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MAKING SENSE OF THE SURİÇİ DISTRICT THROUGH THE HOME PLACE

İclal Ayşe Küçükırca

The Suriçi district is the historical walled city of Diyarbakır in Turkey and mostly inhabited by Kurdish people. During the armed conflict between the YPS (Yekîneyên Parastina Sîvîl - Civil Defense Units) and the Turkish security forces, 2015-17, I lived close to the area. I decided to write on the internal displacement from Suriçi when people started leaving their homes with a couple of blankets and clothes under their arms and their children walking next to them.

Demographically, Suriçi is a district composed of mostly working-class people of diverse backgrounds (Kurds, Doms, Assyrians, Armenians, Chaldeans, Arabs, Ezidis and Turks), most of whom work either as agricultural laborers in the historical Hevsel gardens or as seasonal agricultural workers. There are also artisans who work with copper and iron. Due to the extended family formation, there is a large young population with many children. Suriçi was a major city of Persian, Roman, Sassanian, Byzantine and Islamic empires. In 1988, the district was officially registered as a protected urban area, and in 2015 the Republic of Turkey officially recorded it as a historical site. The historical city walls around the district, its peculiar streets and architectural structures, synagogues, churches and mosques, caravanserais, fountains and hammams are part of the outstanding cultural heritage of Suriçi. Therefore, both the architectural structures and surrounding neighbourhoods in this district carry historical significance and were also an integral part of daily life before the conflict.



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There are various studies focussing on previous internal displacements in Turkey and a variety of NGO reports on the internal displacement from the Suriçi district between 2015-17. Yet, no study so far has focussed on the loss of home and the conditions of homelessness. 'Home' as a place can take various meanings in different historical and geographical contexts. For some, home furnishings symbolize 'home', while for others, home can become a place of solidarity, a place of healing, a place of resistance or a place of violence. My study examines the different meanings of the home space and homelessness for the people of Suriçi who were forced to leave their homes due to the armed conflict. The study is based on 22 semi-structured deep interviews with internally displaced people.

In the particular context of Suriçi, I argue that home should be analyzed primarily in terms of class, ethnicity and gender axes. The interviews revealed four different meanings of home and homelessness for the people of Suriçi: home as a lost commodity, home as a place of privacy, of memory, and of solidarity.



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İclal Ayşe Küçükırca was awarded a Philipp Schwartz Fellowship at IAAW by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation in 2017. However, due to bureaucratic reasons in Turkey, the start had to be postponed. She completed her PhD degree at the SPEL (Social, Political, Ethical and Legal Philosophy) programme at Binghamton University, New York in 2011. She has worked as an Assistant Professor at the Philosophy department of Mardin Artuklu University.



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