THE PLATFORM

Current Muslim Affairs 2024

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Foundation for science, culture and education

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RESEARCH CENTRE FOR SOCIAL THOUGHT AND POLICY

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Research Centre for Social Thought and Policy (TODAM) was founded to realize the goal of a just, equitable, and prosperous society. In addition to contributing to social thought, it aims to propose practicable solutions to contemporary social challenges. We aim to witness the different dimensions of social change based on knowledge and to bring solutions to social problems on the axis of common values and benefits. The activities we carry out at TODAM are based on a realistic understanding and constructive approach to current social issues from the lens of social sciences. In this way, we act as a bridge between researchers, decision-makers, and civil society and advance the possibility of producing independent knowledge about our social world.

THE PLATFORM

The Platform: Current Muslim Affairs is a digital publication published by TODAM at İLKE Foundation to provide up-to-date analyses on topics that significantly impact contemporary Muslim societies in the fields of society, education, economics, science, and politics.

As an output of the Thought and Movements in Muslim Societies project, The Platform covers a broad range of topics regarding Muslim communities through in-depth analyses written by experts in the field. In addition to analyses, it offers a holistic perspective to its readers through infographics, interviews, and a database. With its contents, The Platform's vision is to present a comprehensive perspective on a wide range of areas—from economics to the arts, and from politics to thought—along with data and analyses, thereby reaching an international audience.

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İLKE Publication No	250
E-ISBN	978-625-7684-55-2
DOI	http://dx.doi.org/10.71174/pmdg155

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Introduction

Elif Sağır & Ayşenur Ergin

From the Middle East to the Balkans and from America to East Asia, the contemporary agenda of Muslim societies is experiencing a profound transformation. A wide range of topics—from the economy to the climate crisis, from international law to culture and the arts—shape the social, economic, and political dynamics of these societies. As these changes unfold, the need for a platform to understand and discuss their direction becomes increasingly vital. In response to this growing necessity, the İLKE Foundation launched the Thought and Movements in Muslim Societies project in 2021. As a part of this project, the Bulletin of Intellectual Streams in the Muslim World provided a monthly bulletin on Muslim communities across the globe between 2021 and 2023. In 2023, the project has been transformed into a digital publication, namely, The Platform: Current Muslim Affairs, and continues its mission with the same dedication.

The need for a comprehensive understanding of the real dynamics within Muslim societies has been underscored once again, especially in the wake of the changes that began on October 7. The Al-Aqsa Flood Operation, launched on October 7, not only affected the Muslim world but also signaled the beginning of a new global era. This process has undermined the claims of Western nations to global leadership in upholding international law and human rights. The unconditional support for Israel by different governments all around the world, despite the ongoing 75-year occupation of Palestinian territories and the accelerated genocide in Gaza over the past year, has exposed the failures of the international system's so-called commitment to justice and equality. Moreover, it sparked many debates on world order and global power dynamics. Meanwhile, the rise in pro-Palestinian discourse and activism worldwide indicates a shifting perception of the Palestinian cause and a growing transnational solidarity. The growing involvement of Muslim diasporas in the West, civil society organizations, student movements, and human rights defenders in activism has ensured that, despite intense propaganda efforts, the Palestinian cause remains at the forefront. At the same time, this process has sparked new discussions within Muslim societies themselves and pushed them to seek alternative mechanisms to contemporary social, political, and intellectual structures.

Throughout 2024, The Platform has featured a variety of analyses and interviews that explore current dynamics and relationships with a focus on specific countries and regions. Under the theme of higher education, we examined scientific productivity in Muslim societies through quantitative indicators, emphasizing international education and knowledge production. Addressing the theme of Muslims in the Age of Migration, we provided in-depth analyses that cover a wide range of issues, from diasporas to migration management. Under the title of Media in the Muslim World, we presented comprehensive analyses on topics

ranging from the manifestations of Islamophobia on social media and the portrayal of migrants to the colonial hegemony of the media and online censorship. We also analyzed China's longstanding settler-colonial policies in East Turkestan while examining its assimilation and oppression strategies in relation to the inadequate representation of Uyghurs on social media and situating it as part of systematic repression. Moreover, with the theme of Civil Society in the Muslim World, we examined the structures and status of civic spaces from North Macedonia to Kyrgyzstan while shedding light on civil society, social movements, and unionization efforts in Muslim societies. The student uprisings and revolution in Bangladesh in June 2024 sparked debates on whether the country was entering a new era, and in this regard, it became one of the central focuses in our discussions on civil society in the Muslim world. As the final theme of the year, we prioritized Muslim scientists' contribution to the field of science and technology. While highlighting studies in the fields of social sciences and religious studies, we also focused on scientific and technological innovations developed by Muslims. Under the theme of Science and Technology in the Muslim World, we covered a wide array of analyses, from Nobel Prize-winning scientists to digitalization, from the increasing debates on vaccines post-COVID-19 in Türkiye and globally to institutions the works of institutions focused on climate change.

In addition to our coverage of major topics, we have closely monitored and highlighted contemporary issues, including boycott movements and South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice as well as Türkiye's effort to normalize with the Assad regime and women's rights discourse in the U.S. elections. The U.S. government's support for genocide in its foreign policy, contrasted with its emphasis on women's rights during the election process, has exposed the contradictions in its rhetoric, especially as tens of thousands of women and children have been killed in Gaza and Lebanon. Meanwhile, Türkiye's effort to normalize with the Assad regime has led to many debates, and the genocide case filed against Israel at the International Court of Justice has emerged as one of the most critical legal issues highlighted by the Gaza crisis. We have provided our readers with in-depth analyses of all these issues throughout 2024.

In addition to these analyses, we have also showcased interviews with prominent Muslim figures throughout the year on our YouTube channel. In our interview with Muhammad Jalal, founder and host of The Thinking Muslim Podcast, we discussed the necessity for Muslims to increase their visibility on social media and effectively shape their own narratives. Palestinian activist Issa Amro, founder of Youth Against Settlements in the West Bank, shared his perspective on how simply existing as a Palestinian acts as a form of resistance. He also talked about the pro-Palestinian protests

that have spread all around the world after October 7, now referred to as a "global intifada." We also conducted an interview with Muhammad Mussa, researcher officer at CAGE International, an organization dedicated to supporting and raising awareness about individuals targeted by post-9/11 "War on Terror" policies and human rights violations. Building on the post-9/11 theme, we introduced our audience to the Free Aafia Movement, which has been gaining increasing awareness in Türkiye, with our interview with Fowzia Siddiqui, sister of Aafia Siddiqui, who remains unjustly imprisoned in the U.S. Our conversation with Siddiqui focused on Aafia's case and the ongoing fight for justice.

We are pleased to present *The Platform: Current Muslim Affairs 2024*, which offers in-depth analyses of the developments and challenges faced by Muslim societies all around the world over the past year. Aiming to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intersection between local realities of Muslim societies and global dynamics, we envision The Platform as an integral part of efforts to achieve a more just world order. We hope that readers find it valuable and that it sparks meaningful discussions among those interested in these critical issues.

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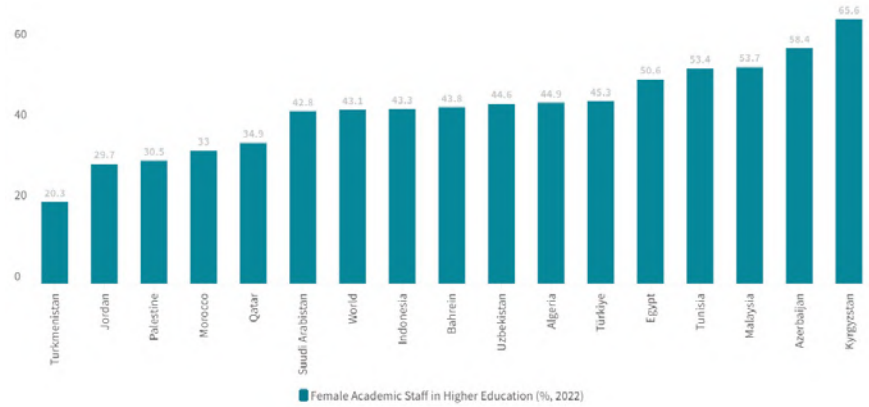
Higher Education Data at a Glance

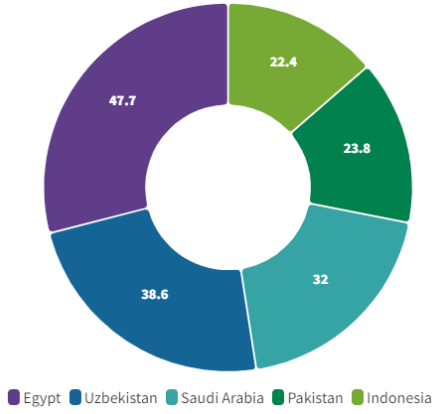
Female Academic Staff in Higher Education, By Country (2022)



Source: Our World in Data

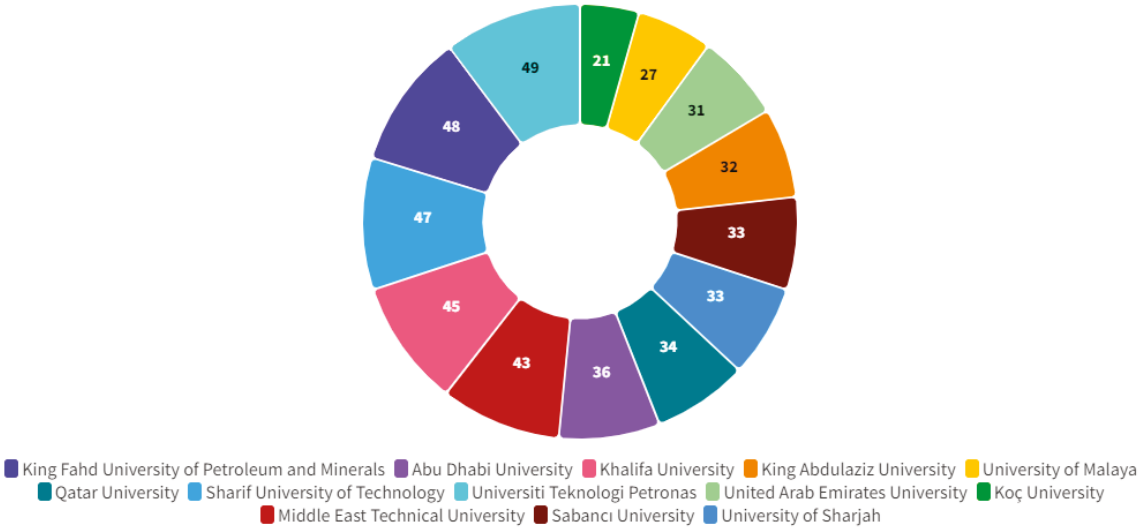
It is noteworthy that ten Muslim-majority countries have a higher percentage of female academic staff than the global average of 43.1%

The Proportion of Research Funding for ISR, By Country (2023)



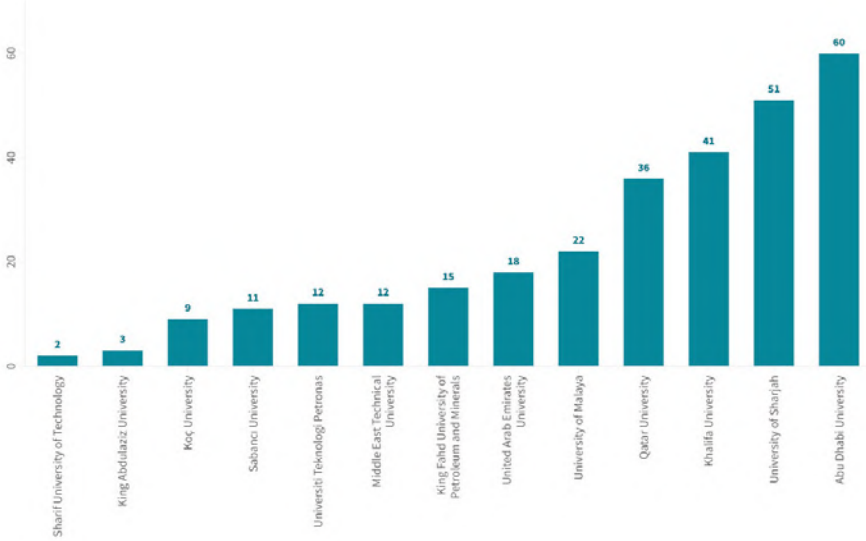
Egypt, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Indonesia show the transformation in Muslim societies' understanding of knowledge by shifting from a single-disciplinary approach to a more integrated synthesis.

The ISR Publication Rate of Universities in the Top 400 (2024)



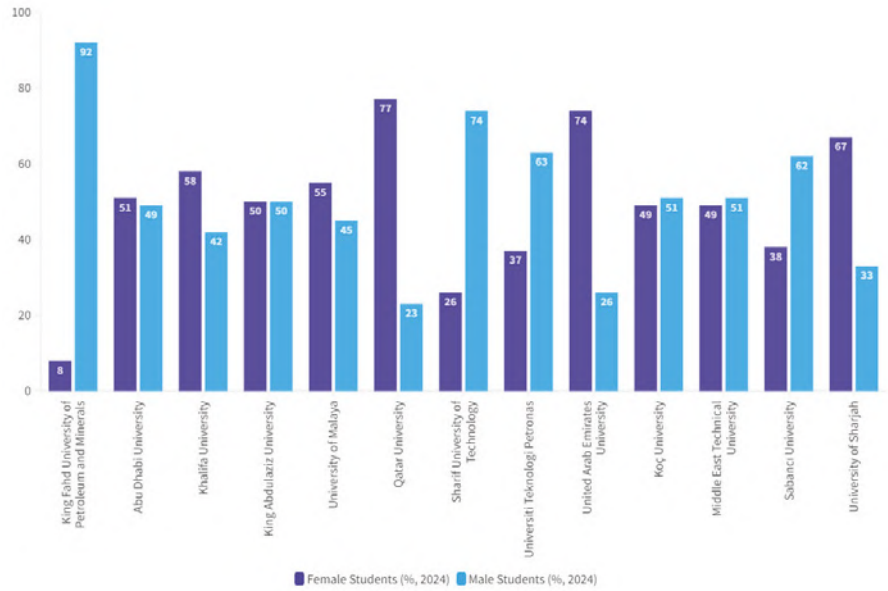
Universities in the Muslim world that focus on technology and natural sciences stand out, indicating that an interdisciplinary approach is preferred in the natural sciences.

The Percentage of International Students (2024)



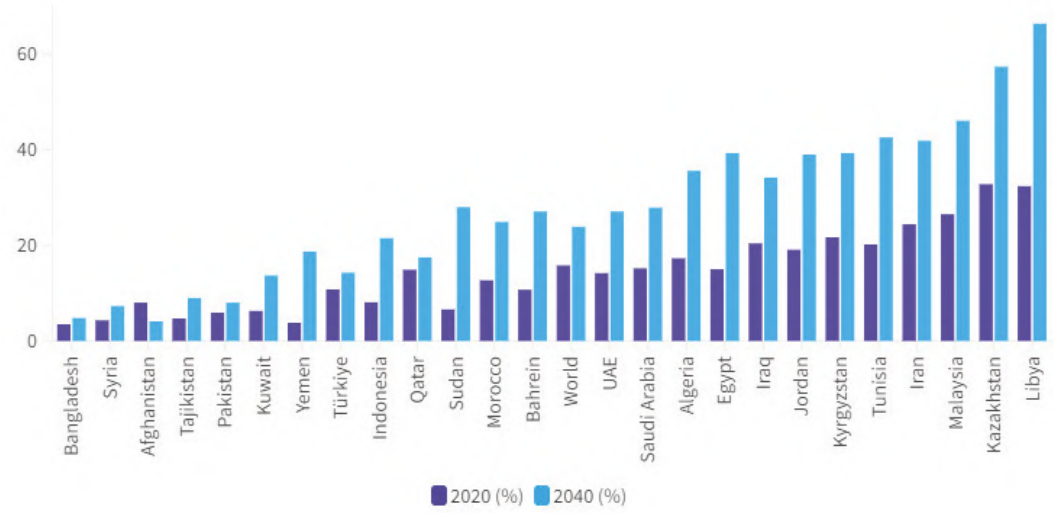
While the UAE has become a hub for international students, political conditions in Saudi Arabia and Iran limit international student mobility.

The Percentage of Female / Male Students in the Universities in the Top 400 in the World



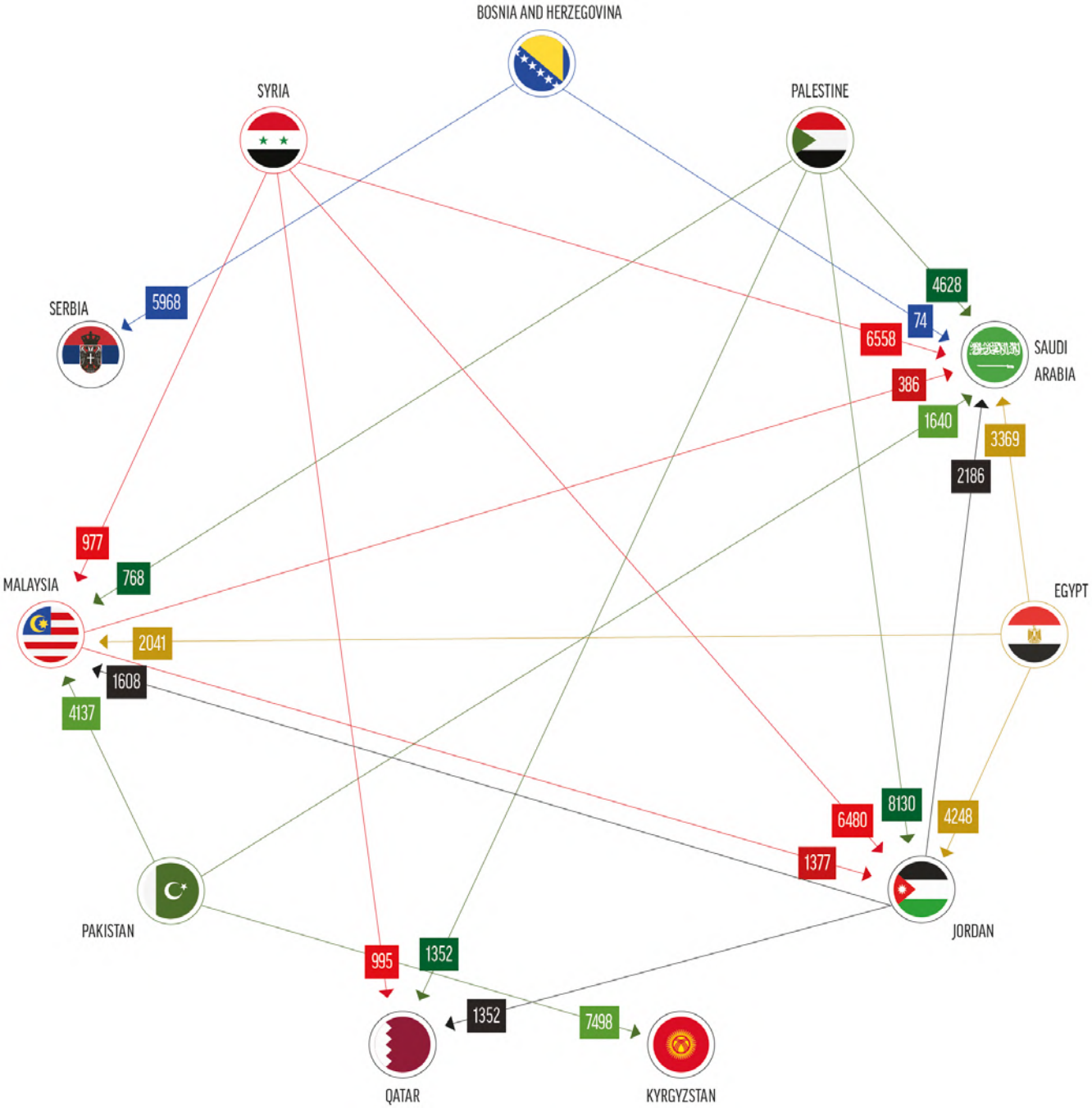
The fact that male students mainly chose technology, engineering, and architecture programs at Sabancı University, King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals, and Sharif University of Technology highlights the significant role of gender in choosing an academic program.

