tedious topographical narrative and serves to show the distribution of Armenians and Mussulmans"⁴⁶⁸, and he continues:

On the left of the paper is represented the rock of Van with the cuneiform inscriptions and the city or fortified town at its southern base. On the right extends the hill ridge of Toprak Kala, commencing on the west with the bold crag of Ak Kopri, and making a bay towards the gardens as it stretches in an easterly direction, presenting the side of what is actually a nearly meridional mass. Between the two lies the plain — a bower of leafy gardens, most dense along a line drawn south of Ak Kopri, but continuing westwards from the southerly outskirts of those thickly-planted quarters to the district of Shamiram or Semiramis, south of the citadel. Mussulmans and Armenians are distributed over the area of these suburbs, and they share between them the population of the walled town. Some quarters in the gardens are peopled exclusively by Armenians, some by Mussulmans, and some by both alike.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁷ Hampartsum, p. 95 as cited in Dalalyan.

⁴⁶⁸ Lynch, II, p. 80.

⁴⁶⁹ Lynch, II, p. 80.

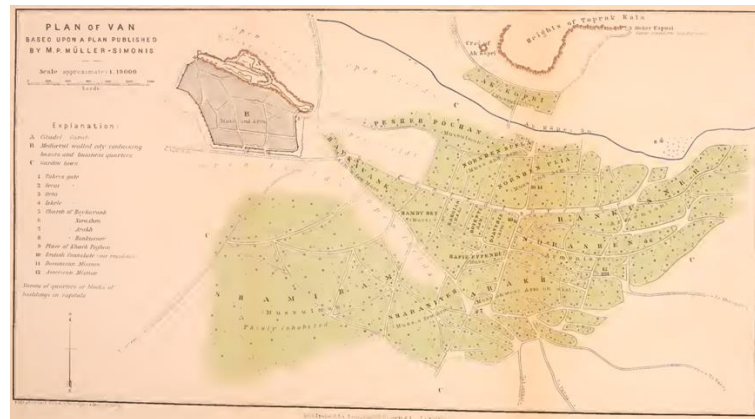


Figure 4-34 The urban plan of Van, 1901. The map is found in the travel accounts of H.F.B. Lynch, dated 1901.

Lynch's plan clearly separates the inner city from *Aygestan*, an “*extra muros* suburb”⁴⁷⁰. Open fields as a buffer zone are marked between the inner city and *Aygestan*, dividing these two different settlement forms. Those open fields were kept as pastures for grazing and agricultural production, and marshes remained as an important wetland, being a habitat for various species. Those vast spaces were mostly used by “itinerant peddlers and by nomads, including the Boshas or Gypsies”. Before the establishment of *Aygestan*, its corresponding site was the extension of open fields where an irregular residential area was located, which was “built initially with unsteady materials for nomads and the most deprived classes”⁴⁷¹. However, from the mid-19th century onwards, the area began to transform following some of the landmark events in Van's history, such as the great fire of 1876, the famine of 1880-81 and the wars. Around 1850, the dwellers of *Aygestan* were already mostly the wealthy inhabitants of Van, independent from their ethnic origin. They were the ones who fled from the inner city in search of healthy spaces due to the rising fires, epidemic, and scarcity of food and resources. They built residences surrounded by greenery and orchards.⁴⁷² In a way, this urban change is one of the first examples in Van, where internal migration has resulted in a major change in the demographic structure and built environment, in other words, the gentrification of the urban

⁴⁷⁰ Minassian, ‘The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, p. 174.

⁴⁷¹ Minassian, ‘The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, p. 174.

⁴⁷² Hewsén, p. 33.

environment. We have limited knowledge about what happened to the ones who had to move their household to another area.

Like the Müller-Simonis map, Lynch's version also carves the main streets of the inner city and, particularly, the *Aygestan*. As Yıldız notes, since *Aygestan* became more populated as it developed and since the inner city remained the administrative and commercial centre until the last quarter of the 19th century, there was heavy traffic of people between the city and the gardens. Yet, towards the end of the 19th century, with the establishment of markets, bazaars, schools, missionaries, and some governmental offices, *Aygestan* appeared as an alternative city centre of Van.⁴⁷³

The inner city was connected to the *Aygestan* garden district, with two main axes: In the north, in the east-west direction, lays 'The Great Road to the Gardens', a large, long avenue which ran almost five kilometres decorated with willows and poplars and linked the city to the gardens. This street was divided into sections, such as Khach-Boghan Street (Figure 4-37), which is called Sıhke Avenue today. The remaining part of this long street corresponds to Melen Street, which today exhibits a strict axiality between the castle and the city centre. In the south, another main axis was 'Arark Street', which today is divided into Terzioğlu Street and İki Nisan Boulevard. In the midway of the 'The Great Road to the Gardens', or "Champs-Élysées" of Van, 'Khach-Boghan' Square intersected it, which is still one of the busiest nodes of Van today, Beşyol. Another remarkable urban node of the period was Ararents Square (Figure 4-38, 4-39), located at the intersection of Arark Street and Nalbantoğlu Street (today's Cumhuriyet Avenue). Considering these main axes, one would need an hour to pass the district through it diagonally or vertically.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷³ Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız, 'Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Van Kentinde Nüfus, Etnisite ve Yerleşme', pp. 48–49.

⁴⁷⁴ Karekin Srvantsdians, 'Hamov-Hodov' in *Yerger* (Yerevan, 1978), I, p. 397 as cited in Dalalyan.



Figure 4-35 Khach-Boghan Street, 1900s⁴⁷⁵.

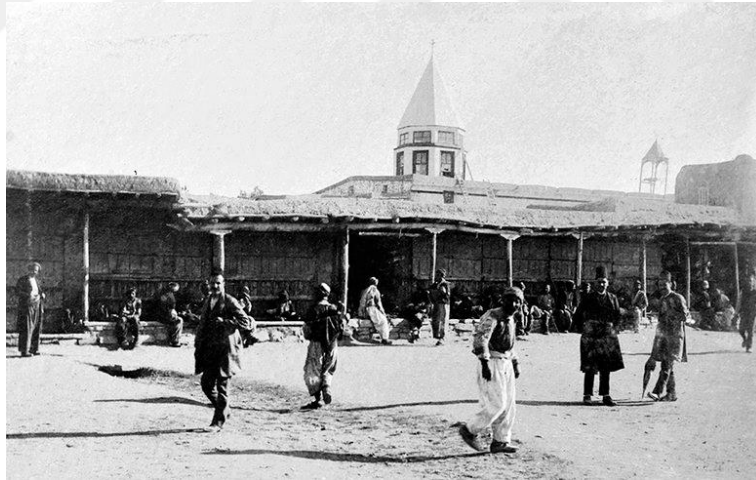


Figure 4-36 Ararents Square in Arark neighbourhood.⁴⁷⁶ The Arark Holy Virgin church is in the background. Photograph from Bedros Yeghiayian collection.

⁴⁷⁵ ‘Van Şehrinin Bağlar Cihetindeki Haçboğan Mevki 1900’ler’ <https://www.facebook.com/1955104961480659/photos/van-şehrinin-bağlar-cihetinde-ki-haçboğan-mevki-1900-ler/2741657199492094/?paipv=0&eav=AfY6DzNjK1b8FwPE6bkd4KglqggbELa1s9BOX6s4SmbNFI-NIb1tsI326iXQ_2n5ZHw&_rdr> [accessed 3 January 2023].

⁴⁷⁶ Robert Tatoyan, ‘The Churches of the City of Van’, 2018 <<https://www.houshamadyan.org/mapottomanempire/vilayet-of-van/kaza-of-van/religion/churches-and-monasteries-2.html>> [accessed 3 January 2023].

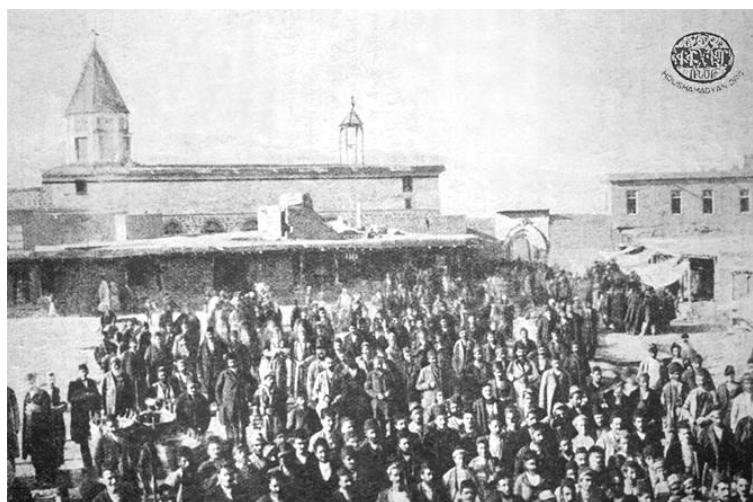


Figure 4-37 Ararents Square and worshippers gathered there.⁴⁷⁷

The inhabitants of Aygestan were distributed among eleven neighbourhoods⁴⁷⁸.⁴⁷⁹ Among them, Akerpi (*Akköprü*) neighbourhood in the north and Shamiramalti (*Şamram*) and Shabaniyeh (*Şabaniye*) neighbourhoods in the south were dominated by Muslim populations, while Haykavank, Hafız Efendi, Hankoysner (*Hankusner*), Norashen (*Noraşen*) and Arark (*Erek*) neighbourhoods inhabited by Armenians. There were also mixed neighbourhoods such as Norshen-Ulia. (*Yukarı Noraşen*) and Norshen-Sufla (*Aşağı Noraşen*).⁴⁸⁰ Yet Minassian debates how it is hard to assume the spatial division among different inhabitant groups in Van with diverse ethnic or religious backgrounds:

It has not been possible to ascertain precisely how the space partition of the ethnic-religious communities of Van has occurred: by spontaneous groupings, by municipal regulations, or by edicts? Although the mosques and the churches, with their minarets and their domes, mark the landscape with the cultural diversity, there nevertheless exist unifying factors.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁷ Raymond H. Kévorkian and Paul B. Paboudjian, *Les Arméniens dans l'Empire Ottoman à la veille du Génocide* (Paris, 1992) as cited in Tatoyan, 'The Churches of the City of Van'.

⁴⁷⁸ The names of all neighbourhoods are: Shamiramalti, Haykavank, Pashen-Poghan, Norshen-Ulia, Norshen-Sufla, Akerpi, Hankoysner, Arark, Gulurtagh, Norashen, Ararutstagh, Hafiz-Efendi, Karoyan, Boyents, Javshin, Shabaniyeh, and Seghkekeki.

⁴⁷⁹ Minassian, 'The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', p. 177.

⁴⁸⁰ Drawing on his memoirs, Yeramian discusses the demographics of Aygestan and recalls stories of the forced migration of some Armenian families as the Turkish population increased in formerly Armenian neighborhoods such as the Norashen neighborhood. Yeramian noted that around ten Armenian families were forced to sell their homes and moved to central or eastern parts of the district.

⁴⁸¹ Minassian, 'The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', p. 177.

The houses of *Aygestan* were typically built with wood and clay, topped with a flat roof. Only a few of them were three storeys and had a balcony or terrace attached; most of the houses were single or two-storey with a large garden full of trees and domestic animals (donkeys, mules, horses, cows, goats, sheep, dogs, chickens, pigeons) whose smells and noises characterised the rustic atmosphere of the district.⁴⁸² As Yıldız notes, most of the inhabitants of Van used their homes in *Aygestan* as summer cottages; therefore, they owned residences both in the inner city and in the garden district.⁴⁸³

The neighbourhoods hosted residential suburbs and various institutions such as consulates of Russia, Great Britain, France, Persia, and Italy, religious missions of the American Protestant Mission, French Dominican Mission, German Mission, and educational institutions. The district was also equipped with “public services as well bazaars, mosques, churches, schools, American hospital, military hospital, telegraph, agricultural bank, etc.”.⁴⁸⁴ As I mentioned above, Ararents Square was the heart of public life in old Van, where the city's second market was located (Figure 4-40, 2-41). Apart from the Khach-Boghan Square, Ararents Square and their vicinity, which altogether marked the sub-centres of the district (Figure 4-42, 4-43), the urban image of *Aygestan* resembles “a large village” with houses “buried in bushes of roses and lilies, flanked with barns and stables and surrounded with orchards and vegetable gardens” (Figure 4-44)

⁴⁸² Minassian, ‘The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, p. 177.

⁴⁸³ Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız, ‘Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Van Kentinde Nüfus, Etnisite ve Yerleşme’, p. 47.

⁴⁸⁴ Minassian, ‘The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, p. 175.



Figure 4-38 Bazaar of Arark.⁴⁸⁵ Photograph from the Armenian Diaspora Memory and Innovation collection of OVENK.



Figure 4-39 Local market in Ararents Square in the Arark neighbourhood. Courtesy of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation Archive, Project Save Photograph Archive, L1983.014.001.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁵ 'Bazaar of Arark in Van' <<http://ovenk.com/bazaar-of-arark-in-van/>> [accessed 4 January 2023].

⁴⁸⁶ 'Van Public Square Farmer's Market - L1983.014.001' <<https://projectsave.catalogaccess.com/photos/43939>> [accessed 4 November 2023].



Figure 4-40 An urban street in Aygestan.⁴⁸⁷ The buildings facing the street have multiple large openings.



Figure 4-41 An urban street in the Aygestan.⁴⁸⁸ The street was lined with poplars.

⁴⁸⁷ ‘Cumhuriyet Öncesi Van Fotoğraf Arşivi’.

⁴⁸⁸ ‘Cumhuriyet Öncesi Van Fotoğraf Arşivi’.

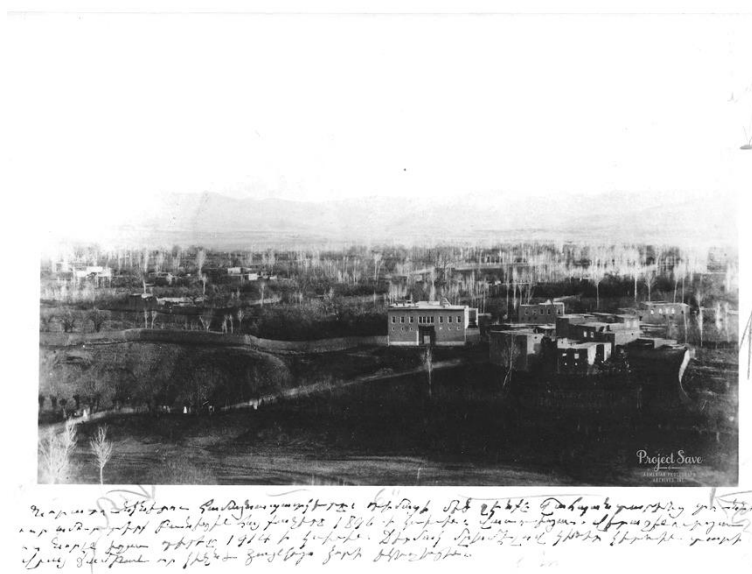


Figure 4-42 Aygestan, proving the image of a ‘large village’. Courtesy of Vart Shirvanian Hachigian, Project Save Photograph Archive, Missionary Collection, K1993.022.045.⁴⁸⁹

Beyond its built environment, *Aygestan* well “justifies” the name of ‘garden city’ as all buildings and structures were engulfed in the greenery with willows and poplars on the edge of irrigation canals that crossed orchards with apple, apricot, cherry, orange, lemon, pomegranate, vegetable gardens and vineyards (Figure 4-45).⁴⁹⁰ In the words of Armenian ethnographer Karekin Srvantsdians, *Aygestan* feels as follows:

the Aykesdan of Van ... through the efforts of its residents, is a decorated, blissful place, where each house has an adjacent grove, orchard and water springs in front of the threshold, on both sides of the street by the strands of brooks are orderly planted leafy willows, at places also poplars, Jack trees and Scots elms. In the middle of the street is the communal spacious road and the leafy arms of the branch-full trees embracing each other from its sides into a wonderful umbrella for the passers-by, through which the rays of the sun project themselves as flickering stars on the ground or on the heads and faces of people in passing or those sitting such as the cool of the moonlight, in a peaceful night, glistens the breeze at the bosom of the shallow waters of the sea side. The roots of these trees, whose green and verdure hair is anointed with the dune in the air and the warmth of the sun, flourish with the passing water ... and irrigating everyone’s rightful grove and orchard; providing water for cleaning the houses, drinking and for all use that need be.

⁴⁸⁹ ‘City of Van - K1993.022.045’ <<https://projectsave.catalogaccess.com/photos/41476>> [accessed 4 November 2023].

⁴⁹⁰ Minassian, ‘The City of Van at the Turn of the Twentieth Century’, p. 175.



Figure 4-43 Rev. Yarrow's house seen from the windmill, in Aygestan. Courtesy of Vart Shirvanian Hachigian, Project Save Photograph Archive, Missionary Collection, K1993.022.063.⁴⁹¹

According to H.F.B. Lynch, the population of Van, including *Aygestan*, at the end of the 19th century consisted of around 10.000 Muslims and 20.000 Armenians, while James Brant, the British consul of Erzurum recorded 5000 Muslim families (around 25.000 inhabitants) and 2000 Armenian families (around 10000 inhabitants). Armenian sources for him indicated that 17.000 Muslims, including Turks, Kurds, Persians, and Circassians and 20.000 Armenians lived in *Aygestan*. In terms of the Muslim population, Lynch notes that Kurds represented the majority; however, they were assimilated by marriage with Turkish families and introduced themselves as Turks or Ottomans.⁴⁹² Regarding that, Hewsens also states that “Turks were few in the vilayet, and many of these were Islamicised Armenians and Turkicised Kurds.”⁴⁹³ According to Cuinet, the total population of the vilayet of Van around 1890 was 430.000 which was distributed among different ethnic and religious groups as follows: 210.000 Kurds, 92.000 Nestorians, 79.998 Armenians, 30.500 Ottoman Turks, 6.000 Chaldeans, 5400 Yezidis and the rest was represented by different minorities such as Circassians and Latins.

⁴⁹¹ ‘Van Public Square Farmer’s Market - L1983.014.001’.

⁴⁹² Lynch, II, pp. 83–84.

⁴⁹³ Hewsens, p. 37.

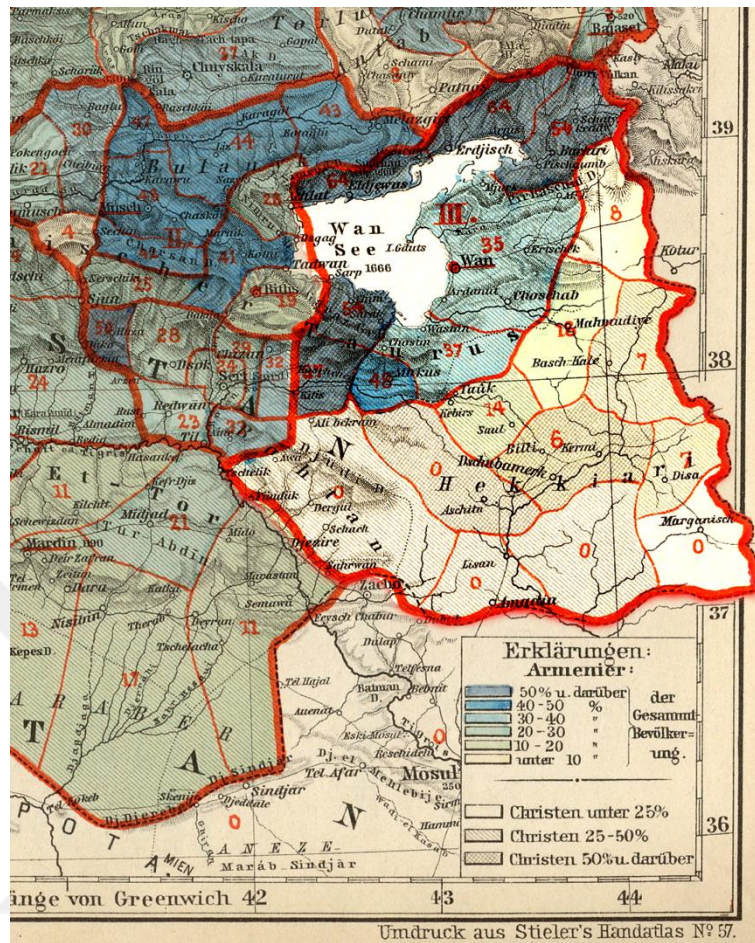


Figure 4-44 Armenian population in Van province in 1896. Map from Presidency of the Republic of Turkey Directorate of State Archives, Ottoman Archives – BOA.

Despite the disputed data on Van's population distribution up to the early 20th century, it is certain that no one would disagree with how diverse Van was in terms of cultures, religions, languages and so on. Yet the events on the eve of World War I marked a major disruption in the superdiversity of Van. The easiest way to start describing the great transformation of the period was to refer to numbers: According to Armenian sources, just before 1915, around 38.000 people were living in Van, whereas the numbers after the population census in 1927 show that the total population of the city was only 6.981.⁴⁹⁴ The loss of population during World War I and the deportation of the Armenian population after 1915 are the major reasons behind this dramatic change. Therefore, the war resulted not only in population

⁴⁹⁴ Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız, 'Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Van Kentinde Nüfus, Etnisite ve Yerleşme', p. 63.

decline but also, most remarkably, reduced diversity. During the course of the events, in April 1918, “approximately 25.000 Armenian civilians, soldiers, and irregulars evacuated toward the Urmia district of northern Persia”.⁴⁹⁵ This forced migration from the homeland signalled the end of almost two thousand five hundred years of Armenian presence in the region.

After all, the old city of Van no longer exists today. Neither *Şahesdan* nor *Aygestan*⁴⁹⁶. The city was totally destroyed in 1918. Beyond debating because of whom the city was burned or demolished, it is sadly obvious that the site of old Van was as ruined as the everyday life of thousands of hearts dwelled around the streets and gardens of this beloved city. Standing on top of the rock, today one can only feel the remnants of the foundations of the houses, substructures of walls, masses of two mosques with severed minarets, ruins of other public buildings (probably hammams and caravans) and the traces of the streets “which vaguely reminds us of the irregular grid of streets and residential blocks of the past”⁴⁹⁷. And, not to forget, one can also feel the new life flourishing in the riddled and thus humpy landscape of the site, by the steppe vegetation covering the area, reminding the memories that it still, even without certain structures, harbours (Figure 4-47).

This contested landscape today remains the powerful representation of diverse arrivals and departures, forcing me to imagine how life there was before, how it looked like, how it smelled and sounded. On top of these questions, every time I walked among this ruined landscape, several times, I asked myself how Van today relates to its superdiversity in the past, both in cultural and spatial terms, how the city is eager to recall its historical moments of living together and how the space has (dis)involved in this? Beyond these questions, another one has constantly been digging my brain cells from the first day I met Van: How has this city healed itself after all losses – of all kinds of them? How and to what extent does Van today,

⁴⁹⁵ Minassian, ‘Van 1915’, p. 243.

⁴⁹⁶ While the inner district was totally destroyed, most of the buildings in *Aygestan* remained, yet still the rhythm and dynamics of the district has majorly changed.

⁴⁹⁷ Cuneo, p. 126.

through spaces of appearance and disappearance, care for its rich cultural heritage supported by diverse scapes? How has this city healed itself after all its losses?



Figure 4-45 This landscape! Photograph by the author, captured in August 2021.

What Van has been exposed to was neither mere a demographic nor a mere spatial change in the built environment and urban macro form; thus, it was neither only about the loss of population nor only cultural heritage. It was both and more than both. Particularly around the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century marked the rising years of Van in terms of advanced societal structure, commercial life, intellectual milieu, educational institutions, foreign governmental and religious missionaries, and press activities.⁴⁹⁸ To illustrate, around 1897, there were one hundred and twenty-five primary schools and, ten elementary schools belonging to the Muslim population and eleven Armenian schools in Van.⁴⁹⁹ However, these numbers decreased to only fourteen primary schools and one elementary school in 1923.⁵⁰⁰ Even only these figures on educational facilities exhibit how the quality of life has regressed in Van. It took decades for the city to heal itself.

⁴⁹⁸ Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız, ‘Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Van Kentinde Nüfus, Etnisite ve Yerleşme’, p. 64.

⁴⁹⁹ Lynch, II, p. 96.

⁵⁰⁰ Mehmet Zeydin Yıldız, ‘Geç Osmanlı Döneminde Van Kentinde Nüfus, Etnisite ve Yerleşme’, p. 64.

4.4 A city of hope

Following the destruction of the old Van, it was imperative to establish a new city from scratch and develop a new urbanisation strategy informing the new macro form and, thus, a new urban life. In response to that urgent need, a new city was built almost two kilometres east of the site of the old Van, which partly settled on the site of *Aygestan*. Since then, the city has developed in tiers. According to Şahabettin Öztürk and Metin Yeğin, architects and scholars from Van, the history of modern urban development and transformation of Van is anchored with four periods: until 1918, between 1918-1985, between 1985-2011 and 2011 onwards.⁵⁰¹

I already illustrated above what Van looked like until 1918. The period between 1915 and 1918 marked two critical demographic changes because of major population mobilities and, therefore, highly affected the urbanisation processes afterwards. As mentioned above, one of them was the deportation of non-Muslim inhabitants, including Armenians, Chaldeans and Nastrunis, in April 1918. The other was the mobility of the Muslim inhabitants, mostly Kurds, at the beginning of World War I from Van to the southern or western provinces of Turkey.⁵⁰² These two forced migration flows of ‘locals’ of Van critically changed the demography of the city; in fact, they subverted the societal structure. Most of those refugees were placed in Konya and other Anatolian cities via Bitlis, Diyarbakır, Urfa and Adana, while a few of them settled in the latter ones.⁵⁰³

⁵⁰¹ Şahabettin Öztürk and Mustafa Yeğin, ‘Yüz Yıllık Perspektifte Van Kentinin Dönüşümü Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme’, *Mimarlık ve Yaşam Dergisi*, 7.1 (2022), 1–26 (p. 3).

⁵⁰² Sinan Hakan, ‘Birinci Dünya Savaşı ve Sonrasında Van’da Nüfus Hareketleri’, in *Dünya’da Van: Nüfus, Etnisite, Tarih ve Toplum*, ed. by Ercan Çağlayan (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019), p. 71.

⁵⁰³ Hakan, p. 74.



Figure 4-46 *Kurdish villagers in an Armenian neighbourhood in old Van, 1916.* Photograph by Aram Vrouyr, Collection of Museum of the History of Armenia.⁵⁰⁴

The surviving ones, corresponding to %20 of the refugees in this unfortunate community, lived only a few years in the arrival city; after the forced migration of the non-Muslim community, they moved back to Van in a state of high exhaustion.⁵⁰⁵ Following this change, the period between 1918 and 1919 witnessed critical resettlement policies by the Ottoman Empire within the ‘Muslimisation’ project as a precautionary measure for the possible return of Armenians. This included the resettlement of 5000 Muslims from Iran⁵⁰⁶ in 1918, and around 5545 people belonged to *Brukis*, a Kurdish clan, from Caucasia, and around 555 people belonged to another Kurdish clan called *Zilans* in 1919.⁵⁰⁷

After the establishment of the Republic in 1923, the government kept implementing resettlement policies, yet the critical difference in their approach was not to target the Muslimisation of certain territories but the ‘Turkification’ of them. Guided by the confidential *Report for Reform in the East* developed in 1925, either the Kurdish

⁵⁰⁴ ‘III. LA MISE EN ŒUVRE DU GÉNOCIDE (En)’ <<http://bnulibrary.org/index.php/en/iii-la-mise-en-oeuvre-du-genocide-en>> [accessed 4 November 2023].

⁵⁰⁵ Hakan, p. 75.

⁵⁰⁶ Some scholars argue that this group might belong to Küresünni clan (*aşiret*).

⁵⁰⁷ Hakan, pp. 80–83.

population was forcedly resettled in the territories dominated by Turkish inhabitants or the Turkish population was placed in the regions where the number of Kurdish families was rising as they settled in the abandoned houses of non-Muslims.⁵⁰⁸ In this context, according to the government, Van was one of the critical locations to be urgently intervened in and transformed into a city characterised by the principles of a new nation-state. Accordingly, between 1928 and 1937⁵⁰⁹, 13.545 Turkish people from Russia, Caucasia and Iran, as well as within internal resettlement policies, people from Trabzon (especially Sürmene), Rize, Çorum and Kars were placed in Van and its adjacent towns and villages.⁵¹⁰

After departures and arrivals, the city spreaded autonomously; while some of the remaining population moved into derelict houses of non-Muslims, some others built traditional types of houses in plots adjacent to the existing ones in *Aygestan*, where the destructions were not at a significant level.⁵¹¹ As a first planning attempt to solve the shelter needs of the remaining population, an urban plan was developed in 1925, which commanded the new city to be settled in the north.⁵¹² The preference of not renovating and rebuilding the site of the old Van was described as a geographic and ecological necessity. Some of the inhabitants of Van today mentioned that the information they were given was because of the rise and fall of the lake's water level. However, the fact is that the 1925 plan was also developed with close reference to the lake.

I should critically note here that in line with the resettlement policies of the nation-state, the first urban planning attempts for Van during the early Republican period explicitly and intentionally ignored the site of old Van since the very idea was to build a new city from scratch with its modern demography and identity of 'high

⁵⁰⁸ Ercan Çağlayan, 'Cumhuriyet Döneminde Muş, Bitlis ve Van'a Yapılan İskan Çalışmaları (1923-1938)', *Tarih Okulu Dergisi*, 22, 2015, p. 271; Ağcakaya, p. 89.

⁵⁰⁹ The resettlement policies targeting Van was not limited to that period, after military coup in 1960, Turkification Project, which for a decade relatively eased off during the multi-party period, paced again and as a result families from Black Sea region were placed in Van and its vicinity (such as Dönerdere case). For more information, see Ağcakaya.

⁵¹⁰ Çağlayan, 'Cumhuriyet Döneminde Muş, Bitlis ve Van'a Yapılan İskan Çalışmaları (1923-1938)', pp. 281-84.

⁵¹¹ Asım Kömürcüoğlu, 'Van Şehir Plan Raporu', *Arkitekt*, 157-158 (1945), 27-29 (p. 27).

⁵¹² Öztürk and Yeğin, p. 9.

Turkish regime'⁵¹³. According to Güven Arif Sargın, this strategy of 'organised forgetting' "underlies modern Turkey's attitudes in its creation of national identities and collective memories".⁵¹⁴ Like the capital of the nation-state, many other cities, such as Van, were considered both the object and the apparatus of this strategy,⁵¹⁵ proving to us how space is treated and employed as an 'instrument'. Regarding that, Heynen notes that "using architecture as a tool to change society" shows us the desire of modern architecture and planning "to fashion people's lives in new ways was taken up by some politicians who relied upon architecture and urbanism in order to effectuate a rapid modernisation of their country".⁵¹⁶ In terms of planning the city of Van, the intention of this 'high modernism', implying the validity of the capacity of comprehensive planning and state-imposed architecture, was to utilise architecture and space as an instrument of 'disciplining'; demarcating new 'borders' and 'orders' that could re-shape the society and culture while bio-politically erasing the traces of the other pasts.

The urban spine of the new plan was lined with the strong axuality of İskele Avenue, which runs continuously for almost seven kilometres. The new settlements were sprawled in the İskele (harbour) Neighbourhood, in close connection to the harbour, in service for the ships operating between Tatvan and Van as part of railways.⁵¹⁷ As indicated in the plan, the settlements were limited to Şamranaltı (*Shamiramaltı*) neighbourhood in the south, Akköprü (*Akerpi*) neighbourhood in the north, İskele and Selimbey neighbourhoods in the west and Yenimahalle in the east. In addition to İskele Avenue, in this period, around the 1930s, Cumhuriyet (Republican) Street

⁵¹³ High Turkish regime was ensured not only with modern urban plans but also by means of instrumentalisation of everyday life in the city. This included publication of the newspaper called *Van*. in 1939. As an ideological apparatus of the nation-state, *Van* highly promoted Turkish racial supremacy, Turkish language and the fictional historiography on Turkish History Thesis, all of which disregarded the superdiversity in the region and particularly the presence of Kurdish ethnicity and culture, even implying Kurds as 'hunk' Turks who left out their Turkish identity and Kurdish language as stemmed from 'Urartian Turkish'. For more information on *Van*, please see Ercan Çağlayan, 'Yerel Basında Ulus İnşası: Van Gazetesi Örneği', in *Dünya'da Van: Nüfus, Etnisite, Tarih ve Toplum*, ed. by Ercan Çağlayan (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019).

⁵¹⁴ Güven Arif Sargın, 'Displaced Memories, or the Architecture of Forgetting and Remembrance', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 22.5 (2004), pp. 659–60.

⁵¹⁵ Sargın, 'Displaced Memories, or the Architecture of Forgetting and Remembrance', p. 659.

⁵¹⁶ Heynen, p. 347.

⁵¹⁷ Erzen.

was built to function as the ‘centre’ or ‘market’ (*yeni çarşı*) of new Van, and as it can be seen in the plan, the street connects Beşyol Crossroad (former Khach-Boghan) to İki Nisan Crossroad (former Arark Square). Via Beşyol, the street was also in direct connection with İskele Avenue and Sihke Avenue. In that period, the head of the street was marked with governmental buildings to create powerful spatiality of the nation-state and its elites.⁵¹⁸

The second modern city plan of Van was developed in 1945 by Asım Kömürcüoğlu (Figure 4-47). While analysing the context to guide his plan, Kömürcüoğlu mentions how Van, once a city under the spotlight of many civilisations and known for its powerful positioning in the region in terms of its nature, architectural monuments, urban life and socio-cultural diversity, became such deprived of all the richness it had before.⁵¹⁹ The main conclusion of his analysis was that the commercial activities in the city were too limited, and when adding the low population and lack of knowledge and budget, it was not even possible to think about the development of the existing urban structure, let alone its maintenance; therefore, it was urgent to find a solution for the future situation of this place or to establish a new city.⁵²⁰

In light of these conclusions, Kömürcüoğlu designed the masterplan for the new Van, whose conceptual basis was very much inspired by the lake due to the various potentials it had kept for the benefit of the new city. What he highlighted was that the lake not only offered a beautiful scape and a recreational opportunity, but beyond those, it provides many ecosystem services, such as being a natural means of connection and transport between the markets of our fertile and productive cities and the eastern provinces or being a shelter for many wetland species including edible ones.⁵²¹ Thus, according to the master plan, the city was planned to be developed along the lake's coastline, on land directly connected with the old Van's site. That

⁵¹⁸ Yakup Ataş, ‘Türkiye’de Kentleşme Politikalarının Mülk Sahipliğine Etkileri: Van’da Cumhuriyet Caddesi Örneği (1957-2010)’ (Van Yüzüncüyıl University, 2019), p. 84 <<https://www.bps.go.id/dynamictable/2018/05/18/1337/persentase-panjang-jalan-tol-yang-beroperasi-menurut-operatonya-2014.html>>.

⁵¹⁹ Kömürcüoğlu, pp. 27–28.

