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Are Syrians in Türkiye vulnerable to 'epistemic injustice'?: A 'narrative inquiry' in the case of Bursa

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Abstract

This study examines whether Syrians under temporary protection status in Türkiye vulnerable to epistemic injustice from the host society, exploring implications and transformation of these approaches. It provides a framework for understanding how the host society perceives Syrian refugees, assessing credibility within identified narrative motifs. The study focuses on the host community's narrative, revealing negative stereotypes and testimonial injustices faced by Syrians (as traitors and economic migrants). Interestingly, no correlation exists between exposure to epistemic injustice and anti-Syrian sentiments. To conclude, participants who do not identify as anti-Syrian or see Syrians as beneficial still deny epistemic agency of Syrians.

INTRODUCTION

Since the first refugee caravan arrived in 2011, Türkiye has housed millions of Syrians escaping the civil war, adopted an 'open-door' policy and offered them shelter and humanitarian assistance (Koca, 2015, p. 209; Morgül, 2023, p. 30). Over the course of 12 years, the number of Syrians in Türkiye has increased, along with the diversity of problems arising between the host society and the Syrian refugees. The Turkish government's open-door policy approach seemed to resonate with the local population considering the adoption of discourses on religious brotherhood and housing guests. However, due to changes in the country's internal dynamics, especially economic problems and the realization that Syrians are not temporary guests,

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anti-Syrian approaches and attitudes have become increasingly prevalent (Acar, 2021, p. 192; Özdemir & Öner-Özkan, 2016, p. 240). Among these problems, the lack of the ability to develop coexistence policies stands out as a major concern. This study investigates the role of prejudices and stereotyping in perpetuating epistemic injustice.

In the context of epistemic injustice debates, this study explores the extent to which displaced Syrians experience "testimonial injustice" and whether their statements are attributed low credibility. This study focuses on the narrative of the host community, particularly on the shopkeepers in the Altıparmak neighbourhood in Bursa, by specifically narrowing down the host community as a requirement of narrative research. The limitation of the study to this sample stems from the fact that "narrative inquiry" basically involves a long-term or large-scale data set compiled from a small number of participants (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 71). This type of research is based on the assumption of the integrity of human experience and that participants convey their own experiences as freely as possible in a narrative form seamlessly.

Altıparmak neighbourhood is one of the regions where the interactions between the local community and the Syrian refugees are most common and versatile. In addition, Bursa is also important as it is one of the provinces where the Syrian refugee population is highest in terms of number and density. Within this scope, the study aims to address the following research objectives: First, it explores whether Syrian refugees in Türkiye are vulnerable to (though not necessarily suffered from) 'testimonial injustice'. Second, the study investigates whether this 'testimonial injustice' exposes them to other forms of injustice. Third, the study delves into the host community's narratives about Syrians to explicate the underlying reasons ascribed to Syrians' displacement in Türkiye (whether Syrians are perceived as forcibly displaced persons, economic migrants, or have other motives for migration). Additionally, the study explores how this perceived basis for displacement impacts the attitudes of the host community towards Syrians. To address these research objectives, we initially provide a conceptual mapping of epistemic injustice, demonstrating how the concept is used in the migration literature and our potential contribution to the literature. Next, we explain the methodology of the study, other migration studies that center on this methodology and why this methodology was chosen for our study. In the last section of the study, we try to explain the main negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes against Syrians in Türkiye and the main testimonial injustices that we have observed in relation to these stereotypes, supported by interview excerpts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Fricker (2007, p. 1) emphasizes that epistemic injustice is primarily about distributional injustice in relation to epistemic goods such as knowledge or education. Kidd et al. (2017, p. 1) define epistemic injustice as 'unfair forms of treatment in relation to knowledge, understanding and participation in communicative practices.' Basically defined as such, according to Fricker (2007, p. 1), there are two kinds of epistemic injustice: testimonial and hermeneutical. Our study focuses on testimonial injustice, which occurs when the listener, due to bias, attributes a deflated and low level of credibility to what a speaker expresses. To concretize this, she presents an example of when racial prejudice triggers a police officer's perception in a way to attribute low credibility to a young black man. Thus, it can be argued that testimonial injustice occurs when a group is not heard because of their low credibility in society (Fricker, 2013, p. 1319). This type of epistemic injustice is visible when the voice or information produced by oppressed individuals or groups is viewed as illegitimate (Cin et al., 2022, p. 120). In this case, despite the evidence, the listener shuts themselves off to the possibility of acquiring the correct information due to their prejudice against the speaker's epistemic state. Such an approach may lead to the speaker not even being given the chance to express themselves and share knowledge. This epistemic disconnect, which at first glance seems to be interpersonal, disrupts the structures or functions of institutions, activities and systems as it gains prevalence and may expand to other spheres of life (Kılınç, 2022, pp. 73–74). Thus, an injustice can become systemic and embedded in the structures or institutions of society (Cin et al., 2022, p. 120).