Estimated Share of Higher Education Graduates (2020-2040)



The proportion of higher education graduates in Tunisia, Egypt, Kazakhstan, and Libya is expected to increase by 2040. While the growing number of universities in Libya contributes to this increase, it does not address the issue of quality in higher education.

Where do students go to Study?



In 2022, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Malaysia were preferred destinations for education, with universities in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Malaysia ranking among the top 400 globally.

Higher Education, Scientific Production, and R&D in Islamic Countries

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Today, higher education institutions are engaged in research, education, and community service. While carrying out these activities, higher education institutions also contribute to economic and social benefits alongside knowledge production and the acquisition of vocational and social skills. Although the levels of education in the past were not as open as they are today, higher education institutions have functioned as the foremost educational and knowledge-producing institutions of their periods. In this context, we can talk about the thousand-year history of the university. Nizamiyya Madrasas in the Islamic world and Bologna, Oxford, and Paris universities in the West are cited as the first examples of universities. Through many religious, political, social, and economic struggles, the concept and functions of the university have evolved from the 11th century to the present day. The fundamental transformations in the development of the university are commonly defined as the Medieval University, the Humboldtian Model, and the Third Generation University. Expectations for the commercialization of scientific production and the generation of economic benefits have also increased alongside education and research in today's universities (Erdoğmuş, 2023).

It is crucial for Muslims and Muslim countries to invest in research, education, and knowledge production for their economic and social development. Furthermore, there is a need for Islamic countries to contribute more to global science and education and solutions for fundamental problems of humanity. This paper presents a basic overview of the current state of higher education institutions and research and development activities in Muslim countries. Due to data sources and identification challenges, the focus is on the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) since it is not feasible to determine the contribution of Muslim scientists outside these countries. Various studies have covered different periods and fields of science, particularly in the last thirty years, to gauge scientific productivity and performance in the Islamic world. We have tried to reveal the current situation based on the most recent and comprehensive studies available.

Universities in Islamic Countries and Their Ranking

It is not easy to determine the exact number of universities in each country, and there are often approximate numbers and estimates available. The website statista.com provides estimated numbers of universities for different countries. Based on the numbers on this website, the number of universities in prominent Islamic countries is listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Estimated Number of Universities Worldwide by Country (July 2023)

Country	Number of Universities
Indonesia	3277
Iran	440
Pakistan	359
Malaysia	351
Nigeria	278
Tunisia	236
Türkiye	208

Source: "Estimated number of universities worldwide as of July 2023, by country", Statista.

When analyzing the table above, it is essential to consider the size of universities in each country. In this context, since Türkiye's universities are relatively larger, it appears to have fewer universities than some countries, with lower figures in terms of population and number of university students.

University rankings have been closely monitored in recent years, albeit subject to ongoing debates. Ranking institutions utilize different methodologies. The Times Higher Education (THE) ranking system focuses on research-intensive universities. In contrast, the QS World University Rankings focuses more on reputation criteria, and the research factor has less compared to THE. This section presents the positions of universities in Islamic countries in the top 500 university rankings according to these two ranking systems. The universities in Islamic countries within the top 500 of The Times Higher Education 2024 rankings are listed below.

Table 2. Universities in Islamic Countries in the Top 500 According to The Times Higher Education (2024)

Ranking Range	University	Country
201-250	King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals	Saudi Arabia
251-300	Abu Dhabi University	UAE
	Khalifa University	UAE
	Qatar University	Qatar
	King Abdulaziz University	Saudi Arabia
	University of Malaya	Malaysia
301-350	Universiti Teknologi Petronas	Malaysia
	United Arab Emirates University	UAE
351-400	Amirkabir University of Technology	Iran
	University of Sharjah	UAE
	Koç University	Türkiye
	Orta Doğu Technical University	Türkiye
	Sabancı University	Türkiye

401-500	Universiti Brunei Darussalam	Brunei
	Zayed University	UAE
	Quaid-i-Azam University	Pakistan
	King Saud University	Saudi Arabia
	Prince Sultan University (PSU)	Saudi Arabia
	Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University	Saudi Arabia
	Iran University of Science and Technology	Iran
	University of Tehran	Iran
	Universiti Utara Malaysia	Malaysia
	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	Malaysia
	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	Malaysia
	Universiti Sains Malaysia	Malaysia

Source: The table was created by the author from The Times Higher Education 2024 rankings.

In The Times Higher Education 2024 ranking, 25 universities from Islamic countries (members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) are within the top 500. In this ranking, while 14 universities were in the top 500 in 2020, this number has increased to 25 today. Among the OIC member countries in the 2024 ranking, 6 universities are from Malaysia, 5 from Saudi Arabia, 5 from the UAE, 3 from Türkiye, and 3 from Iran. Pakistan, Qatar, and Brunei each have 1 university in the ranking. It is worth noting that larger countries with higher education systems, such as Türkiye and Iran, have fewer universities in this ranking compared to smaller countries with smaller higher education systems.

Another ranking system, QS World University Rankings 2024: Top Global Universities, lists the top 50 universities in Islamic countries (OIC), which is presented below.

Table 3. Top 50 Universities in Islamic Countries (OIC) in QS World University Rankings 2024: Top Global Universities List

OIC Ranking	World Ranking	University	Country
1	65	Universiti Malaya (UM)	Malaysia
2	137	Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)	Malaysia
3	143	King Abdulaziz University (KAU)	Saudi Arabia
4	158	Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)	Malaysia
5	159	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)	Malaysia
6	173	Qatar University	Qatar
7	180	King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals	Saudi Arabia
8	188	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia	Malaysia
9	203	King Saud University	Saudi Arabia
10	226	American University of Beirut (AUB)	Lebanon
11	230	Al-Farabi Kazakh National University	Kazakhstan
12	230	Khalifa University	UAE
13	237	Universitas Indonesia	Indonesia
14	263	Gadjah Mada University	Indonesia
15	281	Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB)	Indonesia
16	284	Taylor's University	Malaysia

17	290	United Arab Emirates University	UAE
18	300	UCSI University	Malaysia
19	307	Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP)	Malaysia
20	310	Hamad bin Khalifa University	Qatar
21	315	Quaid-i-Azam University	Pakistan
22	334	Sharif University of Technology	Iran
23	345	Airlangga University	Indonesia
24	355	L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University (ENU)	Kazakhstan
25	360	University of Tehran	Iran
26	364	American University of Sharjah	UAE
27	367	National University of Sciences And Technology (NUST) Islamabad	Pakistan
28	371	Cairo University	Egypt
29	375	Amirkabir University of Technology	Iran
30	387	Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD)	Brunei
31	404	Istanbul Technical University	Türkiye
32	415	The American University in Cairo	Egypt
33	431	Koç University	Türkiye
34	454	Sultan Qaboos University	Oman
35	465	University of Sharjah	UAE
36	489	IPB University (Aka Bogor Agricultural University)	Indonesia
37	502	Bilkent University	Türkiye
38	514	Bogaziçi University	Türkiye
39	525	Universiti Teknologi Brunei	Brunei
40	526	Sabanci University	Türkiye
41	538	Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM)	Malaysia
42	540	Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS)	Pakistan
43	551	Ajman University	UAE
44	551	Canadian University Dubai	UAE
45	555	Universiti Teknologi MARA - UITM	Malaysia
46	582	Applied Science University - Bahrain	Bahreyn
47	586	Sunway University	Malaysia
48	590	Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd university	Saudi Arabia
49	595	Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University (IAU)	Saudi Arabia
50	605	American University in Dubai	UAE

Source: The table was created by the author from QS World University Rankings 2024: Top Global Universities.

In the QS World University Rankings 2024: Top Global Universities list, 36 universities from Islamic countries (members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) are within the top 500. Among the OIC member countries in the QS 2024 ranking, 8 universities are from Malaysia, 5 from Indonesia, and 4 from the UAE. In this ranking, Saudi Arabia and Iran have 3 universities; Türkiye, Egypt, Qatar, Kazakhstan, and Pakistan have 2 universities; and Lebanon, Oman, and Brunei have 1. Similar to THE rankings, it is noteworthy that larger countries with higher education systems, like Türkiye and Iran, have fewer universities in this ranking compared to smaller countries with smaller higher education systems. In contrast, Malaysia has the highest number of universities in this ranking, and Indonesia, which does not have any universities in THE rankings, has 5 universities in the QS rankings.

As mentioned before, since the methodologies of the ranking systems differ, the number of universities of countries in the rankings also differs. A notable development is that the number of universities from Islamic world countries in both rankings has increased over the years. Yet, although the increase in the number of universities in Islamic countries in the rankings is important, it requires a more comprehensive analysis. The following section discusses the productivity of universities in Islamic countries.

Scientific Productivity and Performance in Islamic Countries

In their analysis based on articles published in SCOPUS between 2000 and 2011, Sarwar and Hassan (2015) examined productivity and collaborations in science and technology within the Muslim world. According to their study, Türkiye ranks first in scientific outputs, followed by Iran, Malaysia, Egypt, and Pakistan. The majority of research outputs are in the fields of veterinary medicine, chemical engineering, chemistry, dentistry, agriculture, and biosciences. Between 2000 and 2011, there was an increase of over 10% in all fields of science and technology. The areas with the highest increase include economics, econometrics and finance, immunology and microbiology, agricultural and biological sciences, mathematics, and computer science. Except for Tunisia's and Algeria's collaborations with France, Islamic countries have primarily collaborated amongst themselves. Authors from countries other than Türkiye and Iran have worked with broader groups. Another notable development during this period is that research outputs from the Muslim world surpassed the world average in 2009.

In Oldac's (2022) study covering the last 30 years based on articles published in WoS, Türkiye ranked 21st, Iran 23rd, Egypt 39th, Saudi Arabia 40th, Malaysia 43rd, and Pakistan 46th in the world ranking. The figure below shows the total number of publications in some Islamic countries in the last 30 years:

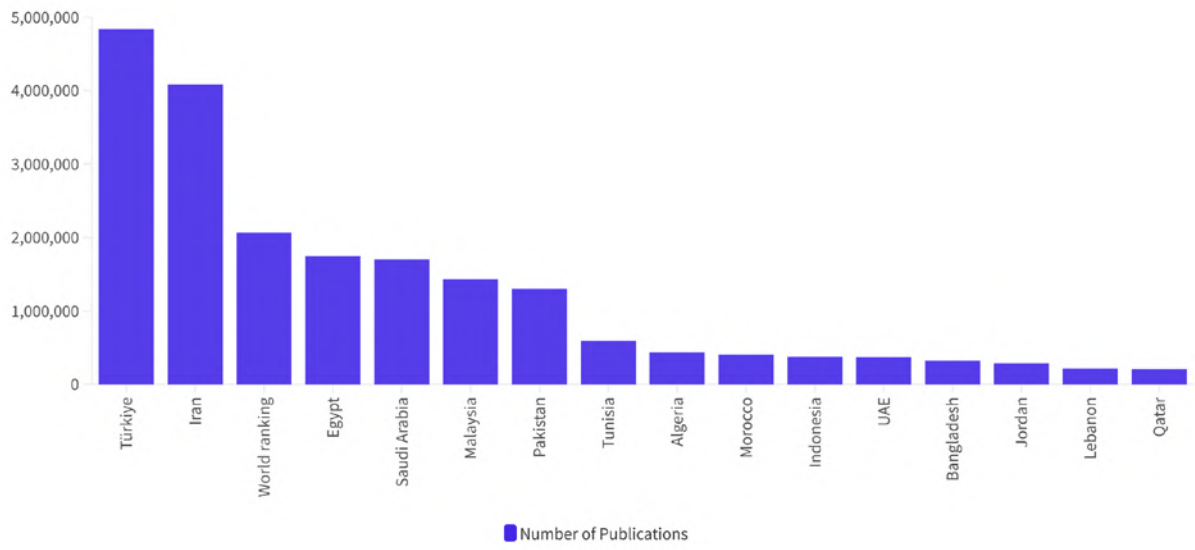

Figure 1. Distribution of Publications in the Web of Science Database in Member Countries of the OIC (1990-2020)

Source: Oldac, 2022

According to this figure, Türkiye and Iran are significantly ahead of other Muslim countries and are above the world average. They are followed by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Pakistan. The contributions of Muslim countries to global science relative to their populations were lower until the 2010s, but there has been an increase since then.

We have previously noted that the number of publications from Islamic countries surpassed the world average from 2009 onwards, and there has been an increase in research outputs since the 2010s. There have also been some changes in this period. Until 2014, Türkiye was at the forefront of scientific productivity, but Iran took the lead after that year. As of 2018, the research productivity of the top ten member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is shown in Graph 2 below. The graph provides both the position of countries among OIC countries and their position in global research activity. In terms of global research activity, the United States (17.30) and China (15.18) rank first and second, respectively. Among OIC countries, Iran (1.52) and Türkiye (1.15) are at the forefront.

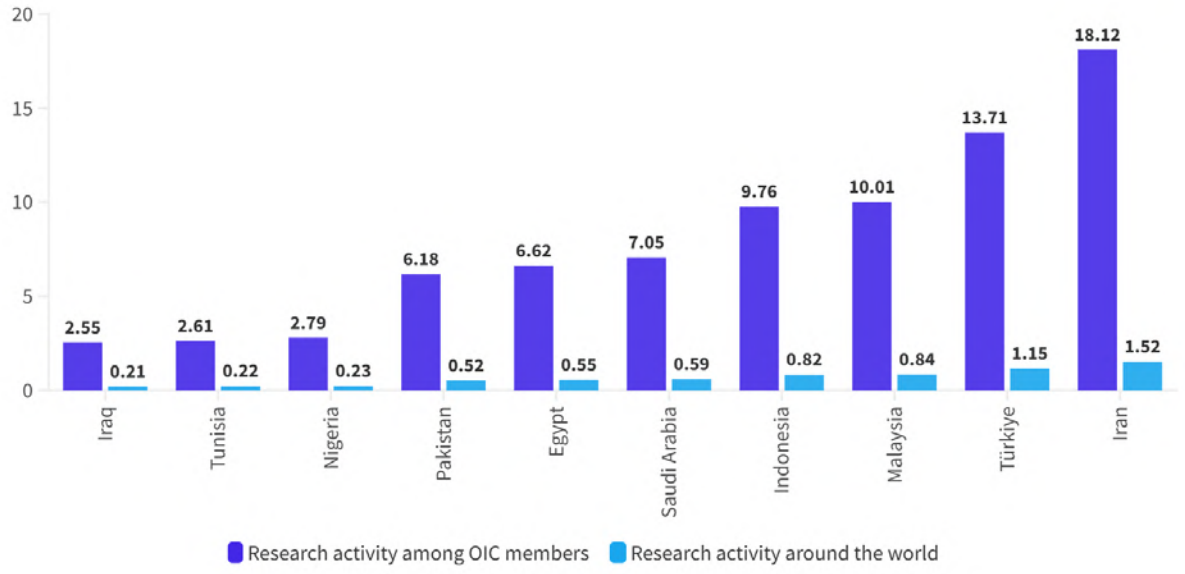

Figure 2. Research Activity among OIC Members (%, 2018)

Source: Haq and Tanveer, 2020

According to Haq and Tanveer (2020) and Oldac (2022), there have been changes in publication trends in Islamic countries in recent years. Since 2014, Iran has taken the first place, while Türkiye is in the second place. Moreover, it can be observed that Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Pakistan have been on the rise during these years and have surpassed Malaysia. However, countries' positions in publication activity differ when these rankings are considered in terms of population. In this context, although Malaysia's position in the ranking seems to have decreased, the production system in this country should not be ignored. When rankings are based on the journal percentiles, larger countries with broader scientific systems (such as Türkiye, Iran, and Pakistan) are ranked lower. In contrast, smaller countries (such as Qatar, the UAE, and Lebanon) or emerging countries (such as Indonesia and Bangladesh) are ranked higher in this ranking.

Some R&D Indicators in Islamic Countries

According to Hamid (2015), OIC countries allocate 0.5% of their GDP to R&D. The world average in this regard is 1.78%, while it is 3% for developed countries. According to Oldac's study (2022), some R&D indicators in 15 OIC member countries that stand out according to their scientific publications in the WoS database in 2017-2018 are shown in Figure 3 and 4:

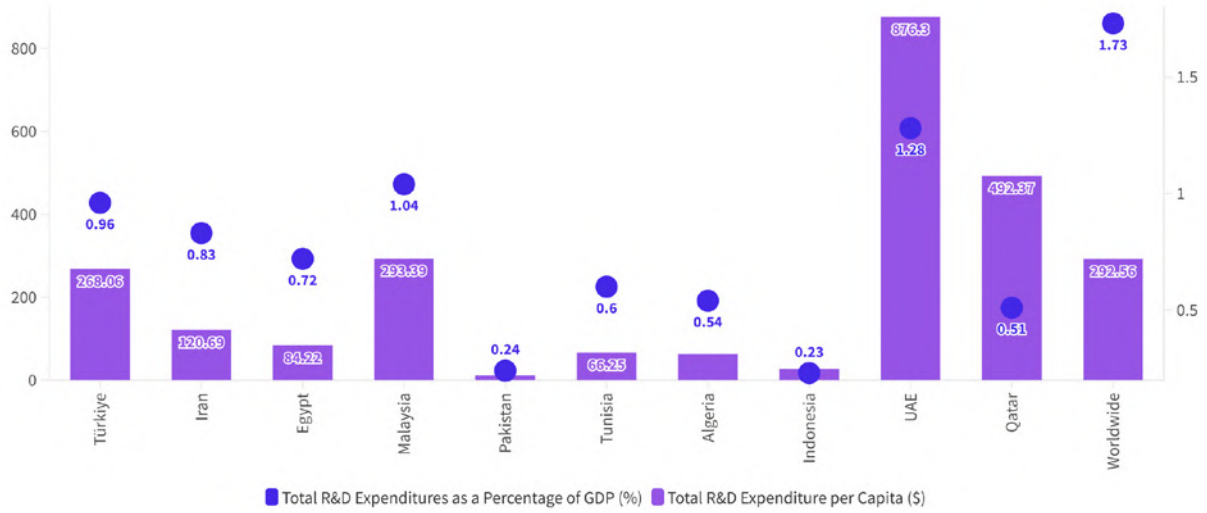

Figure 3. The Ratio of R&D Expenditures to GDP and the Per Capita Total Expenditure in Some Member Countries of the OIC Which Stand Out According to Publications in the WoS

Source: Oldac, 2022

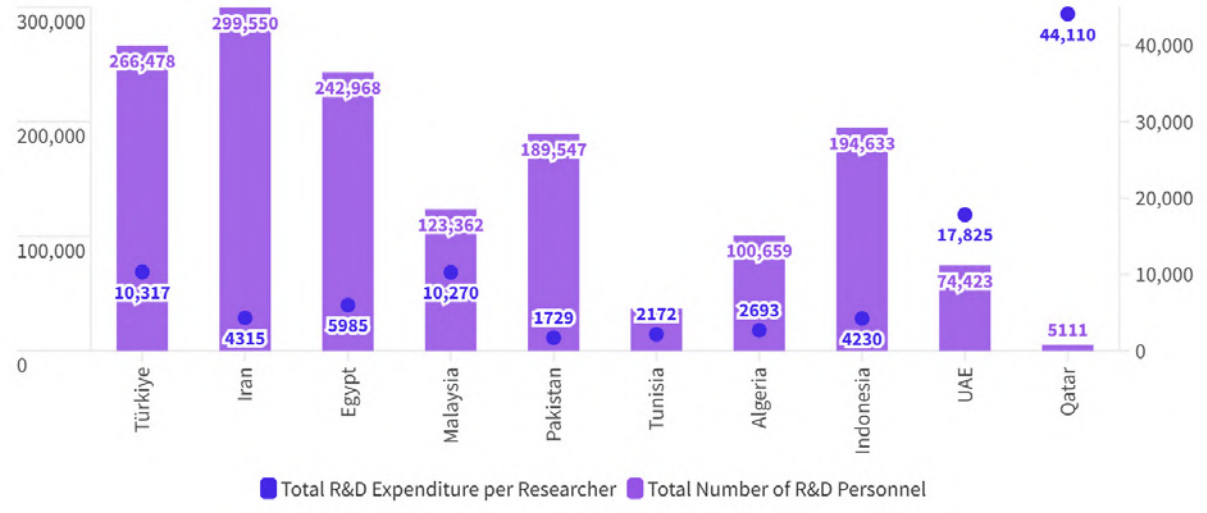

Figure 4. Indicator of R&D Expenditures Per Researcher in Some Member Countries of the OIC Which Stand out According to Publications in the WoS ($)

Source: Oldac, 2022

When Figures 3 and 4 are analyzed, the UAE and Malaysia are above 1%, while Türkiye is close to this ratio. In terms of total R&D expenditures per capita, the UAE and Qatar stand out as the countries with the highest amounts, prominently ranking at the top. Following these countries, Malaysia and Türkiye have ratios close to the world average. Regarding the total number of R&D personnel, Iran, Türkiye, and Egypt are at the forefront. These results indicate that quantitative factors are not automatically converted into publications or R&D outputs.