⁵²⁰ Kömürcüoğlu, p. 28.

⁵²¹ Kömürcüoğlu, p. 29.

decision would have decreased the transportation costs of goods from the harbour to the city, as the proposed urban macro form embraced the harbour and its vicinity as the centre of the new city. The prospective extension of the railway towards the harbour would have also supported that decision. The plan also proposed several public buildings such as *Halkevi* (people's house), city hotel, music hall, marketplace, and recreational spaces to transform this part of the city into a centre of attraction for its inhabitants.



Figure 4-47 The masterplan of Van by Asım Kömürcüoğlu, 1945.⁵²²

I would hope that those decisions of the planner, beyond serving the good of the masterplan itself, were made so that both its inhabitants and the city would heal themselves after the terrifying destructions that happened a few decades before the plan. The lake would have eased this process by delivering ‘peaceful’ scapes with its balmy, fresh breeze, vast blue and mild climate, as well as fascinating views of majestic mountains. Yet this could only remain as the researcher’s fantasy. In “Partitions and an Anti-Xenophobic Architectural Historiography”, while suggesting a re-narration of the history of the socio-spatial impact of the Lausanne Peace Treaty, Esra Akcan concludes harshly that the more she traced the displacement in both departure and arrival geography, the more she became distanced to describe

⁵²² Öztürk and Yeğin, p. 11.

demographic exchanges as being for the sake of “peace” which has been narrated mainstream, she therefore associates them with “state violence”.⁵²³ Although I did not come across any archival documents or narratives of exchange in Van during my fieldwork, as I noted earlier, the violent practices of the nation-state can be traced through planning decisions.

Sadly, unlike what K  m  rc  o  lu’s plan proposed, the urban life in Van today does not embrace the lake as it was planned; on the contrary, the coastline was left abandoned for decades until the implementation of current urban design projects focusing recently on the rehabilitation of the coasts, thus, on integrating the coastline with the urban life. The construction of the city of Van as we know it today began in the 1940s. Although in 1936, the government assigned a committee to visit Van and assess the options for the possible location of the new city, which resulted in suggesting Elmalık (Zivistan) as a prospective location, the city developed around Cumhuriyet Avenue. Accordingly, new buildings were constructed, such as the Governor’s Office (*Valilik*), City Hall, People’s House (*Halkevi*), Customs Directorate, and many other public buildings (Figure 4-48) and open public spaces (Figure 4-49). In addition to public buildings, many mud-brick houses were also built along Cumhuriyet Avenue.⁵²⁴ With all these buildings, a modern city with bureaucratic institutions and public spaces at the centre was intended to be built contrary to traditional Ottoman cities centred around religious buildings.⁵²⁵

Towards the 1970s, the Law of Property Ownership issued in 1965 had its repercussions in Van, as it did in Turkey in general, and the profit-orientated construction model (*yapsat  ılık*) was developed.⁵²⁶ In this period, therefore, the construction of low-rise traditional houses was replaced with the construction of apartment blocks (Figure 4-50, 4-51, 4-52). Another urban plan for Van was

⁵²³ Esra Akcan, ‘Partitions and an Anti-Xenophobic Architectural Historiography’, in *Art and Architecture of Migration and Discrimination*, ed. by Esra Akcan and İftikhar Dadi (London and New York: Routledge, 2023), pp. 19–32 (pp. 19–20).

⁵²⁴   zt  rk and Ye  in, p. 11.

⁵²⁵ Bilik, p. 113.

⁵²⁶   nsal Keser, ‘Van Kenti ve Yapılar’, in *Van Kent Sempozyumu* (Van: TMMOB Van İl Koordinasyon Kurulu, 2009), p. 42; Aysu U  urlar, ‘Van Kentsel Gelişimi ve G  ncel Konut Piyasası İlişkinin De  erlendirilmesi’, *İDEALKENT*, 10.27 (2019), p. 460.

developed in 1974, which introduced a circular plan scheme and certain rules informing the land use, density, maximum construction area and height. However, following the Zoning Amnesty Law enacted in 1983, many unlicensed buildings were constructed, and the city developed rapidly irregularly.⁵²⁷



Figure 4-48 The former building of Van City Hall.⁵²⁸



Figure 4-49 Beşyol Crossroads, 1968.⁵²⁹ Photograph from the personal archives of Murat Çakmakçı.

⁵²⁷ Öztürk and Yeğin, p. 12.

⁵²⁸ 'Eski Van ' <https://twitter.com/eski_vann> [accessed 9 January 2023].

⁵²⁹ 'Eski Van '.

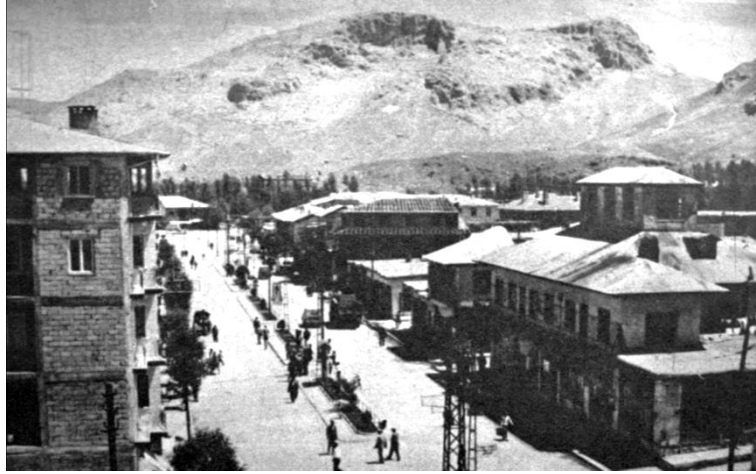


Figure 4-50 Cumhuriyet Avenue, 1970s.⁵³⁰ Photograph from the personal archives of Oğuz Topoğlu.



Figure 4-51 Cumhuriyet Avenue with new apartment blocks.⁵³¹

The third modern urbanisation period of Van was marked by another critical demographic and socio-political change in the city. From 1987 onwards, for almost a decade, Van was characterised by the brutal political violence in the region due to the armed conflict between Turkish security forces and PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party). During that period, Van was marginalised by military forces and declared a state of emergency province in 1987, together with thirteen other cities in the region. The city was governed under state of emergency policies until 2003, which

⁵³⁰ Oğuz Topoğlu, '1970 Van Fotoğrafları' <<https://www.oguztopoglu.com/2013/01/1970-senesi-van-fotograflar-cumhuriyet.html>> [accessed 18 August 2023].

⁵³¹ 'Eski Van' <https://twitter.com/eski_vann> [accessed 18 August 2023].

dramatically restricted civil and political rights in the city.⁵³² On top of socio-political consequences, the state of emergency period triggered spatial inequalities in the city as the terrific violence resulted in the forced evacuation of villages, prevention of access to pastures, which threatened the main livelihood of rural communities, displacement of Kurdish communities who were living in the rural regions of Van and its vicinity, and hence internal forced migration of them to the city centre of Van to find a more secured state of living.



*Figure 4-52 Maraş Avenue with a view of the Castle.*⁵³³

Van was one of the most affected cities in the region. The city received migrants both from its villages and from other adjacent cities such as Hakkari, Şırnak, Ağrı, Bitlis and Muş. As a result of this forced mobility, the population of Van city centre almost doubled between 1990 and 2000⁵³⁴, which accordingly led to social and spatial inequalities accompanied by unemployment and poverty.⁵³⁵ According to official statistics, the migration rate was observed as -26,3 between 1980 and 1985,

⁵³² Deniz Yüksek and Dilek Kurban, *An Assessment of the Van Action Plan for IDPs*, ed. by Josee Lavoie (İstanbul: TESEV, 2009).

⁵³³ 'Eski Van'.

⁵³⁴ According to the Van Governorship, "the urban population of the provincial center (Van Municipality) increased from around 155,000 in 1990 to around 285,000 in 2000, the period covering the height of displacement in the region". For more information, please see Yüksek and Kurban. Apart from these official numbers, local authorities believed that it was way much than declared; e.g. the Rector of Van Yüzüncüyıl University at that period, Cengiz Andıç, said that the population of the city had tripled. See Bilik, p. 117.

⁵³⁵ Biner, p. 33.

-37,9 between 1985 and 1990 and -43,6 between 1995-2000, which shows that in-migration was greater than out-migration during these periods. As of 2020, considering the internal migration dynamics, the city is still facing emigration, with a rate of -9,9. As numbers show, Van can be regarded as ‘urbanised’ in terms of its demographic development, yet when economic and social urbanisation factors are taken into account, the process can only be termed as ‘demographic inflation’⁵³⁶ or ‘over urbanisation’ to point the fact that the city could not offer much for the socio-economic wellbeing of rising population.

Neither the spatial nor socio-economic structure of the city was adequate to host this high number of migrants, and consequently, the urban sprawl that started in the early 1980s accelerated even more after the migrations. While rural economies became abandoned during this brutal period, the poverty rate and informal economies increased in the city centre, where the migrants who were ‘producers’ before were detached from their livelihoods primarily based on mobile and sedentary pastoralism, then turned to be ‘unskilled workers’ employed in unsecured jobs and exposed to precarious working and living conditions. This period corresponds to the transition from what Tarık Şengül, a political scientist and critical urbanist, calls the ‘urbanisation of the labour’ to the ‘urbanisation of the capital’. While the former focuses on the internal (forced) migration from the rural to the urban, the latter deals with how the labour of migrants as new urban poor is instrumentalised for new areas of capitalisation in the cities.⁵³⁷

The spatial reflection of this in Van, as in many other cities which received migrants from rural areas, was the establishment of new settlements in the periphery of the city in the form of squatter housing. The neighbourhoods such as Hacібekir (*Xaçort*), Karşıyaka and Yeni, located in the foothills of Mount Ereğ, majorly hosted the migrants from 1987 onwards, and for instance, Bostaniçi and Yalım Erez neighbourhoods were established during the influx (Figure 4-53). The first arrivals mostly settled in Hacібekir, Süphan, Şamranaltı, Altıntepe, İstasyon, Beyüzümü,

⁵³⁶ Özer, p. 67.

⁵³⁷ Tarık H. Şengül, *Kentsel Çelişki ve Siyaset - Kapitalist Kentleşme Süreçlerinin Eleştirisi* (İstanbul: İmge Kitabevi, 2009), pp. 122–36.

Akköprü and Sıhke neighbourhoods, and some of them were further enlarged by the immigration of relatives and paisans of the first arrivals.⁵³⁸

The socio-spatial consequences of the forced displacement of Kurdish communities in the early 1990s were one of the key topics in my fieldwork in Van. As a city shaped intentionally or unintentionally by different migrations, almost all of the dialogues I established with the people I met there at some point turned into the forced evacuation of Kurdish villages and the migration of the inhabitants of these villages to the city centre of Van. One day, after witnessing many stories about the neighbourhoods settled on the outskirts of Mount Erek, I felt urged to visit one of these peripheral neighbourhoods and took a *dolmuş* (informal minibus) from Musa Anter Park to Bostaniçi.

With large plots, generally one or two-storey detached family houses, each having its own authentic mass articulation, large gardens attached to houses and vast lands in between parcels that can still be perceived as fields, Bostaniçi resembled a quasi-urbanised village. After having a short walk on streets offering a panoramic view to Mount Erek, I found *muhtarlık* (*muhtar*'s office), a tiny, prefabricated pavilion I situated in a small compound consisting of buildings that persisted from the time when the neighbourhood was a *belde*; buildings such as municipal hall, marriage office, municipal bus garage, etc. There, I chatted with the *muhtar* (neighbourhood governor), Cemal. For 21 years, he has been the *muhtar* of the Bostaniçi neighbourhood that emerged after the arrival of Kurdish families from villages. During the course of our conversation, Cemal divulged the history of his own family and recounted their journey from Bahçesaray, a rural town located in the northern region of Van city centre.

B: Why did your family migrate from Bahçesaray 34 years ago?

C: The reason we came here is that the climate of Van is better. We also liked farming very much. We bought a field here at that time. We came in 1982, we bought a big field here. After that, we bought one or two more fields one by one. We were

⁵³⁸ Özer, p. 77.

*farming, farming was actually a bit better in those days. We could actually take care of ourselves very well by farming at that time.*⁵³⁹

Without any additional questions or comments from my side, he continued his narrative by describing how migrations in the 1990s changed the distribution of the land and the spatial characteristics of their vicinity. For him, his family's migration was not a 'forced' one, yet the forced arrivals had entirely changed the environment:

Things changed a bit after that. As you said, migrations increased. When we came at that time, there was nothing, including this place [muhtar's office]. All this was fields. I mean, this was a village. There were no houses here. There were no houses, no trees, nothing. It was a flat land at that time. After 1990, when the forced migration started, they came one by one. Fields were turned into land. Houses were built, and structures were built. Then, the zoning plan came and so on. So we sold our field. Instead, we built a house, a building here.

The transformation of the land, or initially the fields as Cemal named it, accelerated after receiving new residents. As the city was not prepared or well equipped to handle the fundamental needs of the rising population, the urbanisation of the rural peripheries of the city has proceeded informally in the hands of people. Here, I should note that Kurdish kinship (*akrabalık/soydaşlık*) and fellow-citizenship (*hemşehrilik*)⁵⁴⁰ dynamics led to the settlement preferences of migrants' distribution in the city.⁵⁴¹ For instance, as quoted by Cemal, the inhabitants of Ertoş village from Hakkari spreaded to different settlements in three groups; one of them moved to Yüksekova, the central provincial town of Hakkari, the other attached to the Seyrantepe neighbourhood of Van while the last group formed their own neighbourhood which is called Yalım Erez today. The kinship not only impacted the

⁵³⁹ Cemal, Interview, 20.05.2022.

⁵⁴⁰ For example, in Akköprü and İstasyon neighbourhoods Burikan clan, in Gölbaşı neighbourhood Helan clan, in Gölbaşı and Aburrahman Gazi neighbourhoods Giravi clan, and in Karşıyaka neighbourhood Gevdan, Jirki, Izdırın and Mamhuran clan members intensely inhabit. In Gölbaşı and Abdurrahman Gazi neighbourhoods people from Yüksekova and Başkale, in Şafak neighbourhood people from Çaldıran, Çatak and Gürpınar, and in Beyüzümü and Yalım Erez neighbourhoods people from Hakkari Çukurca mostly settle down. For more information, see Orhan Deniz, 'Van Kent Merkezine Yapılan Göçler ve Göçün Kentsel Gelişim Üzerine Etkisi', in *TÜCAUM V. Ulusal Coğrafya Sempozyumu* (Ankara, 2009), p. 180.

⁵⁴¹ Orhan Deniz and Erol Etlan, 'Kırdan Kente Göç ve Göçmenlerin Uyum Süreci Üzerine Bir Çalışma: Van Örneği', *Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi*, 6.2 (2009), 472–98 (pp. 481–82).

settlement preference but was also notably influential in how the land was distributed, organised, and planned:

*As I said, here it was a village. It was very far from the centre, and the land was cheap. For example, a big family or clan would come, and there would be 5, 6, 10, or 20 other families, and they would come and buy big fields here together. Everyone would leave a road in the middle. They divided the land according to their own budgets and built houses for themselves by saying, “5 metres from this side of the road is mine, this side of the land is yours, there should be this much distance between us”. Now, for example, if you ask about a street and ask where these people are from, for example, they bought a field together, this street dates back to that time, you would say that they are from Başkale. I mean a family. For example, if you ask where the people over there are from, they say they are from Bahçesaray. They all came from the same place together. That's how it is.*⁵⁴²

As illustrated by *muhtar* Cemal, the spatial transformation of the village and development of the new neighbourhood was held in an informal trajectory, bringing the agency of forcibly displaced persons to a necessary level as well. In that context, Van witnessed ‘kinship urbanism’, where the everyday production of kinship generated and led to the dwelling morphology as well as the socio-cultural geography of the city. We could consider such a city-making as the socio-spatial extension of the “traditional kinship-based rural communities”⁵⁴³, which is deeply based on the solidarity among wider family and kin while spatially placing the dwelling unit in a certain proximity to each other, but not only. As Bayram, the *muhtar* of Hafızıye Neighbourhood, points out, kinship has been highly impactful in the urbanisation of Van, changing its urban land use, fabric, and characteristics:

What you see as Akköprü it used to be completely forested. When you go up from the bus station intersection towards the military area, it was all forested, completely uninhabited, and abandoned. There were also vegetable gardens on the outskirts. There was absolutely no development like what you see now. In fact, when we were kids, they used to warn us not to go there. There were field mice, and we were scared...It was empty. I mean, there was nobody there... After the migrations in 1993, someone came; for instance, he brought his sheep from the village and settled there, finding himself a place where he could live with his animals. Then other relatives came. Well, this is a foreign place, so they settled next to him. The

⁵⁴² Cemal, Interview, 20.05.2022.

⁵⁴³ Thomas Pfirsch and Consuelo Araos, ‘Urban Kinships: Everyday Kinship and the Making of the City’, *Articulo: Journal of Urban Research*, 20, 2019.

*neighbour on the other side might be from the same village, and he settled next to him. If you notice, if you go in this direction, I can say the whole complex; I mean, if there are 5,000 houses in a neighbourhood, then every 150 houses in those 5,000 houses are kin. It might be their cousin, their uncle, or someone they brought along.*⁵⁴⁴

This also marks how the relationship between those communities and the state was blurred or ruptured, leaving them in a position to build a new life from scratch without any formal guidance or assistance, thus, in other words, in a position where they have to struggle with disattachment, unemployment, poverty and social humiliation through their own methods of attachment. At that point, kinship facilitated the “sharing of everyday life” based on “help with no expectations in return, pursuing a common cause, and sharing resources... for subsistence” while intrinsically participating in each other’s everyday life.⁵⁴⁵



Figure 4-53 Bostaniçi neighbourhood, 2022. *Before the 1990s, Bostaniçi was a small town within 3 kilometres of the Van city centre. After the rising population of Kurdish migrants, its status changed into a provincial neighbourhood. Photograph from the author’s personal archive.*

According to Çağatay Keskinok, the rural population has been left to the urban market conditions without any effective state intervention or support, and a large segment of the population, therefore, has been left alone with unhealthy living conditions on the peripheries of the city and has been forced to solve its own problems with the limited opportunities provided by kinship and similar bonds.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ Bayram, Interview, 20.05.2022.

⁵⁴⁵ Pfirsch and Araos.

⁵⁴⁶ Çağatay H. Keskinok, ‘Van Kenti’nin Kentleşme Sorunları’, in *Van Kent Sempozyumu* (Van: TMMOB Van İl Koordinasyon Kurulu, 2009), p. 225.

There, Keskinok insistently points out that the spatial inequalities that emerged as a result of forced migrations to the city centre of Van did not stem from a lack of ‘planned zones’. His argument was that pre-assumptions implying unsuccessful urban planning as the root of these urban problems are invalid for the case of Van, which he illustrated with the land use plan of the city developed by Esat Turak in 1993:

The total area covered by the master plan is 6150 decares. This planned area is assumed to accommodate a population of 508 thousand under the assumption of 20% under-saturation. These data show that, despite significant social inequalities such as forced migration, the population of the city in 2007 is well below the population assumed for 2005 in the master planning process.⁵⁴⁷

Although it remains uncertain whether Turak's urban plan was influenced by or referenced the pre-existing self-organised spatial structure of migrant communities, the narratives of *muhtars* and other residents of Van provide evidence that these neighbourhoods developed gradually, but still at a pace, in response to the spatial interventions of newly arriving families of that time. The locals I met in the city referred to how the socio-economic activities and necessary spatial arrangements of rural lifestyle were tried to be maintained in those peripheral neighbourhoods. To me, it was so taken for granted that in a city like Van, which is known for its pastoralist lifestyle, it would not be an issue for displaced Kurdish families to maintain their rural livelihoods in the city as well. Yet, that was not the case.

The stories I encountered weaved a narrative of “mobile spatial fields”, as coined by Nancy Munn, a concept that offers an understanding of how embodied practices and experiences actively produce and consume space. Munn’s conceptualisation offers an interwoven framework to grasp the intricacies behind mobility, body, and space. It speaks about “space, time, and bodily action” with “places” and their “powers” as “the spatiotemporal dimensions of a theoretical problem require analytic foregrounding”, which Munn found in the ethnography of the space and place.⁵⁴⁸ As per her theoretical assertion, the emergence of new spatiotemporal configurations is

⁵⁴⁷ Keskinok, p. 224. [translation by the author]

⁵⁴⁸ Nancy D. Munn, ‘Excluded Spaces : The Figure in the Australian Aboriginal Landscape’, *Critical Inquiry*, 22.3 (1996), 446–65 (p. 447).

a result of the interplay between the mobile spatial fields⁵⁴⁹ of actors and the terrestrial spaces of bodily activity. On one hand, mobile spatial fields, which Munn derived by furthering Lefebvre's "field of action" and "basis of action", symbolically produce interactions among bodies and their changing terrestrial spaces. On the other hand, this interaction notably speaks about locality; thus, not only bodies but also their "locatedness" are moving, so we could refer to 'mobile localities' as well. In this way, as Low marks, the body, as an embodied space, makes her/his own place in the world.⁵⁵⁰ When Munn points to a mobile spatial field, the 'space' she referred to is a space defined by reference to the actor, the body, and the organising centre of the action.

Since a spatial field extends from the actor, it can also be understood as a culturally defined, corporeal-sensual field of significant distances stretching out from the body in a particular stance or action at a given locale or as it moves through locales... The body is thus understood as a spatial field (and the spatial field as a bodily field).⁵⁵¹

Departing from the relation between mobility and spatiality, I argue that locality is constructed via bodyscapes, thus "simultaneously in the land, people's minds, customs, and bodily practices"⁵⁵². It is not only the bodies themselves but the ideas, meanings, and symbols as well as dwelling, labour and rituals, as if defining the scapes, are transformed from land to land, making the topography layered, curved, and cultivated with new activities and performances towards co-creation of diverse memories. This points to translocality that can be defined as "situatedness during the mobility" when "considering material and embodied practices of migrants to grasp the translocation geographies that they can simultaneously bring to life in different spaces, places and scales".⁵⁵³ In Van, internally displaced Kurdish people had to reterritorialise their dwelling, labour and rituals in changing spaces, places, and scales of life. However, those families did not refrain from carrying their know-how

⁵⁴⁹ Munn's choice to use "fields" here is not accidental, as her research is rooted in Aboriginal ancestral landscapes.

⁵⁵⁰ Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, p. 102.

⁵⁵¹ Munn, p. 451.

⁵⁵² Stuart Rockefeller, *Starting From Quirpini: Place, Power and Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009) as cited in Setha Low, *Spatializing Culture: The Ethnography of Space and Place*, p. 102.

⁵⁵³ Piscitelli, p. 8.

with them, which are indeed instruments of re-attaching to a context, setting up their daily practices and co-producing their own space while engaging with the urban and re-constructing a new locality there.

Miraz was one of the internally displaced people I interviewed; his family moved to Van from Şırnak in 1992 when he was one year old. I met him in the very first days of the second cycle of my fieldwork, where he generously responded to my questions, most of the time illustrating his arguments by means of anecdotes from his family's biography. Being a political activist, he was highly engaged with the issues around transnational migrations to the city. Back then, in August 2021, he was part of the refugee commission in one of the political organisations in Van. When he expressed that he, with his family, is living in the Hacıbekir neighbourhood (*Xaçort*), I asked him what kind of a life was built there.

M: My father has been in Van for 29 years now. He hasn't adapted to the city yet.

B: Actually, Van is not a very huge, urbanised city, at least in terms of geography and culture; it is similar to the villages you came from. Despite that, huh?

M: I mean, despite that. If you come to our garden, you will see that we have a garden this small. But we still have a bread-making place, tandoors, and stables. So you will see these things because they could not adapt here⁵⁵⁴.

Despite the numerous challenges encountered, the authentic and powerful bonds between community members not only triggered individual mobilisation but also facilitated the transmission of traditional ecological knowledge rooted in rural lifestyles and production practices to the urban landscapes of Van. Consequently, the periphery of the current city, perhaps evoking its historical roots, once again embraced a rural appearance and identity (Figure 4-54).

The fourth, and for today, the last urbanisation period of Van was triggered by the 2011 earthquake. Due to the geological formation of the region, Van experienced several destructive earthquakes in its history, which happened in 1941 and 1976 during the last century. As a consequence of the 2011 earthquake %70 of the buildings constructed over the previous thirty years were demolished, and most of

⁵⁵⁴ Miraz, Interview, 10.08.2021.

the remaining ones were found to be heavily damaged. The less damaged ones were the one, or two-storey houses belonging to the urban poor.⁵⁵⁵ The devastating results of the earthquake called for urgent urban planning decisions, and accordingly, the foci of growth were determined as being towards Edremit in the south, the foothills of Mount Erek in the east, and Kalecik in the northwest.⁵⁵⁶



Figure 4-54 The urban fabric towards the informal. The plots with gardens are just an aerial reflection of the mobile localities.

In this context, after the earthquakes in 2011, loans and incentives were provided to earthquake victims in order to overcome the housing shortage in the city, and new public housing units were built in many parts of the city, such as Kalecik, Sıhke-Akköprü, Kevenli, Bostaniçi and Edremit by the Housing Development Administration (TOKİ).⁵⁵⁷ Inevitably, urban life in the city centre was also affected by this process, where new sub-centres emerged in the city following the latest construction projects. The development of İki Nisan Boulevard and its vicinity can illustrate how new building typologies (e.g. ground floor for commercial use and upper floors for residential use) transformed urban life. Today, İki Nisan Boulevard is lined with several shops, cafes, and restaurants, mainly hosting the younger generation of the inhabitants of Van.

⁵⁵⁵ Öztürk and Yeğin, pp. 18–21.

⁵⁵⁶ Öztürk and Yeğin, p. 22.

⁵⁵⁷ Uğurlar, p. 464.

4.5 Epilogue: Other narratives

Kim demiş Vana şehir diye? Adı çıkmış Van'ın. Ben şehirdir diyemiyorum, inadımdan mı? İnanın ki değil. Van, şehir değil de ondan. Van dağınık, koskocaman bir köydür. Yirmi otuz doğu köyünü bir araya getiriniz, oldu işte size Van!

*...Van yıkılmış da yapılmamış. Bu gidişle yapılmayacağı da benziyor. Vanlılar kadar şehirleriyle ilgisiz insanlar hiçbir yerde göremezsiniz. Bundan dolayıdır ki, Van, Van olamayacaktır. Bahtsız diyar.*⁵⁵⁸



Figure 4-55 Van from the castle, the 1990s.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, few cities possessed such a rich history marked by diverse cultures, milestones, and interactions like Van. Only a few cities can be as superdiverse as Van. Digging the long history of the city while putting a special endeavour to understand its complex and multi-layered history through diverse mobilities of human populations and how they have been narrated, throughout this chapter, I tried to map the socio-spatial reflections of these mobilities in the ‘development’ of the city. I would call it the unfortunate life of this city, which

⁵⁵⁸ These words belong to one of the leading writer and human activist Yaşar Kemal. His family roots are from Muradiye, Van. After visiting the city in 1951, he expressed his observations as follows: “Who says Van is a city? Van is notorious. I can't say it's a city, because of my stubbornness? Believe me, it's not. Because Van is not a city. Van is a disorganised, huge village. Put twenty or thirty eastern villages together and that's Van!

...Van was destroyed but not rebuilt. It looks like it will not be built at this rate. You cannot see people who are as uninterested in their city as the people of Van anywhere else. Therefore, Van will not be Van. Unlucky land.”

See Yaşar Kemal, *Bu Diyar Baştan Başa* (İstanbul: Adam Yayınevi, 1971), p. 33. (translation by the author).

shows us how it has risen and fallen several times. The urban culture of Van was kneaded generously by diverse communities, from Armenians to Persians, Byzantines to Mongols, Arabs to Ottomans and finally, by citizens of the modern Turkish Republic, still consisting of different minorities.

In the forthcoming chapter, I will present a comprehensive account of my fieldwork, wherein the formal and informal dialogues that I held with people with historical ties to or presently residing in Van will be expounded upon. I interviewed them regarding their knowledge of or affiliation with historical narratives, and most of the respondents, including Reşit, a journalist from Van, initiated their responses by referencing the Urartians. As a resident of Van and a purveyor of storytelling, Reşit possesses a vested interest in the history of the city, most probably due to his professional background.

B: What is the most common narrative you know about the history of Van? Where would you start to tell this narrative?

R: I would start with the Urartians. They ruled in Van for many years. Van is their capital, called Tuşba. Van Fortress can be seen from here, we will look at it in a moment, they built a wonderful architecture on a wonderful stone structure. Moreover, forty, forty-five kilometres away from the castle, four thousand years ago, they built a drinking water supply line from Gürpınar to Van Fortress. Its name is Shamran. And Van still uses it in its irrigation system.⁵⁵⁹

I found this very interesting at the beginning. Despite the existence of various notable civilisations, such as Armenians, Persians, or Ottomans, in the recent history of Van, the inhabitants of Van have chosen to weave their narrative around Urartians. Subsequently, during the course of my fieldwork, it became apparent that this mental association or alignment of Van's history with Urartians is primarily attributed to their conspicuous architectural legacy, such as the resplendent Rock and the Van Fortress. Although the hearth of the city is presently unconnected to the Rock site, the robust urban axiality evokes a palpable sense of its presence. Beyond that, as almost nothing remained in the city centre from pre-modern times, the Rock and a few sisters of it, such as *Toprakkale*, or *Zımzım Rocks* as used in daily language, have

⁵⁵⁹ Reşit, Interview, 15.08.2021.

almost completely taken over the task of exhibiting the history of the city as a tourist attraction. The reaction of Ahmet, who is a sociologist from Hakkari but living in Van since his early childhood and working as a parliamentary counsellor, in response to my aforementioned inquiry serves as evidence that:

*Van has a remarkable history. It has a cultural distinctiveness. Let me put it this way: apart from tourism, I don't know, nature, etc., if we look at the activities that have emerged as cultural practices by human action, yes, Van has a serious history. This is more evident with the Urartians. Van is known as the centre of Urartu. This is also evident in their structures.*⁵⁶⁰

The personal reflections of Reşit and Ahmet demonstrate how they inherently look for spatial traces in associating themselves with the history of the city they have inhabited for so long. As I unquestionably did the same, both while hanging out in the city and during the interviews, I tried to catch spatial clues. Most of the time, the historical narratives showed me how diverse the urban culture of Van was. Upon receiving responses regarding ancient history, I inquired about the Armenians. The responses largely emphasised their contributions to the urban culture of Van. During my conversation with Musa, a lawyer and human rights activist hailing from Van, while he was recounting his family's migration stories, he arrived at a juncture where he discussed how his family, having undergone several forced displacements, eventually settled in lands that Armenians formerly inhabited. When I inquired about what traces he had discovered of their presence, his response was highly symbolic:

*In fact, Armenians had almost all the trade and industrial activities of that period. For example, as we were told at that time, in the villages, Kurds were in charge of agriculture, while Armenians were in charge of industry and manual labour. For example, they have big churches at the skirts of that [Erek] mountain.*⁵⁶¹

Ahmet was highly engaged with the urban culture of old Van and how it was shaped within diversity and resulted in 'good practices' for him:

Van was also a diplomatic city. It was even a centre of literature and culture. The first printing houses in Turkey or in this region were in Van. They were printing houses established during the Armenian period. And in these printing houses, French translations were also being made. Of course, there are other specific areas.

⁵⁶⁰ Ahmet, Interview, 18.08.2021.

⁵⁶¹ Musa, Interview, 11.08.2021.

Especially related to craftsmanship. For example, there is a mine called “savat”. It consists of a metal with several different components. Its production is called savat craftsmanship. This was a craftsmanship done during the Armenian period. I would even recommend you to go and see a place selling Savat jewellery near the castle.⁵⁶²

Van is an afflicted city characterised notably by the border, migration, and displacement. Yet it witnessed all the good and the bad of being territorialised by the border. On the one hand, the city served as the capital of history-making civilisations and has been home to communities of different origins, history, languages, and faiths; on the other hand, the body of it several times was interfered in during wars and recently by the instruments of the modern nation-state. Not only ideological apparatuses but also disasters several times destroyed the city. The words of Yaşar Kemal eloquently capture the city's situation in a few but powerful words: “Van was destroyed but not rebuilt.”

How the traces of the ‘other’ were erased spatially and culturally in Van not only constructed a historical narrative. In my first days in Van, as a ‘stranger’ who has long internalised the architectural knowledge set, my eyes were seeking an ‘inner city’, a ‘downtown’, a ‘historical city centre’ equipped with lots of ‘brown signs’. This unintentional act was, in fact, an inherent reaction to personally construct the context of a place I was trying to understand for the first time. After reading quite a bit about the history of Van, I was expecting to find representations of multiple histories in the city centre, say it to be architectural pieces, monuments, sculptures, or even more ruins. However, this was not the fact. Still, throughout my fieldwork, I looked for such traces to integrate them into the thesis. This is why during formal and informal talks with the people I met in Van, next to various questions about the migration patterns and their relation with the urbanisation and diversity of this city, I also asked a lot about what kind of narration they are familiar with considering the history of this city; with whom, where and how the historical narrative starts for them; how the city is built, destroyed, and rebuilt and how the city has reacted to all those spatially.

⁵⁶² Ahmet, Interview, 18.08.2021.

Only at the beginning of one of the focus group interviews I did with humanitarian aid workers from a leading humanitarian aid NGO in Van, one of the participants, who, like me, was a stranger in the city that moved from Adana to Van recently for work, all of a sudden started telling me about how she was disappointed with not seeing any historical remains in the city centre. Indeed, my question at the time to her was not about the history of the city; rather, I asked her personal view about the current migration context, but she very cleverly brought the subject to the history of this city, even more particularly to the architectural and urban heritage, probably intrigued by that once I introduced myself as an architect and urban researcher:

For example, when I came to Van, I was expecting a more cultural environment. Obviously, this is a geography with a very large history. But unfortunately, I always thought that this was either intentionally destroyed or possibly due to political reasons. Because Van is a region with a high Armenian density. Especially Akdamar Church for example. It is a completely Armenian structure. But I expected this in the centre, in the İpekyolu city centre or other places, in Edremit, for example. But there is nothing. So this is a bit annoying for me. Because when we go to the Urartu Fortress, for example, the Urartians did not climb there. I mean, we climb, there are no stairs or anything. It is really extremely bad. I think it was destroyed on purpose. You know, there is a different urbanisation here; there is completely vertical urbanisation, and there is no horizontal architecture; that is, it has not spread to Edremit at all. It's quite troublesome; there are no mosques, no churches; there's nothing historical left. I think this is political. It's as if it was done on purpose.⁵⁶³

Burçak was highly aware of the politics of space, and later in her reflection, she talked about how being and represented spatially as a 'layered city' eases the adaptation process of migrants. She did not explicitly word it, yet while developing her argument by referring to other cities such as Gaziantep and Hatay, she illustrated her argument with the case of Syrians, how one of the reasons for them to prefer living in those cities is that they find lots of likeness with their historical cities in Syria, such as Aleppo, thus, can more easily create bonds with the city.