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As Fricker (2007, p. 131)observes, epistemic injustice is tied to oppressive systems; racist, sexist xenophobic and other similar approaches and systems affect communication with each other. As such, a speaker may be attributed a credibility gap due to the listener's identity bias. In other words, the approach and attitude towards a speaker (such as a poor immigrant) may shift from trusting the strength of their arguments or the truthfulness of what they claim to be deprived of epistemic authority due to systemic biases. This causes significant harm to the victims of epistemic injustice (Wolf, 2022, p. 228).

Various studies have addressed the link between migration and epistemic injustice in different ways. Hänel (2021) discusses the relation between hermeneutic injustice and misrecognition and demonstrates that these two phenomena are interconnected. Based on the idea that Western states contribute to the intertwining of hermeneutical injustice through the misrecognition of refugees, Hanel concludes that Western states, individually and institutionally, have three main responsibilities: (i) to ensure that refugees are afforded their fair share of credibility in the interpretation of their experiences; (ii) to take responsibility for the problematic social structures that produce and perpetuate hermeneutical injustices; and (iii) to enhance the political efficacy of alternative narratives and subaltern counterpublics, including the voices of refugees (2021, p. 280). Wikström (2014), however, aims to show that in asylum applications, although the applicants' narratives are crucial, the institutional logic is one that showcases epistemic injustice. Wikström emphasizes that the implications of post-structural and post-colonial approaches need to be taken seriously again in order to take the applicant's narrative into account and to foreground individualized circumstances. Such an approach could provide an alternative to the institutional logic of attributing low credibility to refugees' narratives (Wikström, 2014, pp. 216–217). Ivanovic (2018) draws attention to the crucial importance of analysing epistemic deficits and injustices in social interaction for the inclusion of refugees and migrants. Ivanovic addresses the issues of epistemic and social inclusion and exclusion of refugees and migrants from a culturally and historically critical perspective, emphasizing that we have obligations (just as Hanel underlines) towards people living under the burden of Europe's colonial past and deprived of their own meaning and culture. This obligation fundamentally involves paying critical attention to refugees and migrants, their experiences, their suffering, their lives and their deaths, which have become a simple statistic of the global political and economic system. Finally, according to Eckenweiler (2019), the inability of asylum seekers or refugees to exercise their rights or the prevention of the exercise of their rights is one of the most fundamental links between migration and epistemic injustice. In this context, Eckenweiler has tried to show that refugees are vulnerable groups to both testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice and emphasized that testimonial injustice in particular is a critical obstacle to the recognition of the legal status of refugees in terms of attributing a low credibility to the refugee's testimony. Eckenweiler explains this obstacle in terms of refugees' lack of credibility due to the low credibility attributed to their testimony when relaying their stories of flight that could lead to the recognition of their rights.

The aforementioned studies share a fundamental commonality: They put the migrant and the migration experience at the center and build their framework of analysis around the figure of the migrant. While we maintain that this perspective is quite valuable and we will use it to a certain extent in our study, there is no study in the literature that evaluates epistemic injustice by putting the host society at the center. In this respect, the first important contribution of this study to the literature will be its potential to provide a framework to determine whether migrants are vulnerable to epistemic injustice, as assumed in the literature, by putting the host community at the center. Certainly, the focus on refugees as a vulnerable group to epistemic injustice is understandable, but in our view, the investigation into why the host community attributes a low level of credibility to the displaced person's testimony requires examining the host community's approaches and attitudes towards the phenomena of refugee and migration in the context of the types of epistemic injustice.

The study's second expected contribution to the epistemic injustice literature pertains to criticisms aimed at Fricker. Fricker (2007, p. 27) highlights the pivotal significance of systematic testimonial injustice rather than incidental or unsystematic cases. Cases such as the Tom Robinson example, as demonstrated in Fricker's study (2007), serve as an exact instance of systematic testimonial injustice, as underlined by Wanderer (2012). However, forms of testimonial injustice that are much less overt and systematic and not easily recognizable as such, can also occur

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in various aspects of social life (Wanderer, 2012, p. 167). We have identified the existence of such testimonial injustices in our study and have called them 'subtle' forms of testimonial injustice.

In addition, Davidson (2019) points out, by silencing the voices of others, we too know less. Although the Frickerian theoretical background leaves this possibility open, it does not expand on it (understandably by focusing on the victim). Another creative aspect of using the host's narrative within the scope of our study was to capture contexts in which the perpetuation of testimonial injustice by 'knowing' less.