The share of OIC countries in global patent applications is 1.8%. In this regard, China, the United States, and Japan are in the lead in the world. Among OIC countries, Iran, Indonesia, Türkiye, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia share the top positions. These five countries account for 71% of patent applications in OIC countries (SESRIC, 2023).

Conclusion

Political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental changes worldwide deeply affect higher education. Developments in higher education make it necessary to approach higher education with a strategic perspective and make structural and administrative changes with this perspective. It is important to respond quickly to the changes that will occur and meet the expectations of higher education in today's world (Erdoğmuş, 2019). In this sense, positioning higher education and knowledge production as significant factors in economic and social development is necessary.

Universities and knowledge production play a significant role in the economic and social development of countries. Out of more than 200 countries worldwide, 57 or 28.5% are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). OIC countries have a population ratio that can have a global impact. After the G20 countries, OIC countries have the largest population in the world institutionally, corresponding to 24.56% of the world's total population. However, the total gross national income of OIC countries has not reached a level that can be sufficiently effective globally. The total gross national incomes of OIC countries correspond to 35.29% of the European Union (EU), 49.24% of China, and 32.23% of the United States institutionally. In other words, it is only about 1.65 times that of Germany and approximately 1.33 times that of Japan. The economic size of OIC countries corresponds to only 7.81% of the world economy, which clearly demonstrates that they are not influential enough globally (Yıldırım & Yeşilata, 2020).

Abdus Salam from Pakistan won the Nobel Prize in Physics, Ahmed Zewail from Egypt and Aziz Sancar from Türkiye won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Additionally, there are numerous researchers and scientists living and working in the United States and other countries. It is a fact that a significant portion of productive and prominent researchers and scientists reside outside Muslim countries. The three Nobel Prize laureates in science have lived and worked in the United Kingdom and the United States (Najam, 2015). In this context, it is essential to establish a contemporary infrastructure, well-educated scientists, a comprehensive research monitoring system, allocation of research and development funds, and practical research policies by removing cultural, political, and security barriers to foster innovative and productive research in Muslim countries (Rizvi, 2005).

When evaluating the contributions of Islamic countries to global science, it is important to note that the publications and indexed journals examined primarily focus on English and European languages, and publications in the languages used by OIC countries may not be represented enough. Furthermore, when referring to the Muslim world, it is important not to limit it only to Islamic countries. The best example of this is India, which has a larger Muslim population than many other countries. Therefore, it is beneficial to consider these factors when assessing the publishing productivity of Islamic countries. Despite these constraints and the relatively recent increase in scientific production, it is clear that there is a need for an improvement in scientific output and performance in Islamic countries, as well as the creation of the necessary environment and resources to support it.

Islamic countries should focus on enhancing quality, capacity, and efficiency in areas such as research, knowledge production, and acquiring professional knowledge and skills in higher education. On the other hand, it is essential for higher education institutions not to lose sight of their goals and priorities, such as providing answers to human existence and the search for meaning and providing philosophical and intellectual knowledge. Islamic countries and higher education institutions should strive to follow mainstream developments in higher education and knowledge production globally while simultaneously seeking to develop original approaches and methods.

Brain Drain in Africa

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Dr., Anadolu Agency

Africa is often referred to as "The Continent of the Future" or "Rising Africa." The continent is known not only for its abundant natural resources but also for its young population. Therefore, it's crucial to discuss the type of education and employment opportunities provided for the young population. With a population of 1.3 billion and an average age of 19, a significant portion of African youth prefer to pursue education outside the continent for various reasons.

The internal political, economic, and security issues of African countries are among the leading causes that negatively affect the education system and lead African youth to leave their countries for better education. Of course, each country has its own unique problems, and at the same time, the reasons why young people choose foreign countries for education are reported. According to a report titled *Best Global Destinations for Higher Education for African Students* published by the U.S.-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in 2000, 281,000 young Africans chose to pursue education abroad, while this number increased to 441,000 in 2010 and 624,000 in 2020. While Moroccans are the first among those who prefer education outside the continent, Nigerians take the lead in Sub-Saharan Africa. France is first among the countries preferred outside the continent, followed by China, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Canada, and Türkiye.[1]

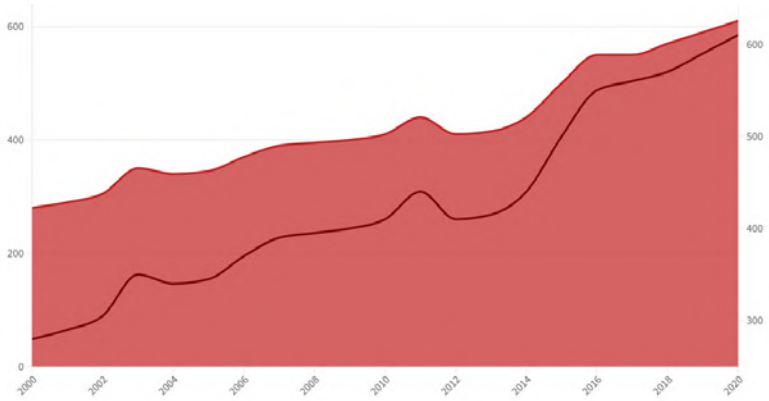

Figure 1. African Students in Higher Education Outside Their Home Countries (2000-2020)

Source: "What Are the Top Global Destinations for Higher Education for African Students?", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

1 See.: "What Are the Top Global Destinations for Higher Education for African Students?", https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/07/13/what-are-top-global-destinations-for-higher-education-for-african-students-pub-90203

Cape Town University

Why do African Youth Prefer to Move Outside the Continent?

There are different reasons why African youth prefer to study abroad, especially in the US and Europe. Reasons include the scholarships, accommodations, job opportunities, laboratory and classroom facilities provided by foreign countries, compared to many African countries where education doesn't receive sufficient budget allocation and where the curriculum and education conditions are not ideal. Additionally, it's worth noting that obtaining education in Western countries is perceived as a "prestige" in Africa. Hence, African youth also choose education overseas to gain more acceptance and higher status in their own societies.

The number of universities in many African countries is increasing every year. In recent years, many foundation universities have also been established in addition to state universities. Uganda, South Africa, and Kenya are just a few examples of these countries. For instance, while only one university was operational in Uganda in the 1970s, now nearly sixty universities provide education. Indeed, Uganda Islamic University, established in 1988, currently provides education to around 10,000 students from twenty-two countries in Africa and beyond.[2]

Three Examples for Africa: Nigeria, Sudan, and South Africa

Considering that there are 54 countries in Africa and a population of 1.3 billion, it is necessary to elaborate on the topic with notable examples without generalizing. In this regard, give the examples of South Africa, known for its quality education, Sudan, whose education system has been devastated due to internal conflict, and Nigeria, where unresolved problems pose a significant threat to the education system. South Africa, which stands out with its education quality and opportunities for students, also hosts many students from Türkiye for education. It is home to universities such as Cape Town, Witwatersrand, Pretoria, and Stellenbosch, ranked within the top 500 globally. This country constitutes a significant alternative to Western

2 See.: "Afrikalı gençler üniversitelerin yetersiz olması nedeniyle kıta dışına gidiyor", https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dosya-haber/afrikali-gencler-universitelerin-yetersiz-olmasi-nedeniyle-kita-disina-gidiyor/3034272

universities with its high quality of education and affordable tuition fees. In addition to the quality of education, young Africans and people from all over the world prefer the Republic of South Africa for its living conditions and natural beauty.

While South Africa shines with its education quality, many African countries have experienced a decline in education quality in recent years due to economic and political crises. Sudan serves as a very vivid example in this regard. Particularly favored for Arabic and Islamic education, Sudan's education system has suffered greatly in recent years due to political crises and internal conflicts. Young people who came to Sudan for education from various countries, particularly from Africa, were forced to return to their countries after the civil war. Despite being seen as an education hub for the Islamic world, Sudan's education system has suffered irreparable damage due to economic crises and internal conflict. Institutions like the International University of Africa, Al Neelain University, University of Bahri, University of Medical Sciences and Technology, Elrazi University, Sudan University of Science and Technology, University of Kordofan, Omdurman Islamic University, Jazeera University, and University of Khartoum highlight the international dimension of education in Sudan. The internal crises in Sudan, which creates an alternative in Africa, have negatively affected the education system and students, forcing many students to drop out of their education.

With a population of 220 million and a rich religious and cultural heritage, Nigeria's educational institutions struggle with many problems from kindergarten to university. Insufficient budget allocated to education, inability to pay salaries on time, strikes, internal conflicts, terrorist attacks, corruption, and high tuition fees negatively affect education. In Nigeria, where the gap between the rich and the poor is growing, education in public schools is declining due to insufficient budget, while there is a notable increase in private schools. Today, nearly 170 universities are operating in Nigeria. Education in the country, with its state system, revolves around state administrations, churches, private schools, and madrasas, with no common curriculum. Despite efforts, Nigeria remains among the countries where the education system fails to achieve the desired level. Therefore, those with economic means in the country send their children to either costly private universities or schools in Western countries.

The country often hits the headlines with academics on strike due to unpaid salaries, and many aspire to work abroad. Nigerians working abroad in fields like medicine, pharmacy, or engineering cannot contribute to their homeland. Nigerian youth prefer countries like Ghana, Benin, Egypt, or pre-civil war Sudan for education, adversely affecting the Nigerian economy. Indeed, students studying abroad spend approximately $3 billion annually.

Nigeria is home to the highest number of children who cannot go to school in the world due to Boko Haram attacks and other reasons. In addition, more than 7 million Almajirai aged between 4 and 15 in the country grow up without protection, vocational, or formal education. The Almajiranci system, a form of education to memorize the Quran, has become dysfunctional due to colonial policies and neglect by Muslims in the country. The children in the Almajiranci system try to meet their needs by begging, and when they cannot find jobs in the future, they either fall into the hands of armed groups or engage in illegal activities, thus not only ruining their own futures but also negatively impacting the country's development.[3]

Brain Drain in Africa and Its Consequences

The fact that African students receive education abroad has both positive and negative consequences. Indeed, African youth studying abroad have the opportunity to transfer their experiences and knowledge to their people upon returning to their countries, while those who do not return contribute to brain drain. When young individuals choose not to return to their home country after completing

3 See.: "Bir Afrika Ülkesinin Tarihî Serencamı: Nijerya'da Eğitim Meselesi ve Almajirilik Sistemi", Association of Researchers on Africa (AFAM), https://afam.org.tr/bir-afrika-ulkesinin-tarihi-serencami-nijeryada-egitim-meselesi-ve-almajirilik-sistemi/

their education, fulfilling the demand for skilled workers in African countries becomes increasingly challenging. This situation also results in the inability of educated young people to transfer their experience and knowledge to their own people. Although it is possible to say that young people who return to their countries have the opportunity to observe their countries from an external perspective and see their shortcomings, it is an undeniable fact that a significant portion of African youth do not want to return to their countries after their education.

On the other hand, we should also note that "African elites" and their children also demand education outside the continent. Indeed, African leaders in power, wealthy Africans, or prominent members of society prefer their children to go abroad for education, which results in the country of education deepening its political, economic, and military influence in African countries. Many political and military elites in countries such as Cameroon, Gabon, Nigeria, and African countries greatly affected by coups in recent years have received education in the United States or Europe. This situation highlights that the education process can create a "dependency" relationship, leading to economic, cultural, and political dependence on the countries that provide education.

As long as the problems in the education system, as seen in the examples of Nigeria and Sudan, are ignored, they grow and create even bigger societal problems. Conflicts, poverty, and parental neglect adversely affect children's education. Young people who do not receive a good education and cannot find employment engage in crime, negatively affecting the country and society.

Unless the state mechanism, the business world, and the prominent members of society collaborate to find a holistic solution to the problem of education in African countries for economics, security, and employment after graduation, the problems become permanent. Otherwise, Africa and these countries, which have a rich history in education, cannot solve their own problems or contribute to regional or global solutions due to problems in the education system.

Fear, Politics and Students in Kashmir

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Res. Asst., The Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities

In 2009, fearing that the annual convocation of the University of Kashmir, to be presided over by the then President of India, Pratibha Patel, might be disrupted, the university administration banned the Kashmir University Students Union (KUSU). A year later, its office was demolished. Formed in 2007 "as a pressure group to take up student issues" (Raina, 2007), the Union quickly engaged in anti-establishment politics, organizing protests against human rights violations and other such issues (Naqash, 2017). Two things are stark in these administrative decisions and the political positions of the Union: one, student politics is highly discouraged by university administration at the behest of the state authorities, and second, student politics is intimately connected to the politics of the right to self-determination in the region. Nevertheless, despite the ban, in 2017, the organization called for protests, and thousands of students, some even in their uniforms, turned to the streets chanting the slogans of freedom (Masood & Ehsan, 2018).

This brief history and influence of KUSU provide an insight into what student politics in Kashmir is about. In this article, I mainly focus on student politics in the post-accession period in the context of the ongoing struggle for self-determination movement in Kashmir. In 1947, as the British left the subcontinent, the former ruler of Kashmir was given the option to either join India or Pakistan or remain independent. Amid communal riots, massacres, and, subsequently, a war, the ruler decided to join India. Since then, a movement for the right to self-determination has been ongoing, which turned into a popular insurgency in the late 1980s. Huzaifa Pandith argues that unlike what is expected of student politics -of advocating student issues- student politics in Kashmir is markedly

> ***Student-led agitations in Kashmir often have been initiated to counter government repression.***

different. Rather, he notes, "it places itself squarely in the people's struggle for self-determination and counter-colonial sentiment in the Kashmir Valley" (Pandit, 2019, p. 95). Thus, student-led agitations in Kashmir often have been initiated to counter government repression. From the late 1970s, student politics became more palpable. With the rise of organizations like Islami Jamiat Tulba (the student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami) and Islamic Students League, the role of religion in politics took center stage. However, it also intensified the debate around the nature of the self-determination movement. For decades, the movement relied on dialogue with a very low-intensity insurgency accompanying it. However, for multiple reasons, not least student politics, it changed and effectively shaped the current insurgent movement, especially its high-intensity phase in the middle of the 1990s.

"Freedom is our first lesson."

Source: Kashmir University Students Union [Facebook], 2016

I am not interested in providing a more detailed historical timeline of the student movement in Kashmir or on university campuses; rather, I am interested in understanding what it means to be a student activist in a contested territory like Kashmir with a high degree of violence. However, I should note here that the spread of education affected Kashmiri society generally, and it is one of the main reasons that student politics is so attached to the politics of self-determination. Thus, for example, when a relic of Prophet Muhammad was stolen from a mosque, leading to massive protests, the students demonstrated in front of UN offices and demanded a plebiscite (Naqash, 2017). Mohd Tahir Ganie argues that contemporary youth in Kashmir are remarkably different from earlier generations due to their embeddedness in the social media ecosystem. However, the unique experiences of living in an armed conflict in the "post-9/11 world

order, and the concomitant rise of Islamophobia/ War on Terror discourses" influence the political consciousness of Kashmiri Youth. Yet, they have an organic link with earlier generations through the politics of Azadi (Freedom). This political consciousness, however, leads the Indian state to think about Kashmiri Youth from a security perspective (Ganie, 2022, pp. 97-98). The aforementioned case of KUSU is an apt example of understanding this. However, there is a grim reality also where hundreds of young Kashmiris (students) have been killed, maimed, tortured, or simply are languishing in jails.

In this situation, where politics is heavily securitized, and the threat to life is imminent, what does it even mean to be a student? What happens to her aspirations? In the last half a decade since India unilaterally revoked the autonomous status of the region, it might be easy to define such aspirations straightforwardly since the choice is obvious between life and fear. Does that mean the possibility of a student-led social movement is faint? It brings me to the points raised by Ganie that Kashmiri youth are embedded in a social media ecosystem with a lived experience in which the Muslim Question features prominently not just locally but globally.

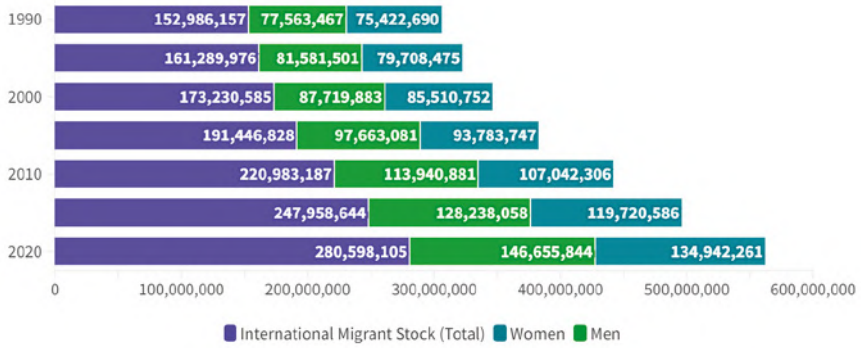
I am particularly thinking about Palestine and how social media has helped to understand the situation, especially when the mainstream has taken a very pro-Israel stand. The Palestinian context provides an ideal space where the politics of protest can be articulated, especially since Kashmir and Palestine have evoked solidarity towards each other (Javaid, 2023). However, such has not been the case, and one plausible answer to this predicament is fear and total control over life in Kashmir by the state. A report in the Associated Press noted that Indian authorities have "asked Muslim preachers not to mention the conflict in their sermons," further adding that "the restrictions are part of India's efforts to curb any form of protest that could turn into demands for ending New Delhi's rule in the disputed region" (Hussain & Saaliq, 2023).