The 'erasure' of the architectural and cultural heritage of the city and its socio-political connotations was a prominent theme in the interviews I did with so-called locals of the Van and the people who recently started living in the city for vocational

⁵⁶³ Burçak, Focus Group Interview, 20.08.2021.

reasons (e.g., humanitarian work). No matter if I asked about the history of the city or about the characteristics of migration flows, the reflections of the participants so often merged these two concepts, which made me receive linked answers. For instance, when I asked about the common narrative about the history of Van to, another fieldwork participant, Ahmet, his immediate answer was that “Van was an Armenian and Kurdish city”. He then continued:

Armenians were really persecuted here, in this land. And the people who have laboured in the lands of this city, in the trade of this city, in every aspect of this city, the people whose sweat is the sweat of their brow, the people who make this city what it is, let me put it this way. A community, an identity that shapes the culture of this city. They either did not feel safe here or had to flee. They had to leave this place in any way. While leaving, they were massacred, killed, whatever you want to call it. While this also took away many things belonging to this place, it also took away the future of this place to be more beautiful, more colourful. Perhaps the culture of this place could have been much different today. It could have been more colourful. It could have been better. This was also hit at the same time. This was also undermined.⁵⁶⁴

Burçak’s interpretation of socio-cultural and spatial historical layers of cities and, in addition to that, Ahmet’s comment on what, beyond the seen, the visible, forced migrations from Van had moved away recalls my earlier claim: *Each migration points to a wider socio-spatial context extending simply connecting a departure and arrival location on a map.* This beloved city, honoured with its breathtaking topography and scapes, was spatially and socially demolished several times because of both human and non-human factors, yet the transformation is still on. The urban culture of the city has been under great transformation again with the arrival and departure of people, as well as labour, ideas, media, goods, etc. The mobility of diversity has been shaping the city in its ‘micropublics’. That’s why I argue that we need to delve into the stories and narratives of people to grasp where, how and with whom the ‘difference’ takes place and how the city has been affected by it. *An intersectional perspective in understanding the socio-spatial impact of migration enables us to comprehend urbanisation fully.*

⁵⁶⁴ Ahmet, Interview, 18.08.2021.



CHAPTER 5

IN-BETWEEN MAKING AND TAKING PLACE TOWARDS A COLLECTIVE URBAN NARRATIVE OF VAN



Figure 5-1 An ordinary day at Beşyol markets. A photograph by the author, captured in March 2022.

Since the homogenising tendencies of the dominant way of articulating space cannot accommodate the difference inherent in [migrant] lives, what is important in conceptualising ... space is not any aesthetic concern but the need to embody notions of difference including how these are accommodated in everyday life. *This difference is played out in the relationships between space and time and the ways in which these are mediated through the body...* If the role of the abstract notion of space is to homogenise then the element that it does not account for is the living, being, moving, gesturing body, which constantly produces difference through the way it lives in and through moments.⁵⁶⁵

Throughout the trajectory of this research, a few of the questions never left me: How does migration, often ending with forced displacement, affect the city? Then comes more detailed ones related to the subjects of migration: How has migration of diverse people affected Van? This subsequently called for a description, perhaps a ‘thick

⁵⁶⁵ Awan, *Diasporic Agencies: Mapping the City Otherwise*, p. 18. (emphasis by the author)

description', about diversity, delving into other questions one after another about what diversity is, how it occurs and how 'the diverse' together with 'the different' is formed or co-created. Following what Awan suggested above, I argue that diversity as well is accommodated in everyday life. It occurs in the ways that the space is experienced and inhabited "by those whose lives span different cultures, spaces, and times, as well as the spatial experiences of those who are situated at the margins"⁵⁶⁶.

As I mentioned earlier while presenting the 'fieldwork ecosystem', I met many people in Van; some of whom I met intentionally through planned interviews, some randomly while hanging out in a place or next to people I interviewed or indirectly while trying to reach out a 'target' participant or over an occasion, for instance, while celebrating *Newroz*. Each of them has different spatial, temporal, and socio-cultural attachments to Van, making their stories unique in that sense. While during the conversations with those people and later checking my field notes and transcribing and reading the audio records of those moments, I couldn't help being surprised every time: Although I roughly, but still in a way, 'structured' the interviews, just after the first couple of questions, when the person I talked with and I settle at the moment and my presence as a stranger was broken a little bit, the trajectory of each interview started to evolve around the particular narrative that appeared at that moment.

Now sharing commons, the urban landscape of Van with its buildings, streets, parks, coastal lands, marine areas, and mountainous territories, each individual experienced and stored a distinct bodily engagement with mobility and displacement, which affected how they make the meaning and use of this city. Together with the spatial qualities of the city, the body as 'a mutable, reactive, expressive and dynamic archive' is, therefore, the central source and inspiration of my socio-spatial analysis in attempting to understand the transformation of the urban culture of Van, driven by migrations. Thus, the contacts I had in the fieldwork have been more than merely 'participants' of an interview, yet there are, with their stories, memories, references and interpretations, socio-spatial agents of this work who together co-create a

⁵⁶⁶ Awan, *Diasporic Agencies: Mapping the City Otherwise*, p. 33.

collective urban narrative. I should quote Rolf Lindner here, who argues that the city and its spaces are sites of collective narrative-making:

Cities are not empty pages but narrative spaces in which particular (hi)stories, myths and parables are inscribed. These cultural codings have a cumulative effect in part the result of the process of continuous intertextual cross-reference. The reflections on the cultural texture of cities are intended to make clear that we are dealing with processes of long duration. Like a rhizome, the cultural texture has burrowed deep, and unconsciously guides even those who are determined to radically alter the image of the city.⁵⁶⁷

I would go further; the urban culture, or in Lindner's terminology, the "cultural texture" of Van, has been truly shaping how the people of this city inhabit it. Furthermore, it is noteworthy to mention that the spatial elements, as a stage, have played a significant role in shaping the daily life of the inhabitants of Van. I argue that in Van, migrations have powerfully influenced and diversified the everyday social reality of the city, as well as the spatial characteristics of it. In the first days of my fieldwork, as a scholar trained as an architect and urban researcher, I was deliriously looking for spatial clues of current migrations. My initial tendency was to trace the socio-spatial reflections of the transnational migrants in Van, namely, the displacement of people from Iran, Afghanistan, and Syria. Their different scales and forms of presence, or let's say appearance here, in everyday life was my first inspiration that gave birth to this research, as each appearance and plurality of them altogether collectively could tell us about other forms of urban inhabitation. In the later cycles of the fieldwork, I recognised that the existence of different biopolitical subjectivities in the city has been a powerful means of spatially and temporally connecting to the city. We could multiply, but they could be observed as differences among the stranger and local, the irregular and regular, the registered and unregistered, the temporary and permanent, the short-term and long-term, and the group and individual.

Beyond the diversity displayed by the reterritorialisation of transnational migrants, which extends beyond demographic differences, the fieldwork revealed that other

⁵⁶⁷ Lindner, p. 53.

forms of human and non-human mobility also contribute to the multifaceted diversity of Van and its influence on the urban culture. Over a centuries-long temporality, the city witnessed migrations and mobilities of: educational migrations, mainly from smaller provinces in the region and villages after the establishment of Van 100. Yıl University in 1982; migration of internally displaced Kurdish communities since the late 1980s; vocational migrations of the faculty members and administrative personnel as well as other governmental officers such as security forces, investors, and national and international humanitarian aid workers since 1990s; transnational mobility of human and non-human beings within ‘suitcase trade’ across borders (with Russia in early 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and with Iran since late 1990s), increasing transnational migration of Iranian asylum-seekers since 2000s; ‘recreational migration’ of Iranians since 2010s; internal migrations (in and out) triggered by the devastating earthquakes in 2011, transnational migration of Syrian asylum-seekers since 2014 and of Afghan asylum-seekers excessively since 2019.

During the fieldwork, numerous peculiar stories and memories have been woven around in creating a ‘collective urban narrative’, how diverse people(s) of Van, who together - yet unconsciously - establish the ‘emergence of difference’ in the city, are/have been/were in movement to make ‘ways’; as well as to make ‘places’ that they passed across or temporally or permanently have inhabited. The encounters during the fieldwork showed me that it is not always about making the place but also notably about ‘taking place’ when it comes to the tactics and strategies in engaging with the city or to the practices of reterritorialisation in rebuilding one’s locality in a new context. At that point, borrowing from Heynen, I argue that displacement holds a critical effect on place by means of “opening up a closed system, enlarging the possibilities for individual expressions through divergent interpretations, creating new, unexpected layers of meaning and use, multiplying the range of acceptable attitudes”.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁸ Hilde Heynen and André Loeckx, ‘Scenes of Ambivalence: Concluding Remarks on Architectural Patterns of Displacement’, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 52.2 (1998), 100–108 (p. 52).

Within the limitations of my fieldwork, each single excerpt from the narratives of people I met guided the making of the ‘collective urban narrative’ of Van (Figure 5-2). With contradictions, dichotomies and even discrepancies among each other, each narrative manifests its own agency while appearing with its own spatiotemporal case, reflecting one’s body exists in the narrative itself. Therefore, while each narrative adds to the superdiversity of the city, it is itself the cause of it. Not only the bodies and their narratives but also how they come together in space could tell us a lot about the superdiversity of this city. Excavating the socio-spatial traces, we could unfold that encounters of making and taking place are often the results of intersecting migrations in Van.

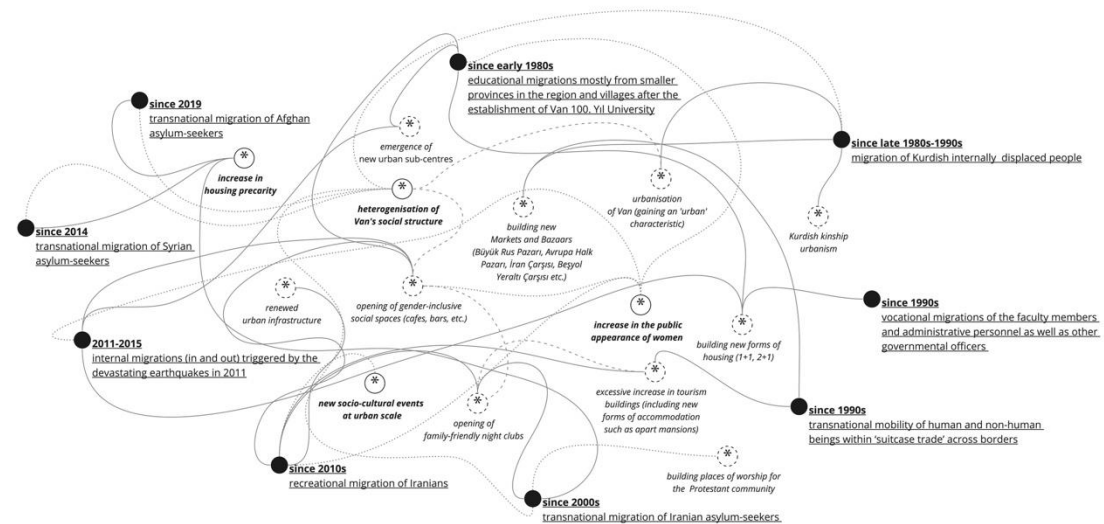


Figure 5-2 Collective urban narrative of Van around migration.

In this line of flight, I will map the socio-spatial traces of how bodies construct **dwelling, labour** and **ritual** in Van in the following sections. These three interrelated themes appeared organically in the fieldwork and were structured as part of the post-fieldwork exercise I conducted after transcribing the interview records and my audio field notes. The socio-spatial tracing continued while ‘analysing’ the collected data. I was deliberately in search of intersections, not to find and represent commonalities only, but on the contrary, to elaborate ‘microcultures’ of intersections to present the diversity accommodated in the urban culture of Van. Thereby, it appeared that at the micro scale informed by bodyscapes, diversity has emerged and amplified in Van

through how migrants take place to live, work, and perform their rituals in the most mundane practices and spaces of life in the city.

5.1 Mobile bodies, mobile dwellings

I consider dwelling as the condition of making of the bodyscapes. Thus, it embraces both the physical making of the home as a domestic place, as well as ‘taking’ it. As Arendt interprets it in *The Life of the Mind*, although we can use the term ‘house’ for various architectural objects such as “mud hut of a tribe, for the palace of a king, the country home of a city dweller, the cottage in the village, the apartment house in town”, it signifies what “the eyes of the body or by those of the mind” see. There is an invisible house beyond the recognisable, and it implies the act of dwelling:

The point here is that it implies something considerably less tangible than the structure perceived by our eyes. It implies “housing somebody” and being dwelt in as no tent, put up today and taken down tomorrow, could house or serve as a dwelling place. The word “house” is the unseen measure, “holds the limits of all things” pertaining to dwelling; it is a word that could not exist unless one presupposed thinking about being housed, dwelling, having a home.⁵⁶⁹

We could take Arendt’s approach as a phenomenological line of flight to add distinct perspectives to the idea of house and home. Following her interpretation, at the extension of the idea of a house, at a relational level, dwelling corresponds to “embodied immersion in an environment where all aspects, objects, nature, people continuously inform the life patterns of one another”⁵⁷⁰. This signifies the practical engagement of bodies with their surroundings in understanding how bodies construct their ‘home’ and ‘environment’. The term ‘a dwelling’ signifies a place of residence or a habitation. Yet, as denoted by Catherine Brun, ‘dwelling’ can also function as a verb, encompassing a manner of ‘being’, a manner of ‘doing’, and a manner of

⁵⁶⁹ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 171.

⁵⁷⁰ Biehl, ‘Dwelling Encounters: Migration , Diversity and Ambivalence in an Istanbul Neighbourhood’, p. 19.

‘relating’.⁵⁷¹ Here, the dual connotations of ‘dwelling’, as a verb and as a noun, intersect.

Neither home nor environment is ‘static’. As Heynen maps while illustrating ‘space as a stage’, architecture also is a series of changes; thus, the physical elements of the built environment are “not static objects but moving projects, continuously being transformed as well during their conception stage as once they are built”⁵⁷². According to Heynen and Loeckx, building and dwelling practices within the domain of architecture have the ability to function as a mechanism for effectively dealing with the issue of displacement. Architecture can manifest, enforce, or stage displacement, and at times, it can even generate exceptional arrangements that facilitate individuals in overcoming the ambivalences of everyday life. It permits ambivalence to transpire, the ambivalence that aligns with the desire to be both at home and away.⁵⁷³ When considering dwelling together with superdiversity, we could trace how it is constructed relationally through the agency of diverse migrants. At that point, while trying to grasp how dwelling in displacement has been formed in Van, my initial observation was that the superdiversity of Van is not spatially concentrated. Therefore, it is not so meaningful to illustrate the formation of migrants’ dwellings with reference to particular urban settlements. Throughout the fieldwork, I traced the difference in spaces, actors, and personal stories of the formation of dwelling in displacement.

It was a sunny May day in Van. As I was spending the last few days of my fieldwork, I remember myself with full of ideas, emotions, and questions that emerged after meeting so many people I had never known before, most of whom have impressively touching, at the same time inspiring stories. Yet even at that moment, it still felt exciting to meet new people, migrants who have been passing borders in all senses for years. Yet all of the families I planned to meet that day were living in the same

⁵⁷¹ Cathrine Brun, ‘Dwelling in The Temporary: The Involuntary Mobility of Displaced Georgians in Rented Accommodation’, *Cultural Studies*, 30.3 (2016), 421–40 (p. 6) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2015.1113633>>.

⁵⁷² Heynen, p. 353.

⁵⁷³ Heynen and Loeckx, p. 108.

neighbourhood, Hafiziye, the central part of which is defined by two busy streets of the city: Maraş Avenue and İki Nisan Boulevard. After the relocation of the İpekyolu Municipality and the construction of *Kent Park* (City Park) in the neighbourhood, it started to attract even more residents and has become referred to as one of the centres of the city.

My contact person in Hafiziye, who introduced me to a migrant from Afghanistan, Wali, was the *muhtar*. As I detailed in Chapter 3, my intention during those days was to meet as many of the *muhtars* in central Van. That's why I insistently called them to set a date or sometimes spontaneously showed up in their office to catch them in their spare moment. With *muhtar* Bayram, the process was relatively easy since, as a person who previously worked in the tourism sector and also with the UNHCR for the transportation of asylum-seekers to assigned satellite cities, he was interested in the subject of my research and warmly welcomed us⁵⁷⁴ in his office after my first call. Bayram himself witnessed migration when he was in primary school age; his family moved from Gürpınar, a small town of Van, to Hafiziye in 1978 to provide him with better conditions for a proper education. When I asked him why his family particularly preferred to settle in that part of the city, he replied to me with a bunch of more information, briefly summarising the urbanisation of the city through migrations:

Van hadn't developed like this before. The centre was the Cumhuriyet Avenue. The place we call Maraş Avenue today had partially developed. I mean, it was a street, it had the status of a street, but only a part of it had developed... At that time, Van had its own established structure. There were the local people of Van, or rather, the natives of Van. Back then, there was no migration or anything like that. Until 1993, Van had its locals. So, what happened? The villages in Van were evacuated. Not just Van's villages, but also in places like Hakkari, Şırnak, Siirt, Batman, Diyarbakır, and Urfa... When these villages were evacuated, there was an influx into Van. When there was an influx into Van, our neighbourhood, which used to be just a regular neighbourhood before, automatically became the centre of Van. In other words, the reason we especially preferred this neighbourhood was that it was

⁵⁷⁴ During the third and fourth cycle of my research, I was with Johanna who was also conducting doctoral research about the local perceptions in Van about the border. We co-interviewed some of the participants of my fieldwork, which is shown in Annex 1.

*the closest neighbourhood to the centre of Van. It is now the central neighbourhood of Van.*⁵⁷⁵

For Bayram, the migration of Kurdish families after being forcibly displaced from their villages is a turning point in the history of the city. As the city got more and more heterogenised, urbanisation accelerated with the new initiatives of internally displaced people. Not only did the population increased, but also the new inhabitants of Van built residential and commercial areas in the city, tied with their kinship relations. According to Bayram, “*Van actually became mosaicised with the 1990s migration. Before that, there was nothing like that in Van; there were certain people.*” After 1915, for nearly seven decades, the city was inhabited by individuals self-identified as ‘locals’ or ‘natives’ of Van. It is a controversial issue to identify who constitutes the locals of this city. Above everything, the narratives about the locality spatially concentrate on the city centre of the city; therefore, when an interviewee referred to the ‘locals of Van’, she/he indeed meant the people who have long been living in the city centre of Van. In that context, the conventional narrative about the locals of the city centre emphasises Armenians dominantly as former locals. Yet, the nation-state, therefore body-nation, building process had immensely highlighted the locality of people of Turkish origin, through which Turkmens and Acems have been narrated as the ‘true locals of Van’:

*The current Van has a history of 30 years, 30-40 years. Normally, after the Armenians, the Acems remained as the natives of Van. The real natives of Van are the Armenians raised in Van. After they were forced to migrate, Acems and Turks remained... I am not talking about the districts of Van; I am talking about the centre of Van.*⁵⁷⁶

*They call the Acems “true Van locals”. These are Iranian Turks. In Van, they say this. For example, if you ask someone in Van, “Are you a native of Van?” and if they are Kurdish and somewhat knowledgeable about the issue, and if they are intellectual, they might respond, “No, why would I be an Acem?” In the local dialect, they are also called “Küresunni”. Most of them speak and understand Kurdish*⁵⁷⁷.

⁵⁷⁵ Bayram, Interview, 20.05.2022.

⁵⁷⁶ Miraz, Interview, 10.08.2021.

⁵⁷⁷ Reşit, Interview, 15.08.2021.

The inclusion of Küresünni people to increase the population of Turkish origins in Van through resettlement policies as part of the nation-building changed not only the demographic structure of the city but also affected how the locality was constructed and through referring to whom it has been narrated. Bayram briefly summarised to me what had been told and knew about the relocation of Turks from Iran.

Some people say different things about who the locals of Van are, but let me tell you who the locals of Van are. We call those who stayed in Van during 1915 and later came to settle in the centre of Van, the true locals of Van. In the 19420s, people from Iran arrived. They are now referred to as “Küresünni” in Van. They are called Acem or Küresünni. As an ethnic group, there were no Kurds among Van’s locals. The Kurds were in the villages, in districts like Gürpınar, Özalp, Çaldıran, and Muradiye; they didn’t live in the city centre. For example, the Buruki clan settled in Van city centre later. After Kinyas Kartal settled in Van, he brought them here, so they came through migration. They were brought from the Caucasus.⁵⁷⁸

The city underwent a massive transformation in the 1990s, regaining its pluralistic composition. Nevertheless, as anticipated, the influx of Kurds not only impacted the city but also significantly altered the socio-cultural characteristics of the Kurdish community, which primarily consisted of ‘nomads’ or ‘mobile pastoralists’ dwelling in mountainous villages. For instance, according to Musa, a local lawyer and human rights activist, the forced decision to become ‘settled’ in urban areas served as a catalyst for the Kurdish political movement and the growth of Kurdish society in every sense:

They weren’t in the city. Generally, they were in rural areas...But in general, the Kurdish way of life is like this, living in the mountains...At that time, pressure from the state and compulsory village evacuations triggered people’s migration to the city centre of Van. Consequently, the dynamics within the city began to change. It led to the urbanisation of the Kurds, so to speak. They became involved in the trade industry, had influence in public areas, could embrace their own identities, and established their social and cultural lives.⁵⁷⁹

Musa continued telling me about how the Kurds turned forced migration into an advantage; as for him, “All of these changes began with that process, so in a way, there were positive outcomes of migration”. He then extended his argument by

⁵⁷⁸ Bayram, Interview, 20.05.2022.

⁵⁷⁹ Musa, Interview, 11.08.2021.

illustrating his family's case: *"I also came during migration. That is, they migrated to Van with my birth in the 90s. For example, during that period, speaking for my own village, the education level was at zero. Currently, there are approximately 20 people with university-level education, at least at the undergraduate level."* Yet still, for a few of the Kurdish internally displaced people I met in Van, the migration to the city centre means the loss of traditional identities, such as declining use of the Kurdish language. Unlike the situation today, where one can often hear Kurdish conversations or Kurdish music coming from the shops while strolling on the streets, in the 1990s, it was prohibited to speak Kurdish in public spaces.

Yet today, language matters notably in transnational migrants' preference of dwelling, both at regional and urban scales. While tracing the socio-spatiality of migrations in the city, I always asked why people settled in Van and, following that, how they chose where to dwell. The dwelling form of migrants in Van shows a 'dispersed settlement', so it is not likely that any neighbourhood or part of the city can be considered as belonging to a single ethnic community. This made me question the role of 'kinship' in the making of dwelling. During a focus group interview, I was talking with three humanitarian aid workers; two of them moved to Van for vocational reasons in recent years, and the other is from the city; all have been working with asylum-seekers and migrants for almost a decade. After they framed the general context and contemporary situation regarding the transnational migrations to Van, our conversation deepened into the particular spatialities of this human mobility. I told them my observation that unlike in other cities such as Gaziantep, Hatay or Adana, I did not recognise any urban 'migrant enclaves' in Van. In response to this, Burçak told me that the language is highly influential in determining the place to dwell:

Now, if you think about the Afghans here, generally, the people here speak Kurdish, and they are also quite receptive to Farsi. They don't have any problems, there's no language barrier, and there's no place that they must live together. But, for example, in Syrian families, those who can't learn Turkish need to live in Arab neighbourhoods to be able to communicate.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁸⁰ Burçak, Focus Group Interview, 20.08.2021.

She further continued that since Afghans and Iranians can easily adapt to the Kurdish language and that they can facilitate their everyday life on their own in terms of daily communication skills, there is no need for them to live in close proximity to each other in large populations that may result in ethnic enclaves. She said, “*This doesn’t push them towards forming neighbourhoods or living together. They can already communicate with anyone they greet on the street in Kurdish or Farsi*”. However, for Syrian migrants, language may appear as a socio-cultural barrier. According to Selin, who worked with Syrian migrants for years, they are generally inclined to settle very close to each other and to set up their own neighbourhoods by taking place in the same dwelling area, located often in the peripheries.⁵⁸¹ Burçak supported her interpretation by highlighting the capabilities and limits of communities in making and taking place with reference to their cultural identities. Based on that, she further explained why Syrians do not prefer settling in Van:

*In general, Syrians love to preserve their kinship ties and culture. Now, they do not have social networks here. I mean, they generally have very strong social networks. For example, Syrians in Adana always live together. They have regions there, they know their neighbourhoods, and they are together in general. And they love ghettoisation and keeping their culture alive. But there is no bond that can attract them here. They also have no social network. That is probably why Syrians may not be coming here... Their social networks are also very strong there. For example, Syrian families do not leave newly arrived Syrian families alone. They find their houses, they find them jobs.*⁵⁸²

It is widely discussed among many scholars that although following the spatial traces of migrants is a challenging task, they still need to build spatial connections to be able to take place in the city.⁵⁸³ Accordingly, it is possible to unveil that migrants intrinsically need to build a connection to the place they temporarily or permanently inhabit in order to establish and develop links with the arrival context. Within a cross-

⁵⁸¹ Selin, Focus Group Interview, 20.08.2021.

⁵⁸² Burçak, Focus Group Interview, 20.08.2021.

⁵⁸³ M. Göregenli and P. Karakuş, ‘Göç Araştırmalarında Mekan Boyutu: Kültürel ve Mekansal Bütünleşme’, *Türk Psikoloji Yazıları*, 17.34 (2014), 101–15; Yasemin Çakırer Özservet, ‘Modern Göçebeler Olarak Göçmenler, Mekân ve Şehre Uyum’, *Sosyoloji Divanı*, 3.6 (2015); Bilge Çakır, ‘Bir Sınır Kentinde Kitleli Göçün Toplumsal Etkileri: Hatay Deneyimi’, in *Çağlar Boyu Göç (Tarih-Kültür-Medeniyet)* (Ss., ed. by İsa Kalaycı and Gökhan Kalmış (Ankara: Gazi Kitabevi, 2021), pp. 507–38.

scalar approach, I contend that by digging into the formation of dwelling through exploration at a body scale, we could trace how migrants in Van make and take places of dwelling.

Furthermore, not only the language but also other elements informing the biopolitical subjectivities of migrants are influential in the formation of the dwelling. During our conversation with Selin and Burçak, Necmi got involved again and brought a different perspective to the discussion. Specifically, he highlighted the cruciality of migrants' legal 'status' in determining their choice to cohabit or live more separately from other migrants.⁵⁸⁴ He said that since the influx of Syrian migrants occurred massively, they have been given temporary protection status, which clearly puts forward that "the reasons for Syrians' arrival are always clear; they have nothing hidden". Thus, they are not anticipated to undertake distinct bureaucratic measures that are specific to each individual case; rather, their immigration grounds are widely known and uniform for all Syrian migrants. On the other hand, for Afghan or Iranian citizens, whose immigration has not been massively represented but has instead been presented through individual cases, either by the individuals themselves or as a family, the course of their asylum process highly depends on the personal history for each case. *"Since they come for more individual reasons, they do not want their reasons for applying for international protection to be known. They do not want their locations to be identified."*

Following Necmi's observation about the legal status of migrants, we could unfold how biopolitical subjectivities shape migrants' everyday lives in the city. It is, however, an unstable process surrounded by ambiguities; the 'titles' and the 'status' always change on the move. Even the status at the origin country may differ; an asylum-seeker might have been sentenced to the death penalty or deprived of citizenship. Then, while on the move, the migrants often, unless they arrived in

⁵⁸⁴ Necmi, Focus Group Interview, 20.08.2021.

Turkey in accordance with the procedures for entry into a foreign country, experience phases of transition from ‘illegality to legality’⁵⁸⁵.

For instance, I met Roya and Kaveh, two migrants from Iran who have held international protection since 2014 and 2015, respectively, submitted all the necessary documents, passed all steps ‘successfully’ and have been waiting for third-country resettlement since 2017. I met them at their home, on the second floor of a five-storey apartment on Maraş Avenue. Their home was the most ‘centrally’ located migrant house that I visited in Van. It was a modestly decorated 2+1 house (with two bedrooms and a living room). They invited me to sit on a sofa and drink Persian tea, but after a few seconds when, Roya and Kaveh could not stop themselves from directly sitting on the ground, as for them, it is the comfortable way of hanging out in the living room. I immediately joined them to keep our horizontal eye contact. I felt lucky to be invited to their domestic space. Dwelling, in their case, means the act of practising anonymity in the urban environment to the greatest extent possible. By doing so, they are able to maintain their desired presence in public life while simultaneously concealing their domestic space from others, thus safeguarding their personal information and historical background. Throughout our interview, I felt that both of them preferred to interact with fewer people and hold back from meeting new ones in order to protect their private lives. When I attempted to hear more about that, Roya briefly responded to me:

*There can be a lot of problems. Because people gathered from different cultures, from different parts of Iran, we do not know our backgrounds. We don't know which family they come from; that is, we don't know anything about who they were in the past. Now we want to meet them here, in this minute...For these internal reasons, we don't meet too many people; we don't invite them to our house.*⁵⁸⁶

Later, she expressed that most of the Iranian asylum-seekers in Van are not prone to dwell in relation to each other. In terms of the case of Iranians, the diversity in the history and motivation of migration could appear as a threat to personal security

⁵⁸⁵ This does not apply the case of all migrants; it has been presented in several reports that there are thousands of undocumented migrants living in Turkey. However, the migrants participated in this research have been all registered to the Presidency of Migration Management.

⁵⁸⁶ Roya, Dyadic Interview, 18.08.2021.

since, in Van, there are various background motivations for migrations from Iran, including politics, trade, and tourism. As I will elaborate on in the next section, the migration of Iranians to Van is not limited to immigration of asylum-seekers, but more than that, ‘recreational migrants’ temporally stay in the city to be involved in the retail, leisure, and entertainment activities that they are not allowed to do or only allowed at a limited basis.

During the peak times of the year, such as *Newroz* celebrations or summertime, thousands of Iranians visit the city. Besides those temporary migrants, some of the Iranians have residency in Van as they purchased estates or set up mostly tourism-related companies. This recreational activity has reached such a level that the locals of Van do not see Iranians as refugees or immigrants. According to Nesrin, who has been living in Van since the early 2000s and working for a humanitarian aid NGO in the city for almost a decade, during the days when the city is highly crowded with Iranian tourists, *“people could not distinguish who is a tourist and who is a migrant. Generally, people do not even know that there are asylum-seekers among Iranians; they think that they have come for sightseeing.”*⁵⁸⁷ These intertwined biopolitical subjectivities of Iranians affect the dwelling of Iranian asylum seekers in a binary way.

On the one hand, dwelling at the borderscapes between Turkey and Iran refers to being close to deportation and also to any unforeseen threats coming from Iran, including a mass of people visiting Van temporarily due to tourism activities. On the other hand, the ongoing commercial relationship between Van and Iran means more financial opportunities for them, through which they could more easily adapt to urban life in the city. This also refers to better facilitation of engaging with the city, not through work only but through recreational aspects of everyday life. In our conversation with Kaveh and Roya, I asked them how they feel when thousands of Iranians visit Iran. Kaveh, a political asylum-seeker forced to flee Iran in 2014, expressed it as “feeling better”:

⁵⁸⁷ Nesrin, Interview, 13.08.2021

*At that time, it felt like we were in our own city. Everyone speaks Farsi. We feel very good, very good at that time. Because we miss there... And at such times, we go out on the streets more easily. We feel more comfortable.*⁵⁸⁸

Feeling ‘in-between’ is the essence of being displaced. As Musa mentioned, migration takes a lot from people who are forced to leave the places where their ‘roots’ exist or their identity has been shaped, yet, on the other hand, it opens unpredicted paths as the socio-spatial scale of dwelling expands. For some migrants, for whom Van is a ‘transition site’, the feeling of in-betweenness occurs at higher levels in a way that for them, no matter how long they have stayed in Van, it is not their ‘real’ life that they are living in. Biner interprets this as a “borrowed life”⁵⁸⁹ of an uncertain period of time. It is borrowed from real life where and when the political agency is taken back by transiting from what Agamben calls ‘bare life’, where life is maintained at a biological minimum, to ‘political life’, which, as Arendt persistently emphasised, could only be formed with plural subjects that act freely. It is dwelled in between the real and the imagined.

According to the beforementioned laws and regulations that subject asylum-seekers to residing in assigned satellite cities, life in Van represents a bare life to changing extents as migrants are deprived of active political life. Factors such as status in the origin country, migration motivation, personal history and occupation of migrants are effective in the formation of tactics to deal with the life in-between. For instance, as I presented above, in terms of the case of Iranian asylum-seekers, who are mostly actively engaged with political practice, the everyday life in Van means, in Judith Butler’s words, a “suspended life” where the socially conditioned state of life itself a tactical exercise shaped by scales of (bio)power.⁵⁹⁰ This reflected upon migrants’ lives as pursuing a life at a minimum, less public appearance, less appropriation of the space or less social relations with others. After I asked Roya if they have built

⁵⁸⁸ Kaveh, Dyadic interview, 18.08.2021.

⁵⁸⁹ Biner, p. 176.

⁵⁹⁰ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), pp. 67–68.

any bonds with locals of the Van, she described life in suspension, which is not a 'normal' life:

*I mean, we don't have anything in common. Not at all. Our lifestyles are very different. We see ourselves leaving from here. If we were here completely, if we lived a normal daily life, if we made plans for the future, maybe then we could establish some relations here. But it is not like that. Our thoughts are completely different.*⁵⁹¹

The difference that Roya referred to emerged in daily life, shaped by several socio-cultural aspects, including ideology and religion. However, for some migrants, Van has long ceased to be a site of transition and has become a "site of adaptation". For those, in-between dwelling is mostly supported by the kin. When Bayram, the *muhtar* of Hafiziye Neighbourhood, told me that there are around 75 migrant families composed of Afghans, Syrians and mostly Iranians in his neighbourhood, I asked him if he could introduce me to some of them. He accepted my request without a word and told me that he knew some of the Afghan families in person, as he was facilitating the distribution of humanitarian aid to the families in need of assistance. The other day, Bayram accompanied me to a house of an Afghan family located on a narrow street parallel to Maraş Avenue. The north façade of the street was occupied with six to seven-storey mix-used buildings, while the south façade was composed of single or two-storey detached houses with gardens side by side, which were not in good condition. We stopped in front of a two-storey house that looked abandoned, and Bayram introduced me to Wali, an asylum-seeker from Afghanistan who has been living in Van since 2019. Bayram left us; then Wali invited me to their home on the second floor, where he lives with his family. He later told me that his parents were living on the ground floor. Their house is in an old, derelict building consisting of two underfurnished rooms. We sat on the ground during the interview, and Wali started telling me his story. As I mentioned earlier, I was curious about why migrants preferred to stay in Van instead of transiting to other cities, particularly in the west.