However, as Doan emphasizes, it should not be forgotten that Fricker conceived the idea of epistemic injustice as an umbrella category and she 'efforts to reveal additional forms of epistemic injustice are generally consistent with the broader project laid out in her 2007 book' (Doan, 2017, p. 184). Thus, this study focuses on narrative forms of testimonial injustice, since these forms are both observable by the means of potential epistemic injustice creating mechanisms; and assessable in the means of giving exploratory data to that can contribute to the epistemic injustice discussions. In this sense, we identified the narrative manifestations of negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes which, according to Fricker (2007), have the potential to create testimonial injustice. For Fricker both prejudices and stereotyping are vital to epistemic injustice. Since prejudice can have either positive or negative valence for Fricker, she chooses to define the act of epistemic injustice in terms of disadvantaged groups, focusing on negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes rather than prejudices in general. For her, negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes infiltrate the hearer-speaker dialogue in a way that creates testimonial injustice; and 'it distorts the hearer's perception of the speaker.' (Fricker, 2007, p. 36) She considers negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes as the kind of approach at work in systematic testimonial injustice and defines it as such:

> A widely held disparaging association between a social group and one or more attributes, where this association embodies a generalization that displays some (typically, epistemically culpable) resistance to counter-evidence owing to an ethically bad affective investment.
>
> (Fricker, 2007, p. 35)

Thus, we will examine whether a low level of credibility is attributed to the Syrian refugees' testimony, as the epistemic injustice literature argues today, by evaluating the negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes of the host community about the Syrians in the context of the Bursa province of Türkiye, with the narrative inquiry as the method.

METHODOLOGY

Narrative inquiry

First introduced by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), the narrative inquiry is a qualitative research methodology that primarily focuses on the sharing of personal narratives. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) envision three key dimensions unique to narrative inquiry and guide the research design. The first of these dimensions, which they call narrative inquiry commonplaces, is temporality, which focuses on the importance of the temporal qualities of the events, subjects, or objects under investigation, while the second commonplace, sociality, focuses on sensitizing the social background of personal stories in a way that considers social processes. The final dimension, place, points out the vital relationship with the place where the active participation of the researcher is essential. (2006, pp. 479–480). The simultaneous consideration of all these dimensions provides researchers with a reflexive awareness and facilitates the contextualization of the experience. In this respect, studies using narrative inquiry can be found not only in its original field of educational sciences, but also in many other fields. As for migration literature, Pavlish (2007) presents the life experiences of Congolese refugees in a refugee camp in Rwanda, both thematically and by gender, interviewing with 15 people in two rounds in a 3-day period. Another study with longitudinal design by Kubota et al. (2022) conducted with Syrian refugee children and their families

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in Canada examines the participants' acculturation experiences in the context of social inclusion, focusing on a single family. Another is a study of the Rohingya diaspora in Malaysia, focusing on identity in the context of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Fazal & Lee, 2023). Apart from these examples that use thematic evaluation, other studies basically define the refugee status as a context and deal with various daily practices in it. These examples present the usability of the narrative inquiry technique in migration studies. Notably in all these studies, the focus is mainly on migrants, understandably to investigate the migration experience.

Research field

The Altıparmak neighbourhood was chosen as the research field. Bursa, the 4th most populous city in Türkiye, is also one of the provinces with the highest internal and external migration rates. The ratio of the number of registered Syrians to the total population in the province is 5.13% in 2023, making it the 7th province in Türkiye with the highest percentage of Syrian population (Türkiye Presidency of Migration Management, 2023). As Syrian settlement in Bursa, the Altıparmak neighbourhood and the surrounding areas have gained popularity. The neighbourhood, one of the most economically vibrant parts of the city, is a place where refugees live intensively and Syrians basically adopt it as a public space of their own to the extent that 'new registration of Syrian residence is suspended' as of July 2022 (Türkiye Presidency of Migration Management, 2022). In this sense, the Altıparmak neighbourhood, which for a long time held a central place for the local population, now stands out as a place that has undergone a process of change and where hosts and migrants interact with each other in various contexts (such as neighbours, tenants-landlords or customers-shopkeepers). In terms of narrative inquiry commonplaces, research field has it all; a changing, temporal place that two communities may interact. In terms of theoretical background, it was hypothesized that the relationship of long-standing tradespeople with 'newcomers' may contain narrative implications, namely negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes, that may interpret by the lens of Fricker. Thus, the shopkeepers from the host community were chosen as our participants.

Sampling and data collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Turkish with 10 participants from the host community, who have been shopkeepers in the selected region for more than 3 years. The participants were selected using the purposeful snowball sampling. The interviews conducted in two rounds over a period of 5 months (between September 2022 and January 2023), in the participants' own workplaces, allowing researchers to gain additional impressions about the research field and the experiences of the participants. One of the two researchers who conducted the interview process was responsible for the interview, while the other was interested in recording interviews and general observational data. The first round of interviews focused on participants' perceptions about both the situation of Syrians and the way Syrians express themselves, consisting rather broad questions that concerning the personal experiences of the participants about Syrians. Following Pavlish (2007), a second round of interviews was conducted with 7 selected existing interviewees to explore emerging themes and elaborate them. The collected recordings were transcribed.