Recently, Hafsa Kanjwal has made an argument that the early decades of India's rule were marked by what Neve Gordon calls a "politics of life" in which the Indian government propagated development, empowerment, and progress to normalize its control over the region (Kanjwal, 2023). This theoretical category also explains the post-2019 situation but with a slight difference, as fear has been a profound part of everyday life. Student politics in universities is most affected by such situations since it comes into the way of aspirations. It might seem a grim picture, but it only reflects the slowness of adapting to new political realities. It is difficult to gauge the direction in which the student movement would move and what possibilities it would generate for a comprehensive social movement attached to the self-determination movement. What is required is perseverance and intense conversations about it.

Activists carry a banner that says "Free Kashmir, Free Palestine, Free Syria" at a protest held in Srinagar.

Source: Muzamil Mattoo

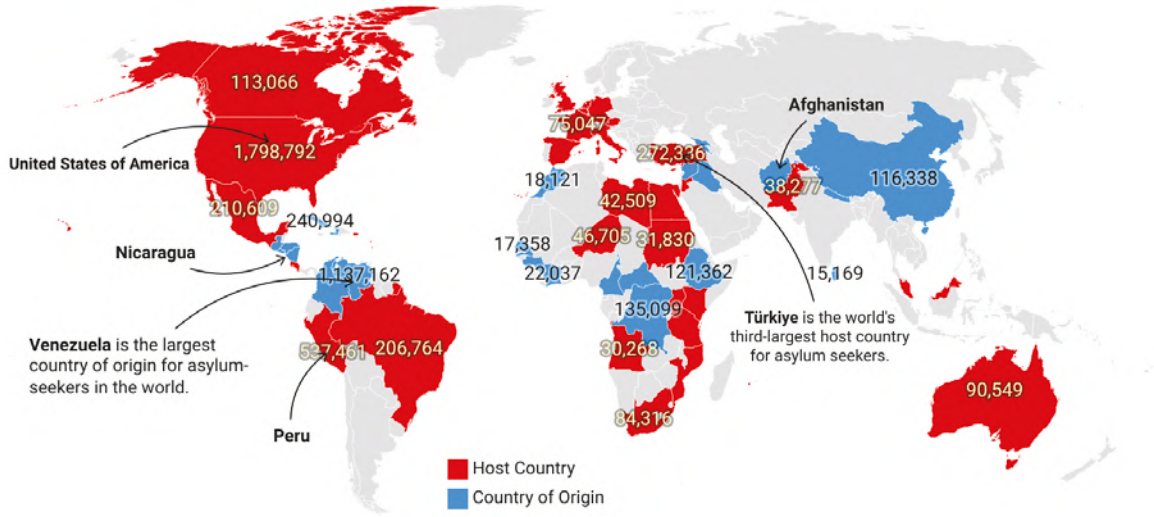
International Migrant Stock



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2020

Referring to any person who has changed their country of residence regardless of legal status or the motivation for migration, the number of international migrants has steadily risen over the years.

The Largest Countries of Origin and Host Countries for Asylum Seekers

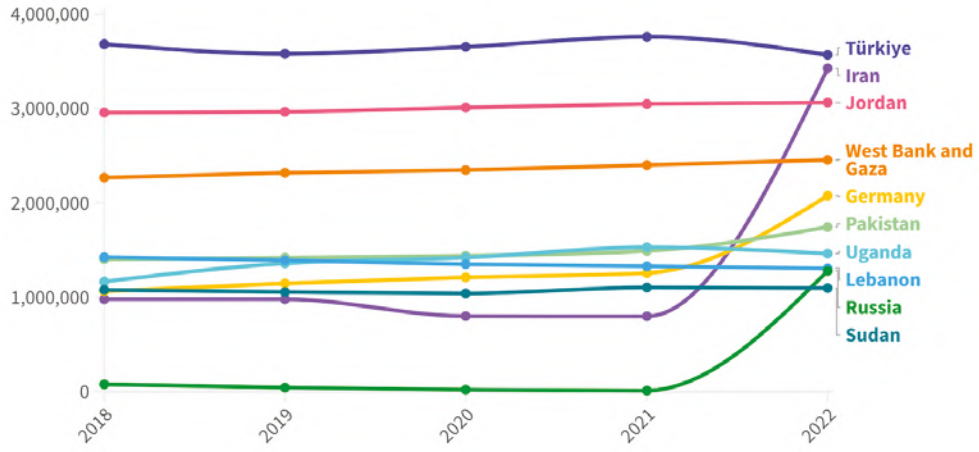


**The first 3 countries of origin and host countries are indicated on the map.*

Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2022

According to mid-2023 data, Türkiye remained the third-largest host country in the world with 272,336 asylum seekers.

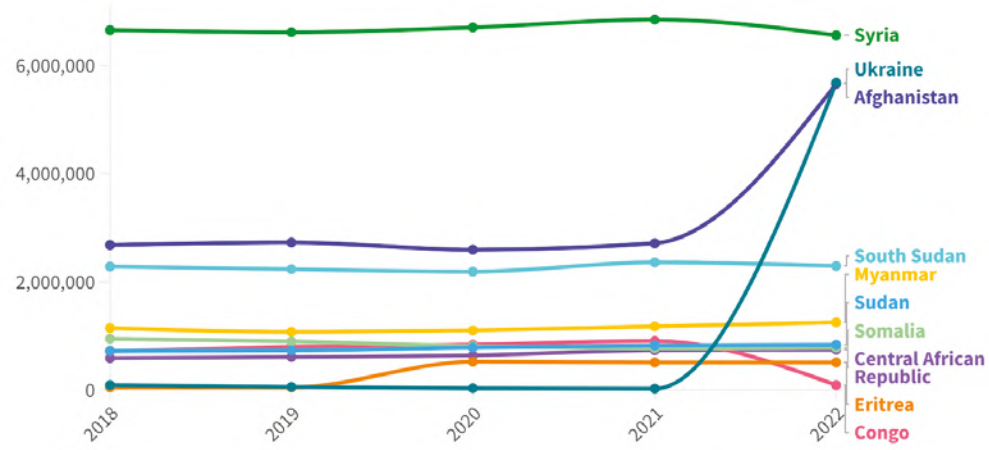
The Largest Refugee-Hosting Countries



Quadrupling its refugee population in 2022, Iran has emerged as the world's second-largest host country for refugees, following Türkiye.

Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2022

The Largest Countries of Origin for Refugees

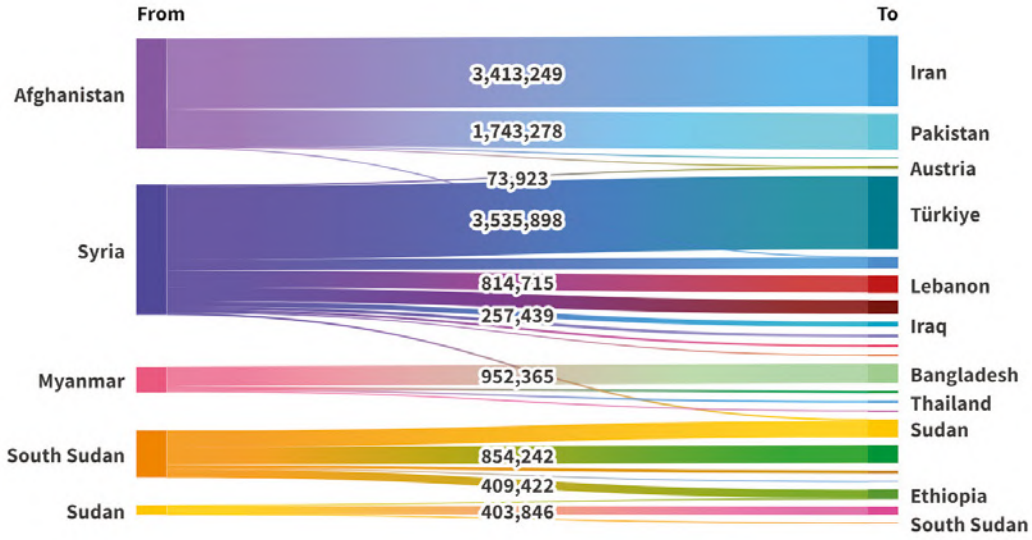


Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2022

In 2022, a total of 5,661,717 Afghans had to leave their country due to deepening food security and economic instability, coupled with the earthquake in June and the Taliban takeover in August in Afghanistan.

Migration Data

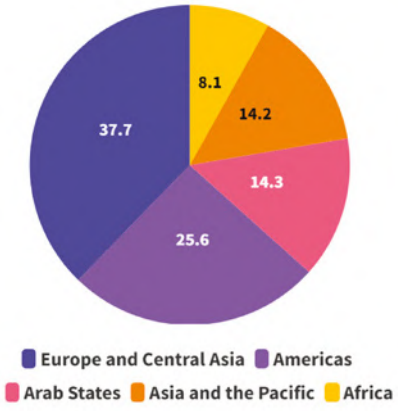
Where have the refugees from Islamic countries migrated to in 2022?



Source: Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2022

The migration flow highlights the significance of regional factors in migration while also demonstrating that refugees seek safety and shelter in proximity to their countries of origin.

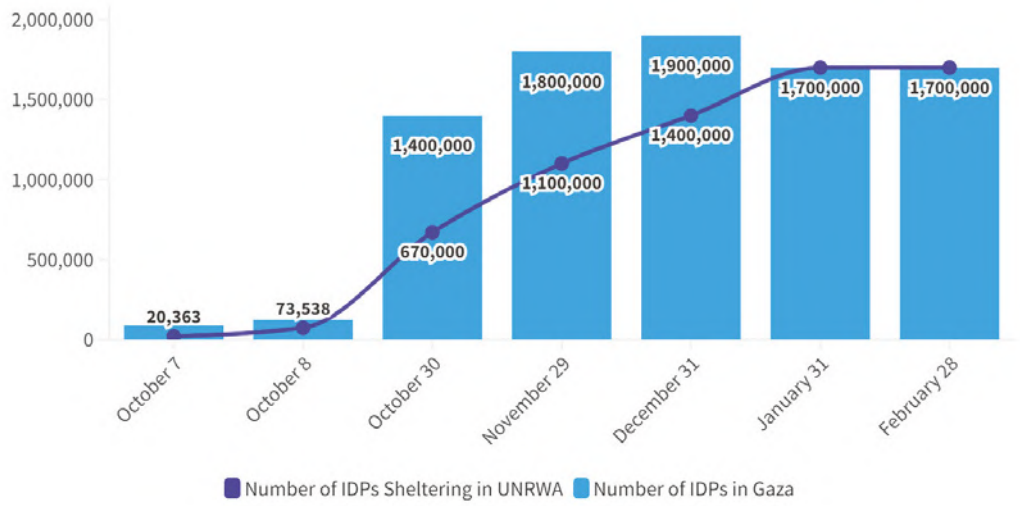
Distribution of International Migrant Workers, By Host Region



In 2019, the number of international migrant workers was estimated at 169 million, accounting for 4.9% of the global labor force of destination countries.

Source: International Labour Organization (ILO) Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers Report, 2021

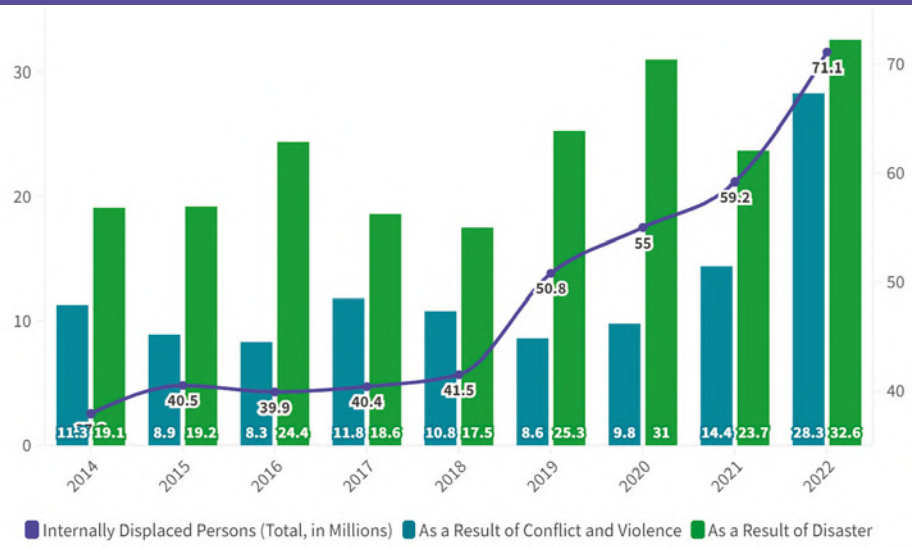
Internally Displaced Persons in Gaza since October 7



Source: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Situation Reports, 2023-2024

According to end-2023 data, 1.9 million people—almost 85% of the population in Gaza, including those who have been displaced previously and repeatedly—were displaced.

Internally Displaced Persons in Gaza since October 7



Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2023

In 2022, the number of displaced people increased by 20%, reaching 71.1 million worldwide.

At a Glance

Social Reproduction of Refugee Status: Palestinian Refugees in Jordan

Sıtkı Karadeniz
Prof., Mardin Artuklu University, Sociology

The fact that the Jews established their own political body after living as "nomads" or "homeless" from the "first exile" until the middle of the last century led to the dispersal of Palestinians across the globe as disembodied bodies. Especially after the Nakba (1948) and the Six-Day War (Naksa, 1967), Palestinians have been scattered as refugees everywhere, especially in neighboring countries, but mainly in Jordan. There are undoubtedly many historical and political reasons, but we will not dwell on them for now. Instead, we will focus on the problem of education for Palestinian refugees living in Jordan and how it reproduces inequalities in reference to Pierre Bourdieu's theories on the relationship between inequality and education. However, as we will analyze, not only education but also living in or outside the camp, citizenship, and identity politics play significant roles in reproducing these inequalities. In other words, we will see that in addition to its function of reproducing existing inequality, education is a result of these secondary conditions.

Today, a significant portion of Palestinians living in Jordan reside in major cities, primarily Amman, outside the settlements officially designated as "camps." However, a considerable number (around 450,000) still live in ten settlements classified as "camps" for various reasons[1]. According to UNRWA, there are currently a total of 2,307,011 registered Palestinian refugees in Jordan. Considering Jordan's current population is around 11 million, this constitutes a significant proportion. So, what is the level of social participation among this population? This can be better answered when we consider access to education.

Forms of Inequality in Refugee Status

According to the latest data from UNRWA[2], 121,000 Palestinian refugee students in grades 1 through 10 across Jordan receive education in shifts under the supervision of 3,902 teachers in 169 schools located in the mentioned ten official camps. This is not the same as the Turkish practice of having different groups of students studying in the same school as morning and afternoon classes; rather, it

1 Amman New Camp (Wihdat), Baqa'a, Husn, Irbid, Jabal el-Hussein, Jerash, Marka, Souf, Talbieh, Zarqa.

2 The most recent data provided by UNRWA is for 2019-2020. See https://bit.ly/3PsVHww. For other data, see https://bit.ly/424sSxC. For an overview of the education system of Jordan, see https://bit.ly/421vjBj.

is a system in which two or three different schools use the same building in shifts. Firstly, the physical capacities of the camps are not suitable for constructing an adequate number of independent school buildings. Since the land allocated when they were first established has remained the same despite the increasing population, the problem is being solved with multi-story buildings, which are often illegal but tolerated. As UNRWA's reports show, buildings are often rented as schools, even though the infrastructure is not very suitable. Consequently, most schools share the same building in rotation, sometimes with two or even three different schools using it alternately. This initial inequality manifests itself in the physical realm.

The second form of inequality also revolves around the camps. Firstly, there exists a "natural" stratification between the camps and areas outside the camps because of the inadequacies of the camps themselves. Additionally, there is a hierarchy among the camps. For instance, the camps established after the Naksa (1967) have much poorer infrastructure, employment opportunities, and social standards than those established after the Nakba (1948), which determines social integration and, consequently, the quality of education. In a situation where the almost sole gateway to leaving the camps is "economic capital," conditions that hinder access to this capital are reproduced alongside policies accompanying them. Thus, the camps become places of "fate." Those who have the ability to create practices to escape this fate, when they leave the camps, become spectators to the darker fate of those left behind. They contribute to shaping a camp demographic that becomes increasingly impoverished, unemployed, uneducated, unhealthy, and prone to crime. Therefore, although students in the camps are subject to the same curriculum, this "natural" stratification not only determines the general student profile but also influences the quality of education provided. Students in the camps must exert more effort to compete with those outside because they are responsible for attending classes and contributing to their families' livelihoods (Günenç & Karadeniz, 2015). An extension of this stratification between the inside and outside of the camps also occurs between Palestinians and Jordanians. A statement by a Palestinian refugee youth summarizes the second form of stratification:

The Talbieh Elementary/Preparatory Boys' School in Talbieh Camp

Source: Nidal Ammouri, UNRWA Photo

Jerash Camp

Source: Ahmad Abu Sitteh, UNRWA Photo

"We are worker-students, while Jordanians are just students". Ultimately, everyone becomes involved in this competition with all forms of capital they possess or lack.

Another form of inequality, of course, is related to who can study where and under what conditions, which is interconnected with the previous ones. For example, on page 28 of UNICEF's 2020 Jordan Country Report on Out-of-School Children[3], it is stated that "Higher education is not free. The tuition fee payable depends on the nationality of the student." This statement seems to indicate a very ordinary situation and may not be seen as a practice that anyone would find strange. After all, it is expected that each country would prioritize its own citizens in such a differentiation. However, the implications are different when it comes to the status of Palestinians in Jordan due to the variation in their refugee status after each war. The education system itself functions as an elimination mechanism from the very beginning. While Palestinian refugees provided with citizenship by UNRWA can enter university for free or at lower tuition fees, the majority residing in Marka and Jerash camps[4], mainly Gazans, cannot benefit from this right because they are not citizens (Özcan & Şenses, 2022). Therefore, Gazans are kept as hostages in a "permanent/permanently temporary" status in Jordan by not being included in the citizenship class and not being allowed to integrate into existing social structures in any way.

The "Refugees" of the Refugees: Palestinians

The way in which the fundamental rights regulating citizenship based on identity are implemented in Jordan not only creates a distinction between Palestinians and native Jordanians as citizens but also among Palestinians themselves, turning some into the "refugees" of refugees. Gazans are taken out of the equation through citizenship rights and are often denied opportunities for upward mobility, which are instead reserved for citizens. If you happen to be a Palestinian who has managed to obtain citizenship and perhaps a university education, you must wait a few years to find a job; however,

3 https://www.unicef.org/jordan/media/5501/file/OSC-Report-EN.pdf

4 While the Marka camp, referred to by the government as "Hitten" and home to more than 62,000 registered refugees today, was established near Amman in 1968. Jerash camp, known as the Gaza camp, where approximately 36,000 refugees live today, was established in 1968 near the famous Roman ruins of Jerash.

A Palestinian refugee, Abed Alqader Qwaider, shows his temporary Jordanian passport.

Source: Abid Katib, Getty Images

as a Jordanian native, you may not have to wait at all by using wasta (relationships of patronage). If you are a Palestinian looking for a job in Jordan, you must work much harder than Jordanians, but even when you start working, you are almost barred from advancing beyond a certain point; for example, if you work as a police officer, you cannot rise to the rank of a senior commander (Achilli, 2015). Thus, Palestinians can be teachers but cannot be principals; they can be police officers but cannot be directors; they can even be prime ministers but cannot have the "true" Jordanian passport.[5] Citizens who are included in the economy and pay taxes but still maintain refugee status are kept in a zone of uncertainty, away from areas where the functioning of the state is thin, and they could intervene in that of the state. Citizenship, which leads to identity being dragged into the zone of uncertainty, along with the existence of identity components such as relative channels for upward mobility, can be seen as a situation specific to Jordan (Karadeniz, 2018).