W: My parents had come to Van 6 years ago. I stayed here too, but I was thinking of going to another province, but I couldn't choose such a province yet... We have many relatives here. We, for example, have two older sisters; my elder sister is

⁵⁹¹ Roya, Dyadic interview, 18.08.2021.

married. She has been here for 20 years. For example, first, she got married and travelled from here to Istanbul. She came back to Van from Istanbul.

B: Where did you stay when you first came to Van?

W: With my parents.

B: Is this downstairs?

W: No, they had another house then, after that, they moved here.

B: Which neighbourhood was that house in?

W: Right down that [Akyıl] mosque.

B: How long did you stay there?

W: We stayed there for 20 days... Then we moved here.

B: How did you find this place?

W: My father found this place for me before I came from Afghanistan.

B: Who helped him? Was it the muhtar or someone else?

W: They found it themselves... A year later, their house was demolished, and they moved here.

For a migrant who entered Turkey through irregular ways like Wali, dwelling in Van generally⁵⁹² begins with release from either the Removal Centre (*Geri Gönderme Merkezi*) located in Kurubaş, outside the city centre or the smuggler. After days or, in some cases, weeks of waiting in detention, on the path to legality, dwelling in Van starts at the moment when the migrants are dropped off at a spot in the city by the police forces. Dwelling in-between for migrants brings several ambiguities from that moment, amongst others, safe shelter at the urgent level. As Miraz, one of the local political activists I met, told me, “*Van is a kind of adaptation centre. If they [Afghans] have contacts with Afghans here, they can stay here for a while. But those who do not have any contact, who do not know the city at all, stay here for 5-10 days at most and then migrate.*”⁵⁹³

⁵⁹² The other option is that if their smuggler is ‘successful’ and ‘well-organised’, the migrants end up in ‘shock houses’ (barn-like structures) during different phases of the trajectory of their migration: In the villages of Iran close to the border, in the border villages of Van or Ağrı and finally in Van city centre, in the neighbourhoods such as Hacıbekir (Xaçort) and Karşıyaka.

⁵⁹³ Miraz, Interview, 10.08.2021.

Wali introduced me to another Afghan family, and that was how I met Emal, who lives on the same street as his family and via them, I met two other families. On that sunny May day, towards the end of my fieldwork, I met Asma, whom I met through Emal. She was from Afghanistan and has been living in Van since 2014. She and her five children were living together a few streets away from Wali's house. Their place was at the garden level of a three-storey building; it was an old one but was better conditioned compared to other old buildings on the street. After I introduced myself and told her about my research, she invited me inside and from the entrance connected to the garden, we directly entered the spacious living room decorated with modest furniture. The TV was on; the little kid was occupied with it. Asma was a tailor, and since she could not afford to rent a place for her work, her home was her workplace as well, like many other migrant women who make a living from tailoring. There were pieces of cloth and sewn clothes in the room, together with her sewing machine.

From the moment I stepped into their house, I inevitably started to think about how many houses they have had to change to 'finally' end up in this place. The stories I heard from other migrants until then point to considerable dwelling mobility across the city among different neighbourhoods. The mobility for a migrant is never-ending; as Sibel Karadağ emphasises, it is a "long-standing precarity begins at their home country, steps up during their migratory movement, and crystalises in Turkey"⁵⁹⁴. Narratives of migrants about their constantly changing homes made me ask more questions about the formation of the dwelling: How many houses fit in one migration? In constant change of the dwelling, is migration actually always happening?

As I mentioned above, if they do not end up in 'shock houses', for migrants who irregularly entered the country, dwelling in Van started after they are transferred to the city centre and left there either by officials or smugglers. In Asma's story, it happened as such in the middle of November 2014. She recalled the day as follows:

⁵⁹⁴ Sibel Karadağ, *Ghosts of İstanbul: Afghans at the Margins of Precarity* (İstanbul: Association for Migration Research (GAR), 2021), p. 11.

I was so afraid, with the children by my side, I was thinking: “What are we going to do? What should we do? I mean, what kind of city is this?” We went to the park. In the park next to the [Hz. Ömer] mosque... The weather was cold. Then, one of our Afghans came up to help us there. In the middle of the night... He took us to his own home. We spent the evening there. Then, the next day, we went out, and they rented a house for us. We got to the house and went there. I had a little money with me. But if you look at the house, it was falling apart.⁵⁹⁵

The dwelling story of Emal and his family in Van started similarly in 2019:

We didn’t have any specific place in mind. We just came this far to Van. We saw that we didn’t have enough money to go anywhere else. We ran out of money with these kids. We stayed in a park here. There’s the Hz. Ömer Mosque, we stayed in the park there for one night. Then a man came and took us from there. We went to his house. It was an old house, no electricity, no water.⁵⁹⁶

During my fieldwork in Van, I heard about Hz. Ömer Mosque and the park next to it located in Beşyol several times. *Beş* means five, and *yol* means road or way in Turkish and with that Beşyol is the intersection of five main streets of the city: Cumhuriyet Avenue, Sıhke Avenue, İskele Avenue, Defterdarlık Street and Ferit Melen Street, making it one of the most used and known squares of Van. Beyond signifying an urban node itself, Beşyol means the centre of the city for the inhabitants, as the node is surrounded by buildings of public institutions such as Van *Valiliği* (Governorate’s Office) and *İpekyolu Hükümet Konağı* (County Seat), passages such as *Bağdat Pasajı* (Baghdad Passage), *Sarı Murat Pasajı* (Sarı Murat Passage) and Hz. Ömer Camii Pasajı (Hz. Ömer Mosque Passage), marketplaces such as *Rus Pazarı* (Russian Market), *Avrupa Halk Pazarı* (European Public Market) and *Büyük Halk Pazarı* (Great Public Market) and *Yeraltı Çarşısı* (Underground Bazaar). When I asked Cemal, the *muhtar* of the Bostaniçi neighbourhood, about the centre of Van, he answered ‘Beşyol’:

Usually, when you give the address, you say, “Where are you? I’m at Beşyol”. They also built a fish sculpture in the middle. Therefore, since it is more convenient as an address, it is the centre. Van already has two exits; the one there is a bit wider. For

⁵⁹⁵ Asma, Interview, 25.05.2022.

⁵⁹⁶ Emal, Interview, 24.05.2022.

*example, İskele Avenue connects to Sihke Avenue from there... In other words, since there is a connection point there, it is the centre.*⁵⁹⁷

Beyond being recognised as the centre, in the everyday discourse, the spot is connotated with irregular migrants since, like Asma and her family, many migrants detained in the Removal Centre are dropped off there while being advised to take care of themselves in their ‘free’ new life. I was even suggested to check the park there in the late evening if I was curious about the smuggling activity, particularly in the summer of 2019, 2020 and 2021, when undocumented migrants are at their highest visibility in the public spaces of the city, Beşyol and especially the park next to the Hz. Ömer Mosque has been one of the prominent places for migrants. In a way, it has been connotated as a place of transition from illegality to legality. Even for some migrants, it is a symbolic in-between space between transit and ‘adaptation’, where diverse emotions are navigated through body-space articulation. Mansoor, an Afghan migrant who has been living in Van since 2010, told me about his father’s first day in Van in Beşyol, who arrived in the city five months before them:

*My father says: “I came here at first. I had no Turkish then. On the first day, the smugglers left me. They set us free. There is the Hz. Ömer Mosque there.” He said, “I couldn’t speak Turkish; it was cold; it was the middle of winter.” You know the winter in Van, it was a very harsh winter. He thought, “What am I going to do?” A man passed by and gave my father a coat. He put the coat on. He walked around without food or water. He had no money. It was night, and he had nowhere to go... They travelled for 21 days on foot. How many times did they enter Turkey, and they were sent back again? He was always on the road for 21 days. He couldn’t take a bath, he was in a very bad condition, he couldn’t shave. “Wherever I passed, people thought I was a beggar,” he said.*⁵⁹⁸

Both for Asma and Mansoor’s father and Mansoor himself, reterritorialisation in displacement has taken place in precarity while ‘making home’ in the arrival context. The precarity exists at the overlap of multiple dimensions of insecurity, namely, in immigration status, employment, housing and even in “the profoundly destabilising effects of precarious work on broader lifeworlds” such as “emotional

⁵⁹⁷ Cemal, Interview, 20.05.2022.

⁵⁹⁸ Mansoor, Dyadic interview, 19.08.2021

consequences”.⁵⁹⁹ For instance, for Asma, dwelling means moving to take place in the ‘free new life’. Sara Ahmed provocatively proposes that “the relationship between movement and attachment is instructive. What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place.”⁶⁰⁰ I argue that for a migrant, movement and dwelling feed on each other as intertwined concepts. In each move, a new spatial meaning emerges corresponding to material and immaterial values, making the places of dwelling. Asma was very attentive to my questions and helped me a lot in tracing her dwelling trajectory. I wondered how she managed to find a place after the night at Beşyol:

B: Where was that house? Do you remember the neighbourhood?

A: I remember the neighbourhood [Halilağa Neighbourhood]. There’s a petrol station near the old police station. Behind the petrol station, there’s a house that no one can see. It’s like a hidden house. In front of it, there’s a two-story house. Behind that, there was a run-down house. He took us there. The house was completely empty; there was nothing inside. He took 200 liras from me. I just wanted to have something, to save ourselves from the cold a bit, so I gave him 200 liras... We entered the house, and then I went out. I didn’t sit for 5-10 minutes; I went out and collected cardboard. I went around; I didn’t know what to get... I bought a blanket. I got two blankets for the kids. I got an old blanket. Then I brought a plate so I could make eggs. I bought small cups for each person, like 200 of them. There’s a market here on Tuesdays. I went there. That’s how we started.

B: How long did you stay there?

A: I stayed there for almost six months. I was still wandering the streets. I mean, a person has to start somewhere; you can’t just stand there. I saw another Afghan, one of our acquaintances. I spoke to him in Persian and said I’m looking for a job. “Is there a job for me or not?” I’m a tailor, you know... After that, he showed me a house. He said, “There’s a tailor here. Maybe it could be suitable for you.” He took me to him and introduced me to that tailor. That tailor was also from our Afghans.

B: Where was the place?

A: He was living in Ali Paşa. He was doing tailoring at home. He was making those şalvar (baggy pants) for men. Then I went, and luckily, the upper floor of his house

⁵⁹⁹ Melanie Lombard, ‘The Experience of Precarity: Low-Paid Economic Migrants’ Housing in Manchester’, *Housing Studies*, 38.2 (2023), 307–26 (p. 311) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2021.1882663>>.

⁶⁰⁰ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 11.

was empty. He lived downstairs. I went upstairs. It was a huge house. He asked for 200 liras as rent.

...

B: How long did you stay there?

A: I stayed there for 2.5 years. Then, I got to know some of the neighbours around there. Then, I had neighbours I knew around me. They brought me little by little things. They were from here... They would come and see my house. They understood that I didn't know Turkish, so they brought me small items.

B: After staying there for two and a half years, why did you leave there?

A: The place was demolished.

This long excerpt from our conversation with Asma only partially illustrates the dwelling precarity of a migrant. After the house in the Ali Paşa Neighbourhood was demolished, she moved into three more houses with her family. Based on the narratives of people I met during my fieldwork, the dwelling precarity in Van for transnational migrants has been rooted in several reasons, such as the socio-economic pressure of ongoing parcel-based urban transformation, limited access to the labour market and fair wage, immigration status and conflicts with social environment.

While I was asking questions about her perception of the spatiality of displacement in Van, Nesrin was responding to me by constantly gesturing with her hand, pointing to the view behind her table. She was working for a humanitarian aid organisation whose office is located on Maraş Avenue, on the fourth floor of a new building opposite the service building of İpekyolu Municipality. When I asked her if she could talk about any settlements associated with particular communities, she said, "There is no such thing as this is the Afghan neighbourhood, this is the Syrians' neighbourhood and so on. Everyone is already dispersed across Van." As per her observation, which illustrates the general picture in terms of sheltering migrants, "In Van, generally, areas with low rent are chosen as settlement areas. For example, the İpekyolu town, which is this area." She then referred to current 'dispersed' constructions all over the city:

Urban transformation has recently started in the İpekyolu district. Construction has just begun. Previously, there were old houses. People used to live there. Later, as part of urban transformation, those who built new houses for themselves started to rent out their old houses, especially to those in difficult situations and more to refugee individuals, with cheaper rents. This was based on their income levels. But now, both in terms of being central and having a high population, İpekyolu has the most refugees... Also, they can frequently change locations. They don't insist on saying, "I would like to live there".⁶⁰¹

The last part of Nesrin's comment hit me at that moment. When faced with a conflict, the prevalent inclination among migrants in Van is to predominantly adopt a modest attitude so as not to 'disrupt' others. Concerning the pursuit of housing, this led to the acceptance of insecure circumstances in order to sustain an emotional connection to a particular locality, which was then moved to the subsequent destination. Thus, the inability to insist on inhabiting a (permanent) (desired) place emerged as an embodiment of dwelling precarity. The ongoing process of parcel-based urban transformation, which has gained momentum following the devastating earthquakes in 2011, has not only brought about changes in the urban fabric of the city characterised by the predominance of one or two-storey mudbrick houses mostly constructed in response to migrations during the 1990s but has also posed an increasing threat to the housing resources available to migrants.

The socio-economic circumstances of migrants often compel them to shelter in inadequate conditions, such as neglected mudbrick houses on the verge of collapse, basement apartments in apartment buildings, and bachelor houses where numerous single men cohabitate. As old houses are demolished to make way for the construction of multi-storey apartment blocks, migrants move to their next dwelling with similar conditions and continue to reside there until it too is demolished or until they cannot afford to live there. For instance, Emal was among the migrants that has been constantly changing houses with his family. Since 2019, when they migrated from Iran to Van, they have moved into four houses located in three neighbourhoods, which he expressed as "*We change houses every year.*" By the time I met them in May 2022, they were residing in a small house in Hafiziye with two rooms (Figure

⁶⁰¹ Nesrin, Interview, 13.08.2021.

5-3). When I asked him the reason forced them to move from their previous house in Akköprü Neighbourhood, I encountered another story connected to urban transformation and destruction:

*I left there because the house was put up for sale. Every day, four or five guys would come and say, "I'm going to buy this house; this house is going to be demolished." I looked into it, but it didn't work out. For example, if the landlord had given us a month and said, "Move out of here; this house is going to be demolished." I said, what can we do? So, we moved from there and came here. I found this house and asked the owner. He said, "Honestly, we're not going to demolish it now. Maybe it'll stay for a year, maybe for ten years. I don't have the money now, we won't demolish it," he said...*⁶⁰²

Brun states that displaced people in rented dwellings are “the strangers who come today and leave tomorrow. They are the deterritorialised migrants who struggle to reterritorialise but have no power and resources to do so.”⁶⁰³ The mobility almost never ends for a migrant; it is the scale, context, and pace that change. A cross-border movement gradually transforms into an around-border movement, then arrives at an urban scale where migrants are ‘free’ to move in provincial borders according to the laws and regulations in force, as I elaborated in Chapter 2. The process of displacement resulting from the involuntary movement resulted in becoming an asylum-seeker across the borders associated with the original home, and subsequently, the mobility between rented houses prevents migrants from re-establishing dwelling away from ‘home’. However, for the mergence of the spatial and the cultural, the migrants constantly endeavour to attach themselves to their environment in order to take place in the city. Social mechanisms such as fellow-citizenship (*hemşehrilik*) play a decisive role in the formation of the migrant dwelling, including building socio-spatial links, although transnational migrants in Van do not create an urban enclave.

As in Asma’s dwelling story, the links established with the place through friendships with fellow-citizens and ‘locals’ are key in mitigating the dwelling precarity. Curious, I asked Asma about the rest of her housing biography:

⁶⁰² Emal, Interview, 24.05.2022.

⁶⁰³ Brun, p. 12.

B: Ah, it was demolished. What happened next?

A: After that, I moved to this neighbourhood [Hafiziye Neighbourhood].

B: How did you find this house? Who helped you?

A: We had friends. The neighbour next to that house is my friend.

B: So, how long have you lived there?

A: I lived there for more than two years.

B: How did you feel about the neighbourhood change?

A: I mean, I felt comfortable here...I felt safer.

B: I wonder if it was because of your neighbours?

A: I don't know. I mean, the neighbours here are more respectful. The people on the other street where we lived were more caring. As soon as I saw them, as soon as I went out on the street, they all came and talked to me. They would say, "Don't feel lonely, we are here, we are your friends, sisters, neighbours". In that way, people felt safe when they say that.

B: After staying there for two years, why did you have to leave?

A: I had a little trouble with the landlord there. The landlord suddenly raised the rent from three hundred to six hundred. I said, "What if I give you an extra two hundred? At least leave me a hundred." He said, "It had to be six hundred. My house is big." No one had lived there before me. After cleaning it, it looked very clean to him. After that, he also raised the rent. The house was empty in the winter. He gave it to me for three hundred. The house was empty; he thought it would be demolished. When winter passed, within six months, he raised it to six hundred and said it had to be six hundred. What could I do? So, only after that I said I would empty the house. I moved out. There are those two-story houses next to it. I moved there. It was empty.

B: How long did you stay there?

A: I stayed there for two years.

B: I'm going to ask the same question. Why did you move from there?

A: The landlord there did this: his daughters were studying at the university in the city centre. He lives in Edremit. He said, "My daughters are coming here; they will stay in this house. My transportation expenses are too high." He said his daughters were coming to this house for university. He said, "If it's not too much trouble, empty the house." So, I had to move out. Besides, his daughters came, but they

*couldn't attend school that year due to the pandemic. In the end, I emptied the house for nothing. So, I moved out from there and came here. This place was empty.*⁶⁰⁴



Figure 5-3 An old mudbrick house in Hafziye. Photograph by the author, captured in May 2022.

5.2 Bodies, labour, and goods across borders

I consider labour as the condition of re-territorialisation of the bodyscapes. In *Human Condition*, Arendt suggests labour as a “biological process of the human body”, shaping life’s necessities. There, she distinguishes labour from work by arguing labour is the ‘production of life’ including material surroundings, hence in close connection to dwelling, whereas positing work as the ‘production of an artificial life’ through the borders of which the life of an individual is ‘housed’ to serve for worldliness.⁶⁰⁵ Departing from this interpretation, I argue that how one engages in labour, the conditions under which it is performed, and the consequences it has on the body and surroundings all contribute to the formation of individuals’ sense of self and their place in society. This is linked to the ‘intercorporeal spatiality’,

⁶⁰⁴ Asma, Interview, 25.05.2022.

⁶⁰⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 7.

informing how individuals perceive themselves, their roles within society, and their relationship with the world. Labour dissolves in our relationship with others and our environment and re-produces bodyscapes in the process of production of life.

Arendt characterises labour as instrumental since it serves the purpose of production of life but does not produce durable or lasting artefacts. While work involves the creation of objects or structures, labour is cyclical, repetitive, and lacks a tangible end product. Thus, it manifests a biopolitical relation with space and time. Here, I propose labour as the impetus of dwelling; in other words, the activity of labouring, as both biological and spatial activity, re-produces bodyscapes, in a sense, both individual and plural social bodies as well as their socio-spatial relations. This includes where, how, with whom and under which conditions people work. For Arendt, together with action, labour, and work are interrelated concepts, which all together form the three fundamental human activities towards a *vita activa*. In her conceptualisation, “the human condition of labour is life itself” and “the human condition of work is worldliness”.⁶⁰⁶ In the ‘modern’ world where the understanding of work and production has been increasingly based on immaterial labour instead of a muscular effort, which Arendt associates with “thinking”, work could be approached as historically re-produced by changing labour relations, which produces the world of territories itself.

It was an August day in 2021 when you could feel all the heat of summer. I was in Van for the second cycle of my fieldwork, and it was also the second time I was that close to the border. The heat was not only because of the weather but more due to the intense agenda in the city. Numerous news were constantly pouring in from the border, detailing the influx of Afghan migrants. At that time, the national media was preoccupied with news emanating from Van, mainly focusing on subjects such as the Turkish-Iran border, irregular migration, smuggling, and the government’s security measures, accompanied by a prevalence of hateful rhetoric against Afghans and other migrants seeking asylum in Turkey. During those days, I thought that it was the right moment to be in Van, recognising it as an opportune time to immerse

⁶⁰⁶ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 7.

myself in my research subject matter, which had gained considerable attention. It was also the right moment to think about ‘border’ and embody ‘borderscapes’.



Figure 5-4 Snippets of national news in August 2021.

If the history of labour is traced in Van, we could find out how the border has been effectively and actively involved in the production of diverse types of work associated with human and non-human migration. The connotations of the border for a Van inhabitant are diverse. It was only at the beginning of our conversation that I asked Ahmet his opinions about the influx of transnational migrants to Van, and his immediate answer covered different significations of border addressing life in Van in terms of mobility. In terms of changing positionalities when approaching the border, Van could be perceived as a city on the margins or a centre of the periphery, as well as a transition site or a settlement hub:

Van has a long border and a close distance, especially with Iran...Van is an important international transit centre, an important transit hub for migrants, as well as a settlement hub for internal migration, an important settlement centre. In other words, when we look at it, those coming from outside are generally Afghans, Iranians, Bangladeshis, and Pakistanis... And from neighbouring provinces in terms of internal migration. Van has a periphery, and this is the centre of this periphery, bordering other small cities. Just as Diyarbakır is to the Southeast, Van is a centre that has increased its potential many times over, especially in recent times, especially in terms of trade potential, education, and health. In other words, it is the most developed city in the region. Apart from this, it is also an important tourism centre with its lake, nature, history, and cultural heritage. In this respect, that

mobility is already felt in Van. Both in terms of those who are citizens of Turkey and those from abroad, you feel it, you see it.⁶⁰⁷



*Figure 5-5 Turkey-Iran border and border wall.*⁶⁰⁸

Border has always taken place in the everyday life of Van: Opening and closing of the border, border trade, smuggling among borders, wars on the other side of the border, armed conflict in the border area, the wall built along the border, migrants crossing the border. We could extend this list by adding its psycho-social impact on society, including migrants for whom the border exists dialectically. The border is both a threat as well as an opportunity for life in Van. That is also why migrations have such a significant effect on the urban landscapes of the city. Located in a territory delineated by the hinterland of borderscapes, the influence of migrations in Van is further magnified since the conceptual image or the idea of the borderscape permeates everyday life in the city. In other words, as Reşit, the journalist from Van, said, “*The border is attractive*”⁶⁰⁹.

For Azadeh, a travel operator from Iran working and living in Van, border means bread-and-butter (*ekmek parası*); it is, therefore, appealing in any sense, but it comes at a cost. She said, “*Since Van is a border city and a Kurdish city, as far as I know,*

⁶⁰⁷ Ahmet, Interview, 18.08.2021.

⁶⁰⁸ ‘Van’ın İran Sınırı Modüler Duvar ve Teknolojik İmkanlarla Daha Güvenli Olacak’ <<https://www.aksam.com.tr/foto-galeri/guncel/vanin-iran-siniri-moduler-duvar-ve-teknolojik-imkanlarla-daha-guvenli-olacak/65068/3>> [accessed 24 September 2023].

⁶⁰⁹ Reşit, Interview, 15.08.2021.

it has been condemned by the state to be left under-developed and powerless”⁶¹⁰. For her, this is the most apparent problem of Van: the city has been ‘marginalised’ politically and economically, which, in the end, affects its socio-economic life. However, in the urban culture of Van, the border has long been the symbol of abundance. Being in the margins has long been associated with economic prosperity. When I asked İdris, the *muhtar* of Serhat Neighbourhood, about how migrations have affected the city in general, he responded me in a way that immediately linked migration to the concept of border in terms of urban economics:

*Migration is still happening, but unfortunately, we are experiencing some difficulties due to unemployment. All of our border gates are closed. There are no factories in Van. People are experiencing great difficulties because there are no job opportunities to work. All of our young people have to migrate abroad for work. When they cannot find a job here, they have to migrate to the west. Of course, if they can find a job there. As the people of Van, they generally go to the construction sector. Van’s villages are all like that. We have to send our young people to the west to work in construction. Job opportunities are limited. In the past, thanks to the border trade, people used to earn their livelihood with the suitcase trade. Unfortunately, this is also closed now. People are really in a very difficult situation right now.*⁶¹¹

It is notable that in Van, the border leads to both in-migrate and out-migrate. When İdris expressed that “*our border gates are closed*”, he meant not only the temporary closure of the border during the COVID-19 pandemic but also the fact that the smuggling or ‘suitcase trade’ (*bavul ticareti*) has been over. For decades, the economic culture of the city was based on informal cross-border trade, especially with Iran. The end of this trade led to the removal of significant economic activity and input, and it triggered the out-migration of especially the youth of Van to the western cities in search of more job opportunities.

The interplay between the concepts of migration and border, in the context of urban economics, not only affects the demographic structure of the city, but as I have argued and traced throughout this thesis, it also has a direct impact on the urban culture and its different socio-spatial components. The informal cross-border trade

⁶¹⁰ Azadeh, Interview, 21.05.2022.

⁶¹¹ İdris, Interview, 17.08.2021

in the city had been the leading economic activity, which was based on the mobility of bodies, labour, and goods as non-human migrants. According to the predominant narratives presented in the interviews, the contemporary chronicle of the cross-border mobility of labour in Van coincides with the end of the 1990s, when the Soviet Union collapsed economically and politically. Therefore, the first informal trade activities beyond national borders were carried out with Russian shuttle traders (*chelnoki*). Deniz Yüksek points out that during the breakdown of the Soviet Union, hundreds of thousands of people from the region started engaging in informal trade activities to boost their income. This involved travelling between various towns and countries situated in the Middle East, Europe, and South and East Asia. Within the Middle East, the primary objective of these traders was to travel to Turkey, where they acquired clothing, fabrics, and domestic products.⁶¹² By interpreting Manuel Castell's concept on "space of flows", she further suggests:

...the cross-border mobility of people, as well as the movements of goods, money and symbols that they carry, can be perceived as taking place in a space of flows that is distinct from the space of flows controlled by corporate capital.⁶¹³

As such, in the case of İstanbul that Yüksek investigated, the informal cross-border trade in Van had initially taken place in streets and claimed by grassroots economic actors such as "jobless Russian women, immigrant shopkeepers, street vendors, and itinerant traders"⁶¹⁴.

In that context, based on their series of ethnographic fieldwork in the Black Sea region from the early 1980s to 1990s, Ildiko Hann and Chris Hann observed that the *Rus Pazarı* (Russian Market) could be found in every town in the region, along the coastline. Yet they noted in brackets that there are undoubtedly additional offshoots that extend into the Anatolian interior, which they were not able to examine.⁶¹⁵ At least Van was among those cities that have hosted a *Rus Pazarı* since the early 1990s.

⁶¹² Deniz Yüksek, 'Shuttling Goods, Weaving Consumer Tastes: Informal Trade between Turkey and Russia', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 31.1 (2007), 60–72 (p. 61) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2007.00710.x>>.

⁶¹³ Yüksek, p. 62.

⁶¹⁴ Yüksek, p. 63.

⁶¹⁵ Chris Hann and Ildiko Hann, 'Samovars and Sex on Turkey's Russian Markets', *Anthropology Today*, 8.4 (1992), 3 (p. 3) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2783529>>.

The market is located on the edge of one of the central nodes of Van, as I explained earlier, Beşyol. It is settled on an urban block that hosts two other important markets: *Avrupa Halk Pazarı* (European Public Market) and *Büyük Halk Pazarı* (*Great Public Market*). Leventoğlu Street (or *Rus Pazarı* Street as it is called by locals) divides this urban block in a curvilinear form, and with that, the markets are accessed via two perpendicular main streets that intersect at Beşyol, Defterdarlık Street and Ferit Melen Street.

Together with other small shops on Leventoğlu Street, selling handicrafts, housewares, souvenirs, accessories, home textiles and local clothes (such as *fistan*), the entrances of markets define a semi-open space as the street is covered with tarpaulins stretched between opposite shops. The entrance from both sides of the street is marked with arch-shaped gates. The ground was paved with begonite stone to offer a more ‘pedestrian-friendly’ environment, which primarily targets domestic and foreign tourists. In order to attract more tourists, the renovation of the infrastructure and landscape design of the street was completed in 2018 as part of the “Boutique Streets” project of the İpekyolu Municipality, which aimed at transforming particular potential places of Van into a “centre of attraction”.

According to the settlement plan of *Rus Pazarı*, the market spatially consists of approximately 262 shop modules with a 6 m² area per unit. There are around 115 shops in the market, where different sizes of shops are arranged by merging modules. The overall spatial scheme of the market and the circulation is organised via main corridors connected to each other with perpendicular side corridors, all covered with metal sheets to create an enclosed space. The shops in the market sell mostly glassware, souvenirs, clothing, haberdashery, cosmetics, accessories, and home textiles.

The formation of *Rus Pazarı* and its history is notably linked to the socio-spatialisation of intersected migrations hinted at different temporalities. As I mentioned above, the history of it dates to the beginning of the 1990s, “when the Soviet Union removed travel restrictions in the course of its collapse” and organised

“the phased opening of borders after 1988”.⁶¹⁶ As a result, with the free mobility of people and Soviet goods mostly consisting of imitated versions of status-defining ones, marketplaces popped up in the 1990s by means of the ‘shuttle trade’. The *Rus Pazarı* in Van was found in this fashion, with the increasing influence of informal cross-border trade of the period.



Figure 5-6 Approaching Russian Market from Koçbey Street. Collage by the author, with photographs captured in March 2022.



Figure 5-7 The entrance of the Russian market. Collage by the author, with photographs captured in March 2022.

⁶¹⁶ Yüksek, p. 65.



Figure 5-8 Small shops inside the Russian Market. Collage by the author, with photographs captured in March 2022.

According to Sabahattin, a shopkeeper in *Rus Pazarı*, “Russians established this passage,” and that’s why the marketplace was named after them:

The Russians used to bring goods to Van and sell them here through suitcase trade. We didn’t even know what it was. The women from Russia were more honest and more solid merchants than us when they sold the goods they brought here. They continued to bring goods here for three years. At the end of three years, we also got into this business. This time, they were bringing the goods and selling them to us. We were selling those goods to the public in the small stalls we had set up. They started to come and go every two days. Since the products from Russia were sold, the name of this place became the Russian Bazaar over time.⁶¹⁷

I visited *Rus Pazarı* within the third and fourth cycles of my fieldwork. Not only as a researcher but also as an ‘outsider’ to Van, or let’s call as a tourist, I was advised several times to visit there. *Muhtar* Bayram was one of those who asked me if I visited *Rus Pazarı*. Our discussion revolved around the profound impact of various migrations on the evolution of the urban culture of the city. With each subsequent inquiry I posed on this matter, he consistently highlighted the forced displacement of the Kurdish population in the 1990s, specifically emphasising the year 1993 as a significant turning point for Van. At that time, he exemplified the socio-spatial impact of the influx of Kurds to Van via the formation of informal markets, such as

⁶¹⁷ Kadir Cesur, ‘Van’ın Pasajları: Cadde Esnafı Geri Dönüyor’, *Gazete Duvar* (Van, 27 August 2023).

Rus Pazarı. In the narrative of *muhtar* Bayram, the creation of *Rus Pazarı* holds a notable position within the contemporary urban history of the city.

*I don't know if you have been to the Russian market. There is the Russian market, the Eastern market, and the European market. Almost all of them, or let me say 80 per cent, maybe I shouldn't exaggerate, 80 per cent of them are tradespersons who came with the 1993 migration. The Russian market was established there at that time. In the Russian market, those people were given huts. So that people could at least make a living... At that time, ... Russians were travelling back and forth to Van a lot... When the Russians came, there were strange illegitimate events occurred. This has taken off as a primary financial sector in Van...*⁶¹⁸

Since the socio-economic profile of the Kurdish displaced people was connected to rural livelihoods mainly characterised by pastoralism, when they moved to the city centre, difficulties arose due to loss of correspondence with their traditional ecological knowledge and practice of livelihoods. Although the majority of the migrants intentionally preferred settling in the peripheries demarcated by the outskirts of Mount Erek, it was not feasible to maintain pastoralism in the city centre. In his foreword to *Mobile Urbanity*, Marcello Balbo asserts, “rapid growth of the urban population is coupled with an utter scarcity of permanent jobs, that is a demand for labour falling under the heading of ‘formal sector’”⁶¹⁹. In the context of Van, following the sudden rise in the population of the city centre, the considerable migrant labour that became available in the face of urban poverty had to be channelled to other sectors, thus ensuring the migrants’ connection with the city.

According to the research conducted by Orhan Deniz and Erol Etlan, the displaced Kurds, lacking a specific occupation, predominantly find employment in informal sectors that lack social security measures.⁶²⁰ These sectors generally include construction, tabling, portering, painting, street vending, cleaning, and babysitting. The choice of occupation is influenced by societal gender norms, where works such as cleaning and babysitting are usually carried out by young women and the rest by young men. Since the forced migration has led to the sudden loss of assets and years

⁶¹⁸ Bayram, Interview, 20.05.2022.

⁶¹⁹ Marcello Balbo, ‘Foreword’, in *Mobile Urbanity: Translocal Traders and City in Southern Africa* (Roma and Milano: Planum Publisher, 2018), p. IV.

⁶²⁰ Deniz and Etlan, pp. 485–87.

of accumulated resources for those migrants, the urban conditions have subsequently rendered them part of the ‘unskilled’ labour force. Therefore, they become viable candidates for any form of work in the city. The Workers’ Market (*İşçi Pazarı*) in Şerefiye Neighbourhood is mainly comprised of migrants, accounting for 98% of the workforce. Similarly, migrants make up 30% of the labour force in the Shepherds’ Market (*Çoban Pazarı*) in Bahçivan Neighbourhood during the spring season.⁶²¹

Furthermore, due to their deprived living conditions, migrants have occasionally engaged in informal cross-border economic activities, among which we could primarily mention fuel, cigarette, tea, and sugar smuggling. This is why, as Bayram mentioned, it was mainly the Kurdish displaced people who considered the ‘suitcase trade’ as an economic opportunity and initiated the deal with Russian shuttle tradeswomen who had been mobile between the Russian and Turkish border until 1993, when the border gate was permanently closed.

*Some of the people who migrated from the villages and settled in Van made a place for themselves in that Russian market. They lived there. They started to work as tradespersons there. Some of them are now well advanced, they have become big tradespersons... This is how they started to sustain themselves. They were also hardworking people. And they worked hard. In other words, they provided their income in this way.*⁶²²

The establishment of *Rus Pazarı*, thus, was based on Kurdish migrants’ endeavour to find ways of attachment to urban life and led to the creation of a new retail culture in the city, aligned with the spatialisation of informal economies. Following *Rus Pazarı*, other marketplaces such as *Avrupa Halk Pazarı* (European Public Market) and *Büyük Halk Pazarı* (Great Public Market) on the same street; *Bağdat Pasajı* (Baghdad Passage), *Sarı Murat Pasajı* (Sarı Murat Passage) and Hz. Ömer Camii Pasajı (Hz. Ömer Mosque Passage) in Beşyol and *İran Çarşısı* (Iran Bazaar), *Mısır Çarşısı* (Egypt Bazaar) and *Japon Pasajı* (Japan Passage) were established. Recalling the fieldwork, I remember how the number of marketplaces and passages highly attracted my attention, even during my first days in Van. Not only those informal

⁶²¹ Deniz and Etlan, pp. 485–87.