Analysis

Since the aim of this study was not only to compile the experiences of a specific community but also to evaluate them, the analysis of the transcribed data followed the studies with a more explicit theoretical engagement. Following (Fazal & Lee, 2023, p. 211) transcribed data discussed and interpreted through the utterance of narratives that may contain some form of negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes about Syrians. Since we worked on host community and

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conducted a two round-interviews, we used second round to 'Feedback and Discussion with Response Community' step, rather than a post-data collection step. During this final thematic analysis, no coding book or frame was used, instead focus was given to reflect the participants responses and evaluate the Altıparmak context as coherent as possible (Kilpeläinen & Zechner, 2022, pp.1131–1333) through the lens of epistemic injustice, our theoretical background.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the Bursa Uludağ University Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee on 27.05.2022 and session numbered 2022–05 (Decision No: 20). All participants were informed about the study and given an informed consent form. Regarding ethical considerations, the matter is about the lens of the study focusing on the host community, which we think as a joint potential contribution to the literature of epistemic injustice and narrative inquiry in the field of migration studies. Although critical use is generally in the form of making the voice of vulnerable groups heard by conveying their experiences (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022), through an appropriate theoretical lens that promote it, we think that the critical potential of narrative inquiry also allows for a use in the form of 'stories about a group' other than 'stories of a group', even help future 'stories of a group' researches by broaden our narrative landscapes. Thus, extra care was given to both do not misrepresent the host communities' narratives and not be hesitant to analyse them for a critical point of view at the same time.

RESULTS & FINDINGS

Basic negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes towards Syrians

Looking at the situation of Syrians in Türkiye by adhering to Fricker's definition of negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes, three main narrative motifs stand out: (1) Lack of civilization and ignorance of the culture of common life, (2) the local population's narrative of Syrians as socially maladaptive and resistant to integration and (3) local population's narrative that Syrians' victimization is artificial. This perception of Syrians, which is shaped around these three basic narrative motifs, continues to exist largely among the natives without the need for justification and in resistance to counter-evidence. The study explains these three basic negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes. Thereafter, the basic testimonial injustices related to and fed by these stereotypes are presented.

Lack of civilization and ignorance of the culture of common life

One of the most common narrative motifs of the local population is the perception of Syrians as people who have not adopted the concept of civilization and, therefore, have not developed a culture of coexistence. Some interviewees stated that Syrians are unable to develop common living practices due to their own cultural background:

> We are having a big problem with adaptation. Or rather, they have trouble adapting. So they do not have a culture of coexistence. They are prone to violence (…)Which civil society organization do Syrians belong to and what are they fighting for? For environmentalism? Are they going to a theatre?
> (Mr. Ahmet)

The main link between the lack of civilization and epistemic injustice stems from the fact that the regarding Syrians as deprived of civilization. The knowledge and experience of Syrian people are not consulted in any way and this is accepted as a given.

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One of the most established themes in the host society's narrative regarding the lack of civilization of Syrians is that they are seen as people who have not developed individuality who do not have the ability to question any situation or event and who live like a 'herd' or a 'colony':

> Syrians have this culture of submissiveness. They act like a herd, no questioning whatsoever.
>
> (Mr. Erdal)

This herd motif is so prevalent that pejorative meanings have been attributed to the fact that many Syrians live in a house to stay in Türkiye and to cover their rent and living expenses. It seems that epistemic injustice mechanisms, especially the lack of credibility (Fricker, 2007, p. 1), considerably impact this negative picture. Some of the participants believed that Syrians continue to lead such a life as a part of their culture, even though their economic situation is good. The lack of civilization and living as a 'herd' are so intertwined in some narratives that the home life of Syrians has become likened to the living space of a farm animal:

> They live in a household of twenty people. It's like a barn in the village, where there are 30 cows, 20 small sheep and they all live together. It is not clear who is whose wife and who is whose husband.
>
> (Mr. Mecnun)

Another key motif intertwined with the 'herd' motif in the narrative of the local population about Syrians is 'fertility.' There is a feeling of discomfort and uneasiness among the host society due to the high number of children Syrians have. This situation can create a fertility bias that paves the way to different epistemic injustices. The most basic manifestation of this narrative is found in the discourse of 'Türkiye is Arabizing.'

> Observe a Syrian woman, she's definitely giving birth at least nine months after you saw her.
>
> (Mrs. Flz)

Encounters in a congested space: Social maladaptation and cultural barriers

Another key narrative motif that stems from Syrians' lack of civilization is that they are often viewed as social misfits who have almost nothing in common with the host society.

> They are different in all aspects. I mean, if they lived with us for another hundred years, they would not be able to adapt to us.
>
> (Mr. Mecnun)

While the lack of civilization narrative is mainly based on negative identity prejudices, social maladaptation narrative is largely based on social experience and 10 years of coexistence in a congested space. In the narrative of the local population, social maladaptation has many aspects. Its first dimension is the narrative that Syrians maintain their social lives with the least possible contact with the local population. This is a motif that appears in almost all interviews. However, there are two different key approaches regarding the motivation of Syrians to prefer a social life among themselves. The first of these focuses on Syrians' voluntary preference for such a lifestyle and stereotypes the social incompatibility.