Jordan certainly has its justifications behind the policies outlined here; in fact, some Palestinians we talked to in camps or outside even believe (or let's say, they interpret it with good intentions) that these policies aim to prevent Palestinians from losing their identities and their right of return. We don't know if this is really the intention behind these policies. However, when we look at the results, we must acknowledge that this is indeed happening. There are significant differences in the tone of Palestinian identity and motivation for return between inside and outside the camps. Living in a camp and being a refugee are closely associated with Palestinian identity. This can also be observed in the interactions in these camps, as seen in the fieldwork conducted by Ferhat Gökdağ in 2016.[6] Palestinians living outside the camps, who receive a good education, experience increasing levels of prosperity, and can somewhat blend in with Jordanians, show a significant decrease in their emotional investments and sense of belonging to Palestine. Hence, the policies and practices that exclude Palestinians from education, employment,

5 To preserve the "true" Jordanian identity and thus to make the distinction between Palestinians and "original" Jordanians clearer/visible, the Jordanian state uses different symbols on their passports: Palestinians have a P (Palestinian), while Jordanians have a J (Jordanian). Hence, being stamped with "refugee" is not limited to camps or camp conditions; even being a citizen does not prevent a Palestinian from being labeled as a "refugee."

6 Ferhat Gökdağ spent part of 2023 conducting fieldwork for his thesis titled "Ürdün'deki Filistinli Mültecilerin Kudüs Algısı: El-Hüseyin ve Beka Kampları Örneği" in the mentioned camps.

Regardless of its physical conditions, labeling a space as a "camp" establishes the codes for reproducing refugee status; living there, regardless of the conditions, defines one as a refugee.

social, and cultural life remind them that they are always refugees and temporary residents and must return one day, thus continuously reproducing their refugee status. Even merely characterizing where they live as a "camp" plays a significant role in this reproduction.

To summarize, firstly, we must acknowledge that the education system itself continues to formally produce and reproduce refugees through the distinction between citizens and non-citizens, those who live in camps, and those who do not. Secondly, regardless of its physical conditions, labeling a space as a "camp" establishes the codes for reproducing refugee status; living there, regardless of the conditions, defines one as a refugee. Thirdly, Jordan's government policies on citizenship and refugee status produce a kind of "the refugees of refugees" by hierarchically organizing Palestinians within themselves and layering refugee status through distinctions made between those living in camps or outside and those who are granted or denied citizenship. Lastly, by marking the passports and identity documents of those who have been granted citizenship, it creates the groundwork for sustaining inequality. Thus, by first creating spatial and status-based distinctions among Palestinians and then establishing a second level where Palestinians and Jordanians can be distinguished, it ensures the reproduction of inequalities.

Remigration Patterns of Muslim Diasporas in the West: The Case of French Muslims

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The 4.7 to 5.1 million French Muslims, according to our estimates (Refas, 2021), have recently developed new migration behaviors that have not been studied in the literature. We observe three patterns mainly: a selective migration to high-income countries (including booming migration flows to GCC countries), a rapidly expanding migration to Türkiye and Malaysia, and a resurgence of migration to former colonies that had previously experienced a consistent reduction in migration flows from France since the 1980s. Overall, more than 140,000 people migrate to Muslim-majority countries from France every year today, and that flow of permanent or temporary migrants offers a wide range of economic potentials that ought to be studied further. The drivers of migration decisions are the main focus of our research.

Going back to history first, note that in the 1970s and 1980s, large cohorts of Muslims from post-independence African countries and Türkiye left their native lands to live in the West. At the time, the typical push and pull factors of labor migration were their main motivation for leaving their homeland, family, and native culture by ferryboat and immersing themselves in a completely foreign environment. In the case of France, this wave of labor migrants was predominantly coming from former North African and Sub-Saharan colonies (e.g., Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Senegal, Cameroon and Mali) with dominant or large Muslim populations. A few years later, thanks to progressive immigration laws, the families of these labor migrants also immigrated under the "regroupement familial," a right recognized under French law in 1978, and thanks to the birthright ("droit du sol") which grants French nationality to whoever is born in France since the 16th century, they gave birth to millions of second-generation Muslim migrants who predominantly settled for good in France.

Using recent demographic evidence, we estimate that 45 years later, the Muslim immigrants of first, second, or third generation in France range today between 4.7 to 5.1 million (see Table 1). Due to a range of economic and social factors, we observe a growing trend of migration amongst this population, back to the home country of their parents (return migrations) or, interestingly, to third countries (transnational migrations). We also observe other migration patterns, such as temporary migrations or migration strategies involving two or three countries simultaneously (hybrid migrations).

Table 1. Self-declared Religious Affiliations of Migrants and Descendants of Migrants in France

%	Migrants	Both Migrant Parents	One Migrant Parent	Native Parents	Total
No Religion	19	23	48	49	45
Catholic	26	27	39	47	43
Orthodox	3	1	0	0	0.5
Protestant	4	1	1	2	2
Muslim	43	45	8	1	8
Jew	0.5	1	2	0.5	0.5
Buddhist	2.5	1	0.5	0.5	0.5
Other	2	1	1	0.5	0.5
Total	100	100	99.5	100	100

Source: Trajectoires et Origines 2008, INED

To understand these migration flows, we need to focus on three questions mainly: how these populations have changed over time, in particular in terms of preferences and economic or social behavior (demand-side), how France has changed since the 1970s, and accordingly, if there are new push factors inducing the migration decisions, and how destination countries including homeland of their parents have changed since then and offer new pull factors dragging migration flows.

In a nutshell, if we focus on the population of Muslim migrants in France first, we observe that the predominantly blue-collar population that first immigrated to France has put a lot of emphasis on education as a social promotion mechanism, and their progeny is now well-educated and well-inserted in the various social strata of the country (see Figure 1). 33% of the descendants of migrant couples have now graduated with a higher-study degree compared to 5% of their parents (Beauchemin & Simon, 2023). Among second-generation migrants, the proportion is now 44%, i.e., even higher than the rest of the population (43%).

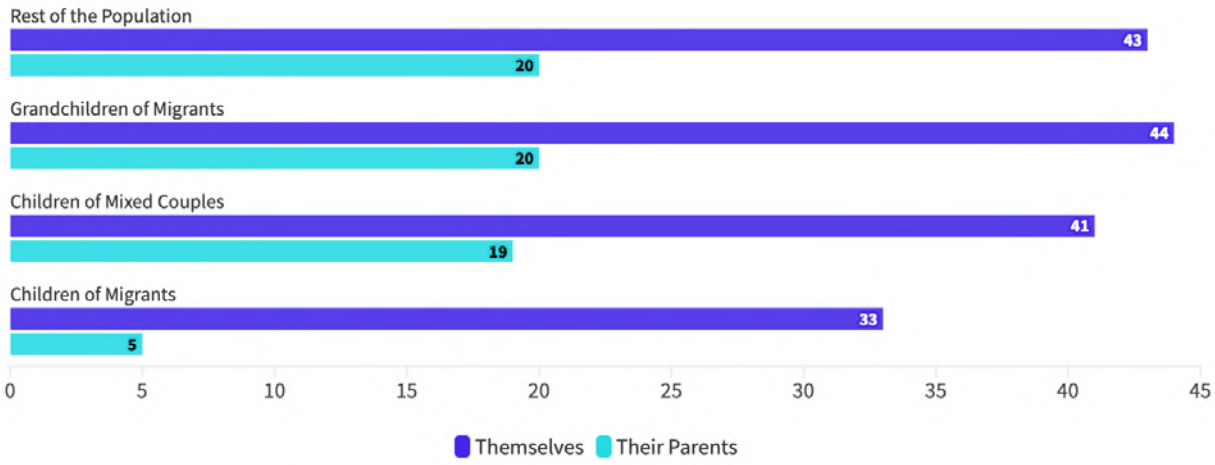

Figure 1. Progression of Higher-Study Graduation Rate Across Generations in France

Source: Trajectoires et Origines 2, INED-INSEE, 2019-2020 (TeO2)

> ***In 2017 alone, more than 140,000 French citizens or residents have migrated to 16 Muslim-majority countries that we identify as main destination countries.***

Despite the social recognition and improvements, these populations feel increasingly discriminated against. In 2019-2020, 26% of Maghreb immigrants reported having suffered unequal treatment or discrimination in the last five years (Beauchemin & Simon, 2023). Interestingly, the same data reveals that discrimination linked to origins has, however, decreased due in part to a shift towards religious motive: 11% of people declaring themselves to be religious Muslim women report religious discrimination, compared to 5% ten years ago. Other social issues specific to the context in France affect the migration decisions of these populations. According to the OECD (2022), for example, 34% of the population in France was at risk of depression in 2021, up from less than 10% in 2019, due to a range of factors, including loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, the world has changed since the 1970s, and new opportunities for migration have emerged for this population, predominantly French and well-qualified. Classical migration theory predicts that the typical pull factor for a worker is the labor price differential (real or expected) offered for the same profession in destination countries. GCC countries, or other OECD countries, offer such opportunities and, therefore, drag migration flows in line with traditional migration models. However, field observations and structured interviews also indicate that for an increasing number of migrants, despite negative labor price differentials, migration from the West back to the homeland of their parents or to other Muslim countries such as Türkiye is a desired option.

Figure 2 below shows that the total number of migrants from France to Muslim-majority countries has slowly decreased over the period 1980-2013, with a major dip since 2000. But after that, the number of migrants boomed and doubled between 2013 and 2017 for the 16 main destinations of French migrants within Muslim-majority countries. This would strengthen the assumption that due to increased Islamophobia in France and increased religiosity among French Muslims, French Muslims are increasingly looking forward to relocating, generating transnational migration flows that remain to be studied in detail.

The tabulation of recent migration data helps identify some growing trends:

- The massive growth of migration to GCC countries and Malaysia (UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar) with growth from 8 times (Malaysia) to more than 100 times (UAE, Bahrein) in the annual outflow of migrants from France between 1980 and 2017.
- The return to annual volumes is slightly higher than in 1980 for former colonies such as Morocco, Tunisia, or Chad, with the noticeable exception of Algeria, which shows a major reduction in the number of migrants in recent years.
- The massive growth of Türkiye as a destination for French migrants, with 28,507 migrants to Türkiye in 2017, i.e., more than 5 times the 1980 number.
- The significant growth in the number of migrants to Morocco since 2013 could be interpreted as a growth in return migrations or a growth in new migrants, especially among retired French citizens and industrial employees.

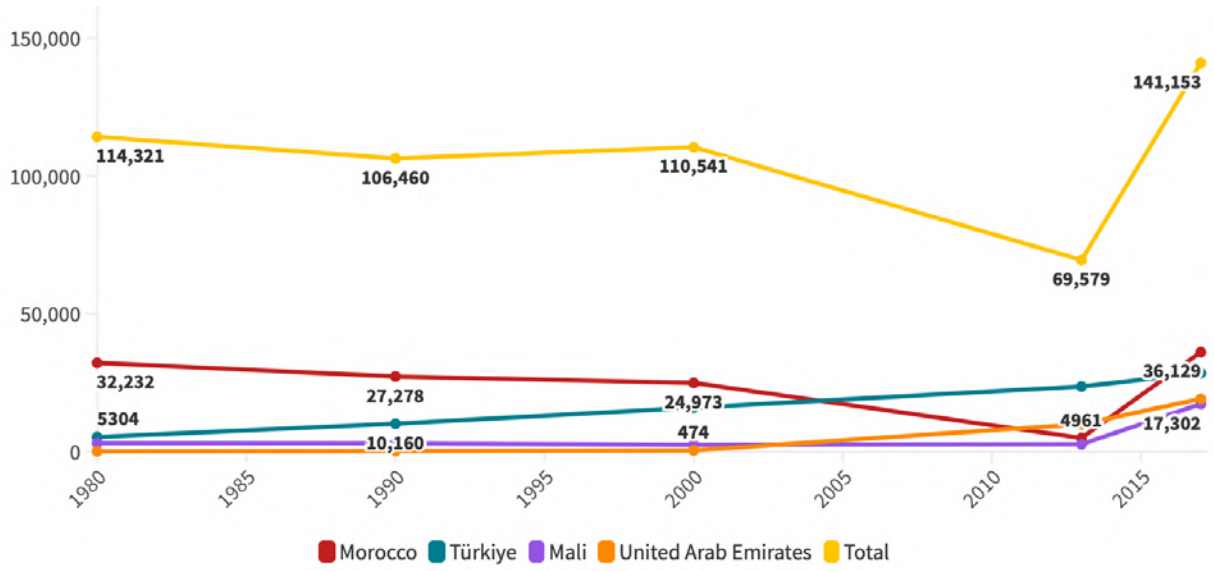

Figure 2. Total Migration to Muslim Majority Countries and Top 4 2017 Migration Destinations from France (1980-2017)

Source: World Bank

It is worth noting that data limitations do not enable us at this stage to distinguish between Muslim and non-Muslim migrants in the data presented, a caveat that an ongoing statistical exercise is trying to correct.

Overall, the economic implications of the migration trends remain relevant for Muslim populations in France and Europe. In 2017 alone, more than 140,000 French citizens or residents have migrated to 16 Muslim-majority countries that we identify as main destination countries. This figure was up from about 70,000 in 2013. The economic implications of that massive outflow of migrants can be studied from the perspective of the recipient or origin country. Countries such as Morocco, Jordan, and Türkiye have developed over the years support programs to facilitate investments and return from their expatriated citizens, but the full economic impact of these investments, in particular the spillover effects on the rest of the economy, are yet to be fully understood.

A simplified evaluation of the economic potential of the remigrations of Muslim diasporas in the West to Muslim-majority countries could be attempted by looking at the average savings of these populations and the related investment capacity. For example, Arrondel and Coffinet (2019) report a median wealth of €113,300 per household in France. The 4.7 - 5.1 million Muslims in France (assuming an average of 2.9 persons by household as reported by INSEE) could have an accumulated wealth of €183 to €203 billion in 2019. If the transnational remigration assumption is confirmed for the majority of the 141,153 annual migrants from France to the Muslim-majority countries reported, the potential repatriation of the savings of these migrants to their new country of residence could reach €5.5 billion on an annual basis (€1.4 billion and €1.1 billion for Morocco and Türkiye alone). Other economic implications include transfer or knowledge through direct investment, entrepreneurship or corporate and academic channels. In 2014, Philippe Legrain published *Immigrants: Your Country Needs Them*, an excellent book about immigration, showing why Western countries should welcome migrants (Legrain, 2014). Ten years later, we probably now need such a book to discuss why transnational migrants are highly needed in Muslim-majority nations.

"The Ones Who Walk Away": Phantoms, Ambivalence & Hope within Exiled Egyptians in Istanbul

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It was in the Spring of 2018 when one of my professors assigned us to read Ursula K. Le Guin's short philosophical fiction, *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*. Published in 1973, Le Guin's allegory depicts a seemingly utopian city, Omelas, where all its residents live prosperously and happily. Nonetheless, the reader gradually discovers that the city's prosperousness is essentially built upon the torture and suffering of one single child locked up in a broom closet. The people of Omelas also come to comprehend this reality, and only a tiny portion of them, moved by a strong emotion of guilt, decide to withdraw from the city altogether (Le Guin, 1973). Despite its shortness, this allegory features an ever-lasting situation in which individuals grow to recognize numerous spots of injustices inborn in the larger structures of their lives. In their instinctual strive for happiness and fulfilling a good life, individuals respond and act differently towards these many broom closets. Whether they choose to bypass these dark closets or decide to change something about them, we are usually left with a flood of emotions that involve moments of a sense of agency and occasions of complete helplessness. Annabel Herzog writes, "The case of 'Omelas' reveals the hopelessness of change and the ambiguity of resistance against a society believed to be optimal. What can be done against a system like that of Omelas except to leave, and what does leaving mean?" (Herzog, 2021, p. 76).

In the summer of 2018, I emigrated from Egypt and settled in Istanbul. Following the Eid morning prayer and right in front of the ancient Egyptian obelisk centering the square of The Blue Mosque, I stood rapt in awe while gazing at the large number of Egyptian expatriates occupying the space. On the 3rd of July 2013, following street protests, the army toppled the former first democratically elected president Mohamed Morsi and suspended the constitution. Subsequently, massive arrest campaigns, street violence, and mass murder started taking place in the months after, targeting senior leaders and members of the Muslim Brotherhood together with variant opponents of the new regime. In consequence, the Turkish regime instantly showed sympathy and support, condemning the military coup. Thereupon, Türkiye received thousands of Egyptian expatriates, many of whom were Islamists and members of the Muslim Brotherhood. According to senior Turkish officials quoted in the media in 2019 and 2020, some 15-30,000 Egyptians live in Türkiye (Ayyash, 2022). Expatriates imagined Türkiye as a fertile space for possible transnational activism and political engagement with their homeland.

The ones who walk away from Egypt are different from their Omelian counterparts. A good number of them did not choose to leave but were rather forced to. They certainly did not escape a utopia where all citizens are thrilled and well-off. But what

one finds common between the fictional work and this reality is the ghost of their homelands and the memory of the suffering child in the broom closet, personifying a state of ongoing structural violence over which a rapid and radical urban innovation process is taking place. In this paper, based on my ethnographic research, I try to take it from where Le Guin ended and look into the new lives of deportees. I dig into the nuances of what it is like to be an Egyptian political migrant living in Istanbul. Looking at the potentialities between the "not yet" and the "no longer" and the spaces between hope and despair, my prime purpose is to fathom how these exiled Egyptians engage emotionally with the political situation in Egypt, given that their physical presence became elsewhere. I argue that most of my interlocutors were constantly haunted by the past, which evoked a liminal state of being, and the only way out for many of them was to abandon the Egyptian political sphere and find potentialities of hope elsewhere.

The Presence of an Absence (Haunted)

After a long transportation journey, I finally arrived at "Beykoz Kundura," located on the Northern end of the Bosphorus shore in the district of Beykoz. "Beykoz Kundura" is an industrial, cultural area with a spacious complex encompassing numerous film studios. I entered the filming location, which features a dull prison building with lots of dimly lit prison cells and strong cigarette smoke. A group of exiled Egyptian filmmakers were filming a drama series titled Dungeon 55 that narrates the story of several political prisoners and their everyday struggles with a psychopathic police officer. During the break, Ali, an old actor who played the role of a jailer in the drama series, breathed a deep sigh of sorrow and looked at Jamal, his fellow actor, sharing the heavy thought that had just crossed his mind. He expressed his sympathy toward the political prisoners in Egypt. Ali revealed to his friend

Protestors hold a photo of Morsi and a flag with the "Rabia" sign at a protest in Istanbul.

Source: Murad Sezer, Reuters

that the atmosphere of the filming location and the role he played made him acutely fathom what it is like to be a political detainee. Specters were always looming somewhere between the words in the site visits and during the interviews. The figure of the ghost or the absentee often took different forms. Sometimes, it is a friend or a relative who is politically detained. Other times, it was a martyr. Specters also came in the form of flashbacks to street protests, the January revolution itself as an abstraction with a package of connotations and meanings or an earlier subjectivity tied to it.

Bringing up the influence of absences on reality and the return of remnants of the past in the presence, Jacques Derrida coins the concept of "hauntology" in his seminal work Specters of Marx (1993). The term "hauntology" is a portmanteau formulated from the fusion of two words. The first is "haunt," which refers to the appearance or the materialization of a ghost or an absent figure. The second word is "ontology," which is concerned with the nature of being. In that sense, the term as a whole translates to "the persistence of a present past or 'the return of the dead'" (Sami, 2021, p. 380). Mark Fisher reflects further on Derrida's choice of the term. He remarks that Derrida was attempting to challenge the conventional "ontology," which illustrates being exclusively based on existence and presence while dismissing the profound role that absences play in this illustration. To most of my interlocutors, the Egyptian public space, with all its materiality and sentimentality, is distant, absent, and only accessible through virtuality or digital platforms. While carrying a digital ethnography, however, it was quite compelling to see how particular spaces in exile, like the art sphere, carried phantoms that had a recognizable influence on my interlocutors.