⁶²² Bayram, Interview, 20.05.2022.

retail spaces but also new shopping centres such as Van AVM, Van Mall AVM, and Turkuaz AVM and shops in changing sizes have been visibly taking place in the everyday urban culture of the city, making its two main streets, Cumhuriyet and Maraş one of the most crowded streets that I have been.

Throughout my fieldwork, I often associated the vibrancy of the streets of Van with being so close to the border. The everyday movement in the city was very evident, and it was almost impossible not to notice the sphere of influence of the borderscapes. The closure of the Russian border in 1993 did not mean the end of the suitcase trade in Van. On the contrary, after engaging with cross-border informal economies, the traders in Van headed towards the Iranian border this time. It was when smuggling became a leading economic activity in the city. The migrations occurred in superdiversity, meaning that diverse actors, motivations and impacts have had a significant influence on the transformation of labouring in Van. In this context, the informal cross-border trade with Iran and, following that, the ‘temporary’ and ‘seasonal’ influx of Iranian recreational migrants triggered the spread of gainful informal work, where the workplace has expanded beyond borders and dispersed in the city. I asked Bayram the meaning of the presence of Iran nationals in the city, thinking the agency of them informed by different social categories, making them one of the key actors of the urban life in Van. As I mentioned earlier, the border as a concept has been associated with various symbolisms in Van, prominently with affirmative meanings such as gain and abundance. Bayram’s response was aligned in that sense:

*Around 1998-1999, there was a very good flow to Iran. What I mean by flow was the luggage trade. The diesel sector came here before, around 1996-1997. Diesel oil was coming from Iran; they smuggled diesel oil illegally. During those times, Van has revitalised a lot. With this revival, smuggling increased and smuggled cigarettes came after diesel was banned. Again, that vitality continued.*⁶²³

The excessive and rapid increase in the income of the tradespeople in Van was a catalyst in the transformation of the city’s ‘rural’ appearance. In that sense, after the migration of the Kurdish internally displaced people, the rising cross-border trade

⁶²³ Bayram, Interview, 20.05.2022.

with Iran occurred as another driving force in terms of the urbanisation of the city. The ‘vitality’, as emphasised by Bayram, led to the construction of new housing blocks on the sites formerly occupied with mudbrick houses. Not only inhabitants of Van but also people outside moved to the city and established a network among smugglers to join the cross-border trade, which also resulted in rapid urban investments in the city:

How did it [the vitality] continue? For example, a man living in Malatya or Istanbul made a place for himself in Van as well. He would buy the goods of Iran from here and deliver them towards the West. Both he and the ones here were making a profit. And Van market was very much lively. I mean, how should I explain it? Maybe if you opened ten factories in Van, there wouldn't be as much activity and vitality as this one. Because why? In a factory, as you know, people depend on a certain salary, but since the income in smuggling was quite high, people's wealth increased.

Like Bayram, the narratives of the ‘locals’ I met showed how informal cross-border trade ‘improved’ the city since “the whole economy was working”:

Van's hotels were working, the restaurants were working, the barber, the confectioner, the shoemaker, you name it, the whole economy was working. And since the incomes of the people working in Van were very high, they started to live luxurious lives. These housing estates [referring to the estates near the muhtar's office] were all built at that time. Because before, people had no sources of income, so they could build these estates and live in them. In today's conditions, these are houses worth one or one and a half million. Today, people cannot afford to buy a house worth one million. But at that time, there was income; people could afford it. When there was demand, they were built. Because of this income, Van was very developed at that time. Not only cigarettes and diesel oil trade but also foodstuffs were coming in. Tea was coming, rice was coming, and even eggs were coming. In other words, everything was cheaper in Iran because the Turkish currency was more valuable than the Iranian currency. Accordingly, people were going and bringing goods.⁶²⁴

From the beginning of the 1990s to the mid-2010s, the urban scale of labouring in Van was highly associated with ‘informality’ and ‘irregularity’, making the city perceived as an ‘illegal territory’. For instance, with Nesrin, the social worker I introduced in the previous section, we were talking about the attitudes of local people towards migrants, and she commented that “*people are already accustomed to the*

⁶²⁴ Bayram, Interview, 20.05.2022.

idea that this is an illegal territory, with people coming and going”⁶²⁵. Her tone of voice and body language were so normal and ordinary while she was saying that. That moment reminded me of Sennett’s analogy when he expressed how it is too normal in New York to encounter diversity over an ordinary walk. This is so applicable to Van, and in addition to diversity, the illegality of borderscapes has long been commonplace in the city. However, a significant change has taken place in the relationship between mobility and illegality since the mid-2010s. Subsequently, the actors, extent, and trajectory of the informal cross-border economy with Iran have undergone a radical transformation. Traders from Van no longer traverse the border to purchase goods or food at an affordable price; on the contrary, particularly from 2016 onwards, there has been a substantial increase in the number of Iranian individuals engaging in intensive “suitcase trade” within the city.

On the other side of illegality, in response to the increasing influx of Afghans in 2019, ‘migrant smuggling’ appeared in the city as irregular work within an informal cross-border network. The smugglers involved in the network were organised transnationally among each other, which allowed them to transport migrants from Bangladesh to Van. Reşit, the journalist, expressed to me that this is a “multinational story”: *“A group sets out from Bangladesh for economic reasons, travelling through India and entering Afghanistan from the north of New Delhi. They join the group in Afghanistan that wants to migrate. Then, they merge with the group who want to migrate to Pakistan and then with the ones in Iran, if any. In essence, they are gathering step by step; think of it like a train.”*⁶²⁶ The corresponding fee in 2021 for this journey ranged from 2000 to 500 USD per person, depending on the point of departure.

Along the road, local smugglers accompany migrants on their way to the next border. When the migrants arrive at the Turkey-Iran border, the scale of operation of the smugglers changes, and the linear trajectory of the journey until Iran becomes disrupted with particular stops on the road. The story then takes place in the ‘shock

⁶²⁵ Nesrin, Interview, 13.08.2021.

⁶²⁶ Reşit, Interview, 15.08.2021.

houses' (*şok evi*), locally called *khavgah*, which means 'dorm' in Farsi, arranged on both sides of the border. Barn-like shock houses have been utilised for temporary sheltering of irregular migrants; they are kept there until the smugglers become sure that the border area is safe for crossing. The socio-spatial practice of smugglers working close to the borderscapes is based on observing the landscape and looking for the most secure place to maintain the illegal journey. The safe locations, thus the houses to be used as *khavgah*, constantly change along the borderline. The local smuggler in charge of transporting migrants from Iran to the border and the other one from the border to the closest village of Van re-creates the migration route at certain intervals according to each security update. The ultimate undertaking of this transnational smuggling network transpires within the city centre of Van. Subsequently, the irregular migrants are allocated to temporary accommodation in residential areas situated on the outskirts of the city, adjacent to Mount Ereğ, which mostly host internally displaced people, as I mentioned before.

The fieldwork participants have frequently expressed that as a result of the ongoing economic crisis in the country and the subsequent depreciation of the Turkish Lira, the informal cross-border trade with Iran has shifted its course unfavourably for the traders from Van since the goods in Iran are no cheaper than here. The remaining economic gap following the withdrawal of suitcase trade in the urban economic landscape of Van, hence, has been replaced by alternative forms of illegal economic activities. Miraz, who was living in Hacıbekir when I met him, commented on how illegality takes place in his neighbourhood:

They [Afghans] are asylum seekers now. So, they have no rights here. That is why they are hiding. I mean outside the city... There are those houses in all the places where there are squatter neighbourhoods, always in the ones close to Mount Ereğ: Dere, Hacıbekir, Yalı, Yeni and Yalım Ereğ. They built houses like barns and put people on top of each other. They make them wait there. I know 5 thousand liras per day. For example, if I bring 20 people and they will stay 24 hours, each has to pay 5 thousand liras. They sell a loaf of bread for 20 TL. They sell water for 5 TL... For example, the house right next to ours was sold to a refugee. So everyone is doing it.

*People can't find work anymore. To make easy money. Either drugs or human trafficking. There's no other way.*⁶²⁷



Figure 5-9 Demolition of a shock house in Hacibekir. From a daily newspaper issued on 26 September 2021.

The journey from illegality to legality commences once again at that juncture, subsequent to taking temporary sheltering in shock houses when the so-called ‘successful’ smuggler abandons the migrants at a specific location in the urban landscape. However, if the migrant is still prone to pursue the illegal route, supplementary ‘assistance’ is provided to facilitate the procurement of bus tickets from Van to another destination city, mostly İstanbul. The other option is that the migrants opt to remain in Van until arriving at a locale with more favourable circumstances, typically if they possess kinship ties or lack the financial means to sustain illegality. In that case, Van becomes a “site of adaptation” for those. In her book *Türkiye’de Mültecilik: İltica, Geçicilik ve Yasallık – Van Uydu Şehir Örneği*, Biner carefully depicts how such a transition occurs at a body scale:

The transition from illegality to legality is a crossroads where the mind and body change hands. When this crossroads is reached, and the legal path is chosen, a sense of relief is experienced. Although the transition from the smuggler to the state system feels safe at first, the visibility surrendered to the smuggler is regained once the journey begins. Thus, a transition is made to a realm where everything is dark, everyone is invisible, and holds their breath, to a space where one’s body can let go

⁶²⁷ Miraz, Interview, 10.08.2021

of itself, where it is not controlled by anyone else, where the individual can decide on his/her movement.⁶²⁸

Biner's follow-up question, "What happens when the legal way is chosen, and every step of the legal process is "successfully" passed?" echoed frequently during my fieldwork as well. The life stories of the migrants I met show that maintaining labouring is the condition of re-territorialisation in the arrival context. In order to 'take place' in the city, migrants are mostly involved in precarious working environments. Most of them take part in the 'invisible' labour, for instance, as a dishwasher in restaurants or in *lokantas*. Even in such workplaces, which could be considered at the bottom of the labour hierarchy, "they are not even employed as waiters or bellboys in restaurants because they do not want to be seen too much"⁶²⁹. Those places are where labour and (dis)appearance interweave one into the other. It is the socio-cultural background of migrants, but most importantly, their 'legal status', that leads to choices of work and, therefore, to the ways the body does labour within changing scales of visibility.

The narratives around work have interlaced each other in the fieldwork. For instance, because of the reasons addressing the labour hierarchy, works carried out by hand are more widespread among some of the migrants. Both locals and migrants themselves similarly stated that not all the work in the city had been shared justly, even between migrants. To illustrate this point, the complex spatio-temporal appearance of Iranian nationals throughout the history of Van reveals a distinct narrative concerning their presence in the city. With the increase in cross-border trade conducted by Iranians, asylum seekers from Iran gradually started to distance themselves from the service industry and began to participate in transactions with their compatriot merchants or travel agents. They assumed the role of coordinators to some extent in these commercial endeavours.

Because they are also residents of this place compared to the others. Because those coming from the other side, for trade, work, or entertainment, either know them or can establish a relationship with them. Because among those who came for asylum,

⁶²⁸ Biner, pp. 165–66. (translation by the author)

⁶²⁹ Musa, Interview, 11.08.2021.

*there were those who had been living here for 4-5 years, and even some for 7-8 years. They were more familiar with this place. And in a way, they had become like the locals here. They had become like those living here, and they were more knowledgeable about this place. They were coordinating the others, you could say.*⁶³⁰

For some of the locals and NGO social workers I met, this is not only due to the exchange between Iran nationals possessing a variety of migration statuses, motivations, and history but also because of the “intellectual background”, in the words of Selin, the social worker I introduced in the previous section. Thus, works that are more visible, such as hairdressing by both women and men, have been carried out by Iranians, among other migrants. Participants of the fieldwork also highly mentioned that Iranian migrants have been engaged with more “skilled labour”, as there are many doctors, lawyers, engineers, psychologists, journalists, translators, and tourism agents living in Van. *“In other words, there are people from all professions from Iran.”*⁶³¹ Ahmet’s words over another conversation complemented Selin’s expressions: “This sense of being local or foreign, outsiders and insiders, kind of disappeared [with Iran nationals]. Now, Iran and Iranians have become a part of our everyday life. They work in professions like tailoring, barbering, hairdressing, and similar craftsship-type businesses.” He then furthered his comment in a way to draw a relationship between work and appearance based on the superdiversity of the city:

[Afghans and Syrians] were there, but of course, not as visible as Iranians. I mean, they weren’t as prominent in the photograph. Those who came from Syria were generally in places where people were more concentrated, not constantly, but we saw them a bit more when they were begging or doing something similar; we would notice them there. Particularly in some sectors, we would see Afghans a bit more. In another sense, we didn’t see them in every aspect of social life like Iranians. But we would see Iranians doing some work...[Afghans], you would see them in the background of the service sector, doing more behind-the-scenes jobs. But Iranians, rather than being in the service sector, seemed to be like the elite class living here. They were doing the same shopping as you. They were having fun in the same way

⁶³⁰ Ahmet, Interview, 18.08.2021.

⁶³¹ Selin, Focus Group Interview, 20.08.2021.

*you were. But it wasn't the same for Afghans. Afghans were constantly, so to speak, in the role of labourers. But you wouldn't see Iranians like that.*⁶³²

In Arendt's conceptualisation of labour and work, "what work produces is an objective world that constitutes a shared human reality"⁶³³. She characterises this as work constituting the fundamental framework of human experience by fabricating a realm that we subsequently inhabit and to which we contribute in our own unique manner through our own labour. Arendt offers a useful analogy to comprehend the function of this realm when she posits that just as a table serves as an 'in-between', separating and simultaneously connecting individuals, the world similarly functions as an in-between, providing a communal foundation that unites us as a community but also divides us into distinct individuals. For her, through work, the plurality of human beings gathers within a common reality that is defined by a shared objective space.

In this shared objective space, or public realm in her terminology, Arendt asserts that "In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal their unique personal identities actively and thus make their appearance in the human world". Although Arendt associates 'appearance' with plurality as the condition of 'action', I further that the 'work' itself generates the creation of 'spaces of appearance' in the public realm. Therefore, recalling Heynen's 'space as a stage' concept, the performance no longer occurs in the Ancient Greek sense where "the stage is the public square, and the audience is her fellow citizens"⁶³⁴, but we could find that performativity more often in the 'ordinary' spaces of the city. When Ahmet says, "*I mean, they weren't as prominent in the photograph*" or "*You wouldn't see them doing a job or work*", he was indeed referring to 'appearance through work' and by work, he meant to "not-behind-the-scenes" work, on the contrary, work that is bodily there. The workplace, hence, becomes a 'space of (dis)appearance' where plural agencies are involved in a shared activity.

⁶³² Ahmet, Interview, 18.08.2021.

⁶³³ Paul Voice, 'Labour, Work and Action', in *Hannah Arendt: Key Concepts*, ed. by Patrick Hayden (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 36–51 (p. 40).

⁶³⁴ Voice, p. 46.

This is also about what Ash Amin widely discussed in ‘Ethnicity and the Multicultural City: Living with Diversity’. Within this work, Amin voiced his criticism towards the “republican urban theory”, which has overlooked the spaces of action, encounter, and visibility and pre-assumed that freedom to interact with the ‘other’ “ only occurred in squares, parks, streets, cafes and shopping malls.⁶³⁵ However, as argued by Amin, in everyday reality, those ‘public’ spaces could not extend beyond being a ‘transition’ space and thus could enable only limited contact with the ‘other’. His critique centres around the concepts of “everyday lived experiences” and “local negotiations of difference”, as well as the examination of “microcultures” within specific locations. These microcultures serve as the interface between abstract rights, obligations, local structures, and resources, and they significantly shape individual and interpersonal experiences. At that point, the ideal places to confront and comprehend ‘difference’ are those spaces where obligatory mundane discussions occur, such as workplaces, educational institutions, neighbourhood associations, sports clubs, and other venues of social interaction that involve the everyday reality of people. As Amin puts it, “However, contact is a necessary but not sufficient condition for multicultural understanding, for these are sites of mercurial social interaction, divided allegiances, and cultural practices also shaped beyond [those places]”.⁶³⁶

Each time I met a new person in Van, I asked them, over a more formal (e.g. interview) or informal (e.g. chatting) talk, what the city centre in Van meant for them. My aim was to get to know the local and embodied knowledge about so-called frequently used spaces in the city and landmark places. As an architect and urban researcher, I was expecting responses to be aligned more with conceived spaces such as parks or squares. However, the narratives of the people rather point to places related to ‘work’. For some of the participants, this explicitly means where they are employed and where their workplace is.

The centre of Van is what they call the “çarşı” [bazaar]. The part where the Governorate is located is essentially the çarşı. This area [around İpekyolu

⁶³⁵ Amin, p. 968.

⁶³⁶ Amin, p. 969.

Municipality] has become the new çarşı. So, starting from the Governorate, you have Cumhuriyet Avenue, Beşyol, and Maraş; these three make up the çarşı... Our workplace used to be behind the Governorate. I mostly used that area. Now, my place is here; I've had an office here for two years. I meet people in the park [across the street]. Or I say, "Come to the front of the municipality." If I'm giving directions to someone, I say, "Across from the municipality." Whatever place you use becomes your centre of the çarşı.⁶³⁷

I go to the Courthouse; those are generally the roads in the city centre, the routes, you know. Either I'm going to the Courthouse or to Beşyol, or I'm around our own office. I'm there until 5 o'clock. After 5, if there's a need for something at home, if there's shopping, there's a greengrocer right next to the office or a big greengrocer next to the house. I do the shopping from there and then come home. If I have other things to do outside, another need, I go to the city centre.⁶³⁸

Embedded within Roya's short narrative above detailing the rhythm of her ordinary day, the concept of work in the realm of everyday reality not only aligns with the customary notion of 'employment' but predominantly encompasses daily tasks such as doing shopping, buying materials for work, picking up kids from the school, paying the bills or visiting police unit to report presence in the satellite area. To illustrate, some of the responses I recorded were *Ezberciler Çarşısı* (Ezberciler Bazaar), Cumhuriyet Avenue, Maraş Avenue and Beşyol. One of the participants referred to the temporal dimension by commenting that the centre of Van is "where the economy and labour is, so Cumhuriyet Avenue during daytime and Edremit in the evening, after 5 pm"⁶³⁹. With various shops, hotels, banks, offices, bazaars and markets along the avenue and several vivid small commercial streets that connect to it, Cumhuriyet Avenue is where labour is utmost embodied in the city; therefore, it manifestly symbolises 'work' and because of that is associated with being the centre of the city:

Everyone has to come here in one way or another. It's called the bazaar, and that's where it is. People come there to shop. That's why they come there, it attracts everyone. Whether you're going to the hospital, the university, or shopping, you'll

⁶³⁷ Nesrin, Interview, 13.08.2021.

⁶³⁸ Roya, Dyadic interview, 18.08.2021.

⁶³⁹ Reşit, Interview, 15.08.2021.

end up going there. In fact, Van locals have nicknamed Cumhuriyet Avenue “Mecburiyet Caddesi”⁶⁴⁰. You’re compelled to go there.⁶⁴¹

5.3 Rituals of fluid localities and bodies

I consider rituals as the condition of localisation of the bodyscapes. It has been long argued that neither place nor locality is fixed and homogenous. As I offer in the title of this section, localities are fluid, and bodies in move are shaping, reshaping, being shaped and being reshaped in/by this fluidity. Recalling Sara Ahmed, it is what moves us that holds us in place. I further argue that what moves us is our hopeful search for a new locality where we move in between spaces while carrying meanings, symbols, and values familiar to us to other contexts. Localities, in this sense, are fluid. In Arendt’s scholarship, we could find traces of this idea built upon the distinction between the private and the public. For her, the localities change “between private and public [that] depends on where a person moves” among different scales and places. In addition to those, the locality is constructed by means of the agency of “individuals, households, groups, tribes, and social classes” and the social relations and institutions among those which are scarcely “harmonious, recurring and continuous” but majorly “discordant, conflictual, and unstable”.⁶⁴²

Therefore, localities, as Doreen Massey puts it, “are always provisional, always in the process of being made, always contested”.⁶⁴³ The characters, meanings and identities of places are in constant transformation as “new products of history” in relation to the agency of changing biopolitical subjectivities that take place while making and re-making it through various ways of attachment, use and, finally, appearance. From there, we could arrive at Ali Madanipour’s claim that “the local is ontologically multiple and diverse”. Departing from seminal scholarships, including Arendt’s views on the locality embracing not only the human world but also the

⁶⁴⁰ This can be roughly translated as “Compulsory Avenue”.

⁶⁴¹ Ahmet, Interview, 18.08.2021.

⁶⁴² Ali Madanipour, ‘Limits of Localism: Four Dimensions of Power’, *Transactions of the Association of European Schools of Planning*, 1.1 (2017), 33–44 (p. 35) <<https://doi.org/10.24306/traesop.2017.01.003>>.

⁶⁴³ Doreen Massey, ‘Questions of Locality’, *Geography*, 78.2 (1993), 142–49 (p. 149).

material environment in a wider sense that involves it and Massey's focus on 'extra-local' agents and relations in making of the local, Madanipour suggests that

the ontology of the local shows multiplicity, diversity, relationality, historicity, materiality, and change, albeit with different paces and extents. The ontology of the local is simultaneously substantive, relational and experiential, simultaneously spatial and temporal, which reflects and is reflected in the way the local is represented and delineated, and subsequently on the meaning and character of localism.⁶⁴⁴

If the meaning and character of the locality are co-produced by the agency of diverse biopolitical subjectivities, rituals to 'take place' are both conditions and facilitators of this process. Rituals are, above all, about 'appearance'; "a mode of paying attention"⁶⁴⁵. It is a process for "marking interest". By that, place is the fundamental component of ritual; it is through place that ritual directs attention. In a wider sense, rituals establish intercorporeal significance by "directing attention", where the ordinary becomes worth paying attention to. The characterisation of a ritual occurs in a twofold procedure: "parcelling out and repetition"⁶⁴⁶. Based on those and by marking the spatio-temporal essence of the ritual, we could suggest that the ritual reveals a process of creative transformation where "a time sequence is transposed into a spatial sequence"⁶⁴⁷. In 'Urban Rituals in Italy and the Netherlands', Heidi de Mare and Anna Vos as well point to the spatio-temporal characteristic of the ritual by interpreting it as a "physical aspect of the memory"⁶⁴⁸. This is because the sociocultural identities of individuals are frequently shaped and defined by seemingly trivial actions, characterised by their rhythms and inherent qualities, which are in minute detail documented and acknowledged immediately.

'Ritual spaces' and 'urban rituals' focus primarily on stereotyped, stylised, collective, public, and formal 'modes of behaviour' that are enacted in a certain place. All kinds of ideas, impressions, stories and myths may be attached to this

⁶⁴⁴ Madanipour, p. 35.

⁶⁴⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith, 'To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual' (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 103.

⁶⁴⁶ Smith, p. 111.

⁶⁴⁷ Smith, p. 113.

⁶⁴⁸ Heidi De Mare and Anna Vos, 'Urban Rituals in Italy and the Netherlands', ed. by Heidi de Mare and Anna Vos (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993), p. 10.

behaviour... Like a body of thought, such physical forms - modes of behaviour, gestures, acts - are also (often unconsciously) transmitted in a culture.⁶⁴⁹

As De Mare and Vos describe, there are certain levels of socio-spatial practices that we could consider as ‘use of (urban) space’ and ‘rituals in (urban) space’. These include uses linked to fundamental human needs to sustain life; spatial patterns associated with temporal rhythms of routines and rituals are non-ordinary activities “by which the normal course of life is periodically (annually, for instance) interrupted, turned around, and confirmed (the religious calendar, Carnival, and royal, national or political festivities)” and co-production of meanings assigned to what people do, think, feel, talk and experience.⁶⁵⁰ Along these various levels of embodying the city and its spaces, rituals occur at a transversal level, cross-cutting each.

In this line of thought, I use ‘ritual’ in a broader socio-spatial sense that not only refers to events of emblematic significance, such as religious or sacred gatherings but also to different levels and scales of everyday practices that become ritualised when engaged with a meaning.⁶⁵¹ In the context of migration, this refers to how migrants, with their superdiversity, localise themselves in the arrival context through means of ‘belonging and relatedness’. Furthermore, I take into account the transformative power of rituals in establishing events towards urban change while taking place in the public spaces of the city. These public spaces include spaces of local ‘micropublics’ where difference is encountered, confronted, and negotiated, as emphasised by Amin. In this sense, the lives of migrants with different biographies, migration histories, dwellings, and labour practices in Van are composed of different places and scales of rituals to create their own localities while challenging and contributing to the settled ones.

⁶⁴⁹ De Mare and Vos, p. 10.

⁶⁵⁰ De Mare and Vos, p. 12.

⁶⁵¹ Nadjé Al-Ali, ‘Gender Relations, Transnational Ties and Rituals among Bosnian Refugees’, *Global Networks*, 2.3 (2002), 249–62 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0374.00040>>; Andrea Verdasco, ‘Everyday Rituals of Migration: Constructing Relatedness and Agency among Young Refugees in Denmark’, *Ethnos*, 85.3 (2020), 550–74 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2019.1604558>>.

It was a cold March day in Van. The urban landscape of the city was covered with snow. Still, the cold weather hadn't affected the liveliness of the city because it was the time of *Newroz*, and during *Newroz* the streets, shops and restaurants of Van would be filled with diversity of people. During the first and second cycles of my fieldwork, I heard a lot about *Newroz* in Van, not only from the Kurdish inhabitants but just as much from the Iranians. In addition to feeling the urban life in the city during tough winter weather conditions, as mentioned several times in interviews, that's why I did not want to miss the chance to be in the city around the third week of March 2022.

The shift in trade direction at the Turkey-Iran border affected not only Van's urban economy but also, consequently, its everyday life. Gradually, since approximately 2013, but most intensely since 2016, people from Iran have visited Van, and some of them chose to settle in the city afterwards to establish business. In this context, we could convey that the mobility of goods triggered the mobility of people, which resulted in the emergence of another category based on spatio-temporality of mobility; 'recreational migration'. In conventional sources of academia or media in general, these people are not widely named as 'migrants' but 'tourists'. Yet, here, I deliberately use the term recreational migrant due to a few reasons: They have been involved in the superdiversity of the city more atypically and contributing to it not only through the difference in their migration motivation, ethnicity, class, or status but mostly through the temporal dimension and reflection of their mobility. On the other hand, it is worth understanding their mobility from a 'forced migration' perspective as the reasons behind their travel from cities of Iran to Van are not only 'touristic'; Iranians frequently visit Van over a year to 'freely' practice their 'rituals' that has not been allowed or been restricted in their home country. Therefore, in the case of recreational migrants from Iran, dynamics of "lifestyle mobility" that "privileged citizens often see ... as part of the everyday life"⁶⁵² and 'forced migration' blurs.

⁶⁵² Scott A. Cohen, Tara Duncan, and Maria Thulemark, 'Lifestyle Mobilities: The Crossroads of Travel, Leisure and Migration', *Mobilities*, 10.1 (2015), 155–72 (p. 157) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2013.826481>>.

Throughout my fieldwork, when any talk with locals of the city comes to people from Iran, it always ended up with how much they like ‘entertaining’. When they say entertainment, it means dancing in nightclubs, hanging out in Iranian cafes, mostly shopping, and ‘being so visible’ while doing all of these. Visibility, in that sense, appears as a socio-spatial practice between different actors of the superdiversity of Van. During our conversation with Roya and Kaveh, two beforementioned migrants from Iran, we were talking about the dwelling practices of migrants in Van and Roya commented that people from Iran generally prefer to stay in the city centre. She furthered her comment, saying, “*We don’t usually go to the outskirts, like 90% of us. We don’t know the people there. Also, we’re either working, or we want to go out a lot. It’d be difficult, coming and going there; you’d then need a car or take public transportation.*”⁶⁵³ It was so prominent during that conversation that, for them, dwelling is notably associated with the city centre, enabling them to be involved in ‘skilled’ work and urban leisure. Furthermore, their narrative very much speaks about dwelling in relation to ‘appearance’:

R: We Iranians want to go out a bit more. We like to go out. For example, we roam around every day, and maybe once a week, we want to go to a shopping mall. We want to take a tour around the city.

K: If there’s a safe disco, we want to go every day. We love to have fun. We may not have much money, but we know how to have a good time.

R: We want to be in the centre of the city.

B: Can you describe it a bit more specifically?

K: We rarely go to the İskele and Kale areas, for example. We are mostly around Sihke and Maraş.

R: Beşyol, Cumhuriyet, Maraş, mostly around these areas. Occasionally, we go around İki Nisan Boulevard, but it’s expensive there, so we can’t stay for long.

K: Cumhuriyet Avenue, all the way to the shopping mall.⁶⁵⁴

After encountering several narratives associating people from Iran with entertainment and particularly enormous shopping, I asked myself how an activity

⁶⁵³ Roya, Dyadic interview, 18.08.2021.

⁶⁵⁴ Roya and Kaveh, Dyadic interview, 18.08.2021.

based on consumption matters for the urban culture of this city. Could consumption be political, or could an urban activity based on consumption be a form of “political production of sociality”⁶⁵⁵ in the context of recreational migration? In ‘Spaces for the Subject of Consumption’, Rob Shields suggests that ‘lifestyle shopping’ should be critically explored “marking of the interdependence of the private spaces of subjectivity, media and commodity consumption, and the changing spatial contexts of everyday public life”⁶⁵⁶. He reveals that the separation of economy and culture within modernism has generally limited the opportunity for meaningful exploration of consumption practices.

Shields argues that an authentic exploration of consumption necessitates an openness to the recognition that lifestyles and consumption cultures should not be mistaken as mere manifestations of class, regional, generational, and gender identities. Rather, they should be seen as the emergence of new forms of ‘identifications’ or ‘subjectivities’. Consequently, consumption could be viewed as “an active, committed production of self and of society”⁶⁵⁷, wherein individuals are not merely assimilated into predefined styles but rather appropriate codes and fashions, making them their own. Approaching leisure and retail from a perspective blending ‘lifestyle mobility’ and ‘forced migration’, I argue that migrants’ ordinary everyday activities in Van, such as dancing, hanging out, or shopping, could be considered as (displaced) ‘rituals’, enabling the formation of new biopolitical subjectivities and new spaces of ‘microculture’. In that case, recreational migrants in Van have been active agents of the urban culture.

The visibility of recreational migrants from Iran is not only through their bodily appearance but also through various media, including visual sources and events. The socio-economic constraints in Iran place limits on several aspects of daily life,

⁶⁵⁵ Katerina Rozakou, ‘Socialities of Solidarity: Revisiting the Gift Taboo in Times of Crises’, *Social Anthropology*, 24.2 (2016), 185–99 (p. 186) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-8676.12305>>; Nicola De Martini Ugolotti and Jayne Caudwell, *Leisure and Forced Migration: Lives Lived in Asylum Systems*, ed. by Nicola De Martini Ugolotti and Jayne Caudwell, *Leisure and Forced Migration* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2022), p. 13 <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429341045>>.

⁶⁵⁶ Rob Shields, ‘Spaces for the Subject of Consumption’, in *Lifestyle Shopping* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 1 <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203413074>>.

⁶⁵⁷ Shields, p. 2.

including behaviours and clothing choices in public areas, which mainly affect the appearance of women. They also extend to the import and consumption of goods and the attendance of events or visits to certain places, all of which, as expected, disproportionately affect women's lives. Because of all these reasons and beyond, people from Iran who visited Van for a holiday are not mere visitors, but they visit the city to act 'freely'. This is why Azadeh, the tourism agent from Iran living in Van, expressed, "*To me, Van is a place like taking a breath*" ⁶⁵⁸. She continued explaining that, in general, when the schools go on holiday in summer, the number of people from Iran visiting Van increases significantly. Besides that, during *Newroz*, the city hosts thousands of people from Iran. In the words of Azadeh, "*In Nowruz, which lasts for 13 days, this place is packed. For example, I know that 17.000 people enter, maybe 20.000 people enter Van*". In the midst of our conversation, I asked her the most prominent reasons why people from Iran visit Van, and her response was:

You also know that our country has certain rules. Women have to cover themselves. That also plays a role. Women want to come here to take a breath. Maybe here, you know, men want to participate in a disco or an entertainment venue without any restrictions. So, these things have an impact, but as I said, the most important thing is that Van is cheaper and offers a lot of shopping opportunities, which makes it a preferred destination.

When I visited Van in March 2022, the city was hosting two primary events: *Newroz* celebrations and Shopping Fest. *Newroz*, being a culturally significant day, is widely celebrated by both Kurds and various ethnic communities in Iran. Despite this shared cultural significance, the socio-spatial practices that inform us about the celebrations reveal a notable diversity in the city. The difference can also be observed historically, particularly when examining the rituals as temporal constructs. In his work *Bir Söylence Bir Tarih: Newroz [A Legend, A History: Newroz]*, Gürdal Aksoy presents the idea of the formation of differences in the symbols, meanings, and practices about the *Newroz*:

Newroz was originally a mytho-ritual of the founding of the Persian kingdom centuries ago. Therefore, initially, it aimed to legitimise and rationalise the established order. It was the Kurds who transformed it into a popular festival,

⁶⁵⁸ Azadeh, Interview, 21.05.2022.

making it the spring equinox of resistance. With the influence of nationalist movements, especially in recent decades, the Newroz narrative has likely been reorganised by Kurdish intellectuals. As Mach pointed out, the construction of the past is one of the fundamental elements of ethnic or national identity. In the context of identity construction, the Newroz narrative has provided Kurds with such an opportunity.⁶⁵⁹

As Aksoy reveals, *Newroz* celebrations of Kurdish communities are highly associated with political connotations; in a sense, they have been part of the “urbanisation of Kurdish culture” in the words of Musa, who stressed the ‘transformative’ side of the migrations several times during our conversation. The rise in the political importance of the *Newroz* celebrations historically corresponds to the forced migration of Kurds to the urban areas. Consequently, especially since the 1990s, the purported cultural symbolism of *Newroz*, which indicates the arrival of spring each year, has gradually evolved into a political movement that hints at the efforts of internally displaced Kurds in re-territorialising their dwelling practices. It is about tactically turning the dynamism that mobility provides, even in the form of a forced displacement, into political action by utilising public spaces at least once a year to show ‘appearances’ as a spatial discourse of proving ‘the difference’.