The second approach emphasizes the fact that Syrians are pushed into such a social life by the local population. Accordingly, the local population excludes Syrians and forces them to live an inward-looking social life by exploiting them economically.

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For the natives, another main issue indicating the social maladaptation of Syrians is the incompatibility in daily life practices. In a wide range of areas such as eating and drinking habits, apartment life (wrong bell ringing, loud talking), entertainment and environmental cleanliness, native population expresses that Syrians cannot adapt to the daily life practices in Türkiye. This perception is prevalent even in the narratives of relatively more moderate towards Syrians:

> They speak incredibly loudly. Their sleeping hours are very different. In the morning they go to bed. They also cook with garlic, their food smells very strong.
>
> (Mr. Erdal)

The narrative that Syrians in Türkiye lead an isolated social life is constructed based on the motif of 'social disharmony' by the anti-Syrian interviewees, whereas it is constructed with the motif of Syrians' fear and uneasiness about the actions and discourses of the natives by the interviewees who are relatively more tolerant of Syrians. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that Syrians lead a social life alienated from the local population, albeit to different degrees and for different reasons. At this point, as a result of 10 years of coexistence, it can be thought that this issue can be solved to some extent by making Syrians more visible in social and economic life. However, it is seen that the increasing visibility of Syrians is met by a significant number of the participants with negative underlying motifs such as 'overgrowth' and 'overconfidence and comfort.' This creates a dilemma for Syrians in Türkiye: When they keep to themselves, they are regarded as a group unwilling to adapt; when they become involved in social life and become more visible, they are blamed for overgrowth or an amplified sense of self-confidence and assertiveness.

Increased self-confidence/visibility and loss of victimization

This motif is based on the judgement that these people should always be grateful and in need of help. The Syrians started to become more visible in social life and their economic development over time is related to the 'disappearance of victimization' and 'end of neediness' in the eyes of the local population.

The fact that Syrians have lost their victim status means that their reasons for being here have also become meaningless in the eyes of a section of the host society. A significant majority of the interviewees regarded even ordinary social activities Syrians perform as enrichment. The main issue here is the perception of Syrians as people who should live in Türkiye with minimum resources. Any action or practice that seems to show otherwise can turn even the fact that Syrians took refuge in Türkiye due to a compelling reason like civil war into deception in the narrative of the local population. In this respect, being able to take a taxi, even the act of going to the hairdresser can be seen as a sign of undeserved prosperity and pleasure and can be narrated as Syrian youth enjoying themselves here while there is a civil war in their country.

As a result, the narrative of Syrians becoming more visible in social life and having a 'burst of self-confidence' is also the source of the most basic pattern of testimonial injustice. Accordingly, the victimized Syrians' argument of fleeing from war and persecution means almost nothing to a significant segment of the local population and the Syrians' stance of fleeing persecution is silenced.

Basic manifestations of epistemic injustice: The Syrian figure as a traitor and the opportunistic economic migrant

Above, hand in hand with the themes of lack of civilization, cultural incompatibility and bursts of self-confidence, we have attempted to unpack the main negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes towards Syrians that pave an approach that undermines or even ignores the epistemic agency of Syrians. Following Fricker, we have focused on the narrative appearances of the negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes[1] by elaborating on their potential for

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creating the epistemic injustice, a more systematic form of credibility deficit. Negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes can create epistemic injustice by infiltrating hearer-speaker dialogue and distorting the hearer's perception (Fricker, 2007, p. 36). In our study, it has been emerged more apparent two broad categories that comprised of these negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes. We have identified two main testimonial injustices linked to such stereotypes: Disbelief in Syrians' motives for fleeing and the figure of the opportunistic economic migrant. The first of these seems to be the most influential factor in the fact that the voice of the Syrian as a knower is rarely heard. This is because it creates the image of a 'person who sold their homeland' or 'a person who came here on vacation,' which makes the testimony of the Syrian unreliable. The second main testimonial injustice related to this is the image of the Syrians as opportunists who have left their homeland and have come to invade Türkiye economically and culturally and whose word should not be taken at face value.

As the first of the main testimonial injustices against Syrians, we will focus on the fact that they are seen as people who sold their homeland and their motives for fleeing are disregarded. In this type of testimonial injustice, multiple negative identities can be presented in the form of a negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes:

> Syrians are a traitor who didn't protect their homeland and ran away and came here. My soldiers fall martyr there for your land. Here, you are gelling your hair and talking to women. Did you come here to have children? Did you flee the war because you couldn't make love comfortably?
>
> (Mrs. Filiz)

The motif of 'treason' is narrated by reinforcing negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes such as 'lack of civilization', 'being social misfits' and 'agitation'. Such an approach escalates anti-Syrianism, denies the Syrian as 'knowers', dismisses their experiences in their homeland and 'silences' them. Even though Syrians and official bodies state that this war is a civil war and that the other side being fought is also Syrian, the narrative of treason does not weaken and can even be expanded to include the view that those who betrayed their homeland yesterday will betray this land tomorrow and commit acts of separatism and terrorism.