One of my interviewees, Amir, who works as an art director and was among the crew working on the aforementioned drama project that tackles the issue of political imprisonment in Egypt, disclosed to me that he had to sleep in the filming location, a prison. Amir illustrates that men often suppress their emotions and do not prefer to share them with their fellows. Yet that night, he could not sleep and recognized his friend who could not sleep either. Both Amir and his friend were imprisoned before they left the country. "The moment each of us takes a break, the general atmosphere immediately reminds us of voices embedded in our ears," he took a deep breath and continued (Amir, 27).

Living on a Threshold (Perplexed)

Ambivalence and unclarity were recurrent effects that many of my interlocutors expressed during our interviews as a consequence of this hauntological condition. While conversing with Ahmad, a 30-year-old actor, he told me, "I am like the ones who danced in the stairwell, neither seen by those above nor those below... I cannot go back to my country, and I am not able to live comfortably in Türkiye either. I am not a Muslim Brother, nor am I isolated from them. I am always in the middle of everything" (Ahmed, 30). I tried to unpack these emotions of perplexity and confusion through the lens of Turner's "liminality" and Szakolczai's "permanent liminality." Liminality in the fieldwork appeared in two forms. The first aspect of this liminality lies in the conflictual emotions of wanting to both remember and forget. Hassan, a 25-year-old art director, revealed that he genuinely wishes to completely forget the day of the Rabaa massacre, which he survived.

"While conversing with Ahmad, he told me: "I am like the ones who danced in the stairwell, neither seen by those above nor those below... I am always in the middle of everything."

Clashes in Cairo on the bridge leading to the Rabaa al-Adawiya Mosque, 2013.

Source: Amr Abdallah Dalsh, Reuters

Towards the end of our conversation, however, he told me that he found a soundtrack on the internet titled "The Carnage." The sound collage combines the sounds of hovering military aircraft, bullets, screams, prayers, and sirens from the day of the Rabaa massacre. Hassan shared that he finds himself searching that track occasionally and listening to it despite his deep desire to let go of that memory.

The second bearing of liminality was hesitating whether to hold on or let go of a particular subjectivity built during the years of street activism preceding exile. One of the artists I interviewed demonstrates an internal conflict that constantly gives him a strong sense of confusion and fogginess. He illustrated that he is interiorly living in two parallel universes. On the one hand, he is getting married and planning to travel and build a stable life for his family. On the other hand, his parents nurtured in him an identity of a revolutionary reformer, and he feels as if he is gradually losing this identity as he moves on with life. He clarifies that he continuously asks himself, "Where is the revolutionist? Where is the one who walked the streets and wanted to change something? This past self is almost dying" (Amir, 27). I asked him if he wanted this persona to die. He answered that he did not have an answer to this question even though it kept crossing his mind. The only partially satisfying answer he has reached is that he will continue building a stable life. Yet the moment a revolution outbursts, he shall be the first to join, leaving everything behind because this is where he belongs.

Hope in the Hopelessness, Agency in the Helplessness

While attending one of the social gatherings carried out by a group of Egyptians living in Istanbul as a participant observant, Salih, a father of three in his late 40s, used a metaphor to describe why he thinks that most of the collective efforts done by Egyptians in exile are ineffective. Salih gave the analogy of a group of expatriates coming from a desert environment who have just landed on a new island with which they are completely unfamiliar. Immediately upon their arrival, the group started working using the exact surviving techniques they were previously living with before leaving their homelands. None of the new arrivals paused to observe the new space and fathom its nature, which was radically different from their past habitus. Neither did any of them thoroughly grasp that their stay on the Island was permanent, not temporary. This analogy is quite powerful as it summarizes the state of many of my interlocutors who are regularly haunted by the absentees and are stuck between a past of activism leading to forced migration and a present reality of exile that is no longer temporary

and legal precarity of many young Egyptians who have had their passports expired and could not renew it from the Egyptian embassy in Türkiye as a punishment for their earlier political participation.

In spite of the survival guilt that comes with the visiting phantoms and the confusion that accompanies a condition of permanent liminality. I argue that the closing of Egypt's political and public sphere continually sparked feelings of hopelessness and defeat, which compelled many of my interlocutors to look for strength and capability elsewhere. In the fieldwork, three characteristics of becoming were evident. The first one is the desire to "become something," which was typically mentioned in relation to professional development, success, holding some sort of material power, etc. The second aspect of becoming is the impulse to "become normal," which speaks to their intense desire to recover and rid themselves of an identity that is trauma-oriented. The third one is about wanting to let go of their previous subjectivities and affiliations. Likewise, many of my interlocutors avoided thinking about change on a large scale and developed a preference for microscopic transformational activity in the domains in which they excelled, remolding the idea of transnational activism and reproducing new ways of imagining agency and change in times of hopelessness and helplessness.

> ***One of the artists I interviewed told me that he continuously asks himself, "Where is the revolutionist? Where is the one who walked the streets and wanted to change something? This past self is almost dying."***

DIGITAL ACTIVISM IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Social media has transformed the way we engage with social justice and activism while enabling widespread mobilization and solidarity across borders. From advocacy to conflict, this infographic highlights key hashtags that have shaped the social and political agenda of Muslims all around the world.

#IStandWithAhmed, 2015

#IStandWithAhmed emerged in support of Ahmed Mohamed, a 9th-grade student arrested in 2015 for bringing a homemade digital clock to school that was mistaken for a "hoax bomb" by his teacher.

#BlackoutEid, 2019

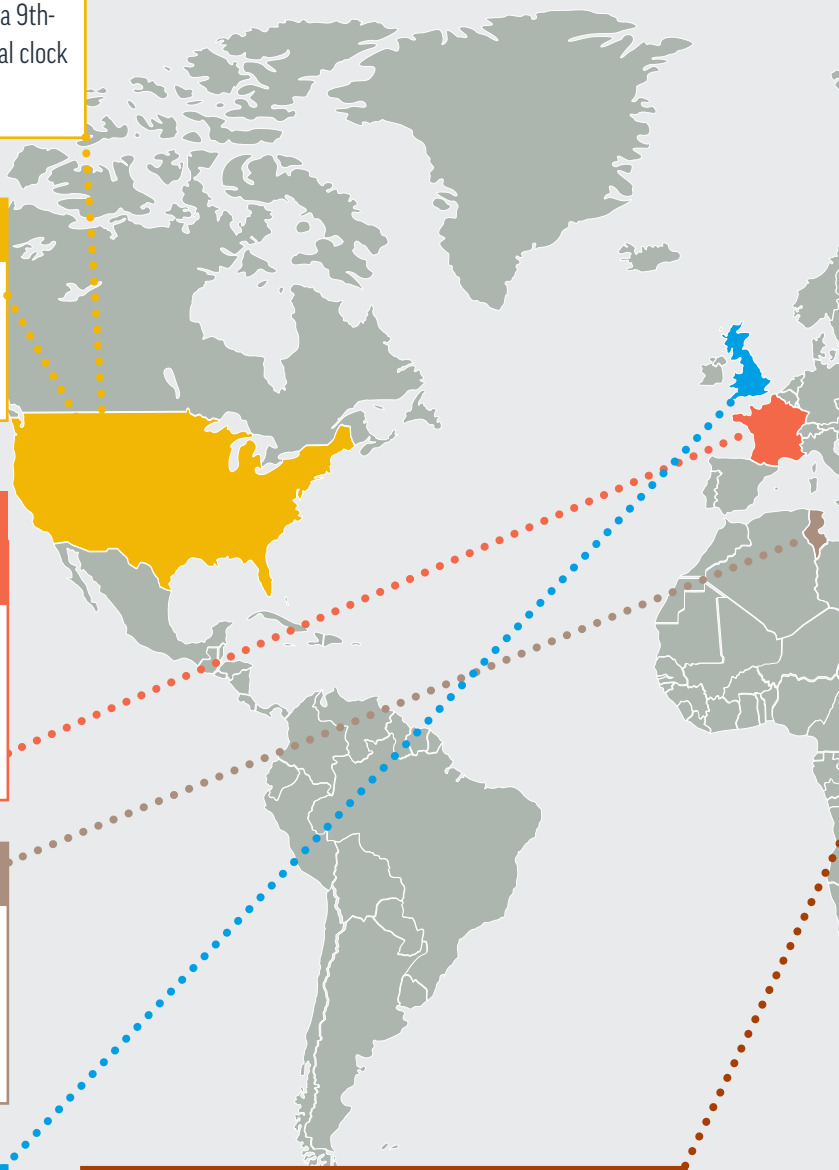
Originating from the #BlackoutDay movement, #BlackoutEid emerged in 2019 as a response to the underrepresentation of black Muslims in the celebration of Eid al-Fitr.

#PasToucheAMonHijab (#BaşörtümdenEliniÇek), 2021

Initiated in response to a proposed amendment in France that would ban women from wearing hijab in public places, the social media campaign #PasToucheAMonHijab (#HandsOffMyHijab) became viral in 2021.

#ArabSpring, 2011

Triggered by Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation in Tunisia, #ArabSpring became the major hashtag representing the revolutionary wave of protests, riots, coups, and civil wars across the Arab world beginning in 2010.



#YouAintNoMuslimBruv, 2015

#YouAintNoMuslimBruv became a viral hashtag following an attack at Leytonstone underground station in London, where a knifeman claimed to act his "brothers in Syria."

#BlueforSudan, 2019

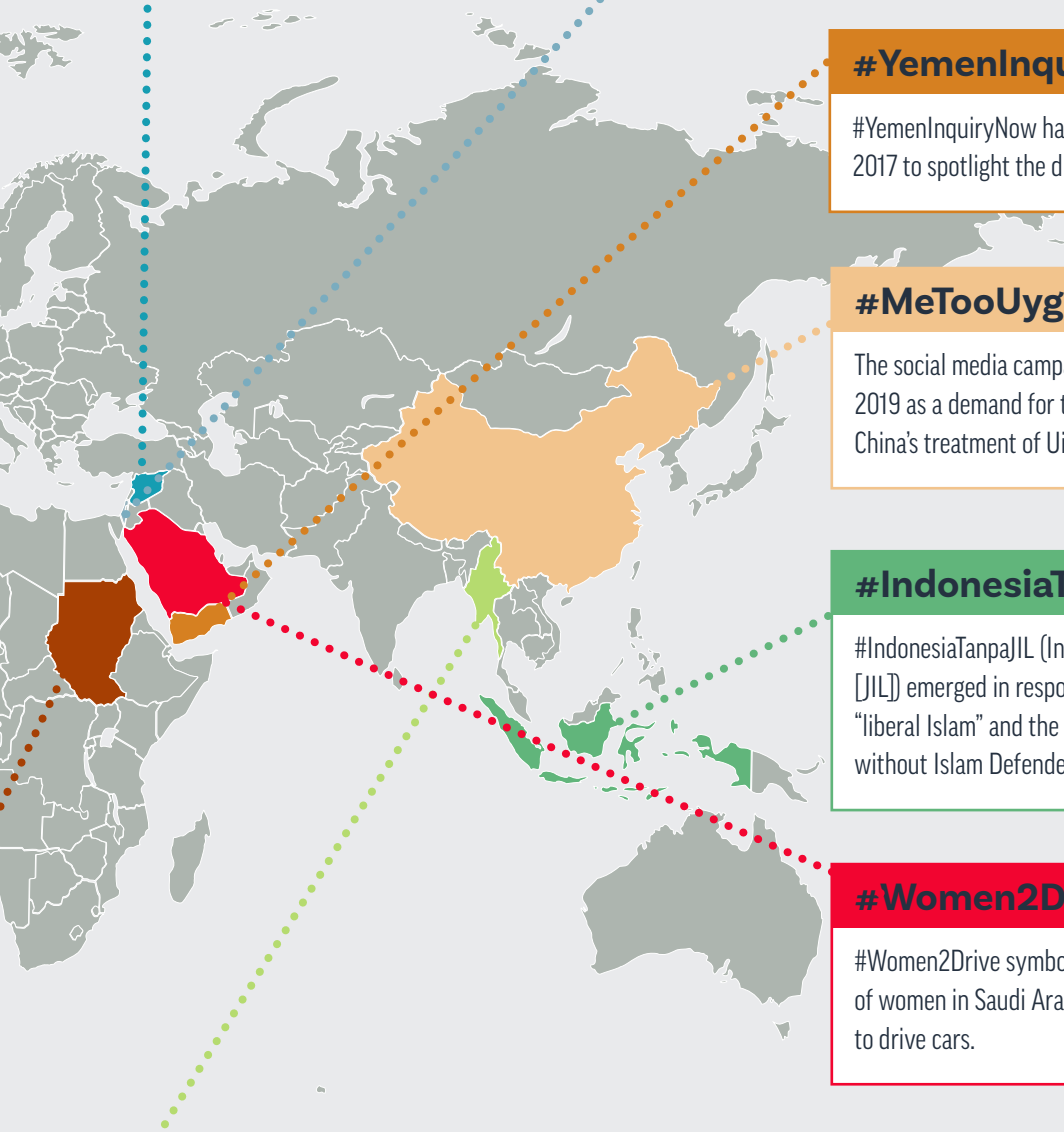
Inspired by Mohamed Mattar, the hashtag #BlueForSudan went viral in solidarity with Sudanese protesters following a deadly crackdown in Khartoum in 2019.

#AleppoIsBurning, 2016

While Aleppo, Syria, was facing relentless bombing and encirclement by the Assad regime in 2016, #AleppoIsBurning became a viral hashtag across many social media platforms.

#SaveSheikhJarrah, 2021

#SaveSheikhJarrah went viral after the Israeli Supreme Court approved the plan of forced evictions of Palestinian families out of their homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in 2021.



#YemenInquiryNow, 2017

#YemenInquiryNow has spread all over social media in 2017 to spotlight the dire humanitarian crisis in Yemen.

#MeTooUygur, 2019

The social media campaign #MeTooUyghur was launched in 2019 as a demand for transparency and accountability in China's treatment of Uighurs and the concentration camps.

#IndonesiaTanpaJIL, 2012

#IndonesiaTanpaJIL (Indonesia without Liberal Islam Network [JIL]) emerged in response to the controversial discourse of "liberal Islam" and the hashtag #IndonesiaTanpaFPI (Indonesia without Islam Defenders Front [FPI]) in Indonesia.

#Women2Drive, 2018

#Women2Drive symbolizes the struggle and triumph of women in Saudi Arabia advocating for their right to drive cars.

#Black4Rohingya, 2021

With the February coup on February in 2021, #Black4Rohingya gained momentum on social media as Myanmar's anti-military protesters shared themselves wearing black in solidarity with the persecuted Rohingya minority.

Can the Subaltern Speak Online?*

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In its broadest sense, the term "subaltern" refers to that which is lower or subordinate. However, the concept does not denote a specific, singular, and immutable group, community, or social unit. The Subaltern Studies Collective has defined the term to describe those positioned lower in terms of class, caste, age, and gender. In her work, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak develops a critique that examines the subaltern not only in class terms but also through language, religion, ethnicity, and gender. The question "Can the subaltern speak?" is linked to the issue of representation for the subaltern. The most significant problem is making the voices of the subaltern heard. Spivak states that the term "voice" is metaphorical, referring to the lack of necessary infrastructure for speech acts. According to her, no one attempts to listen to these "silenced voices." Thus, the answer to the initial question should be "The subaltern cannot speak." However, social mobility has largely shifted to the Internet today. The Internet, being accessible to everyone, serves as an important alternative infrastructure for subaltern groups. In this regard, the question arises about how Syrian migrants, the largest subaltern group currently living in Türkiye, use the Internet.

The research, which explores the internet practices of Syrian migrants in Türkiye by asking, "Can the subaltern speak online?" has led to quite interesting outcomes. The study involved in-depth face-to-face and online interviews with a total of 37 people (22 men, 15 women) and showed that migrants are unable to take full advantage of the vast opportunities offered by the Internet and, in turn, have become more introverted.

Fading Connections

Many studies conducted in Europe show that migrants can maintain their old connections in their homelands through the Internet while also forming new ties with the host societies. However, the situation is quite different for Syrians living in Türkiye. Migrants in Türkiye are hesitant to stay in touch with their social circles back in Syria because of the political situation there. Particularly, those with relatives in areas controlled by the Syrian state are afraid of connecting with their old social circles

* This article is based on the findings of the TÜBİTAK-supported project titled "Suriyeli Göçmenlerin Entegrasyonu Bağlamında Dijital Okuryazarlık ve Dijital Vatandaşlık Seviyelerinin Araştırılması" (Project Director: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Haldun Narmanlıoğlu, Project Researcher: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Serkan Bayrakcı, Project No: 122G140).

through social media or instant messaging and communication apps like WhatsApp. Many migrants have expressed that due to the belief that internet communication is being "monitored" by the Syrian state, they avoid forming deep connections lest they harm those they've left behind.

Prejudice as a Barrier to Forming New Connections

When considering the potential for forming new social ties in Türkiye, Syrian migrants have reported difficulties in communication due to prejudice. They noted that during the first years of their migration, they were welcomed with more tolerance, but now they are hesitant to establish relationships because they see that their perception by society is largely negative. The biggest obstacle to establishing new connections in Türkiye is their "Syrian" identity.

When we examine their involvement in public debates, we see that Syrian migrants are a "subjectless subject." Despite being the main "object" of public discussions concerning migrant issues in Türkiye, they are unable to produce discourse as "subjects." The primary reason for this barrier is the prejudice against migrants, especially Syrians, in public debates, regardless of the cause. Furthermore, Syrians cannot participate in public discussions in their

The biggest obstacle to establishing new connections in Türkiye is their "Syrian" identity.

homeland. They stay away from Syrian public debates due to the fear of harming the old ties they left behind and the constant fear of "deportation." They believe that if they participate in these discussions, their writings and posts will be recorded and could put them in a difficult position if they are deported. In both cases, the source of fear is "digital surveillance," which also hinders their deep connections with old social ties.

The potential for participating in public debates and expressing their identities through digital communication seems unlikely for Syrian migrants. Whether in Syria or Türkiye, when they attempt to discuss issues related to themselves, their future, identity, or problems, they encounter labels such as "foreigner," "traitor," or "the other." In this sense, they are caught between two places (Syria and Türkiye) in a state of liminality. This liminality and lack of belonging result in them being "unable to speak" or, if they do speak, being "unheard" or "silenced" in public debates. These characteristics, indeed, align migrants with the definition of the subaltern, who cannot represent or express themselves and lack a voice. Additionally, migrants also fit another definition of the subaltern as people and groups that are disconnected from social mobility as they are unable to engage with and are excluded from social mobility in the digital realm.

Online Economic Activities

Syrian migrants are quite active in the digital world in terms of economic activities. However, their economic activities are also largely inward-oriented. They extensively use Arabic websites, social media groups, and channels to find jobs and workers. In terms of commerce, there is minimal interaction with non-Syrians. Due to prejudice and language barriers, Syrian migrants primarily carry out their business transactions among themselves, unable to engage in buying and selling relationships with Turkish citizens. However, commerce between migrants and locals is possible if the migrants speak Turkish fluently or if there is already a sense of trust between the parties.

The Role of the Internet in Education

Since the Industrial Revolution, mass education has continued in various forms, and with the advent of new communication technologies, it has become more flexible, adapting to rapidly developing digital information. Education and self-improvement, which are among the most significant practices of digital citizenship, facilitate individuals' participation in both their national communities and the global online community by accessing digitalized information. The monopoly of governments over education is weakening worldwide and gives rise to a flexible structure where people access information according to their needs.