In this regard, well-attended *Newroz* celebrations have been instrumentalised as a socio-spatial practice of politicisation of Kurds by rendering the Kurdish identity ‘visible’ in a manner that spatially proclaims, “We exist and we are here”. Thus, as both a cultural and political ritual, *Newroz* has heightened ethnic consciousness by elucidating distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘the other’ as well as between ‘then’ and ‘now’, thereby facilitating political mobilisation and contributing to the emergence of a wider community. With the rising political momentum of Kurds since the 1990s, cities such as Diyarbakır, Mardin, Şırnak, Ağrı, and Erzurum have been annually hosting wide *Newroz* gatherings in public spaces. In Van, as well, after the migrations in the 1990s, the urban public appearance of Kurds strengthened, and *Newroz* became one of the symbolic political rituals of the Kurdish community in the city. A few key public spaces have been attributed to different political ‘rituals’

⁶⁵⁹ Gürdal Aksoy, *Bir Söylence Bir Tarih: Newroz* (Ankara: Yurt Kitap, 1998), p. 18. [translation by the author]

in the city. For instance, Feqiye Teyran Park on Cumhuriyet Avenue has been mostly used for public press releases and demonstrations. Musa told me that because of that reference to the Park, for him, it is the centre of the city, yet ironically, accessing such centrality has been disrupted in the last years:

*That is the most bustling place. It's the centre. When we try to do our press releases there, they don't allow it. They pushed us to the Sanat Sokağı. Though it happened for the first time this year. Feqiye Teyran Park has been prohibited for five years. We managed to bypass the five-year ban this year, but nine people were detained, and three of them were arrested.*⁶⁶⁰

Other than Feqiye Teyran Park, two other parks have been attributed to other public gatherings: Musa Anter Peace Park, located at the intersection of Mareşal Fevzi Çakmak Avenue and Milli Egemenlik Avenue is used for March 8 and May 1 demonstrations, and the crowd generally spills out into the streets surrounding the park. For *Newroz* celebrations, Atatürk Park next to *Kale* (Van Fortress), which is settled on the periphery of the site of Old Van, has been used. It is also the largest park in Van city centre. Celebrations in 2021 were held there as well. Days before the day, people were talking about it everywhere in the city; one could hear people talking about the programme and the line-up or who was going to be on the stage.

When the day came, we took a taxi to *Kale*, and we needed to stop somewhere on Terzioğlu Street because of the crowd walking down the street. When we heard the Kurdish *halay* music loud enough, we got out of the taxi. The street was crowded with people trying to reach the *Newroz* and also with police officers and their various vehicles including *TOMA* and *Akrep*. After walking for a few minutes at a slow pace, we arrived at the security checkpoint, where women and men were checked in separate lines. The small shops and markets around served as a public 'locker', and people left some of their belongings, such as perfume or cologne bottles, since they were not allowed to be taken inside the celebration area. Although I had been to Atatürk Park several times before, with the festive atmosphere, the music, the smell of the food sold on the street, the traditional outfits of people and the large stage, the park had transformed into a vivid festival area. However, I should note that the

⁶⁶⁰ Musa, Interview, 11.08.2021.

tension was also apparently in the air due to the possibility of immediate aggression between police officers and *Newroz* participants.



Figure 5-10 Newroz celebrations in Atatürk Park in 2022. Photograph by the author, captured in March 2022.

While the Kurdish inhabitants of Van and other Kurdish individuals residing in the nearby towns and small municipalities were assembled in Atatürk Park to uphold their political ritual under the so-called official safeguard, the opposing side of the city was organising a Shopping Fest that specifically targeted recreational migrants from Iran. As Azadeh stated, individuals from Iran exhibited a particular preference for being in Van during their two weeks-long *Nowruz* holiday. Throughout these two weeks, numerous shops, restaurants, and hotels in the city made the necessary preparations to accommodate the influx of thousands of people from Iran. The official announcement of the event declared the entire city centre as the festival area, saying, “Our entire city, especially Cumhuriyet and Kazım Karabekir [Maraş] Avenues, which are the busiest commercial streets in our province, has been designated as a festival area”⁶⁶¹.

This, in turn, resulted in economic and socio-spatial reflections in the city. Azadeh was clear in expressing the effect of the influx from Iran on the urban economy of Van:

Especially the stores in this area are overflowing. Every day, they might fill their shelves or their warehouses, and by evening, they might find them empty again. Because there are so many customers. There’s also the fact that wholesale buyers come here a lot. The prices in this city are a bit more favourable compared to other

⁶⁶¹ ‘Van’da Shopping Fest Festivali Start Aldı’ <<http://www.van.gov.tr/vanda-shopping-fest-festivali-start-aldi>> [accessed 2 October 2023].

cities, so some of them have stores, and they come here to buy wholesale. Yes, during that period, sales were really good.⁶⁶²



Figure 5-11 The opening march of Shopping Fest 2022 along Cumhuriyet Avenue.⁶⁶³



Figure 5-12 Shopping Fest posters were inserted into advertising boards, and stickers were placed on the windows of various shops participating in the festival in the city. Collage by the author, with photographs captured in March 2022.

The impact of shopping during these two weeks and at other peak times of the year, such as in summer, is so intensive that in the urban narrative, shopping is directly attributed to Iranians. This is reflected in the urban façades and surfaces as well. Various spaces of retail and trade are installed with signs in Farsi, creating a multilingual⁶⁶⁴ visual culture in the city. This could be traced in most of the shops on Cumhuriyet and Maraş Avenues as well-connected streets such as Zübeyde

⁶⁶² Azadeh, Interview, 21.05.2022.

⁶⁶³ 'Van'da Shopping Fest Festivali Start Aldı'.

⁶⁶⁴ In addition to Turkish, Kurdish is also highly dominant in visual and urban culture of Van. The presence of English, depending on the land use or geographical location, further enhances the multilingual character of the city.

Hanım Street or Uzun Street. Whenever there is a change in the sociocultural composition of a given locality, “the place sounds and looks differently”, among others, this is due to the presence of spoken and written languages that are different from established languages dominant in an urban landscape. In this regard, language is “the most immediate and direct identifier of people and the most immediately sensitive indicator of social change”.⁶⁶⁵



Figure 5-13 Farsi signs inside and outside of the shop. Collage by the author, with photographs of *Gazete Oksijen*⁶⁶⁶.

The diversity in language has been apparent not only in the visual culture, marking street signs as graphic devices, but also in the different spaces and scales of urban life. This expanded to the organisation of cultural events in Farsi. In my conversation with him, Ahmet boldly emphasised how the ‘touristic’ relation of Iranians turned into a ‘trade’ relation, which, consequently, affected the spatio-temporal dimension of migrations since, in the end, people like Azadeh have become businesspeople and settled in Van.

In particular, in terms of entertainment, they were doing what they couldn’t do in Iran due to the oppressive regime, having fun here. Around 2017, I believe, there were some famous Iranian artists, possibly in exile, who came here. They organised

⁶⁶⁵ Jan Blommaert and Ico Maly, ‘Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis and Social Change: A Case Study’, in *Language and Superdiversity*, ed. by Karel Arnaut and others (Taylor and Francis, 2015), pp. 472–520 (p. 472).

⁶⁶⁶ Baran Can Sayın, ‘İranlıların Van Sevdası’, *Gazete Oksijen*, 2022 <<https://gazeteoksijen.com/turkiye/iranlilarin-van-sevdasi-160118>>.

*a massive concert in Van. It was a significant event, and the artist's name was featured on billboards everywhere. Serious advertising was done targeting Iranians. The concerts were organised by large organisation companies and entirely orchestrated by Iranians. This relationship evolved into more than just tourism; it became a commercial activity. After a while, they found local partners and engaged more in business activities with the people here.*⁶⁶⁷

The yearly concerts, as mentioned by Ahmet, have been organised since 2017 and featured renowned Iranian singers and musicians in exile. Among them were Nasrollah Moein Najafabadi (known as Mosein), Shadmehr Aghili, and Embrahim Hamedî (known as Ebi), whose performances attracted thousands of Iranians in Van. These cultural events in the city have evolved into diverse and multilingual occasions over the years. For instance, in 2019, the Van State Theatre hosted the first bilingual theatre production in Farsi and Kurdish. The play *Deweta Bixwîn (Kanlı Gelin)* [The Bloody Bride], originally written in Spanish, was performed by the Iranian theatre group Fûjan and the Kurdish theatre group Nûpelda. Additionally, as part of the printed and digital publications, a weekly magazine called *Van Gazetesi* has been published in Farsi and Turkish since 2015. The primary objective of this publication is to foster even stronger connections between Van and Iran, thus encompassing news from both regions. Ahmet further explained, *“Indeed, those who reside here read it to keep up with Iran’s news and events. Also, the local news is important for those who are from here but may not speak Turkish and instead speak Farsi. It caters to their needs as well.”*

During the fieldwork, whenever I heard any kind of reflection from people about the ‘bold’ presence of Iranians in the urban culture of Van, I inherently asked them about the attitude of the general public. The responses were twofold. The first refers to the contribution of Iranians to the urban economy and the resulting spatial transformations in the city. Azadeh’s observation was that the local businesses appreciate this influx as “it keeps the wheel turning”. She said, “If you look at a few years ago, these mobilities have brought a lot of benefits. Many hotels were built, and streets were beautified. The municipality started working on infrastructure

⁶⁶⁷ Ahmet, Interview, 18.08.2021.

projects. Nice shops and restaurants opened to cater to the needs of visitors. In my opinion, Iranian tourists have contributed to the growth of this city. They've made this place better.”⁶⁶⁸



Figure 5-14 Covers of Van Gazetesi published bilingually in Farsi and Turkish. Collage by the author, with photographs of Tubittum⁶⁶⁹.

Almost all the local residents I encountered expressed a similar perspective to Azadeh's, highlighting the temporary presence of Iranians as a catalyst for the construction of new establishments, particularly hotels and recreational facilities. For instance, Nesrin, whom I introduced before, mentioned that recreational places like beaches were built, and the coastline was renovated for visitors who would like to enjoy the landscapes by the lake. Or, when I asked Musa if he observed any noticeable urban transformation in response to the changing border relations with Iran and the subsequent influx of Iranian visitors, his immediate reply centred around the excessive increase in the number of hotels.

Taking into account their spatial distribution within the city, the newly built hotels, such as Haldi Hotel, Royal Berk Hotel, and Menua Hotel, were primarily concentrated in the Bahçıvan Neighbourhood and Şerefiye Neighbourhood, predominantly within the urban area delineated by Ferit Melen Avenue, Milli Egemenlik Avenue, and Cumhuriyet Avenue, with some establishments also found in the western section of Maraş Avenue, including Elite World Hotel and the Conforium Hotel. The accommodation facilities for Iranian visitors have not only

⁶⁶⁸ Azadeh, Interview, 21.05.2022.

⁶⁶⁹ 'Tubittum Dergisi' <<https://www.vangazetesi.com/gazete-arsiv/tubittum-dergisi/2/>> [accessed 28 October 2023].

been limited to hotels and guesthouses. The increase in the desire for temporary accommodation in the city has given rise to informal ways of hosting, where locals welcomed Iranian guests at their homes.

In 2018-2019, they couldn't find places in hotels or guesthouses. Local people in Van hosted the Iranians in their homes. Van residents are known for their hospitality. Someone would be out in the evening, see an Iranian family who had come, couldn't find a hotel or guesthouse, and would ask, "We couldn't find a hotel or guesthouse; where can we stay?" The response would be, "Well, if you couldn't find one, come with me; let's go to my place." That's how the people of Van hosted them.⁶⁷⁰

This informality, later on, turned into more investments in the construction of new types of housing in the city, consisting of housing modules of 1+1 and 2+1 apartments, which are not aligned with the conventional lifestyle and needs of the local residents of the city, in other words, not suitable for Kurdish family structures. As part of the ongoing parcel-based urban transformation in the city, the apartment blocks have been designed to target Iranian recreational migrants as well as students and civil servants appointed to fulfil compulsory eastern duty in Van as the primary users of those spaces. These domestic spaces were then involved in the trade between Iran and Van:

After all, 1+1 2+1 apartments were rented by Iranians themselves. They were renting, saying, "Okay, nothing will happen if I come to your place. I'll pay your rent for your place, and when I or my relatives or friends come to Van, we'll have a place to stay. Come on, stay there", they would say. In this way, they were coordinating their visits back and forth.⁶⁷¹

The second type of response in terms of people's perception of the presence of Iranians in public life and the urban culture of Van is gender-based. The general narrative of the participants of the fieldwork about locals' attitudes towards migrants conveys that the situation in Van is not likely to re-produce the stranger-local dichotomy. As I mentioned earlier, this is because most of the inhabitants or their family members, in a way, have a migration or forced displacement (hi)story. Therefore, there is no record of a racist attitude or mistreatment of migrants from the

⁶⁷⁰ Bayram, Interview, 20.05.2022.

⁶⁷¹ Bayram, Interview, 20.05.2022.

locals; there is no distinction on a national or ethnic basis. However, some ‘but’s could follow those narratives, referring to the visibility of Iranian women in public spaces. Our conversation with Musa illustrates the context in that regard:

M: But people were uncomfortable with that point, to be honest.

B: What was the reason for this discomfort?

M: Well, there was a conservative structure in society; whether it was a man or a woman, they didn’t embrace their approach and clothing.

B: Was it because when people from Iran come here, they break free from oppressive clothing styles and dress up as they wish?

M: It’s true. Actually, we cannot say that people in Van could not wear what they want. In our society, people dress up however they like.

B: I noticed that in Van as well.

M: They are comfortable in that regard, but when Iranians overdo it, it’s not something that turns into a reaction in this society, but people express their discomfort when they talk to each other.⁶⁷²

A vacant public space, temporarily repurposed as a parking lot, situated between Feqiye Teyran Park and Van Mall AVM, served as an open-air venue of Shopping Fest for various public events, including exhibitions, dance shows, concerts, DJ performances and so on. When we visited the venue, a well-known DJ from Iran was on the stage. Iranian women were accompanying his performance while dancing, surrounded by crowded spectators composed of locals, mostly men. Recalling Arendt’s ‘actor-spectator’ binary, at that moment, I questioned how taking place of women of Iran in public spaces of Van manifested their socio-spatial agency in the re-making of urban culture from a gendered perspective. The increasing visibility of women of Iran in streets, cafes, bars, shopping centres and other public spaces of the city takes place in the narratives of most of the fieldwork participants, associated with their ‘bold’ appearance.

When considering ‘appearance’ as a socio-spatial practice, the common narrative related to women’s visibility in public spaces expands to other stories that I encountered. It was during the second cycle of my fieldwork that I randomly

⁶⁷² Musa, Interview, 11.08.2021

gathered five women in a small coffee shop. They had all been living in Van since the day they were born. I shortly knew two of them, Elvin, a humanitarian aid worker, and Şilan, the owner of the coffee shop, but the other three I only met there. After introducing ourselves to each other, I briefly explained my research to them, and from there, we started talking about everyday life in Van and how urban life in the city has changed over the last couple of decades. The conversation flowed in that safe space, and I encountered another urban narrative of Van, where the women could not even walk in its streets freely.



Figure 5-15 The public events in the car park as part of Shopping Fest 2022. Collage by the author, with photographs captured in March 2022.

Their narrative dated between the late 1990s and early 2000s and took place in Cumhuriyet Avenue and centred around how it was traumatic for young girls and women to be visible around ‘çarşı’ due to the ‘street harassment’. On the other hand, I shared with them that my situated and limited experience in the city in the last two years was almost the opposite. As a stranger and woman in the city, I feel safe in the public spaces of Van, compared to most of the cities in Turkey. I asked them whether what I felt was somehow a temporary illusion that did not correspond to a seated everyday reality. Elvin’s response to me turned the attention to the relation between migrations and the city:

In today’s change, migration has a significant impact. For example, the arrival of Iranians in Van. The ‘open and relaxed’ dressing style of Iranian women compared to women from Van created a difference. Similarly, people who were forced to migrate after the earthquake had to stay away for 2-3 years. They went to other cities, saw the life there, and returned to Van with a different understanding.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷³ Elvin, Focus Group Interview, 17.08.2021.

Hevi, the other woman who was present around our table, who is a lawyer, supported Elvin's comment by referring to the phenomenon of 'society becoming political' as another notable element of urban change, which is also intricately tied to the city's history of migration. As I previously emphasised, the influx of migrants in the 1990s resulted in the politicisation of Kurds in urban areas, and the promotion of women's liberation and gender rights has gained greater prominence in the political agenda of the Kurdish community in Van, which accounts for nearly 70% of the city's current population. Şilan furthermore added another memory of hers to the conversation, dating back to the end of the 2000s. She commented that when she came back to the city from Gaziantep after she finished high school there in 2009, "*Van had already changed very markedly*", yet still, there were no places where women could by themselves or together with men could hang out. There was only Niçe Bar, located on 1771 Street close to the intersection of Maraş and Cumhuriyet Avenues, on the other side of *Ezberciler Çarşısı*. The upper floor of Niçe Bar was reserved for the use of women. She expressed that there was no place where women could go and drink beer in comfort and safety. Then she referred to her personal migration story and how, after living in Gaziantep, her perspective considerably changed, and she found herself in the effort of creating spaces for women:

*Then, I decided to open Hınar Bar. The concept was around creating a safe space for women, and in a sense, I implemented positive discrimination for women in that venue. I created a place where women could feel comfortable. As the venue started to be used more and more, the community gradually got used to this idea. Hınar, then, became a place where women could dance freely.*⁶⁷⁴

Opening of other bars and cafes followed Hınar. Currently, 1771 Street has turned into a small '*barlar sokağı*' (bar street) with other alternative pubs that exist, such as the abovementioned Niçe Bar, Yeni Eski Bar and Pablo Papalagi Bar. After this encounter, with the awareness of the topics we discussed in that small coffee shop, I started tracing more stories of the socio-spatial transformative agency of migration from a gendered perspective. For instance, for Nesrin, whom I introduced before, the rising diversity of Van is the major catalyst of the change in society's perspective to

⁶⁷⁴ Şilan, Focus Group Interview, 17.08.2021.

alternative lifestyles and tolerance to the differences, or in other words, the existence of the other.

N: The society has changed accordingly. There are mountains of difference between the society when I first came here 7 years ago and the current one. Just like you see people in Ankara who can roam comfortably, here it is the same now. Even as an Ankara native, I think Ankara has become more conservative both in terms of people's mentality and their clothing; in every aspect, the old Ankara is almost gone. But here, for example, there are girls wearing only bralettes, women with their bellies exposed, men in suits, men wearing tight pants, you know, not only women but also men have changed. Right now, everything is very relaxed. Incredibly relaxed. For example, people can get married very comfortably. There are women smoking while walking on the streets. People are drinking beer in the parks. This is a very important change. It didn't used to be like this.

B: What is it attributed to?

N: This is completely an issue. I attribute it to the constant influx of different migrants here, both from Iran and other places. Koreans come here a lot, too; look, a lot of Koreans come here, a lot of tourists come here. Our young people have changed, and their perspectives have changed. This is also very important.

B: As a woman living here, I was curious about how you feel, actually.

N: Absolutely, it wasn't like this until a few years ago. But for example, in the last 2-3 years, I feel very comfortable, very much so. One can express themselves very comfortably here. Especially women, really.⁶⁷⁵

Today, living with superdiversity is associated a lot with leisure and nightlife in Van. On the one hand, new bars, pubs, and cafes, especially, have been opened during the urban transformation process accelerated after the earthquakes in 2011, which mostly locals use; on the other hand, other spaces of leisure have also popped up in the city, connected to recreational migrations. A day around *Newroz*, we were walking on Cumhuriyet Avenue and encountered a few of the stands where nightclub staff were handing out flyers in Farsi. We stopped by one of them and asked for the entrance details. The first reaction we received was that since we are not an Iranian, we could not enter. After they were convinced that we, only two women and researchers, would show up, they were convinced and shared the entry information with us.

⁶⁷⁵ Nesrin, Interview, 13.08.2021.

In further conversations about this short experience with locals and Iranian people I know in the city, I realised that a new nightclub concept emerged in Van: a ‘family-friendly disco’. Dara, owner of one of the leading nightclubs of that type, described it as a ‘unique experience’, unique in the sense that families with children could attend the parties as well.

*For instance, as soon as you enter our place, the music playing, the layout and arrangement of the tables, the drinks we offer, everything creates an entertainment experience unique to the Iranian people.*⁶⁷⁶



Figure 5-16 Flyer of an Iranian disco in Van. Photograph by the author, captured in March 2022.

He further explained that the Iranians prefer to have their children with them when they travel, and they don't want to leave their children in hotels. He said, “*That’s why our venue is very suitable for them. Because we are family-friendly, we provide good security*”⁶⁷⁷. Security for him is connected with two elements: the prohibition of single men (*damsız*) entering and the avoidance of placing the bar on the ground floor or lower levels. If any ‘trouble’ happens on the street, it becomes possible to reach the 11th floor where his bar is located. In Turkey, the family-friendly concept has been widely used for various recreational spaces such as restaurants, cafes, and tea gardens to conservatively segregate spatial use according to hidden gender agendas while glorifying the notion of family as a ‘sacred’ demographic unit to be protected. In that regard, the ‘family-friendly’ bar concept manifests a dialectical

⁶⁷⁶ Dara, Interview, 26.06.2022

⁶⁷⁷ Dara, Interview, 26.06.2022

practice: Albeit adopting a ‘family-friendly’ concept in the context of a nightclub sounds innovative, the reproduction of the biopolitical organisation of space is inevitable. However, from a ‘care’ perspective, those places remarkably contribute to the participation of women having kids in nightlife. Considering life with severe restrictions in Iran, by accommodating ‘difference’ in those places, Van becomes a site of liberation, especially for women.

Coming here, even a few times a year, offers us a chance for liberation.⁶⁷⁸

5.4 Epilogue: Weaving in-between narratives

It is a hard commitment to trace the in-between. When it is about tracing the mobile and the spatial as a precondition to the action, it is even harder. Mobility is an interplay among the gradual scales of being visible and invisible; therefore, it occurs among diverse spaces and scapes while creating its own means. While tracing mobility as a socio-spatial construct, ‘ordinary’ socio-spatial practices and contexts and how these can be re-produced and negotiated through apparently mundane spaces became prominent in the fieldwork. Additionally, as the production of the space is intertwined with the rhythms of everyday life, an examination of personal biographies, narratives and stories has emerged as a meaningful approach to exploring the concept of superdiversity in Van, which is characterised by the existence of various social agents.

The stories I encountered weaved a narrative of “mobile spatial fields”, as coined by Nancy Munn, a concept that offers an understanding of how embodied practices and experiences occur as interactions between the social agency of bodies and terrestrial spaces.⁶⁷⁹ Mobile spatial fields are culturally defined, intercorporeal fields that extend from the body and move through different spaces and bodyscapes. I thereby exhibited throughout this chapter how the socio-spatial practice of people making

⁶⁷⁸ Words of Sima, a 21 years old woman from Iran, who visited Van in 2022. Sayın.

⁶⁷⁹ Munn, p. 449.

and taking place in Van becomes embodied in an “actor-centred, mobile body”⁶⁸⁰. Departing from that, I represented how various titles or statuses that, in fact, are in exchange with biopolitical subjectivities, mostly assigned, used, and disseminated by governmental structures, encounter in everyday life. My focus is on the ‘intersections’, at how ‘new’ structures of difference are being added to, layered upon, arranged, and positioned with regard to already-existing ‘old’ structures of difference.⁶⁸¹

In that sense, Van, as a layered city of memory, provided the context for the research and, beyond that, has become the research itself due to its critical socio-political history in exhibiting to us the spatial traces of nation-state as well as body-nation process as in the events of 1915 or later in the 1990s, both of which ended with the forced displacement of the ones to be externalised. Locating at the borderscapes of Turkey and Iran, the city has received transnational immigration from Iran and Iraq as well as from Afghanistan since the 1980s. Today, with the rising global migrations of people due to wars, climate crisis, or poverty, Van appeared as a historical junction for migrations from South Asia and the Middle East, including origin countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq and Syria, to Europe. With that, in addition to the provinces such as Hatay, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa and Mardin located along the south-eastern border of Turkey where the Syrian mass migration geographically occurred, Van appears as another critical locality for transnational migrations to and/or via Turkey.

In that sense, the locality in Van has been defined by the bodyscapes of social agents connected to migration. As I explored throughout this chapter, it has been through the socio-spatial practices around dwelling, labour, and rituals that superdiverse inhabitants of this city create their ‘fluid’ localities. By those practices, the meaning of the city has been re-produced through collective urban narrative as ‘site of

⁶⁸⁰ Seta M. Low, ‘Embodied Space(s): Anthropological Theories of Body, Space, and Culture’, *Space and Culture*, 6.1 (2003), 9–18 (p. 14).

⁶⁸¹ Steven Vertovec, ‘Conclusion’, in *Diversities Old and New: Migration and Socio-Spatial Patterns in New York, Singapore and Johannesburg*, ed. by Steven Vertovec (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 247 <<https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137495488>>.

transition', 'site of adaptation', 'site of illegality', 'site of informality' or 'site of liberation'. This shows us how the different social agents have followed a different mode of attaching the city. Most of the narratives I encountered take place at the intersection of multiple migrations, and they inform us about how Van has been developed and characterised as an urban landscape that hosts differences.

Throughout this chapter, I aimed to exhibit the socio-spatial traces of migration-driven superdiversity in Van by referring to personal biographies and stories of the people I encountered during the different cycles of the fieldwork. It has been through the stories translated to the written form of the oral excerpts that the research finds its micro-scale explorations operated by the bodyscapes, that it 'knows through the body'. As Tim Cresswell suggests, "Mobility, as a social product, does not exist in an abstract world of absolute time and space, but is a meaningful world of social space and social time"⁶⁸². For him, mobility is part of the social production of time and space since it subverts the abstraction of the spatialisation of time and temporalisation of space. The inclusion of the body in the social production of space and time is what allows mobility to transcend abstractions:

What connects mobility at the scale of the body to mobility at other scales is meaning. Stories about mobility, stories that are frequently ideological, connect blood cells to street patterns, reproduction to space travel.⁶⁸³

In search of the bodily and spatial inscription of migration, fielding as a critical spatial practice was not limited to the in-situ practice in the field but also the post-fieldwork, which included 'translating' the collected data into other types of data. Therefore, the dense post-fieldwork consisted of transcribing, organising, and mapping the data collected in oral, written and drawn formats. While transcribing, I transformed all the oral data into text format without making any interpretations of the audio records. As all interviews were held in Turkish, I did not need to do any translation from migrants' own language to Turkish. The only interpretation I did was to translate the excerpts into English while writing the thesis. On the other hand,

⁶⁸² Timothy Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World, On the Move* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 5 <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203446713-12>>.

⁶⁸³ Cresswell, p. 6.

organising the data required an intensive engagement with the data, where I read the material several times and then created connections among the most relevant ones to find out ‘relations’ that could inform my interpretation. My aim, at that point, was to highlight the commonalities in the narratives of the participants, to capture particular symbols, values, and meanings so as not to end up with standardised conclusions. Finally, during the mapping of the data, I proposed main themes that relevant data could attach to. This does not necessarily mean that particular data is considered under a single theme; on the contrary, I deliberately traced for the ‘relationality’ to uncover the intersections across themes.

I should not here that none of the abovementioned data analysis techniques were used sequentially. In this thesis, I intentionally did not separate analysis from the entire process; at each instance of ‘fielding’, I was actively in search of the meaning of the events, encounters and places that I witnessed in Van. Having different temporal and spatial references, the oral excerpts and field notes appeared to be interwoven together as a ‘collective urban narrative’ interrelated to three prominent themes: dwelling, labour, and ritual. With that, I aimed to show how ordinary socio-spatial practices of migrants create a superdiverse urban landscape since the difference takes place at ‘micropublics’ when people create, adapt, and interfere in the conditions of taking place to live, work, and perform their rituals. This recalls my earlier claim that *the personal history of a migrant indicates the history of (micro)urbanisation*.

My observations and the interviews reveal that socio-political ruptures due to wars, conflicts, occupations and as well as environmental and socio-political ones such as earthquakes and floods in Van consequenced with or led to migrations from or to the city. Locating at the borderscapes even amplifies the impact of any socio-political conflict. As I mentioned before, border, in that sense, dialectically exists in the urban culture of Van. It is both an opportunity and a thread, where both are connected to human and non-human migration across borders, thus with the circulation of the capital. As I claimed earlier, *it has been migrant encounters that moderate the micro-urbanisation of contemporary migration-driven cities*. In *Migrant Encounters*, Sara

Friedman and Pardis Mahdavi argue that “such encounters transform both migrants themselves and the various states [and spaces] they move among, although often in unpredictable ways”.⁶⁸⁴ While states aim to classify migrants into distinct categories, migrants themselves disrupt these attempts at categorisation and singularity by transitioning between roles and various domains.⁶⁸⁵ As I presented throughout this chapter, this involves negotiations with homeowners, real estate or neighbours in finding a shelter to re-territorialise their dwelling, engaging with informal or invisible works in the face of being considered as ‘unskilled labour’ or insistence in the spatialisation of bodily emancipation despite the risk of being marginalised. The dynamic nature of encounters between the state, migrants, and other local actors gives rise to a variety of bodyscapes that occupy the in-betweenness among various spaces and times. With that, migrant encounters facilitate new modes of urban changes in micropublics of the city, showing us how migrant experiences challenge the boundaries of assigned legal or socio-cultural status in making and taking place in Van.

⁶⁸⁴ Sara L. Friedman and Pardis Mahdavi, *Introduction: Migrant Encounters*, ed. by Sara L. Friedman and Pardis Mahdavi, *Migrant Encounters: Intimate Labor, the State, and Mobility Across Asia* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press All, 2015), p. 1 <<https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812291841-006>>.

⁶⁸⁵ Friedman and Mahdavi.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

How can one not be impressed by Van after witnessing its captivating landscape, with on one side the boundless Van Lake and on the other side high mountains giving birth to rivers to embosom spacious plains? When you find yourself up on the top of the clifty rock, you are immediately touched by the gorgeous landscape, making you feel as if you are travelling between air and soil, through and over the mountains or across diverse temporalities of numerous publics that marked their presence either in stone or in words, thus along with the imagery of all possible stories that this city has kept hidden for a long, long time. (August 20th, 2021)

This thesis excavated the urbanisation of Van, with its diverse spatialities, temporalities and agencies, through the study of different migrations. It argues that investigating the cities through investigating migrations can enable the recognition of multiple scales of knowledge and experience. This points to the inclusion of both urban and bodily conditions in the inquiry within an embodied socio-spatial analysis, allowing for a ‘finer-scale’ investigation, as argued by Setha Low. The thesis is, therefore, a well-elaborated attempt to understand the modes of urbanisation of the city of Van by developing a critical inquiry into migration through bodies.

Aligned with increasing migrations over the world, global cities are increasingly inhabited by diverse populations, many of whom are constantly mobile across internal and external borders. Consequently, the urban landscape has become fragmented and transitory, eroding the traditional notion of cities as permanent

settlements.⁶⁸⁶ In this frame, cities cease to be considered as “a universal form or a bounded unit”⁶⁸⁷ but are rather envisaged as a “multi-scalar process of socio-spatial transformation”⁶⁸⁸ consistently reproduced by mobility and migrations. Diversity, and more particularly superdiversity as coined by Steven Vertovec, is the keyword of the cities affected by migration.

This thesis is based on the exploration of how the urban landscapes of Van have been shaped by migrations, particularly after the formation of the nation-state. Throughout the thesis, I deliberately used the term ‘urban landscapes’ to embrace the relational aspect of the physical urban space and the socio-cultural environment. Recalling Arjun Appadurai, the ‘scapes’ approach manifests the interconnectedness of all human and non-human agents in territories. Furthermore, it deals with the movement of people, information, capital, media, and ideas across different spatial and temporal scales, including local, regional, and global contexts. This research finds itself in the complexity that urban landscapes hold. In terms of Van, this means how (migrant) bodies have been involved in the making and taking of place in relation to other bodies as well as non-human entities such as space, labour, ideas, goods, rituals, meanings, etc.

I presented throughout the thesis that migrations are simply not about moving from one cartographic coordinate to another; thus, they do not merely represent a linear connection of physical territories located across borders. Migration indeed is ‘a movement that carries meaning’. As Tim Cresswell suggests, “Mobility is not just a function of time and space, but an agent in their production”⁶⁸⁹. Regarding that, it interconnects languages, memories, ideas and imprints from other spaces and times, along with the re-territorialisation of displaced bodies that have been interpreted in this research as ‘mutable, reactive, expressive, and dynamic archives’. Accordingly, the thesis referred to the narrative, affective and operative capacities of bodies in

⁶⁸⁶ Piscitelli, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁷ Piscitelli, p. 3.

⁶⁸⁸ Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, ‘Towards a New Epistemology of the Urban?’, *City*, 19.2–3 (2015), 151–82 (p. 152) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2015.1014712>>.

⁶⁸⁹ Cresswell, p. 6.

their act to re-territorialise in a new socio-spatial context and, therefore, to re-localise the bodyscapes. In this line of flight, I employed a relational framework that juxtaposes, overlaps, and intersects bodyscapes and urban landscapes when tracing the migration-driven superdiversity in Van. I attempted to elaborate on urban landscapes as a set of places and relations marked by diverse temporalities, constantly transformed by migrations.

Therefore, in this thesis, I have explored the lived experiences of transnational migrants as well as other actors, almost all of whom are indeed connected to a form of migration (e.g., internal displacement) in their personal history. Such an exploration was guided by interlinked research questions, which was initiated with questioning how to investigate the urban landscapes that have been significantly impacted by different forms of migration. From this inquiry, which referred to the scale of the city, I urged to explore the actors shaping and re-shaping urban landscapes and integrated the scale of the body, which was framed by asking how to refer to the 'body' in understanding the transformation of the urban landscapes of Van. Finally, the main research question interlinked with those two appeared to be how to trace the urban culture of Van diversified by migrant bodyscapes.

6.1 Reflections on the relational set

This is a relational research that attempted to move beyond linear fashions of research, which posits that the method follows the theory supported by key references. It found its relational being in fielding, in listening, in tracing, in writing. The relationality was embedded in how I worked, how the field emerged as a socio-spatial practice, and how difference and diversity have taken its place along the thesis through the social agency of not only human and non-human participants of the fieldwork but also through the archival sources. This is also reflected in the formation of research questions. Although the research has been guided by the abovementioned primary questions, even more of them accompanied me throughout the trajectory of the thesis. Thereby, I incorporated a diversity of interrelated concepts that framed the thesis theoretically and methodically. By that, I aimed to present a multifaceted

and dynamic framework that could excavate the complexity of the migration-driven superdiversity of Van. I, therefore, suggested a ‘relational set’ which mapped a non-hierarchical, non-linear, and de-centralised form of connectivity. By means of this relational set, I was able to gather a plurality of arguments as well as concepts. Now, re-visiting it (Figure 6-1), I will summarise the findings of the thesis and present how it maps the connectivity and relations among different levels of inquiry of the research.