> For those who leave their homeland, who left it behind, it's impossible to say what they are ready to do to Türkiye.I don't find them trustworthy.
>
> (Mrs. Ayşe)

According to Fricker (2007, p. 27),testimonial injustices linked to other injustices through prejudice can be called systematic. Being exposed to prejudice makes a person susceptible not only to testimonial injustice but also to other injustices and therefore, when such prejudice constitutes a testimonial injustice, this injustice becomes systematically linked to other types of actual or potential injustices. As can be seen from the statements of some of the interviewees above, not believing their motives for fleeing from Syria to Türkiye can also lead to other potential injustices and accusations. In this sense, it is possible to say that Syrians in Türkiye may become victims of systematic testimonial injustice.

Another main basis for the interviewees' portrayal of Syrians as untrustworthy and dangerous people who are incapable of defending their homeland is the discourse 'we would never leave our homeland, we did/would fight for our homeland' as a means of comparison. This motif is so strong that even one interviewee, who did not fully credit the narrative of Syrians selling their homeland because he was in a dialogue with other Syrians and consulted their knowledge and experience, nevertheless kept the motif that we Turks would not flee no matter what:

> Now, if it were us, we wouldn't leave Türkiye; we would fight, we would die, but we still wouldn't leave. Now there is also this; I ask some Syrians why they fled. (…)They say that their cousin is fighting on the other side
>
> (Mr. Mustafa)

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One of the important conclusions of our study is even those who would not be defined as anti-Syrian and even those who think that Syrians have been subjected to many injustices Türkiye in certain respects can adopt narratives that may amount to testimonial injustice towards Syrians. As seen above, another interviewee emphasized that based on the knowledge and experience of the Syrian, these people did not actually sell out their homeland. On the contrary, they took refuge in Türkiye because they did not want to fight with their own citizens:

> Syrians have fled the war. I have nothing to say about their answer to the question 'Why did you come here?' They ask, 'Whom am I going to fight against?' To them, it's not that some outside force attacked their country; whichever side catches them takes them to their own front.
>
> (Mr. Turgut)

Although the above participant emphasized that the narrative of selling out one's homeland is not truthful and characterized the circulation of it as injustice and prejudice, he again made a comparison between Turks and Syrians and created a subtle form of testimonial injustice:

> My Lord created the Turkish race differently, you can't expect that from the other side. (…) I mean, my Lord created Turks as warriors. We are unique (…)We are a different nation, so you can't expect this from anyone else.
>
> (Mr.Turgut)

It is possible to see that even pro-Syrian participants can actualize a different mechanism of testimonial injustice in their own narrative. Accordingly, qualities such as courage and heroism can only be found in the Turkish race. It would be erroneous to expect such qualities from other nationalities such as Syrians.

The second fundamental testimonial injustice we have observed against Syrians is their perception as 'opportunistic economic immigrants.' This approach means that Syrians came to Türkiye as economic and cultural invaders, contributing nothing to the social and economic environment in the country and unfairly benefiting from the national resources. The first common motif in this regard is that Syrians are granted many economic privileges by public institutions than the native population. Thanks to these privileges, Syrians are getting richer while the local population has to cope with economic problems. Such a motif can transform the initially victimized and helpless Syrian figure into economic and cultural invaders.

Among the examples of Syrian refugees' privileges taken place in the narrative of the local population are entering universities without exams, receiving large amounts of social assistance from the state every month, priority treatment in health facilities and exemption from all kinds of taxes and audits:

> What good are you going to do for Türkiye that you come here in waves? You get citizenship, you try to get the same rights as me. Your children are admitted to the university without an exam. You get priority at hospitals.
>
> (Mrs. Filiz)

In this narrative, alongside all these privileges, there is the figure of the opportunistic and greedy Syrian who seeks to abuse and constantly pursue such privileges. Syrians can be positioned as people who, thanks to these privileges, are no longer in need of any help whatsoever and even have unjustifiably improved economic opportunities compared to the native population.

> Show me a Syrian who is hungry. Show me a Syrian begging. All beggars are Turks. They were begging 6–7 years ago. Then, aids started to be given.
>
> (Mr. Halil)

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The second main motif of the opportunistic and greedy Syrian figure as economic and cultural invaders are shaped around the narrative that young men rather than women, children and old people flee to Türkiye. Some participants openly expressed their discomfort with it:

> What happens in war? Women flee, children flee (…)But a young man twice my size has come with his suitcase as if he has come on vacation.
>
> (Mr. Mecnun)

Moreover, this is also linked to the motif of 'they should have stayed in their homeland and fought' explained earlier. Accordingly, instead of staying in Syria and fighting for their homeland, young Syrian men flee to Türkiye and covet economic opportunities here. This approach can cause even the most natural human need of Syrians to work for a living to be evaluated in the context of welfare hunting.