Syrian migrants have not often had the opportunity for regular and formal education because they must work and complain about it. After arriving in Türkiye, only a few have taken Turkish language courses at private institutions, education centers of private universities, or those of Ankara University's Turkish and Foreign Languages Application and Research Center (TÖMER). Yet, since they had to work, they had to also leave these courses without completing them. Hence, Syrian migrants use the Internet to learn Turkish and improve themselves in various fields.

Interpreting the research findings in relation to subaltern studies, we can argue that Syrian migrants remain inwardly focused and outwardly silent. Unfortunately, it is not possible to draw a different conclusion considering the digital practices of subaltern migrants in this context. Due to prejudices, fear, trust issues, and language barriers, the internet practices of the Syrian migrants are quite limited. No one is trying to listen to the "silenced voices" in the digital space. However, being open to everyone, the Internet is an important alternative for public participation and speech. Silence is partly related to the subaltern's inability to speak and partly to whether the speech reaches its audience. The sharp boundaries mean that the subaltern's voice is not heard. Speaking is connected to listening, and when there are those who do not want to listen, silence prevails even when the subaltern speaks.

> ***No one is trying to listen to the "silenced voices" in the digital space. However, being open to everyone, the Internet is an important alternative for public participation and speech.***

In conclusion, as explained above, Syrian migrants in Türkiye are unable to form new connections through the Internet, particularly in terms of integration. They refrain from participating in public discussions that could contribute to democracy in both their homeland and Türkiye. In the economic domain, the inward nature of migrant networks hinders integration, perpetuating the isolation of Syrians. Participation in economic life through these inward networks should be problematized in the context of integration and investigated further in future studies. Additionally, while increasing economic opportunities for one group, how these networks affect other groups is another issue that requires further exploration.

The Underrepresentation of Uyghurs in the Age of Social Media is Rooted in Settler Colonialism

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In the late 1940s, three enduring occupations began in three distinct parts of the world, marking a new wave of colonization as European colonialism was coming to an end. India occupied Kashmir in 1947, Israel began its occupation of Palestine in 1948, and China occupied East Turkestan in 1949 (the preferred term for the Uyghur homeland in Eastern China - "Xinjiang," a Chinese name which means "New Frontier" erasing Uyghur and other Turkic people's long presence in the region). This temporal proximity is not merely coincidental; it represents a historical moment when one form of colonialism was waning and another was emerging. The occupiers, some of whom saw themselves as formerly oppressed, utilized similar justifications for their colonial endeavors, leading to a continuum of settler colonialism.

Patrick Wolfe, a leading scholar on settler colonialism, describes settler colonialism as an ongoing mechanism rather than a historical event, aiming to erase indigenous populations to facilitate settler expropriation of land. Wolfe famously noted, "Settler colonialism destroys to replace" (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). Over seven decades in Kashmir, Palestine, and East Turkestan, the settler powers have systematically worked to obliterate existing cultures, languages, and forms of resistance, replacing them with fabricated narratives of prosperity—what I refer to in my research as "Digital Potemkin Villages."[1] These digital façades obscure the absence of indigenous voices, which have been silenced and replaced with narratives more palatable to the colonizers.

The underrepresentation of Uyghurs in the media is a profound issue, intricately tied to the mechanisms of settler colonialism. By examining the roles of social media influencers in constructing distorted representations of occupied regions, we gain insight into the broader strategies of narrative control employed by settler governments. The suppression of Uyghur voices and the proliferation of Digital Potemkin Villages underscore the ongoing struggle for truth, liberation, and justice in the face of the oppressive Chinese regime. As digital platforms continue to shape public perceptions, it is crucial

1 Editor's Note: The term "Potemkin village" refers to an impressive façade designed to hide or divert attention from an undesirable condition.

Source: *Turkistan Press*

to critically analyze and challenge the narratives that seek to obscure the lived realities of oppressed communities. In my Ph.D. research, I study how Muslim minority dissidents' voices are silenced on social media platforms and how oppressive regimes use different methods and tools to fill that void with propaganda. One such tool is social media influencers. In an era dominated by social media, the battle for narrative control has intensified. Influencers, particularly those aligned with pro-government agendas, play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of occupied territories. Pro-government influencers are adept at manipulating social media to project an image of normalcy in occupied regions. For example, you will find countless vlogs of Chinese influencers on YouTube that showcase the "bright" side of East Turkestan, focusing on food, landscapes, and culture while ignoring the egregious human rights violations, concentration camps, and strict surveillance. These state-sponsored narratives are designed to avoid detection as government propaganda, thus escaping labels like "Chinese government media" on platforms like X and YouTube.

On the other hand, the Chinese government's strategy also extends beyond national borders, enlisting influencers and journalists of various ethnicities and religions from other countries to create vlogs and media portraying East Turkestan as a region of normalcy. This tactic is particularly effective when influencers and journalists from Muslim-majority countries, such as Pakistan, present a sanitized version of life in East Turkestan, thereby reinforcing the Chinese government's narrative among global Muslim audiences. This personal connection between influencers and their millions of followers lends an air of authenticity to their content, which overshadows the voices of Uyghur dissidents in the diaspora. Therefore, when a Pakistani Muslim vlogger goes to East Turkestan on the orders of the Chinese government, they say exactly what the rest of the Muslim audience in Pakistan and other parts of the world wants to hear: "There is no religious persecution in East Turkestan." Their lies display a conviction as if Uyghurs are happily living under Chinese rule and as if East Turkestan is a part of China. But what matters here is how much awareness you already have about the issue. If you have Uyghur friends or have research interests in the region like me, you

A vlog on YouTube refers to Urumqi and Xinjiang as the "most developed" Muslim cities in the world.

Most Developed Muslim City in the World ? ÜRÜMQI, XINJIANG, CHINA CN

can easily call off the façade of these social media influencers that try to exonerate China of its crimes in East Turkestan. If you do not, chances are high that you will fall for the lies, sometimes even glossed with labels of extremism and terrorism. The Chinese government has invested heavily in controlling the narrative around the Uyghurs and Xinjiang. Through state-sponsored media and international propaganda efforts, the government presents its actions in Xinjiang as necessary measures against terrorism and extremism. This narrative, propagated through various news and social media channels, aims to counteract international criticism and shape public perception (Blanchard & Ben, 2018). However, if you reside somewhere in North America, there is a high probability that you have never even heard about this Turkic Muslim minority group. Despite being central to major human rights issues, their stories and experiences are often underreported or misrepresented. Although the Uyghur diaspora is scattered all around the world, they have faced significant challenges in gaining visibility in global public discourse about human rights violations and ethnic cleansing.

The Chinese government's stringent control over information and media within its borders significantly hampers the ability of both domestic and international journalists to report on Uyghur issues (Schiavenza, 2019). China has dedicated PR firms in many countries to run their propaganda machinery (Cook, 2023). Independent reporting is often restricted, and journalists face risks of harassment, detention, or expulsion. This creates a challenging environment for uncovering and disseminating information about the Uyghurs. There are two significant points here that I have come to understand through my research and interviews with the Uyghur dissidents in exile. One is erasure, where direct surveillance of Uygur dissidents and journalists on social media platforms prevents them from exposing the actual truth of East Turkestan. The other is replacement, where the Chinese government spends a lot of resources around their PR campaigns in East Turkestan by inviting vloggers from not only China but also

outside countries on tours to this troubled region, portraying a facade of normalcy. The distorted representations created by influencers have significant implications. They obscure the harsh realities of occupation and human rights abuses, fostering ignorance and apathy among global audiences. The comparatively limited reach of Uyghur dissidents, constrained by censorship and lack of resources, exacerbates this issue. The resulting information void is filled by pro-government propaganda, further entrenching the occupier's narrative. Influencer content often fetishizes Indigenous cultures and lifestyles, presenting an illusion of normalcy that benefits settler governments. This content not only silences dissident narratives but also replaces them with a curated version of reality that conceals the ongoing settler colonialism.

Conclusion

The Uyghurs have a rich history in Central Asia, with their own distinct language, culture, and traditions. Over the centuries, the region known today as Xinjiang (new territory) has been a crucial hub along the Silk Road, fostering a blend of various cultures and religions. In recent decades, however, the Uyghur identity has been increasingly suppressed by the Chinese government. According to Amnesty International's 2021 report on Uyghurs, policies aimed at assimilating Uyghurs into Han Chinese culture, such as restrictions on religious practices, language use, and cultural expressions, have contributed to the erosion of their unique cultural identity. These actions have culminated in reports of severe human rights abuses, including mass detentions in what the Chinese government calls "re-education camps." The underrepresentation of Uyghurs in media is a multifaceted issue with significant implications for global awareness, policy, and the Uyghur community. By understanding the factors contributing to this underrepresentation and actively working to address them, journalists, media organizations, policymakers, and the public can help bring the Uyghur crisis to the forefront of global discourse. Increased media coverage can catalyze international action, support advocacy efforts, and ultimately contribute to justice and relief for the Uyghur people.

The tweet by the Global Times, established by the Chinese Communist Party for propaganda, celebrates the success of the fight against terrorism and security measures in the Xinjiang region.

The suppression of Uyghur voices and the proliferation of digital potemkin villages underscore the ongoing struggle for truth, liberation, and justice in the face of the oppressive Chinese regime.

Seeing Pain: On the Visual Representation of Disaster and Online Censorship in Social Media

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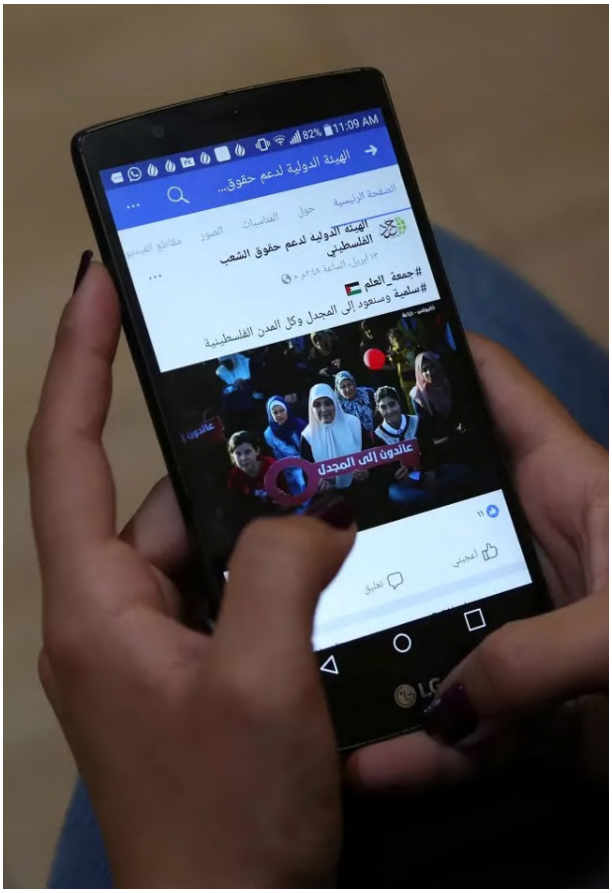
"By the witness and what is witnessed..."

(Surah Al-Buruj, 85:3)

Social media is a platform where visual content can spread rapidly and reach large audiences. Therefore, the visuals shared on social media significantly influence the perceptions and emotional responses of the viewer. Today, social media also reminds viewers of their ethical and political responsibilities by exposing distant sufferings.

In social media, which is considered one of the most powerful and fastest communication tools today, visual content from areas undergoing conflict, disaster, or human rights violations plays a critical role in raising global awareness, or in other words, in bearing witness and being witnessed. However, social media platform executives sometimes aim to prevent the spread of such content by applying censorship for different reasons and to make such events "invisible." Hence, the censorship of such content brings along important ethical and political debates.



Source: Reuters

Watching Others' Suffering from Social Media

"Yes, and how many times can a man turn his head and pretend that he just doesn't see?"

(Blowin' in the Wind, Bob Dylan)

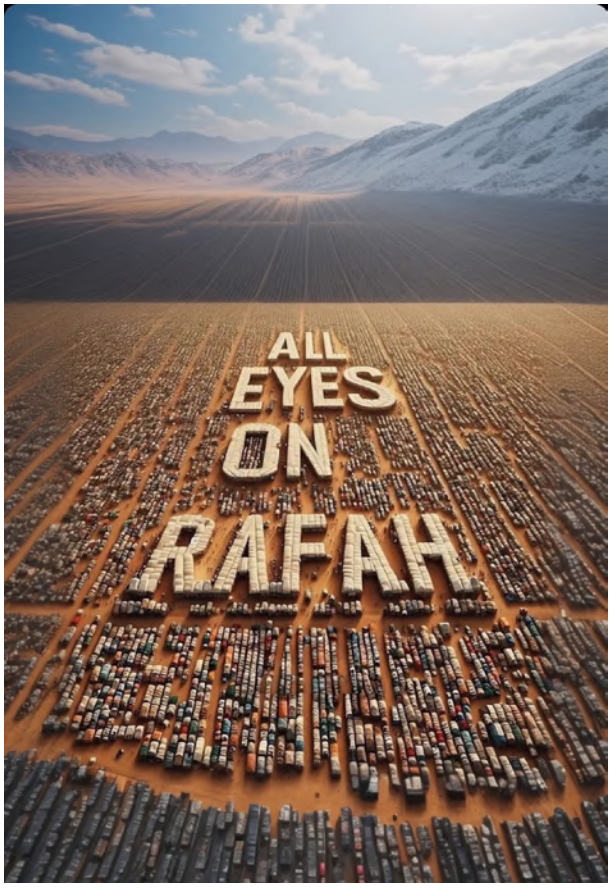
In her book *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006), Lilie Chouliaraki explores how the media's ability to bring distant suffering into our homes influences viewers' responses to this suffering and their sense of public responsibility. Today, the aestheticization and dramatic presentation of suffering on social media significantly affect users' (viewers') sensitivity to pain. Building on Chouliaraki's idea, it can be argued that the constant repetition of tragic events on social media might lead to a lack of empathy among viewers and turn suffering into a form of pornography. In such a case, the aesthetic and dramatic presentation of pain might cause viewers to perceive tragedy as a form of consumption, thereby weakening the impact of real suffering.

Similar to the relationship between photography and human rights, the visuals used on social media can sometimes be seen as sharper, more direct, and more explicit than words in documenting human rights violations and raising public awareness, yet also as manipulative, contextless, and brutal tools. On the other hand, witnessing the suffering of others on social media, with its endless flow, is renewed with every swipe, offering limitless potential for viewing. Thus, distant sufferings are at risk of becoming just one of the millions of consumable content. In this endless stream, the most personal, most private images, which belong to people whose names we don't even know, circulate continuously. In moments when distance and respect suddenly disappear, and emotions such as disgust, contempt, shame, anger, and pity emerge, one of the most fundamental elements of public life also vanishes: "Respect."

According to Byung-Chul Han, what distinguishes respect from merely looking is distance, and a society without distance and respect is heading toward becoming a society of scandal (2024, p. 12).

However, distance is quite blurred on social media because these platforms, conditioned by constantly being under surveillance and putting others under surveillance, mix the private and public, the personal and social. For instance, when a visual content from a public account gets reactions (for various reasons), people often justify this lack of distance with statements like "If you didn't want it public, you shouldn't have shared it; if you did, you must accept the criticism." digital communication enables affective discharge right away. On the basis of its temporality alone, it conveys impulsive reactions more than analog communication does. In this respect, the digital medium is a medium of affect" (Han, 2024, p. 13). Social media reinforces this by providing an endless flow of content that blurs the lines between personal and public, near and far. Responses to the Israel-Palestine conflict on social media provide a great example of this. Users encounter a mix of peaceful protests, brutal violence, and emotional calls on the same platform, creating a chaotic environment where empathy can easily turn into voyeuristic consumption or superficial activism. Here, Luc Boltanski's (1999, pp. 3-7) critique of the "politics of pity" becomes relevant. According to Boltanski, in the context of the politics of pity, the urgent action needed to end suffering always prevails over considerations of justice. From this perspective, the need for immediate action to alleviate suffering (in today's context, the need for a "ceasefire") becomes the most urgent issue.

However, the feeling of pity can sometimes lead to a form of narcissistic empathy, where viewers believe they have done enough by merely acknowledging the suffering. This is evident in social media behaviors where users share visuals, post supportive hashtags, or engage in "performative activism," which involves reducing complex issues to a simple post without engaging in any substantial public action. The most recent example of this debate came with the hashtag "All eyes on Rafah" after the bombing of the tent city known as the "safe zone" on May 27th, where hundreds of civilians were sheltering, followed by this image produced by artificial intelligence:



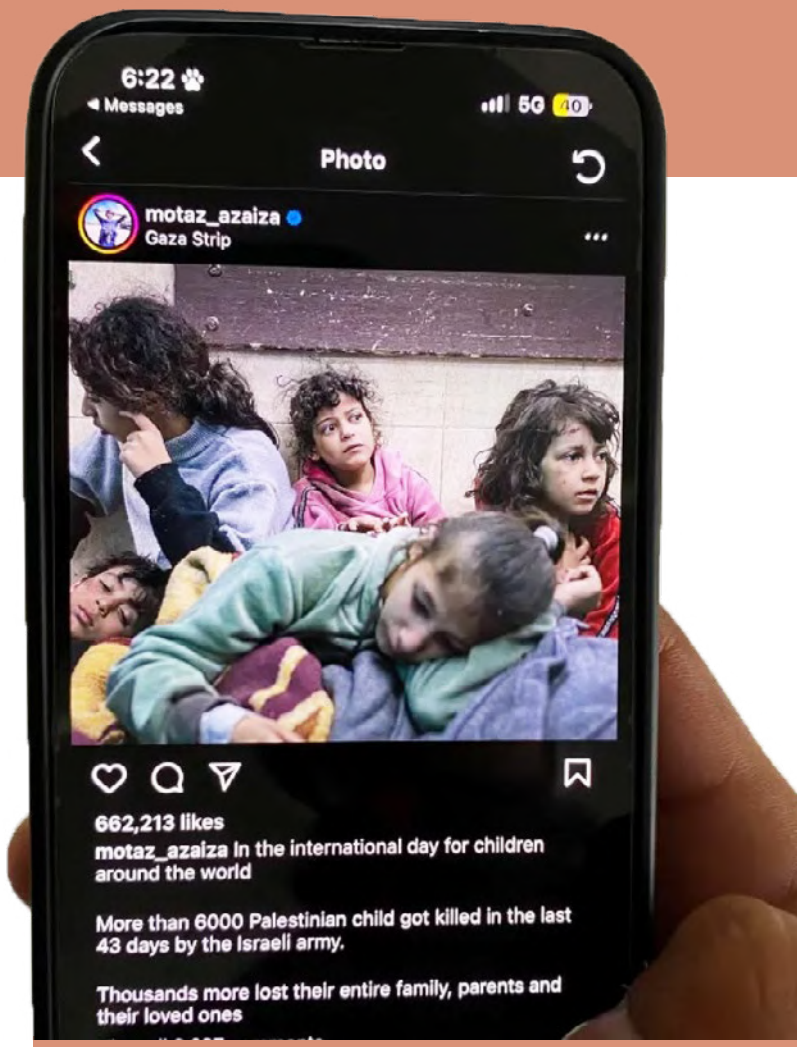
"All eyes on Rafah.".