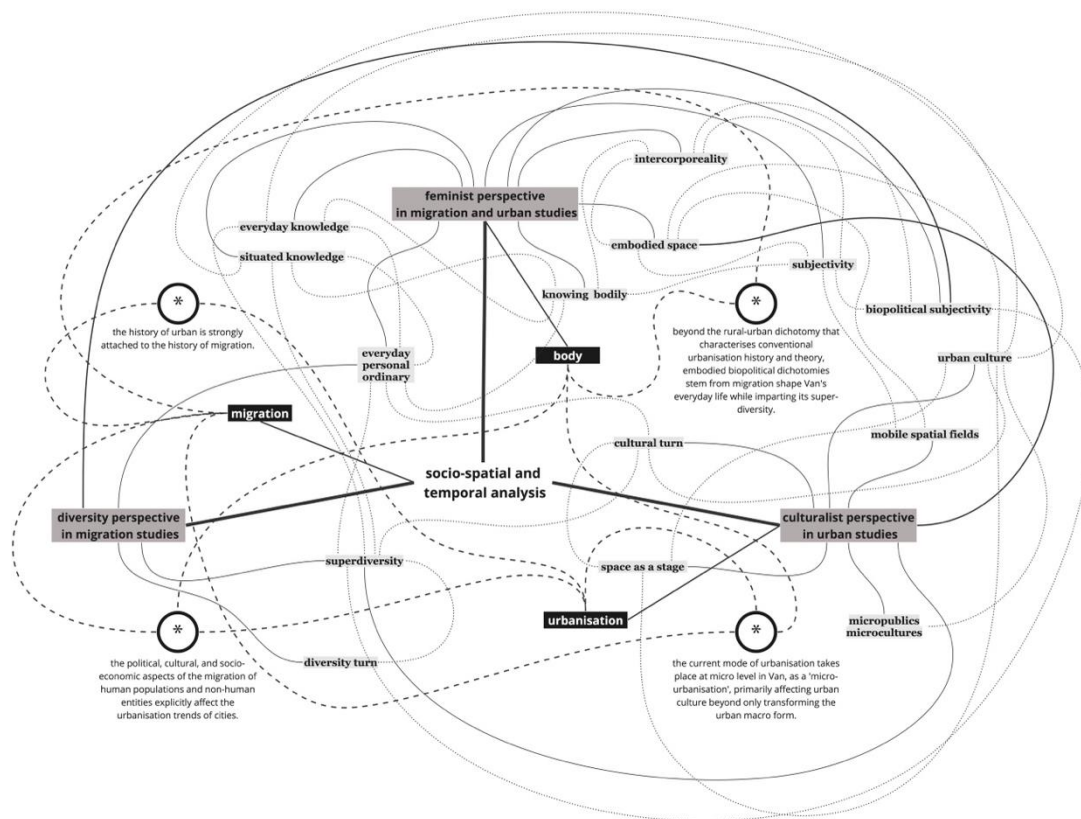


Figure 6-1 Relational set re-visited.

For this research, I departed from inquiring how migrations have taken place in the formation of cities and urban life. My initial point of departure was to explore the current migration context in the eastern borderscapes of Turkey. The reason behind this choice was to study an under-researched and under-invested yet significant region for migrations. I then decided to focus on the city of Van due to being an arrival, departure, and transit urban landscape for different migrants. As presented

throughout the thesis, **Van is a historical and critical urban juncture of migrations.** Over the last few years, the city has received numerous transnational migrants from countries such as Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria. I initially questioned the socio-spatial consequences of this intensive cross-border mobility in the city. At the beginning of the fieldwork, my aim was to follow the traces of current transnational migrations of those mentioned asylum-seekers, no matter if they stay in the city or transit to others on their way to a safer and better destination.

However, even from the first days of the first cycle of fieldwork, I encountered stories that made me question the spaces and temporalities of different migrations in the city. Above all, almost everyone I talked to, who could be identified as ‘local’, had a close temporal and spatial connection with migration. Either themselves or their family members from the previous generation moved from their customary rural lands to the city centre of Van as a result of the forced displacement of thousands of people. With each story I heard during the fieldwork, I got to realise more and more that **not only ‘migration’ but, more particularly, ‘forced displacement’ and ‘deterritorialisation’ have very long been on the agenda of the urban life in Van.** This inspired me to deepen the urban history of Van, not to present a piece of background information about the context, but explicitly to provide the complexity of spatialities and temporalities of migrations that have affected life in the city in every sense.

Indeed, the historical analysis shows that considerably with the beginning of the 20th century, marked with two milestones in the history of Turkey, World War I and the establishment of the Republic, different scales of in and out migrations were recorded in the city. **The urban history of Van has been strongly linked to the history of migrations that affected the city.** For instance, according to the archival sources, with the official decision to become a *vilayet* in 1875, Van received migrations from sanjaks and villages in the region at the end of the 19th century. Even before this trend, the city had already been growing to the east, which then led to the formation of a new type of settlement in the vicinity of the outskirts of Mount Ereğ, *Aygestan*, the garden city. The development of *Aygestan* accelerated towards the end

of the century with the inner migrations from the former city centre, *Şahesdan*. The great fire in 1876, the war between 1877 and 1878, the famine between 1880 and 1881 and the events of 1896 had urged the inhabitants of the city centre to move to the 'gardens' in search of a safer and abundant place where they could produce food within the borders of their domestic space and self-sustain their life.

Decades later, the city faced a devastating historical period that destroyed what had made it a diverse city both spatially and culturally over thousands of years of history. The events from 1915 to 1918 resulted in the erasure of the 'difference' in the city. Between 1915 and 1918, the Muslim inhabitants, mostly Kurds, had to flee to the southern and western provinces during the Russian occupation of the city. Not only were Muslims displaced from their historical lands, but the majority of the Armenian population, together with other non-Muslim communities such as Chaldeans and Nastrunis, were deported from the country. **The production of migrations has controlled the production of space in Van.** In the process of forced displacement of the people, the city itself was deterritorialised with the destruction of the old city, *Şahesdan*. The forced displacement of the former inhabitants of the city provided a context towards the instrumentalisation of space as part of the building of the nation-state. The new city centre of Van was constructed from scratch with all means. A new site without a physical or visual connection to the site of the old city was chosen to build a 'modern' city which could manifest the 'demography and identity of high Turkish regime'. Within the phases of the modern planning of the city, the first urban plan was designed in 1925, which designated today's İskele Neighbourhood as the centre, in close proximity to the harbour. With the master plans dated 1945 and 1974, the city centre was developed along Cumhuriyet Avenue.

The overall political strategy of Muslimisation of the city in the last phases of the Ottoman period was then replaced with the Turkification of the city, and various resettlement policies were executed to structure and control the population. Within that strategy, people of Turkish origin were moved from places within and across the borders to build a new demographic setting in the city. Deportation of non-Muslims from Van and the resettlement policies of the nation-state show that **each migration**

points to a wider socio-political context that extends simply connecting a departure and arrival location on a map. For instance, the *Laz* population living originally in the northern provinces, such as Trabzon and Rize, was one of the main actors in those resettlement policies. Although they were primarily housed in the Kurdish villages such as Dönerdere, some of them were resettled in the city centre who today live in the İskele Neighbourhood adjacent to the Van Lake. According to the accounts of some of the fieldwork participants, they are even attributed as ‘locals’ of Van city centre since they are the ones who have been living in the city since the formation of the new urban centre. Therefore, the spatial transformation of the city marked a socio-temporal reference, which shows the sharp segregation between now and before in terms of the social structure.

The urban history of Van proves that the change after forced migrations occurred at the beginning of the 20th century was not only demographic but also economic, political, and cultural. In that period, Van not only lost its ‘native inhabitants’ but also the collective memory and knowledge that had embraced ‘living with difference’ for centuries. In that sense, **Van has been a socially and culturally produced territory which was ruptured in the fragmentation and delocalisation of the land and of the society.** Throughout the historical analysis based on the archival data, I presented how migrations and mobilities produced the urban landscapes of Van. Yet, after completing the first two cycles of the fieldwork, the historical narratives I found in the accounts of travellers and memoirs of former inhabitants of the city merged with the ethnographic narratives. The in-between space and time blurred and reappeared. The historical and ethnographic narratives as discursive and bodily reflections of lived experiences were woven together by not always and necessarily being aligned with each other. Superdiversity has been the keyword.

The resettlement policies that strengthened the material and immaterial borders of the nation-state were executed after the mid-century as well. The last decades showed that Van was among the cities that were most affected by the regulations of nationalist policies. For instance, the forced evacuation of the villages in eastern and

south-eastern provinces resulted in the internal displacement of Kurdish people in the late 1980s. The Kurdish population living in the villages of Van or neighbouring cities massively moved to the Van city centre, which led to a significant increase in the population of the city centre. While in the 1990s, the population of the city centre was around 153.000, this rose to 280.000 in 2000 and to 500.000 in 2010.⁶⁹⁰ As commented by the participants of the fieldwork, ‘the migration of the 1990s’ never ended; it still continues. The forced migration in the 1990s caused not only the deterritorialisation of Kurdish communities but also their livelihoods. The main economic activity of those displaced people was mobile and sedentary pastoralism and with the forced evacuation of villages, they had to leave their livestock together with their homes. This resulted in re-localising the customary culture that has been formed by practices connected to dwelling, labour, and rituals in a new, urban context. As a response to that, most of the displaced Kurdish families rebuilt their lives in the peripheries of the city centre of Van. In connection to their kinship (*akrabalık*) and fellow-citizenship (*hemşehrilik*) relations, they initiated informal urbanism, which I interpreted as ‘kinship urbanism’ since the ‘planning’ of the resettled land has been practised according to the situated knowledge informed by the conditions and needs of the time. The spatial decisions such as the size of the parcel for each family, the width of the small streets in between and the position of the house and the garden were made according to the needs of the kin and finalised among the members of it. Thus, the spatial projections of the migrations in Van show that **the political, cultural, and socio-economic aspects of migrations explicitly affect the urbanisation trends.**

At that point, in addition to the migration of people from a home context to a new one, the migration of ‘goods’ spatially and temporally marked traces in the production of urban landscapes of Van as well. During the interviews and informal conversations with the locals, including *muhtars* and representatives of non-governmental organisations, it was demonstrated that Van has long been a ‘site of illegality’, which is a remark on how the informal cross-border relations created new

⁶⁹⁰ Açıkgöz, p. 134.

spaces and social actors in the urban economy of the city. Within the research, I interpreted the transportation of a wide range of goods such as clothing, household supplies and textiles, electronics, food (primarily tea and sugar) and petrol oil as a ‘migration of goods’ along with the mobility of the traders shuttling between borders, since **migrations should be understood in relation to each other.**

Historically, the informal cross-border trade initiated in Van with Russian shuttle traders who engaged in informal economies to boost their income after the opening of Russian border gates following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In Van, the cross-border trajectory of Soviet goods met the displaced Kurdish people, where two migrations had intersected and resulted in the formation of a new type of commercial space in the city, the Russian Market. Although the Russian Market in Van was informally set up in the early 1990s with the agency of Russian women traders, after a few years of exchange, the Kurdish displaced migrants took over the Market. After the permanent closure of the Russian border gate in 1993, the informal trade culture in Van geographically shifted to Iran, and new informal actors existed as ‘suitcase traders’ who had been mobile between Iran and Van for decades. The rising urban capital linked to the informal cross-border impacted not only the spaces of commerce but also other urban investments, such as housing. Thereby, the interlinks between migration, border, and the urban economy in Van reveal evidence that **an intersectional perspective in understanding the socio-spatial drivers and impact of migration enables us to comprehend urbanisation fully.** In that line of flight, we could interpret Van as a site that receives transnational and internally displaced populations, as well as cross-border migration of goods, on scales of intensity that have been comparable with the migration of human populations.

Urbanisation and migration have mostly been referred to in relation to each other in the literature; even the early research in migration studies primarily analysed how “urban growth and urbanisation were fuelled by rural-to-urban migration”⁶⁹¹. In ‘Towards a New Epistemology of the Urban?’, Neil Brenner and Christian Schmidt argue that given the expansion of industrialisation in the 19th century, urban

⁶⁹¹ Greenwood and Hunt, XXVI.

development has been regulated by national states and imperial systems.⁶⁹² These systems sought to establish integrated markets and standardised territorial organisation for industrial growth, which unfolds the initial reason for rural-to-urban mobility. However, recent transformations have broken this model, leading to a re-organisation of the urban. The contemporary era has witnessed the rise of diverse urban governance models that do not fit decently into a single territorial framework of state power, whether at a national or another spatial scale; instead, a complex and fragmented landscape of networked neoliberal urban governance has emerged.⁶⁹³ The mainstream frameworks describe contemporary urban restructuring as cities becoming more important in global social, economic, political, and ecological processes. However, “the question of what ‘cities’ and the ‘urban’ are, and how their constitutive properties and geographies may be changing in qualitative terms, is thereby effectively ‘black-boxed’.”⁶⁹⁴ In such a fragmented environment, it is deficient to understand urban and urbanisation by simply departing from the rural-urban dichotomy. The theoretical apparatuses asserting that the rural pushes, while the urban pulls, are not comprehensive enough to map the complexity of the urban phenomena. In this particular conceptual framework, the urban formations should not be perceived as distinct categories of settlements, which are often considered to have emerged as a result of intensive flows to cities, but rather as dynamic and interconnected entities that undergo continual transformation in terms of socio-spatial re-organisation.⁶⁹⁵ Accordingly, I argued that the main drivers of the socio-spatial restructuring of contemporary cities are the processes of multifaceted mobility that connects people and communities with notable diversity, as well as their ideas, labour and cultures. **The capitalisation of the land has intertwined with the biopoliticisation of life.**

While analysing the contemporary socio-cultural structure in Van in terms of migrations and, furthermore, the policies that bind the everyday life of transnational

⁶⁹² Brenner and Schmid, p. 153.

⁶⁹³ Brenner and Schmid, p. 153.

⁶⁹⁴ Brenner and Schmid, p. 155.

⁶⁹⁵ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London, California and New Delhi: Sage, 2005) <<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119112297.ch0>>.

migrants in the city, I recognised the multiplicity of people's legal statuses that appear in the city. These are the social categories that a foreigner as a 'migrant' might have: migrant, irregular migrant, refugee, camp refugee, urban refugee, conditional refugee, temporary protection holder, international protection holder and subsidiary protection holder. When including the internally displaced people, other domestic migrants (for vocational or educational reasons) and other transnational migrants (e.g. recreational or commercial reasons), **Van appears as an urban landscape of superdiversity**. It is as such not because diverse immigration categories and socio-legal statuses exist in the city but because this diversity marks the complexity of people's migration trajectories while moving between spaces. It also reveals the embodied social agency of migrants in the city, in their capacity to re-localise.⁶⁹⁶ These categories are neither static nor objective; they are rather fluid biopolitical subjectivities that are shaped by policies, as well as the socio-spatial practices of migrants.

In this context, over the last decades, the urban landscapes of Van have been produced and reproduced by the dichotomies as well as negotiations between bodies, so-called the stranger and local, the irregular and regular, the registered and unregistered, the temporary and permanent, the short-term and long-term, and the group and individual. These biopolitical subjectivities have been instrumental and directive in the formation of relations between bodyscapes and urban landscapes. As I illustrated in Chapter 5, within the socio-spatial practices of dwelling, labour, and rituals, migrants make and take place while deconstructing and re-constructing those categories by means of how they practice attaching to the city. This highly depends on how bodies appear in urban spaces as well as in the everyday urban narrative. The spatial and temporal multi-layer trajectory of migrations in Van and of the diverse migrants themselves demonstrate a significant complexity that could not be analysed through the socio-spatial tension between the rural and the urban. **Beyond the rural-urban dichotomy that characterises conventional urbanisation history and**

⁶⁹⁶ Ugolotti and Caudwell, p. 12.

theory, embodied biopolitical dichotomies stemming from migration shape Van's everyday life while imparting its superdiversity.

As I presented throughout the thesis, the social categories that define biopolitical subjectivities are historically produced. They are laden with historicity, and their implications change with new legal regulations as well as everyday uses and reappropriations. **At a macro level, the social categories are biopolitical constructs of the body-nation-building process,** which 'labours on individual bodies to form the political body' by determining the ones to stay inside and others to stay outside the borders of the nation. However, at the mezzo level, which informs the society and other social institutions and at the macro level of the body, migrant bodyscapes deconstruct the metaphor of body-nation by practising different forms of spatiality when engaging with urban life. For instance, the complexity of multi-scale contexts of socio-spatial diversification in Van resulted in the formation of new types of public spaces, which Ash Amin calls spaces of 'microculture', such as retail spaces within 'passages' (e.g. *Bağdat Pasajı, Japon Pasajı, İran Çarşısı, Mısır Çarşısı*), 'bazaars' (e.g. *Rus Pazarı, Avrupa Halk Pazarı*), family-friendly discos which either are owned by, or target Iranians or Protestant churches run by different religious diaspora. This shows us the necessity of going beyond referring to the displaced people with their 'vulnerable' or 'bare' existence, which leaves them passive and narrating them with their social agency that makes and takes place in the co-production of urban landscapes. In everyday reality of Van, migrants with their diversity, have been active agents of the co-production of the social space.

The collective narratives of fieldwork participants reveal evidence that the intersecting migrations in the city led to an urban change among levels, including the emergence of new neighbourhoods and sub-centres, construction of new housing types, commercial and cultural facilities that allow for 'migrant encounters' and transformation in the social life which altered the perception towards the appearance of 'other bodies' and the existence of the 'difference', particularly increased women's inclusion to various spaces of urban life. Thus, the migrant bodyscapes lead to the ways that the difference has been lived in the urban landscapes of Van. This

further shows us how **the personal history of a migrant makes the history of urbanisation**. Inspired by Amin's concepts of microcultures and micropublics, I deliberately conceptualised the current mode of urbanisation in Van as a 'micro-urbanisation'. In Chapter 5, I illustrated how the 'transformation' is happening on different scales, from bodily to societal and urban scales. When referring to bodily transformations, I explored bodyscapes in relation to practices of dwelling, labour, and rituals and how they have been reproduced and represented by means of narratives. Recalling Saskia Sassen's argument that "migrant is an indicator of a history in the making"⁶⁹⁷, I illustrated that the narratives show us that the plural histories of migrants construct new societal norms in transition. These norms range widely from what a typical house/housing would be like to which micropublic spaces women could appear in or where the youngsters of the city hang out. The superdiversity of migrants in Van results in the superdiversity of the indicators and impacts in the urban. Therefore, the ongoing spatial and social transformation in Van demonstrates a strong link with the alterations in the urban culture, which informs us about the most important part of urban studies; people who live, work, and play in the cities we study.

Throughout the research, my initial inquiry of how migrations have taken place in the formation of cities and urban life was enriched with several other questions. For instance, I found myself asking more questions about how bodyscapes, suggesting a relational realm of lived experiences of individual bodies and their capacities in extending to other realms, involve in, lead to, and transform the migration-driven urbanisation in Van. The fieldwork in Van was experiential and influential in that sense. Above all, **'fielding' in Van was about knowing bodies and knowing through the body**. It was also about encountering, negotiating, and challenging new bodies. In a constant and intentional loop of learning and unlearning, I conducted urban ethnographic fieldwork in Van in four cycles, all of which evolved around different themes and scopes depending on my changing positionality in the field. The fieldwork included planned interviews with transnational migrants, *muhtars*,

⁶⁹⁷ Sassen, p. 30.

representatives of non-governmental organisations and professional chambers and informal talks with so-called locals. As the unexpected always happens in the field, my fieldwork as well welcomed spontaneous encounters such as with the Christian Protestant community in Van. The backgrounds of each of the people I met in Van were unique and that originally contributed to the research. Recalling how critical it is to embrace an intersectional perspective, I should note that it has been difficult to 'categorise' the people I met in terms of their wider social group. For instance, almost all participants of the fieldwork were 'migrants', either by transnational mobility or internal displacement. This is why I have intentionally avoided referring to the term 'locals' as much as possible.

When tracing the superdiversity and the relations between different forms of migration and multifaceted dynamics of urbanisation in Van, I encountered diverse narratives. Each had its own social agency in representing and exhibiting how bodyscapes make and take place with references to diverse spaces and times. Some of those narratives spatially or temporally intersect, while some others could not even juxtapose in either sense. Yet, they are powerful in meaningfully coming together to create a 'collective urban narrative' of Van in the context of migration. This collective urban narrative is significant, as it represents how the 'emergence of difference' has been established and sustained in the city based on the situated and embodied knowledge of its inhabitants. While decoding the interview records and notes in my field log, I found common ground, a threefold conceptual register, in the narratives of fieldwork participants that maps the socio-spatial traces of how migrations diversify the urban culture of Van through various agencies.

This threefold conceptual register was based on how bodies construct dwelling, labour, and ritual in Van. The collective urban narrative was woven around these three key themes, and it shows that at a micro scale, informed by bodyscapes, the difference has emerged and amplified in Van through how migrants make and take the place to live, work, and perform their rituals. By means of narratives that covered personal stories, memories, and interpretations, I presented how bodyscapes are made, re-territorialised, and localised within changing spaces and times of mobility.

Through that, I became able to deepen in the micropublics of Van, where difference is encountered, confronted, and negotiated. Those are the spaces of obligatory mundane discussions, such as workplaces, markets, shops, cafes, hotels, and other venues of social interaction that involve the everyday reality of people. If we are to discuss the current dynamics of urbanisation in Van, we need to zoom in on the microcultures, as **the current mode of urbanisation takes place as micro-urbanisation, primarily affecting urban culture beyond only transforming the urban macro form.**

I argued throughout the thesis that the understanding and conceptualisations towards urbanisation still need a radical change as the factors that trigger it alter with new complex flows. According to Brenner and Schmidt, urban realities have evolved to become more diverse, multifaceted, and multi-scaled compared to earlier phases of capitalist urbanisation.⁶⁹⁸ While ‘the city’ remains as an ideological concept in mainstream discussions, the contemporary urban phenomenon cannot be seen as a result of repeated replication of a specific socio-spatial condition such as industrialisation, agglomeration, or the emergence of new settlement types. Instead, we are witnessing new urbanisation processes leading to a wide range of socio-economic conditions, territorial formations, and socio-metabolic changes rather than a global proliferation of a single, bounded urban form known as the city.⁶⁹⁹

In her correspondence with Neil Brenner, Ananya Roy questioned the “geographies of urbanisation”. The urban is not limited to the boundaries of an ‘administrative unit’, and this critically blurs the urban-rural differentiation. For Roy, therefore, the urban is an “incomplete and contingent process as well as an undecidable category”, and it is “ontologically multiple”.⁷⁰⁰ This multiplicity is distinctive in the formation of peripheries, new micropublics, emerging livelihoods and informal practices. It is evident in Van, where the city has been managed. In this context, as is the urban, the cultural is also dynamic and ‘undecidable’ (in Roy’s words); it is “more about routes

⁶⁹⁸ Brenner and Schmid, p. 152.

⁶⁹⁹ Brenner and Schmid, p. 152.

⁷⁰⁰ Ananya Roy, ‘What Is Urban about Critical Urban Theory?’, *Urban Geography*, 37.6 (2016), 810–23 (pp. 10–11) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2015.1105485>>.

than roots”,⁷⁰¹ and the social is no longer linked to ‘the society’, but to the superdiversity. However, time and space have long been detached from the experience and remained in abstraction that divides, regulates, and standardises both.⁷⁰² Storytelling could deconstruct the abstraction and may connect us to space, time, and the relation among both. As in the scholarship of Hannah Arendt, narrativity by means of storytelling connects the in-between of spaces, objects, memories, cities, architecture, and artefacts. It creates a web of stories that pins at geographies of action, as it becomes a spatial practice while making bodies appear in the city. **Deepening in urban and personal experiences via collecting narratives as stories, memories, and interpretations is a powerful tool to understand the evolution of space and time as they are imbued with meaning and present spatial and/or temporal intersections, juxtapositions and in-betweennesses.**

It was frequently repeated during the fieldwork that “migrations significantly transformed Van”. As part of an embodied analysis, this is due to migrants transitioning between roles and various domains of the urban landscapes of Van. In addition to negotiations with homeowners, real estates, or neighbours in finding a shelter to re-territorialise their dwelling or engaging with informal or invisible works, migrants in Van have manifested their ‘rituals’ as instruments of ‘appearance’, implying an intercorporeal significance where the ordinary becomes worth paying attention to. My observations, supported by the narratives of the fieldwork participants, show that changing the scope of rituals performed by migrants is a powerful way of taking place in the public and micropublic spaces of the city. The migrant rituals in Van varied in scale, from the celebration of *Newroz* to pursuing activities connected to leisure or following religious ceremonies. These are not only the occasions that help the localisation of migrant values and identities in the arrival context but also create ‘spaces of appearance’ that enable the emergence of new encounters among different subjectivities.

⁷⁰¹ Cresswell, p. 1.

⁷⁰² Cresswell, p. 5.

It is now migrant encounters that moderate the micro-urbanisation of contemporary migration-driven cities like Van. For Arendt, the space of appearance exists in free action and speech; therefore, it is strongly connected to how bodies act and appear in the public space and narrative. Indeed, by drawing attention to the space of appearance, Arendt acknowledges the capacity of the body to do the ‘unexpected’, “their power as a moment of initiation and an inaugural performance of the political”⁷⁰³. Migrant rituals in Van manifest a way of claiming a political space where bodies shift biopolitical subjectivities. Thereby, encounters with the ‘different’ as unexpected in Van have been socio-spatially translated into the appearance of the other in the public spaces, which was, for instance, narrated several times as women’s changing mode of participating in public life over the last decades. The narratives unfolded in the encounter of different lifestyles, which clashed as people moved from city to city or country to county.

The unexpected gender perspective was affirmatively developed, and its socio-spatial impacts can be traced in the everyday life of Van as a result of political and economic motivations connected to migrations. The politicisation of the Kurdish community by being involved in the ‘urban’ after the forced displacement from the villages triggered the politicisation of the society, as well as the individuals themselves. Despite constructing a new life in the peripheries of the Van while also constructing the periphery themselves, the rhythm of the urban life changed how Kurdish migrants maintain their everyday lives and how daily tasks are shared among members of the family. Kurdish women started to appear more frequently in the micropublics of the city, such as in marketplaces, bazaars, and schools. The rising political awareness led to the recognition of gender-based pressures and the questioning of the visibility of women in public life. The most remarkable threshold was crossed with the recreational migrations of Iranians. Although the visibility of Iranian women was criticised harshly by the locals because they do not dress and behave according to the ‘social norms’ of this city, the agency of these women, as

⁷⁰³ Cristina Beltrán, ‘Going Public: Hannah Arendt, Immigrant Action and the Space of Appearance’, *Political Theory*, 37.5 (2009), 595–622 (p. 597).

potential foreign visitors who may contribute to the urban income, made them be 'accepted' as they want to 'be' and even enabled the creation of new leisure spaces in the city where women can freely take place. This illustrates how economic motivations reinforced the tolerance towards the other. The migrant experience has challenged the limits of assigned categories and has become a powerful social agents of both making and taking place in Van and triggering change in the host society.

6.2 Contributions of the research

As shown in Figure 6-1, the thesis welded three perspectives that carefully bring together registers of urban studies and migration studies: the feminist perspective in social sciences, the culturalist perspective in urban studies and the diversity perspective in migration studies. I will present below the original contribution of this thesis to the field with reference to those three perspectives.

Firstly, the feminist perspective brings the recognition of situated and embodied knowledge in the research by outlining the overarching theoretical and methodical stands. This was primarily enabled through following 'knowing through the body', which encouraged the research to build a focus on the bodyscapes and on the playful relation between the scales of the urban and the body. Therefore, the thesis differentiates itself from other research in the field as it adopts a cross-scalar approach by which often neglected elements of a socio-spatial analysis, such as the routines, meanings, and emotions of ordinary people, are voiced. More particularly, this also allowed for recognising the migrant experience and involving it in the analysis to understand how migrations affect cities.

The feminist scholarship was inspirational and influential throughout different temporalities of the research, including the construction of the bibliography of the thesis, the use of urban and migration-related concepts that are in connection with the discussions on body, the inclusion of historical data from different sources that in fact are controversial to each other due different political, ideological and cultural viewpoints; the analysis of knowledge obtained via different sources such as maps,

gravures, photos, memoirs, travel logs, personal logs and personal narratives; and ethnographic fieldwork which allowed for recognition of the knowledge from the margins.

As the exploration of the positionality of the researcher and self-reflexivity is given utmost importance in feminist scholarship, such a perspective guided the research through how knowledge was co-produced. This was informed by my multiple positionings throughout the research, including being a researcher, an architect, a civil society professional and a woman. I started the research from my own embodied experience in the field, in a city where I was an absolute stranger at the beginning. In that sense, walking was the first ethnographic method that I applied to get familiar with the city, re-scale my own socio-spatial context and navigate my body. These walks were then translated into autoethnographic notes by which I presented my own feelings, observations and comments, which altogether remarkably guided the trajectory of the changing research strategies in the field.

Apart from walking, I employed different ethnographic methods, such as interviews. Furthermore, I analysed my personal notes, which I took after informal talks, unexpected encounters, or my personal observations after a field day. They provided deepened data from the field. Beyond guiding the data collection, the feminist perspective helped me to tactically adjust my research strategies according to the reality of the context. For instance, my initial plan was to conduct one-on-one interviews. Yet, it was not always possible to have an appropriate social setting to conduct as such. This is why, in the end, I did different types of interviews, such as semi-structured in-depth interviews, dyadic interviews, or focus group interviews, depending on the socio-spatial circumstances of each interview setting.

Throughout the research, I did not aim at only focusing on gender relations or women's participation in the urban culture, but I benefitted from a feminist perspective while tracing the 'difference' and the 'other'. In this context, this thesis is significant in terms of its theoretical and methodological positioning as well as the way in which the findings highlight how knowledge, spaces and places related to migration in Van are co-produced by different social agents and how scientific and

everyday knowledge can hand in hand provide intertwined forms of socio-spatial analysis.

Secondly, the culturalist perspective brings empirical and analytical analysis of everyday culture and spaces that acknowledges cities as “places of and for local sentiment, personal and collective identity construction, and community building”⁷⁰⁴. It enabled the involvement of symbolic and material constructs of ordinary people in making sense of their physical and social environment. As elaborated above, this perspective as well points to cross-scalar analysis, from the macro, which is defined by historical analysis accompanied by investigating the development of the urban morphology of Van, to the mezzo, which reflects on the analysis of the societal structure and micro which deals with the migrant trajectories from a personal basis and connects the analysis to the lived space. Tracing among scales brings not only analysis at different levels but also the tools of it. Thereby, the thesis instrumentalised various forms of data, including maps, satellite views, field notes and personal oral excerpts.

While complex social and everyday realities such as migration ‘creatively’⁷⁰⁵ fragment the urban landscapes, architects and urbanists need to be in search of new scales and tools for the formation of knowledge and spatiality, where transformation is more operative. Departing from this argument and in dialogue with the feminist perspective mentioned above, I conceptualised bodyscapes as active micro scales of re-production of lived space. When deepening the biographies of the people of Van through exploring their stories, I explored the intercorporeal connections in the often-intersecting migration histories that not only make the personal histories of those people, but altogether of the city as well. This spatially corresponds to intentionally refraining from conventional spatial references to the paces of displacement, such as refugee camps or urban enclaves that have been conventionally associated with the

⁷⁰⁴ Michael Ian Borer, ‘The Location of Culture: The Urban Culturalist Perspective’, *City & Community*, 5.2 (2006), 173–97 (p. 173) <<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6040.2006.00168.x>>.

⁷⁰⁵ I am using “creative” here with its controversial connotations as in David Harvey’s creative destruction.

spatialisation of displacement. Instead, I employed ‘urban landscapes’ as a relational socio-spatial reference that investigates into spatialising the urban culture.

With this remark on ‘spatialisation of urban culture’, my conceptualisation of urban landscapes⁷⁰⁶ clearly differentiates from the early scholars of urban geography who consider urban landscapes as ‘urban morphology. I rather built up my conceptualisation on the ‘landscape approach’⁷⁰⁷ often employed in broader environmental studies, which investigate landscape as a temporal-spatial phenomenon to assess the interactions among nature and culture and, therefore, to display how landscapes are culturally co-produced as cultivations of cultures of diverse human populations and species. In this line of flight, I used urban landscapes as an analytical concept to interpret Van as a cultural landscape carved by various social agencies. This approach reinforced research by considering multifaceted inputs related to migration, urbanisation, and body. At that point, this thesis is significant as it provides a ‘further fine-tuning’ of the socio-spatial analysis in the gradual rapprochement of different knowledge claims.

Thirdly, the diversity perspective brings plurality to the research by using ‘superdiversity’ as an overarching concept. Steven Vertovec has explored various meanings and interpretations of the concept of superdiversity since its entry into the related literature more than a decade ago, and the implications of the concept have been diversified over the years of use. In this research, I used superdiversity to “address the existing and emerging social complexities”⁷⁰⁸, therefore, to develop an enriched theoretical and methodological perspective in order to avoid singularity in

⁷⁰⁶ The origins of this field can be traced back to the morphogenetic research tradition in central Europe, which can be dated back to the work of Otto Schlüter. Schlüter proposed a concept of the cultural landscape (*Kulturlandschaft*) as the human geography counterpart to geomorphology in the field of physical geography. This concept led to an increased focus on the urban landscape (*Stadtlandschaft*) as a prominent research area within industrialized nations. J. W. R. Whitehand and Peter J. Larkham, ‘Urban Landscapes: Issues and Perspectives’, in *Urban Landscapes: International Perspectives*, ed. by J. W. R. Whitehand and Peter J. Larkham (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 1.

⁷⁰⁷ Emerging from 19th-century in the field of geography, landscape approach has experienced a resurgence in interest since the 1980s. This renewed attention is driven by discussions encompassing nature conservation, landscape restoration, ecosystem services, land-use systems, environmental policies, sustainable development, livelihoods and local and indigenous culture.

⁷⁰⁸ Vertovec, *Superdiversity: Migration and Social Complexity*, p. 56.

terms of times, spaces, and peoples. Still, much of the research in migration studies falls short of considering the multifaceted nature of the places and communities, leading to a monochromatic representation of their environments, histories, and cultural affiliations. They often put aside various aspects of the migration context while classifying migrants based on their ethnicity or race.

However, this thesis intentionally traced the superdiversity of times, spaces, and peoples. It argues that both urban historiography and urban theorising shall be based on intersectionality. Cities are reproduced and transformed by intersecting diverse elements of migration, such as the country of origin, routes, connections in the arrival context, family situation, occupation, gender, age, mobility within the arrival context, etc. By focusing on the diverse histories, experiences, motivations, identities, and interactions of migrants in this research within a contested urban context like Van, the superdiversity concept allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities, interconnections and in-betweenness among migration, urbanisation, and diverse forms of identity. In that sense, this research is significant in that it does not reproduce categorisations.

On the other hand, it understands the phenomenon of migration by avoiding socio-cultural separations that stem from, for instance, the distinction between internal and transnational displacement. With this, the research contributed originally to the field by elaborating and illustrating superdiversity with a spatial focus, which has been inadequately discussed so far. The thesis shows that migration-driven difference produces spaces of appearance in the form of new spatial typologies and socialities. Building the research on a spatial focus includes different social realities in the analysis and reinforces the application of the concept of superdiversity by bringing together people of diverse socio-cultural realities. Thus, the research benefitted from and exhibited intersectionality and inclusivity of the spatial approach.