However, some interviewees were aware of the main testimonial injustices presented above and the associated misinformation and the silencing of Syrians.

> Syrians are nervous. Because they receive reactions like 'Why did you come here?' Ask anyone in the neighborhood. They will say that Syrian shopkeepers in this neighborhood do not pay taxes. Yet they all pay taxes.
>
> (Ömr)

We believe that being in contact with Syrians and not avoiding dialogue significantly impacted the fact that some interviewees dismissed unsubstantiated statements about Syrians such as 'they receive monetary aid from the state'. By accepting Syrians as knowers and experiencers and engaging in dialogue with them, testimonial injustices can be somehow eliminated. However, as we have emphasized before, the testimonial injustices against Syrians in Türkiye do not seem to be directly related to being anti-Syrian. In fact, it is possible to see epistemic injustices constructed in different ways even by interviewees who are in a dialogue with Syrians and who, as a result of this dialogue, develop a narrative against the perception of opportunistic economic migrants who 'live off the aid they receive from the state.' A clear example can be seen in the narrative of a participant who has a close dialogue with Syrians. He stated that although they considered it their responsibility to help Syrians at every opportunity, he never attended their weddings and parties:

> (…)there was a barber boy here(…)he said, 'We got up one morning and my mom, dad and brother had breakfast. I went to work. Then I got a phone call. A bomb had hit our house. I became all alone in this world in just an hour.' Now, when you hear these stories, you don't think of the wedding or a special moment.
>
> (Mr. Ömer)

Even for him, who cannot be considered as anti-Syrian and who is aware of and opposes the categories of testimonial injustice against Syrians, it is possible to talk about an epistemic injustice caused by a basic presupposition: the basis of Syrian identity is about suffering, being victimized and therefore being people who need to be protected and cared for. Thus, it is possible to detect a sensitivity towards not participating even in daily practices (weddings or any entertainment) that contradict this identity. This is because victimization is seen as the basis for both the reasons for their presence in Türkiye and their personality traits:

> These people are victims. Even if they don't say so. No matter how much they thank God, they are victims. Nobody accepts being victims, but they are.
>
> (Mr. Ömer)

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Throughout the study, we have tried to explain two basic testimonial injustices based on seeing Syrians as 'traitors' and 'opportunistic economic migrants' who have exploited the war and coveted Türkiye's resources without any recourse to Syrians' knowledge and experience. However, in addition to these two basic testimonial injustices, we observed another epistemic injustice based on defining Syrians only on the axis of victimization and protection in the narratives of interviewees who opposed these epistemic injustices and were open to contact with Syrians. Undoubtedly, their approach of not avoiding a dialogue with Syrians and being more inclined to accept them as a knower has at least enabled them to distance themselves from the basic narrative motifs developed within the local population. However, complicating the situation of Syrians in Türkiye, although these interviewees were not anti-Syrian, they were able to enact a more subtle and hidden motif of epistemic injustice by almost equating being Syrian with being a victim and a person in need of protection.

DISCUSSION

In terms of the commonplaces of narrative inquiry, we observed that the context where the study was carried out was already a place of change in terms of both sociality and space. This dual temporality may also imply that the changes in the Altıparmak neighbourhood are still ongoing. The first comment that comes to mind may be that the participants in our study field experienced a similar change with the Turkish public-opinion. In our opinion, the impact of an anti-Syrian sentiment triggered by current political, economic and social developments, which amount to epistemic injustice, is undeniable. However, regarding the epistemic injustice discussions, we have also observed personal encounter-based level narratives rather than the strict broader concepts.

Within the scope our study, we evaluated the host society's narratives in a congested place like Bursa-Altıparmak, where face-to-face communication is almost inevitable. To Wanderer (2012, pp. 167–168), epistemic role of factors such as face-to-face encounters or the responsibilities that flow from social roles are rarely explicitly considered by Fricker. This insight enabled us to reflect the mechanisms of testimonial injustice that Fricker has comparatively given less attention to. Most notably, we observed that forms of epistemic injustice against Syrians can occur independently of anti-Syrian sentiment. Even though Fricker defines negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes as 'negative', this 'negativity' can be quite complex and subtle in some cases. For Fricker, the negativity of negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes comes from the fact that it creates a credibility deficit and she is not interested in the credibility excess (Fricker, 2007, p. 28). When we think in a way that creates a credibility deficit, the common themes discussed in the study can also be interpreted as epistemic 'muting' when they are expressed in a way that involves a relationship of constant neediness. Thus, it is possible to mention an epistemic injustice directed towards Syrians even by those who cannot be defined as anti-Syrian in any way. In our study, we observed this in the interviews, especially under the theme of 'victimization'. We have identified the existence of such testimonial injustices in our study and have called them 'subtle' forms of testimonial injustice. In this respect, it may be productive to focus on such subtle forms of epistemic injustice in future studies. Methodologically, we believe that research focusing on host societies rather than refugee groups can be instructive in exploring such subtle forms of epistemic injustice. We also think that qualitative and context-based researches such as narrative inquiry can broaden our perspectives by providing background to vulnerable group-centric researches as well. As we think that interviews with refugee groups will be more productive considering these unique forms, we are confident that a study based on Syrians in the same region, drawing on these themes, will be more complementary.