6.2.1 Limitations of the research

I faced three main limitations during the research, all related to fieldwork. The first is that, as I mostly lived and worked in Ankara throughout the trajectory of this research, it was hard to organise different cycles of fieldwork in Van, both logistically and financially. In addition to assembling the content of each cycle of the fieldwork, arranging the contacts, and preparing myself intellectually with many sources about the context, I was occupied a lot with organising my travels to Van. Apart from the logistics, it was also difficult to feel the pressure of ‘data collection’, which at some point led to the fear of missing information while not being in the field or obtaining inadequate information during the limited period of fielding. This was later proved incorrect when analysing the ethnographic data, as it was shown that the observations, narratives, and visuals adequately illustrated the research context, even though not all the data collected was used within the scope of the thesis. The collected data offers a wide range of sources for further studies that can stem from this research.

Considering the COVID-19 pandemic measures, the logistical process became even more challenging. Particularly, the first two cycles of the fieldwork in July 2023 and August 2023 coincided with the outbreak of the pandemic when the measures were at their strictest. This affected the logistical planning of the fieldwork, as travelling between cities could be suddenly restricted without prior notice. Also, I had to take care of my own health as well as the health of the people I met during the in-person interviews. I, therefore, deliberately conducted most of the interviews outdoors.

The last limitation was about reaching the transnational migrants living in different parts of the city. As I mentioned in the previous section, the dwelling pattern of transnational migrants in Van is dispersed. Transnational migrants in the city inhabit different neighbourhoods of the central municipal area. Therefore, it was difficult for me to decide which area or neighbourhood to focus on in the first days of the fieldwork and also to be able to access such different neighbourhoods physically and socially as a stranger in the city. I overcame this obstacle by contacting the *muhtars*

of central neighbourhoods that host relatively more transnational migrants. As they are trusted individuals in their own neighbourhood, reaching out to *muhtars* enabled easy access to the transnational migrants. This also provided the research to reflect on the narrative of another type of social agency, the *muhtarlık*. Interviewing *muhtars* guided me in adjusting my research strategy in terms of defining the sampling of the research. Furthermore, they positioned both as gate openers and gatekeepers throughout the different cycles of the fieldwork.

6.2.2 Further studies

Today, Van is a city that has been a spatially and socially multi-layered city, not excessively with the architectural remains of older civilisations, but more with the superdiverse migrations it has caused, received, and transitioned. This research offers both a theoretical and a methodological investigation into migration-driven socio-spatial transformations of the city of Van from the late Ottoman period through the Republican period to the contemporary era. Beyond the possible further studies mentioned below to be contextualised in Van, the relational framework of this research can be applied to other cities that are highly affected by the migration of human and non-human actors, particularly to border cities. Since the study presents an elaborated theoretical and methodological foundation, any situated and embodied analysis to be developed to understand the complex social realities and diversity of other migration-driven cities can benefit from the framework of this thesis.

For further studies to be grounded in Van, the research provided a detailed narrative mapping of the urbanisation and micro-urbanisation in Van in the context of migrations. This analysis can be complemented with visual mapping of the transformation of dwelling, labour, and ritual practices in Van, supported by the mapping of the urbanisation dynamics since the beginning of the 20th century. In this line of flight, the findings of the research can be utilised as a baseline to expand the analysis of the migration-driven changes in the urban culture of Van in terms of dwelling, labour, and ritual. For instance, mapping the dwelling precarity of transnational migrants, exploring the relation between the informal capital, labour,

and urbanisation in terms of migration of a cross-border good and tracing the socio-spatial consequences of recreational migrations in the nightlife of Van can be among the further research subjects.

Finally, the research has created the ground for the historical analysis of the diversity in Van. The studies on the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the city based on a superdiversity perspective can further contribute to the urban historiography of the city. With that, a more inclusive history of the city can be presented by recognising and including the stories of historically displaced peoples.

6.3 Final implications

What does this research overall imply for the field of urban studies? The trajectory and findings of the research show that migrations of human and non-human actors and their governance have been biopolitical constructs. The dissolution of imperial systems, which, as in the case of Ottomans, was based on the mechanisms of keeping different ethnic, religious, and national communities under control within the utmost largest borders of the empire, led to the formation of nation-states through which the control mechanisms have been transformed into instruments of governing the life of ‘settled’ and ‘mobile’ populations in order to set the norms of the nation within the acquired frontiers.

There have always been exceptions that break what statistics imply and, thus, what norms would like to regulate. They are ‘abnormalities’ which, furthermore, shake the ontological foundation of the biopolitics that has been built upon the concerns of security, characterised in terms of biological processes of the population within the borders.⁷⁰⁹ I argue that movement is the greatest abnormality to challenge the execution of biopolitics. Nomadic pastoralists traverse landscape to landscape while passing different provincial borders. The officer of the official statistical agency cannot identify their settlement for the population census as they are on different scales of move with their home. If one is on constant move, their footprint is on the

⁷⁰⁹ Foucault.

move with them as well, and they leave fewer traces. It is harder to track the one on the move. This is why the first political frameworks of the Turkish nation-state, such as 1934 Settlement Law No. 2510, ordered the forced settlement of nomadic tribes, hence their residence at one of the addresses registered in the system. Dispersion is not allowed in the system of surveillance. Spatial concentration is targeted to operate the control mechanisms.

This is why, for Hardt and Negri, postcolonial heroes are the ones on the move, say it the doms, nomads, nomadic pastoralists, and migrants, who “have destroyed old and new boundaries” while passing “territorial and racial boundaries”.⁷¹⁰ This transgressive action is the most ‘creative’ force in manifesting its relational scapes. Because it is not only the bodies as physical beings but bodies as “mobile archives” of multifaceted knowledge that transgress borders. As shown throughout this thesis, this transgressive action creates new patterns of reappropriation of space. This is when the heroic narrative of the migrant peaks. The entangled flow from scapes to space and space to scapes infiltrates through the material realm of the production of space. This is also when the norms of biopolitics ruptured. Authentically, the other is not normalised as an active agent of any production except otherness.

In this research, therefore, migration has been interpreted with its biopolitical connotations. The bodies have been at the centre since, if the biopolitics of migration is concerned, how migrant bodies are valued differently from the dominant population has needed to be examined in terms of socio-spatial configurations. With that, migration as a phenomenon finds its broader meaning and implications. Since, it is not interrogated by means of a single case or separate cases but through the situations based on the conditions of the body and the urban that are in transformation. The relationality between migration and cities, hence, can be traced through bodyscapes, showing us the affective, operative, and, finally, spatial capacities of bodies in transgressing the liminality of biopolitics.

⁷¹⁰ Hardt and Negri, pp. 362–63.

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APPENDICES

A. Interviews

Interviews								
#	Interview Type	Interview Date	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Work	Born in	Living in Van since
1	Informal talk	7.07.2020	Nuçe	36	Man	Cafe owner	Hakkari, Turkey	Since his early childhood
			Şevval	33	Woman	Architect	Van, Turkey	Since she was born
2	Informal talk	8.07.2020	Mesut	34	Man	Teacher	Van, Turkey	Since he was born
3	Informal talk	11.07.2020	Ufuk	37	Man	Bar owner	Hakkari, Turkey	Since his early childhood
4	Informal talk	13.07.2020	Cihan	34	Man	Musician	Van, Turkey	Since he was born
5	In-depth	14.10.2020	Şevval	33	Woman	Architect	Van, Turkey	Since she was born
6	Informal talk	8.08.2021	Yeter	38	Woman	City planner	Erzincan, Turkey	Since 2016
7	In-depth	10.08.2021	Miraz	32	Man	Geographer, Activist	Şırnak, Turkey	Since his early childhood
8	In-depth	11.08.2021	Musa	33	Man	Lawyer	Van, Turkey	Since his early childhood
9	Informal talk	12.08.2021	Fikri	35	Man	Architect	Van, Turkey	Since he was born
10	In-depth	13.08.2021	Nesrin	48	Woman	Social worker	Ankara, Turkey	Since early 2000s
11	In-depth	15.08.2021	Reşit	33	Man	Journalist	Van, Turkey	Since he was born
12	Dyadic interview	17.08.2021	Mina	21	Woman	Student	Kabul, Afghanistan	Since 2017
			Yasmeen	43	Woman	House worker	Kabul, Afghanistan	Since 2017
13	In-depth	17.08.2021	İrfan	47	Man	Muhtar	Siirt, Turkey	Since he was born
14	Focus group	17.08.2021	Evin	33	Woman	Social worker	Van, Turkey	Since she was born
			Şilan	38	Woman	Cafe owner	Van, Turkey	Since she was born
			Hevi	33	Woman	Lawyer	Van, Turkey	Since she was born
			Rojin	33	Woman	unknown	Van, Turkey	Since she was born
			Cemile	33	Woman	unknown	Van, Turkey	Since she was born
15	In-depth	18.08.2021	Ahmet	34	Man	Sociologist, MP consultant	Hakkari, Turkey	Since his early childhood
16	Dyadic interview	18.08.2021	Roya	36	Woman	Lawyer Assistant (Marketing Officer in Iran)	Urmia, Iran	Since 2015
			Kaveh	40	Man	Unemployed (Journalist and Farmer in Iran)	Tehran, Iran	Since 2014
17	In-depth	19.08.2021	Lale	50	Woman	Muhtar	Van, Turkey	Since she was born
18	Dyadic interview	19.08.2021	Mansoor	30	Man	Car mechanic (High School Student in Afghanistan)	Afghanistan	Since 2010
			Maalek	30	Man	Car mechanic (Law Student in Afghanistan)	Beksul, Afghanistan	Since 2018
19	Focus group	20.08.2021	Necmi	37	Man	Lawyer	Van, Turkey	Since he was born
			Burçak	33	Woman	Social worker	Adana, Turkey	Since last few years
			Selin	33	Woman	Social worker	Kırşehir, Turkey	Since last few years
20	Dyadic interview	21.08.2021	Sami	19	Man	Student	Afghanistan	Since 2018
			Farzana	43	Woman	House worker	Afghanistan	Since 2018

21	Focus group	23.08.2021	Wafa	18	Woman	Student	Aleppo, Syria	
			Nabil	47	Man	Artisan	Aleppo, Syria	
			Kinda	40	Woman	House worker	Aleppo, Syria	
22	Dyadic interview	23.08.2021	Saima	24	Woman	House worker	Afghanistan	Since 2017
			Ghazala	56	Woman	House worker	Afghanistan	Since 2017
23	Focus group	24.08.2021	Marwan	44	Man	unknown	Aleppo, Syria	
			Rania	38	Woman	House worker	Aleppo, Syria	
			Bahar	19	Woman	Student	Aleppo, Syria	
			Lama	38	Woman	House worker	Aleppo, Syria	
24	In-depth	26.08.2021	Behnaz	58	Woman	Hairdresser (same in Iran)	Tehran, Iran	Since 1999
25*	Semi-structured	21.03.2022	Kemal	49	Man	Lawyer	Van, Turkey	Since he was born
26*	Informal talk	21.03.2022	Mustafa	55	Man	Pasteur	Van, Turkey	Since he was born
			Emma	55	Woman	Church officer	South Korea	Since 2013
27*	Informal talk	22.03.2022	Elahesh	19	Man	Pasteur asisstant	Iran	Since 2014
28*	In-depth	20.05.2022	Cemal	51	Man	Muhtar	Van, Turkey	Since his youth
29*	In-depth	20.05.2022	Baki	52	Man	Muhtar	Van, Turkey	Since his primary school years
30*	Informal talk	21.05.2022	Dursun	34	Man	Pasteur asisstant	Van, Turkey	Since he was born
			Vedat	54	Man	Pasteur	Van, Turkey	Since he was born
			Hatice	50	Woman	Church officer	Van, Turkey	Since she was born
31*	In-depth	21.05.2022	Azadeh	41	Woman	Travel operator (House worker in Iran)	Tehran, Iran	Since last +/- 10 years
32	In-depth	24.05.2022	Wali	42	Man	Unemployed (Motorbike mechanic in Afghanistan)	Takhar, Afghanistan	Since 2019
33	In-depth	24.05.2022	Emal	38	Man	Security guard (Farmer in Afghanistan)	Takhar, Afghanistan	Since 2020
34	Dyadic interview	25.05.2022	Shabnam	18	Woman	Student	Kabul, Afghanistan	Since 2014
			Parisa	43	Woman	House worker	Kabul, Afghanistan	Since 2014
35	In-depth	25.05.2022	Asma	41	Woman	Tailor (same in Afghanistan)	Kunduz, Afghanistan	Since 2014
36*	Semi-structured	26.06.2022	Dara	30	Man	Night club owner	Van, Turkey	Since he was born

*These interviews were conducted with doctoral researcher Johanna Ollier affiliated in School of Political Studies at University of Grenoble Alpes.

B. Interview Questions for Transnational Migrants

Part 1: Life in home country
1.1.Kendinizden biraz bahseder misiniz? Kaç yaşındasınız? Nerede doğdunuz, nerede büyüdünüz?
1.2.Doğduğunuz ya da büyüdüğünüz yerdeki yaşamınız nasıldı; örneğin aile yaşantınız, varsa iş yaşamınız, arkadaşlarınızla ilişkileriniz?
1.3.Doğduğunuz ya da büyüdüğünüz yerde gündelik yaşantınız nasıldı; oradaki sıradan bir gününüzü anlatabilir misiniz?
Part 2: Forced-migration story
2.1.Sınırı geçtiğinizde günün hangi saatiydi ve ilk yaptığınız ne oldu?
2.2.Sınırı geçtikten sonra nerede konakladınız; ve kimlerleydiniz, kaç kişiydiniz? O yeri biraz tarif edebilir misiniz? Kentin hangi bölgesinde yer alıyordu; nasıl bir mekandı?
2.3.İlk konakladığınız yerden sonra kaldığınız yeri kaç kez değiştirdiniz ve neden?
2.4.Şu an kaldığınız yere hangi aşamalardan sonra yerleştiniz? Burayı kim buldu?
2.5.Neden şu an yaşadığınız yerde ikamet etmeyi tercih ettiniz? Şu an yaşadığınız yeri tarif edebilir misiniz? Kentin hangi bölümünde yer alıyor; kaç kişi yaşıyorsunuz?
Part 3: Life in Van
3.1.Şu an yaşamınızı ekonomik anlamda nasıl sürdürüyorsunuz; geçim kaynaklarınızı öğrenebilir miyim?
3.2.Van'daki sıradan bir gününüzü anlatabilir misiniz?
3.3.Van halkı hakkındaki düşünceleriniz neler?
3.4.Van kenti hakkındaki düşünceleriniz neler?
3.5.Van'da vakit geçirmekten en çok keyif aldığınız yer neresi?
3.6.Bu kentte olmak size kendinizi nasıl hissettiriyor?
3.7.Van'dan başka bir kente göç etmek istiyor musunuz ya da Türkiye'den başka bir ülkeye?
3.8.Van, göç ettiğiniz yerle herhangi bir benzerliklere sahip mi? Burada kendinizi sanki ülkenizdeymişsiniz gibi hissettiğiniz yerler oluyor mu?
3.9.Bu kentte kendinizi en rahat ve güvenli hissettiğiniz mekan neresi; tarif edebilir misiniz o ortamı?
3.10.Diğer mültecilerle ilişkiniz nasıl; hem geldiğiniz ülkeden hem de diğer ülkelerden göç eden mültecilerle?
3.11.Diğer göçmenlerle bir araya geldiğiniz özel toplanma mekanlarınız var mı?
3.12.Kendi ülkenizden gelen ya da başka göçmenlerle kurduğunuz sosyal medya ağları var mı; Telegram grupları gibi?
3.13.Kentte yaşayanlarla ilişkiniz nasıl? Sizce onların size karşı bakış açısı nasıl?

C. Interview Questions for Representatives of Non-Governmental and Governmental Institutes

Part 1: Migration context in Van
1.1. Van'daki güncel göçmen ve sığınmacı akışından bahsedebilir misiniz?
1.2. Van'a en çok hangi ülkelerden göçmen akışı oluyor?
1.3. Van'da göçmenlerin en çok yerleştiği alanlar nereler?
1.4. Farklı göçmen gruplar, farklı mekanları kullanıyor mu?
1.5. Van'daki toplumun göçmenlere bakış açısı nedir?
1.6. Van'daki toplumun algısında farklı göçmen gruplarına karşı farklı tutumlar söz konusu mu?
1.7. Sizce Vanlılar göçmenlerle en çok hangi mekanlarda karşılaşılıyorlar?
1.8. Göçmenler gündelik yaşamlarını nerelerde devam ettiriyorlar; alışveriş, sağlık, eğitim, sosyal toplanmalar?
Part 2: History of Van
2.1. Van'ın tarihi ile ilgili bildiklerinizi anlatabilir misiniz; bildiğiniz en yaygın anlatı nedir?
2.2. 1915 öncesindeki Vanlılar kentin hangi bölümünde yaşıyorlardı?
2.3. 1980'lerin sonunda hangi köylerden ya da illerden Van'a göçler olmuş? Zorunlu göçen bu insanlar Van'da nerelere yerleşmiş, nasıl bir yaşam kurmuşlar?
2.4. Yine 1980'lerde Afganistan'dan, Irak'tan da göçmenler Van'a yerleşmiş. Bu kişilerin bugün Van'da mevcudiyeti nasıl?
2.5. Van'a İran'dan da çok sık ve farklı sebeplerle göçmen girişi olduğunu biliyorum. Bu durumu açıklayabilir misiniz? İranlıların Van'da kurduğu eğlence mekanları, güzellik salonları, alışveriş yerleri gibi özel yerler var mı; var ise nerelerde konumlanıyorlar?
2.6. Van'ın tarihinde birçok deprem var. 2011 depreminden sonra Van'ın gündelik yaşamında ve kentsel yapısında ne gibi değişiklikler oldu?
Part 3: Daily life in Van
3.1. Sizce Van'ın kent merkezi neresidir, tarif eder misiniz?
3.2. Bu tarif ettiğiniz yeri halkın en çok hangi kesimi kullanıyor?
3.3. Van'ın en işlek bölgesi ya da caddesi neresi, insanlar en çok hangi cadde üzerinde işlerini hallediyorlar?
3.4. Van kent merkezinde insanlar birbirleriyle buluşacakları zaman nereyi tercih ederler; bir binanın ya da parkın önü gibi? Ve siz nerede buluşmayı tercih ediyorsunuz?
3.5. Sizin Van'da en sık gittiğiniz yerler nerelerdir; cadde, sokak, meydan, park ya da belirli mekanlar, vb.?

D. History of Van with Photos and Notes

16th c.
Ottoman
Empire

1648 earthquake

"After a series of devastating wars between Safavid Persia and the Ottoman Empire, it was incorporated into the Ottoman realm in the mid-sixteenth century. Once again, however, the Armenians demonstrated their recuperative powers, as periods of ruin were followed by rebuilding and economic revival and expansion. At the foot of the Great Rock of Van, the population of the walled city increased in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and gradually created the suburb of Aygestan—the Gardens, Orchards, or Vineyards—a new city with broad tree-lined streets, a church in each quarter, a merchant center and market place, and in time schools, foreign consulates, and German, French, and American missionary stations."

Armenian Van/Vasurakan, 2000, pp. 2-3



Van Lake and the towns along the shore
Ottoman Archives of Republic of Turkey Directorate of State
Archives, Document no: HRT/2494



Van Lake and the towns along the shore
Ottoman Archives of Republic of Turkey Directorate of State
Archives, Document no: PLK/4060



Van Vilayet
Ottoman Archives of Republic of Turkey Directorate of State
Archives



Arzvi Vasburagan (Van Eagle)
1885

1875 Van becoming
a vilayet
1876 fire
1877-78 war
1880-81 famine
1895-1896 events
Spreading of the city
formation of the Aygestan

"After the Russian invasion of 1828, the Ottoman government was obliged to bring the frontier lands under closer control. In 1847, the last derebeyys were suppressed and the eyalet of Van was made a sanjak of the eyalet of Erzerum, which had always been under a firm Ottoman hold." In 1875, however, when this cumbersome province was broken up, the sanjaks of Van and Hakkari or Hekhari became separate vilayets, only to be joined together once again into a greater vilayet of Van in 1888. The new administrative unit consisted then of two sanjaks, nineteen kazas (districts), and three hundred nahies (townships or village clusters), altogether containing 2,279 villages."

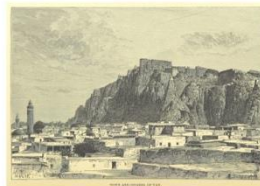
Hevran, Armenian Van/Vasurakan, 2000, p. 33



Van plan of the town
Minassian, Armenian Van/Vasurakan, 2000
Müller-Simonis & H. Hyenrich, Du Caucase au Golfe Persique
à travers l'Arménie, le Kurdistan et la Mésopotamie, Strasbourg,
1892



Van plan of the town
Houshamadyan(houshamadyan.org)
Lynch, Armenia: Travels and Studies, Vol. II, London, 1901



Town and Citadel of Van
The European section of
the Universal Geography, London, 1878 (illustrated by Taylor)



Van- a scene from the town
Houshamadyan(houshamadyan.org)
Müller-Simonis, Durch Armenien, Kurdistan und
Mesopotamien, Mainz, 1897

20th c. Republic of Turkey



"At the turn of the twentieth century, Van by its cumulative history was a 'city of memory.' However, the city that we will invoke does not exist anymore. During World War Van was the theater of an Armenian uprising (1915) and was occupied and then evacuated three times by the Russian army, its population fleeing each time the front changed. It is a city that was totally destroyed in 1918. Today, the site of ancient Vani's is a vast field of ruins, from where emerge truncated minarets, substructures of walls, and a few remnants of churches. The vague outlines of streets and islands of dwellings are still visible from atop the rocky ridge."

Minassian, *Armenian Van/Vaspurakan*, 2000, pp. 171-172



Wedding of an Armenian couple
Courtesy of Vart Shirvanian Hachigian, Project Save Photograph Archive, Missionary Collection, K1993.022.006



Rev. Yarrow's house seen from windmill, before 1915
Courtesy of Vart Shirvanian Hachigian, Project Save Photograph Archive, Missionary Collection, K1993.022.063



A street in Van
Courtesy of Vart Shirvanian Hachigian, Project Save Photograph Archive, Missionary Collection, K1993.022.061



Dr. Reynolds' house and hospital, before 1915
Courtesy of Vart Shirvanian Hachigian, Project Save Photograph Archive, Missionary Collection, K1993.022.065

1915 events
1925 Re-territorialisation of the city centre



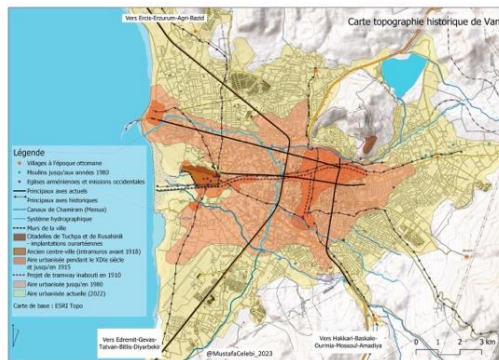
Van vilayet in 1900, in Armenian Soviet Armenian Encyclopedia



Cumhuriyet Avenue, 1950s.



Cumhuriyet Avenue, 1980s.



Historical topography of Van
Mustafa Çelebi



A view from Van centre, 1930s.



Cumhuriyet Avenue, 1970s.



Paris Hotel



Emlak Credit Bank Building

E. Ethic Committee Report

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY

DUMLUPINAR BULVARI 06800
ÇANKAYA ANKARA/TURKEY
T: +90 312 210 22 91
F: +90 312 210 79 59
ueam@metu.edu.tr
www.ueam.metu.edu.tr

Sayı: 28620816 /

18 MART 2021

Konu : Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi : İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Ela Alanyalı Aral

Danışmanlığımı yürüttüğünüz Burcu ATEŞ'in *"Zorunlu Göçün Mekansal ve Bedensel Bir Anlatısı: Van Kenti Sınır Peyzajlarında Somutlaşan Karşılaşmalar"* başlıklı araştırması İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülmüş ve **058-ODTU-2021** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Saygılarımızla bilgilerinize sunarız.

Dr.Öğretim Üyesi Şerife SEVİNÇ
İAEK Başkan Vekili

CURRICULUM VITAE

Surname, Name: Ateş, Burcu

EDUCATION

2020-present	Ph.D. in Spatial Planning , Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space, Vienna University of Technology, Vienna, Austria
2016-2023	Ph.D. in Architecture , Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey
2012-2015	M. Arch in Architecture , Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey
2010-2012	Minor in City Planning , Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey
2007-2012	B. Arch in Architecture , Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey
2004-2007	High School , TED Aliaga College, İzmir, Turkey

RESEARCH VISITS

2021	Visitor Researcher , Floating University, Berlin, Germany
2021	Visitor Researcher , SKOGRAD Research Centre, Belgrade, Serbia
2019-2020	Erasmus+ Learning Mobility Programme Graduate Exchange Student , Berlin University of Applied Sciences, Berlin, Germany
2014	Erasmus+ Learning Mobility Programme Graduate Exchange Student , Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space, Vienna University of Technology, Vienna, Austria

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (selected)

06.2023-07.2023	Consultant , “Mapping Climate Justice Organisations, Collectives and Movements”, Systemic Justice Association, Amsterdam
10.2022-present	Affiliated Researcher , “Emerging Fields in Architecture: TU Trialogue on Urban Co-production”, Interdisciplinary Centre for Urban Culture and Public Space, Vienna University of Technology, Vienna
11.2021-present	Nature & Culture Programme Expert , Yolda Initiative, Ankara
01.2021- present	Network Coordination Team Member , Alliance for Mediterranean Nature & Culture
01.2021-11.2021	Nature & Culture Programme Officer , Yolda Initiative
09.2020- 11.2020	Communications and Design Expert , “Act Against the Gender Violence” by Home-based Working Women and Social Rights Association, İstanbul
07.2020-03.2021	Project Co-coordinator , “Play Together, Adapt Together Project”, European Union Sivil Düşün (Think Civic) Programme, Ankara

10.2019-06.2021	Event Co-coordinator , “V-Day Berlin 2020: A Memory, A Monologue, A Rant, and a Prayer” & “Raise the Vibration”, Berlin
03.2017-10.2021	Researcher , “Architects Who Left Their Marks in Ankara”, Başkent University and Koç University, Ankara
11.2016-12.2020	Research Assistant (with teaching assignments) , Başkent University Department of Architecture, Ankara
01.2016-11.2018	Project Co-coordinator , “An Alternative Approach to Top-down Urban Design Processes: Participatory Design Simulation in 100. Yıl Neighbourhood (Rethink 100. Yıl)”, Middle East Technical University Faculty of Architecture, Ankara
01.2016-01.2017	Instructor , İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University Department of Landscape and Urban Design, Ankara
12.2014-12.2015	Engaged Researcher , “Dikmen Valley Squatter Neighbourhood Right to Shelter Movement”, Ankara Çankaya Municipality Youth Council, Ankara
08.2014-10.2016	Executive Board Member & Deputy Secretary General , UCTEA Chamber of Architects Ankara Branch, Ankara
06.2014-03.2015	Researcher , “39 City 1 Istanbul”, Urban Vision Platform & Design Atelier Kadıköy, İstanbul
06.2013-08.2014	Instructor , “Dikmen Valley Squatter Neighbourhood Summer Schools for Children”, Ankara Çankaya Municipality Youth Council, Ankara
03.2013-02.2014	Researcher , “81 City 81 Vision”, Urban Vision Platform & Design Atelier Kadıköy, Ankara
10.2012-10.2013	Architect , Office 16 Architecture, Ankara

SCHOLARSHIPS & GRANTS

2023	Virtual Mobility Grant , COST Action 1929 Decolonising Development
2022-2023	EXCITE Research Grant , Faculty of Architecture and Planning, Vienna University of Technology
2022	Virtual Mobility Grant , COST Action 1929 Decolonising Development
2022	Conference Participation Grant , COST Action 1929 Decolonising Development
2021	Short-Term Scientific Mission Grants , COST Action 1929 Decolonising Development
2020-2021	Think Civic Programme Grant , European Union
2019-2020	Erasmus+ Learning Mobility Programme Grant , European Commission & Turkish National Agency
2016-2018	Erasmus+ Support to Political Reform Grant , European Commission & Turkish National Agency
2016	Grant for Participation in International Scientific Activities , The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBİTAK)
2014	Erasmus+ Learning Mobility Programme Grant , European Commission & Turkish National Agency
2007-2012	Bachelor Studies Scholarship , Turkish Prime Ministry
2007-2012	Bachelor Studies Scholarship , MNG Group of Companies

2007-2010 **Bachelor Studies Scholarship**, İzmir Chamber of Commerce
1999-2007 **Full Education Grant**, TED Aliğa College Foundation

PUBLICATIONS (selected)

Peer-reviewed articles

Ateş, Burcu, ‘Sahadan Notlar: “100. Yıl”ı Yeniden Düşünmek” Proje Süreci Üzerine’ [Notes from the Fieldwork: On the Trajectory of “Rethink 100. Yıl” Project], *Dosya*, 48, 2021, 33-44.

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Books

Ateş, Burcu, and Elif Cabadak (eds.), *Birlikte Oyun Birlikte Uyum [Play Together Adapt Together]* (Ankara: Sivil Düşün, 2021) (published in Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic and English).

Book Chapters

Ateş, Burcu, Sabine Knierbein, Predrag Milić and Laura Sobral, ‘Ko-Produktion: Ein transformativer Ansatz zur Macht(um)verteilung in der Stadtentwicklung [Co-Production: A Transformative Approach to Power (Re)distribution in Urban Development]’ in *Soziale Innovation und nachhaltige Transformation in der Stadtentwicklung*, ed. by Christian Peer et. al. (Vienna: Verlag TU Academic Press, 2024) (in progress).

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Ateş, Burcu, Merve Başak, Ilgın Kurum, Burcu Uysal, Elif Eda Uzunoğulları, Yücel Can Severcan, 'Rethink 100. Yıl: A Participatory Neighbourhood Design Experience in Ankara' in *Participatory Planning: City, Environment and Climate Change*, ed. by Thanos Andritsos et. al. (Thessaloniki: Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2023), 356-376. (published in Greek and English).

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Conference Papers

Ateş, Burcu, 'Among Bodies and Borders: An Ethnography of Forced Migration in Van' unpublished paper delivered at '5th Congress On Middle Eastern And Islamic Studies Conference' (University of Lyon, 10-14 July, 2023)

Ateş, Burcu, 'Re-reading the Urbanisation of Van: A Spatial Narration of Diverse Mobilities and Displacements Now and Before' unpublished paper delivered at '19th International Migration Research Network (IMISCOE) Annual Conference' (Oslo Metropolitan University, 29 June-1 July, 2022)

Ateş, Burcu, 'Here, daily life becomes a pedagogy itself!: The (Un)Learning Practices of Taking Place' unpublished paper delivered at the conference 'Taking Place and Making Place: Celebrating 25 years of Space and Culture' (Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, 23-25 June, 2022).

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Ateş, Burcu and Melek Pınar Uz Baki, 'Beden-Kent Ankara: Yıkarak Kentleşme Üzerine Eleştirel Bir İnceleme' [Body-Urban Ankara: A Critical Investigation into Urbanisation by Destruction] in *Kent, İnşaat ve Ekonomi Kongresi Bildiri Özetleri Kitapçığı* (Gaziantep: Gaziantep Ticaret Odası, 2019), 81.

Ateş, Burcu, 'Bir Kadın Mimar, Bir Yapı: Neriman Birce ve Gülbahçesi Apartmanı' [A Woman Architect, a Building: Neriman Birce and Gülbahçesi Apartment] unpublished paper delivered at 'Ankara'da İz Bırakan Mimarlar: Neriman Birce' (Koç University Vehbi Koç Ankara Studies Research Center, 29 March, 2019).

Ateş, Burcu, ‘Towards Socio-ecological Cities: Green Public Spaces by Guerrilla Gardening’ in *Book of Abstracts of 12th Symposium of the International Urban Planning and Environment Association* (Lisbon: University of Lisbon, 2016), 51.

Ateş, Burcu, and Elif Cabadak, ‘Office of Housing Rights in Dikmen Vadisi’ unpublished paper delivered at the conference ‘Housing Activism Beyond the West’ (Södertörn University, 27-28 May, 2016).

Ateş, Burcu, ‘On Which Gezi Gives Birth to: Turkey’s First Squat Don Quixote House’ in *Book of Proceedings of the AESOP Annual Congress 2015* (Prague: Czech Technical University, 2015), 3300-3311.

Ateş, Burcu, ‘From Bodies of Political Space to Bodies as Space of Politics: Women in Turkey in the Eclipse of Reason’ unpublished paper delivered at SKuOR PhD Symposium: Public life - Towards a Politics of Care. Bodies. Place. Matter (Vienna University of Technology, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and University of Alberta, 17-18 April, 2015).

Thesis

Ateş, Burcu, *A Spatial Impromptu: Green Resistance by Guerrilla Gardening* (Ankara: Middle East Technical University, 2015) (unpublished master thesis with the supervision of Prof. Dr. Güven Arif Sargın).

Reports

Ateş, Burcu, and Özlem Özdener, ‘*Tunceli Kentsel Vizyon Raporu*’ [*City of Tunceli Urban Vision Report*] (Istanbul: Kentsel Vizyon Atölyesi, 2014).

Ateş, Burcu, and Özlem Özdener, ‘*Mardin Kentsel Vizyon Raporu*’ [*City of Mardin Urban Vision Report*] (Istanbul: Kentsel Vizyon Atölyesi, 2014).

Ateş, Burcu, and Özlem Özdener, ‘*Bolu Kentsel Vizyon Raporu*’ [*City of Bolu Urban Vision Report*] (Istanbul: Kentsel Vizyon Atölyesi, 2014).

Ateş, Burcu, and Özlem Özdener, ‘*Kırklareli Kentsel Vizyon Raporu*’ [*City of Kırklareli Urban Vision Report*] (Istanbul: Kentsel Vizyon Atölyesi, 2014).

MEMBERSHIPS AND OTHER AFFILIATIONS

2023-present	AESOP Young Academics Network
2023-present	European Union Support to Rights (<i>Haklara Destek</i>) Programme Pool of Experts
2022-present	MAVA Leaders for Nature Academy Alumni
2021-present	Alliance for Mediterranean Nature and Culture
2021-present	COST Action 1929 Decolonising Development Working Group 2: Decolonising Pedagogies
2021-present	Architects’ Association 1927
2020-present	AESOP Public Spaces and Urban Cultures Thematic Group
2020-present	European Union Think Civic (<i>Sivil Düşün</i>) Programme Pool of Experts
2012-present	UIA Chamber of Architects Turkey

LANGUAGES

Turkish (native), English (advanced), German (intermediate)