A particular observation among the female participants in our study is interesting. Especially under the common theme of lack of civilization, it is noteworthy that Syrian women are seen as subordinate to men and far from being equipped to assert themselves as individuals. In this respect, the motif of the civilized and self-sufficient Turkish woman and the narrative of the Syrian woman who ties herself to her husband and cannot become an individual is in contrast. We believe that a gender-specific analysis of this issue, which we could not focus on due to the design of our study, would be fruitful for the Turkish context.

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CONCLUSION

This study investigates three main research questions in the context of Syrians in Türkiye and testimonial injustice through narrative inquiry. First, the study delved into the host community's narratives about Syrians to determine the underlying reasons ascribed to Syrians' displacement in Türkiye. Regarding Syrians living in Türkiye, why they took refuge in the country is of critical importance in the narratives of the host communities. There is a dramatic difference between their motivation for coming to Türkiye as fleeing war and persecution and as economic migrants. However, Syrians are rarely consulted about their motivation for fleeing to Türkiye as a knower and experiencer. As such, as we have tried to highlight in this study, natives can tend to speak on behalf of Syrians and can deny their capacity to be a knowing and experiencing subject in various ways. Such an approach, together with identity-biased stereotyping, forms the basis of the testimonial injustice that Syrians in Türkiye are vulnerable to.

Second, the study revealed that increasing anti-Syrian sentiment in Türkiye reinforces epistemic injustice and that epistemic injustices based on various prejudices can escalate anti-Syrian sentiment. Lastly, on whether 'testimonial injustice' exposes them to other forms of injustice, we concluded that Syrians are vulnerable to systematic testimonial injustice. However, we concluded that Syrians are also a vulnerable group to subtle testimonial injustice that is not easily observed.

Thus, we can conclude that epistemic injustice, which can be interpreted as the interruption of a proper dialogue or asymmetry in mutual communication, can be limited in certain respects. We have demonstrated this fact in our study in the case of participants who pushed the possibilities of a dialogue, allowing Syrians to develop their own narratives and accepting them as a 'knower'. For this very reason, we argue that it is essential to develop local and national approaches and policies that can benefit the development and diversification of dialogue mechanisms between Syrian and local populations. However, we are also aware that the current political and economic climate in Türkiye makes this difficult. In fact, it is a useful political instrument for political parties and politicians to portray Syrians as the main cause of economic and political problems and to link the solution for the returnal of Syrians. The most significant policy-making tool during the election was the repatriation of Syrians and the problems arising from them. Thus, all this factors not only feeds the already widespread anti-Syrian sentiment among the local population but also can exacerbate the testimonial injustice against Syrians by limiting the channels of a dialogue.

The above framework is based on the premise that anti-Syrianism and epistemic injustice feed each other. However, the local population does not necessarily have to be anti-Syrian for Syrians to be subjected to testimonial injustice. In fact, as one of the striking results of our study, we can state that testimonial injustice against Syrians is not directly correlated with being anti-Syrian. Undoubtedly, it is possible to say that anti-Syrian interviewees engage in more blatant and diverse mechanisms of testimonial injustice. However, at the same time, even interviewees who may not be considered relatively anti-Syrian can mobilize more subtle mechanisms of testimonial injustice. Consequently, it is possible to say that Syrians are cut off from healthy communication channels with the local population and excluded from conducting a common social life with the local population even in cramped spaces, as in our sample. In fact, as we have tried to demonstrate in the study when Syrians become visible in social life, they are blamed with the motif of 'overgrowth' or 'increased self-confidence'. When they are forced into a social and economic life among themselves, they are met with the motif of 'social maladaptation'. Ultimately, such a divide between the native population and the Syrians, together with Türkiye's increasingly fragile economic and political situation, may lead to collective exclusion and even violence.

A dialogue loses its meaning when it takes place 'in absentia' of any party. In a sense, when we think in terms of epistemic injustice that focuses on 'the open dialogue and its enemies', we hope that the detection of 'in absentia' that increases these splits will ensure that the aforementioned predictions remain as scenarios.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest.

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PEER REVIEW

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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ENDNOTE

[1] It can be said that Fricker (2007) herself often seeks to explicate testimonial injustice by looking at its narrative appearances. For instance, she uses the example of character Solomon for prejudice (p. 34); and the image of a "card-carrying feminist" (p.36).

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