Source: @InsiderWorld_1, Twitter

This AI-generated viral image depicting a vast expanse of tents in a dusty field was shared more than 40 million times on Instagram. It was shared on Instagram stories with a single click; users could see which of their friends had shared the post, and they could add their names to the list. However, the widespread sharing and engagement with this image also sparked some controversies. For instance, some argue that such posts may mark people as passive spectators of others' suffering and ignore the fact that we have other options other than watching. Furthermore, we should also keep in mind that focusing on the question of what we can do about the suffering of others is as important as why it is important to "see" and "show" the suffering. Yet, this is not easy. We live in a society where private feelings are a measurement for perceiving and evaluating the world and others, as Chouliaraki points out, and the media reflects this in various ways every day. We are so preoccupied with emotions, relationships, stories, bodies, and appearances related to "us" through the media (events like the Met Gala, Oscars, Cannes, Eurovision, Memorial Day, Championship Matches, etc.) that the suffering and needs of those who are distant from us turn into mere spectacles in our living rooms. We are unable to see beyond our own issues, yet a simple truth remains clear: our actions have a greater effect when they are directed toward those whose basic needs are neglected than when directed toward those who do not share our common values, thoughts, feelings, lives, and desires. In this sense, while watching the distant sufferings on social media, there is a need to adopt a more comprehensive and critical approach that not only evokes pity but also calls for justice and action.

In her work *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2004), Susan Sontag contends that witnessing distant sufferings is a modern experience that creates emotional distancelessness. While suggesting that this experience is formed through the accumulation of content provided by specialized tourists known as journalists, Sontag argues: "Wars are now also living room sights and sounds. Information about what is happening elsewhere, called "news," features conflict and violence— "If it bleeds, it leads" runs the venerable guideline of tabloids, and

twenty-four-hour headline news shows—to which the response is compassion, or indignation, or titillation, or approval, as each misery heaves into view." (2004, p. 16). Of course, we can no longer only speak of content provided by specialized tourists like journalists. One of the most prominent examples is citizen journalism. However, from Sontag's perspective, it is also a part of our relationship with photographs and videos to recognize that these images are always presented to evoke a certain emotional response. Yet, this does not prevent us from questioning viewers' empathy and ethical responsibilities regarding images shared on social media. However, on the other hand, both the images and social media have a strong and activist aspect in documenting, proving, creating memory, and storytelling, which becomes particularly meaningful when it comes to the effort to give voice to the voiceless. As Edward Said also pointed out, being able to write one's own history and tell one's own story has a critical role, especially for marginalized communities. Therefore, the effort of these communities to leave a lasting legacy for the future is not only a resistance but also a struggle for identity and existence. As Palestinian writer Asmaa Abu Mezied noted, everything recorded on phones by people holding onto their phones to share their suffering and struggle with the world is not only to evoke compassion or mercy from others but also important for documenting this oppression and for future generations: "I am writing this for us, not for them. We hold onto our phones for dear life because we have learned the hard way that documenting what we are going through is very important to ensure that our narrative remains alive and remains ours."[1] However, the voices of communities, whose right to construct their own history and narrative are denied, are not only silenced by mainstream media but also by social media today. They are subjected to shadow bans, silenced, and made invisible. Thus, the potential for societal change created by watching others' sufferings is hindered and ignoring becomes a means of escaping complicity.



Source:
Rashel Naranjo Arellano, Mosaic

1 "Etrafımızdaki Dehşeti Neden Kaydediyoruz?", https://vesaire.org/etrafimizdaki-dehseti-neden-kaydediyoruz/

Activists in Al-Khalil protest against Facebook's censorship of Palestinian content.

Source: AFP

Against Online Censorship

"You can ban TikTok, take us out of the algorithm
But it's too late, we've seen the truth, we bear witness."

(Hind's Hall, Macklemore)

Meta, the company behind platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Threads, and WhatsApp, has drawn attention with systematic censorship practices targeting Palestinian content. Last December, Human Rights Watch confirmed something many users were already aware of: "Online censorship." Researchers examining 1050 cases of online censorship found that Meta systematically censored Palestinian content using methods such as shadow banning, content removal, account suspension or deletion, and restrictions on interaction. Researchers who revealed a systematic model involving censorship such as restriction, deletion, and blocking claimed that Meta removed such content under false pretenses, thus hindering public awareness.

Additionally, they noted that even after completing the report, hundreds more cases of censorship continued to be reported, surpassing the earlier 1050 cases. Furthermore, this situation has not only raised questions about the power of social media platforms to control information flow but also led to the emergence of different resistance tactics and strategies against censorship on social media. In this regard, social media users attempted to bypass algorithms using tactics such as using coded language, sharing emojis, or sharing what the algorithm loves and needs most, such as facial images, to outsmart the algorithm.

Conversations with social media users who suspect that solidarity posts with Palestine are being restricted are featured in a news article in the New Internationalist.[2] These users share some of their experiences on how they deceive the algorithm. For instance, Hamza Ali Shah, a British Palestinian journalist, says, "Let's say I post on football, I'll get 100 plus views, but on Palestine, it's like 50 to 70, especially if it's consecutive posts," and mentions

2 See.: "Social Media Users are Bypassıng Censorship on Palestine" New Internationalist, https://newint.org/social-media-censorship-palestine.

Activists in Gaza protest Facebook's censorship of Palestine-related content.

Source: Mohammed Asad, APA

that he now posts irrelevant content in between Instagram stories on Palestine, or waits 24 hours in between posting to avoid censorship. Another tactic that stands out is the use of the watermelon emoji. The watermelon emoji has become synonymous with solidarity with Palestine. The use of watermelon imagery dates back to the time when Israel deemed the display of the Palestinian flag during the 1967 Six-Day War in Gaza and the West Bank as an offense. Palestinians began using the watermelon, which carries the same white, red, green, and black colors as the flag, to circumvent the ban, and today, the watermelon emoji successfully passes under Meta's radar. Lastly, the tendency of the Instagram algorithm to favor posts containing faces has made sharing one's face a popular method of circumventing the algorithm. Climate activist Mikaela Loach has also expressed that showing her face in posts related to Palestine helps the content reach a wider audience compared to visuals directly linked to Palestine's liberation.

In conclusion, the censorship of the visual representation of others' suffering on social media, in other words, the effort to make disasters "invisible," poses serious problems for freedom of expression and information. Such censorship prevents people in conflict zones from sharing their experiences, voices, and struggles for existence and identity with the world. However, despite attempts to suppress it, it is possible to overcome this and see and show the truth - or, in the simple words of James Agee, "the cruel radiance of what is." Nevertheless, the issue ultimately comes down to wishing for an end to this witnessing. As Bob Dylan famously questioned in his song: "Yes 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows that too many people have died?"

Faces of Civil Resistance in the Muslim World

BANGLADESH

Anti-discrimination Students Movement

In Dhaka in June 2024, protests by Bangladeshi university students against unemployment targeting the quota system spread to campuses. A curfew was declared, and hundreds of students participating in the protests were killed. However, the protests ended Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 15-year rule.

USA

Campus Encampments

University students in the US organized protests against the Zionist regime's genocide in Gaza and demanded that their universities divest from companies that support Israel. The protests began on April 17 at Columbia University in New York, where students set up tents on campus, and soon spread to numerous universities, including Harvard, Yale, Texas, NYU, California, and Minnesota. Despite all the hardships, such as violence, detention, and expulsion of students and faculty members, students declared that they would continue to protest against Zionist collaborators.

FRANCE

Suburb Riots

On June 27, 2023, after the killing of 17-year-old Nahel of Algerian descent by French police in a Paris suburb, the children of first and second-generation immigrant families in Paris started a new riot. Racist and Islamophobic attacks against immigrants and discriminatory policies were also the root causes of this movement. Along with pro-Palestinian protests, the far-right rhetoric and the government's immigration law also continue to be protested by thousands of people in France.

SUDAN

Anti-Coup Protests

Sudan's 2019 revolution and the subsequent coup were products of the country's civil war and colonial history, and the protests led by youth and women were significant examples of a civilian movement. In October 2021, thousands of people organized anti-coup protests in Khartoum and other cities. Since the coup, security forces have killed dozens of people, including children, in efforts to suppress the protests. In 2022, a major civil uprising took place against the civil war, economic problems, and corruption in the country.

INDIA

Citizenship Amendment Act Protests

Following the exclusion of Muslim migrants from the Citizenship Law, massive protests were launched by a group of university students in India in 2019 and spread to universities across the country. Attempts to prevent the protests at Jamia Millia Islamia University in New Delhi and Aligarh Muslim University in Uttar Pradesh with harsh interventions and police violence caused university students to rebel in many states of the country. The Islamophobic attitudes that increased after the protests continued with the headscarf ban implemented in 2022, and Muslim university students, especially women, stood up against the ban.

KASHMIR

Student Uprisings

Protests by Kashmiri university students in Pulwama were violently suppressed in the wake of mass unrest since the killing of Burhan Wani by Indian paramilitary forces in 2016. In response, Kashmiri students took to the streets to protest against government repression and police violence, which resulted in nearly 100 Kashmiris being killed and more than 15,000 injured by Indian forces. Indian troops fired pellet guns, injuring over 6000 people in one or both eyes and causing some to lose their sight. The incident became known as the world's first "mass blindings," and 2017 was referred to as the year of student uprisings in Kashmir.

Trade Unions, Collective Bargaining, and Strikes in Islamic Countries

Sayım Yorgun
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The fact that trade union rights are discussed within a class context and the idea that a society with a class structure would not be considered Islamic has negatively affected the development of industrial relations, especially union organizing in Muslim societies. From an Islamic perspective, some argue that workers and employers are equal, so the state should remain neutral in this relationship. On the other hand, some emphasize that the bargaining power of workers is inadequate, so employees should have the right to organize, and the state should intervene in favor of the disadvantaged. Such discussions influence trade unions, collective bargaining, and strikes; however, these influences appear at different levels across countries.

The extent of union organizing, the scope of collective bargaining, and the number of strikes in Islamic countries are important for a more equitable distribution system and should be examined. This article will evaluate union organizing, collective bargaining, the right to strike, and its practices in some Islamic countries.

Trade Unions

A product of the West's economic, social, and political conditions, the Industrial Revolution led to the dominance of class-based and conflict-oriented labor relations with this major transformation. The implementation of new production and management techniques triggered the transition from individual to collective relations, which in turn brought new necessities to the forefront, and trade unions emerged as a response to these necessities. The fact that there have been unions in the Islamic world since very early times, especially among tradespeople, and that unjust labor practices and exploitative worker-employer relationships are incompatible with Islamic principles have highlighted the need for trade unions in Islamic countries as well.

When we analyze the discussions regarding trade unions, it is known that Islamic countries have implemented legal regulations for trade unions and adopted some of the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). However, we can observe that, essentially, the concept of the trade union is subject to debate, and its compatibility with Islamic principles is being questioned.

Workers' strike organized by HAK-İŞ, 2024.

Source: IHA Ihlas News Agency

The colonial histories, independence struggles, and socio-cultural differences of Islamic countries have created variations in union dynamics, thereby influencing the historical development of trade unions. Undoubtedly, the impact of economic conditions has been quite decisive, and trade unions have also been observed in industrializing countries.

A few points stand out when we look at the trade union density rates in some Islamic countries, as shown in Table 1. Firstly, the density rates are generally low, and there is a lack of transparent data for us to track. Moreover, we can also argue that Kazakhstan's high ranking is a result of the lasting effects of the socialist system.

Türkiye appears to stand out from other Islamic countries in terms of the prevalence and impact of trade unions. Despite criticisms of trade unions and activities in Türkiye, membership in a trade union is relatively common among workers, public servants, and employers. However, the control power of political authorities over unions limits this impact.

Table 1. Trade Union Density Rates in Some Islamic Countries

Countries	Years	Trade Union Density Rates
Pakistan	2016	4.7%
Indonesia	2019	13%
Malaysia	2018	8.7%
Egypt	2010	23.8%
Tunisia	2019	38.1%
Kazakhstan	2017	46.9%
Türkiye	2024	14.8% (July) [1]

Source: QERY, Trade Unions Worldwide, https://qery.no/trade-unions-worldwide/

1 See. https://www.csgb.gov.tr/Media/tk4fzyt0/calisma-hayati-istatistikleri-aylik-e-bulten-eylul-2024.pdf

Driven by nationalist movements and workers' demands for rights, the early unionization struggles in Egypt and Iran emerged in the 20th century. In Iran, trade unions were influential until the years when political repression intensified. In the oil-rich Gulf countries, the economic structure's reliance on migrant labor and the abundance of social welfare programs have resulted in low unionization rates. In countries like Malaysia, we see that the demands of the industrial workforce, which emerged due to economic development, have led to relatively higher unionization rates. Economic developments in the manufacturing, service, and public sectors have positively influenced the growth of trade unions.

In Indonesia, where the trade union density rate is relatively good, the impact of nationalist struggles and a large industrial workforce stands out. In North African countries with nationalist struggles, especially Tunisia and Morocco, there is a medium level of union density compared to European countries. In contrast, Gulf Cooperation Council countries have lower unionization rates.

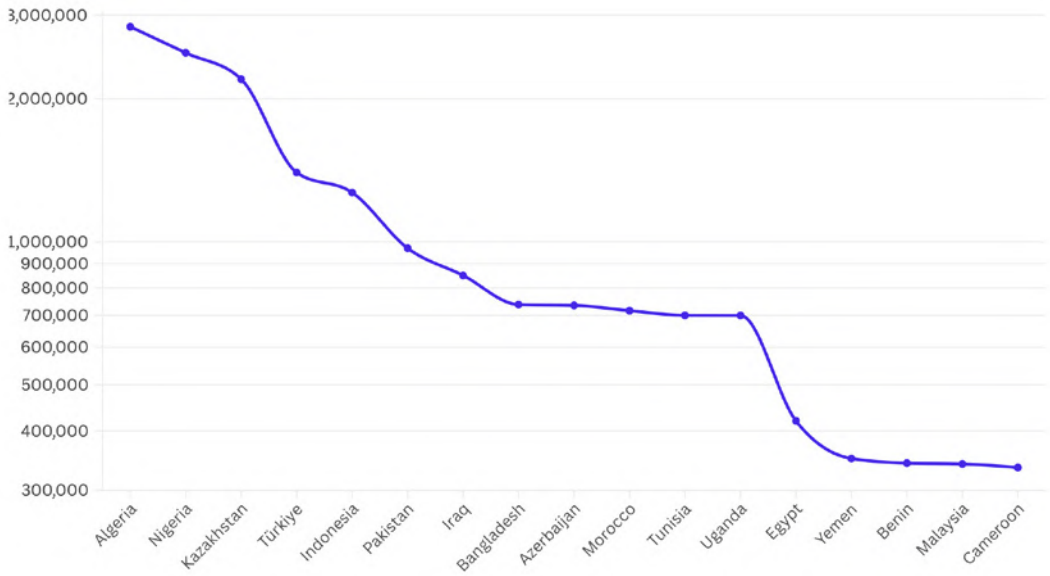

Figure 1. Number of Employees who are Members of a Trade Union Reported by Islamic Countries Affiliated with ITUC as of 2018 (Those with over 350.000 Members)

Source: Yorgun, 2019, s. 1723

Figure 1 shows countries with more than 350.000 union members, and these countries with relatively strong unionization have more developed industries compared to others. Among these, Egypt and Pakistan stand out as countries with a long history of unionization, while Indonesia and Türkiye seem promising for the future (Yorgun, 2019, p. 1723). Based on this data, we can argue that there is a limited trade union. However, Islam not only talks about equitable distribution of resources in society, but it also gives the whole population a right to a basic standard of living (Ahmad, 2011, p. 607). Al-Banna emphasizes "justice" in the employer-employee relationship, and according to him, the term "justice" crystallizes the primary purposes of trade unions. (Syed, 2008, p. 422). In this regard, the exploited have the right to react, and workers who exercise this right and organize cannot be condemned. The primary aim of trade unions is to achieve social justice and make social policies effective. Hence, trade unions strive not only for their members but also

to establish equitable relationships across all segments of society. The limited level of trade unions in Islamic countries leads to a similarly limited impact of these trade unions.

Collective Bargaining

The parties are not equal in typical employment contracts between employers and employees, as the employer generally has greater bargaining power. Therefore, it is necessary for employees with weak bargaining power to unite and engage in collective bargaining. This necessity applies not only to workers but also to employers.

When we examine collective bargaining practices in Islamic countries, we see considerably different approaches. In Türkiye, the first regulation concerning the right to free collective bargaining with the right to strike was introduced in the 1961 Constitution. Following the 1961 Constitution, which was drafted under military tutelage, Law No. 275 guaranteed collective bargaining, and the right to voluntary and free collective bargaining, as well as the autonomy of collective labor, were regulated in the laws and implemented (Yorgun, 2023, p. 100). Despite the fact that the right to collective bargaining in Türkiye is guaranteed by the Constitution, the percentage of workers covered by collective bargaining is around 9%. Civil servants have been granted the right to collective bargaining agreement, but it has not been combined with the right to strike. This situation weakens the bargaining power of unions, and the division among civil servants' unions further weakens them, leading to competition between trade unions. Consequently, governments exploit this fragmented structure (Yorgun, 2011, p. 153), and the impact of collective bargaining remains limited.

When we examine the process in Pakistan, we see that registered trade unions that are elected through secret ballots are granted the right to collective bargaining. In Malaysia, trade unions must be recognized by employers, and civil servants do not have the right to collective labor agreements; however, they do have the right to negotiate their working conditions. In Indonesia, trade unions can engage in collective labor agreements, but this authority is not extended to federations and confederations

The primary aim of trade unions is to achieve social justice and make social policies effective. Hence, they strive not only for their members but also to establish equitable relationships across all segments of society.

People protesting against economic policies in Türkiye hold a banner that says, "We do not want minimum wage but fair distribution and sharing," Fatih, Istanbul, 2023.

Source: Eğitim İlke-Sen (İlkeli Eğitim ve Bilim Çalışanları Dayanışma Sendikası)

(Yorgun, 2019, p. 1726). As we can understand from these explanations, the ineffectiveness of collective bargaining in Islamic countries leads to the loss of workers' rights.

In Islamic countries, where unionization rates are relatively low, it is generally observed that there has not been much progress in terms of collective bargaining either. Collective bargaining is seen in these countries as a system that hinders development, increases costs, leads to conflicts in the workplace, and is not widely preferred (Yorgun, 2019, p. 1728). This perspective negatively impacts the collective bargaining system, disrupts income distribution, and highlights the fact that it is not a coincidence that Islamic countries are among those with unequal income distribution.

Strikes

When we examine Islamic countries that recognize strikes as a right and grant this right to their workers, the situation is not very promising. In those countries with limited trade union rights, the right to strike has been further restricted, and it has been almost impossible to exercise this right in many countries. For instance, workers have the right to strike in Malaysia, but there are restrictions, such as the requirement to provide prior notice and conduct a strike vote, and the Minister of Labor has the authority to intervene in the strike process. In Egypt, workers began striking relatively early, and in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Egyptian workers went on strikes to improve economic conditions. However, from 1962 to 1986, strikes were banned, and compulsory arbitration was enforced.

Since the right to strike is not recognized as a fundamental right in Pakistan, there is an increasingly negative perception of strikes as an unfair labor practice. Strikes that last longer than 30 days can be prohibited, and the government can unilaterally enforce mandatory arbitration, making it impossible to speak of an effective right to strike in Pakistan as well (Yorgun, 2019, pp. 1726-1730).

From an Islamic perspective, workers have the right to demand their legitimate rights and to strike or

> ***From an Islamic perspective, workers have the right to demand their legitimate rights and to strike or engage in collective action against injustice if these rights are not granted.***

engage in collective action against injustice if these rights are not granted (ILC, 2022). Islam regards the right to strike as a means of eliminating injustice within certain limits and does not tolerate actions that exceed these limits (Qur'an 2:190) (Ahmad, 2011, p. 606). Ensuring that workers and employers negotiate on equal terms is considered a fundamental duty of the state. Providing trade unions, collective bargaining, and the right to strike for fair income distribution is considered a basic human right. However, the increasing income inequality, widespread poverty, and rising conflicts among Muslims are undoubtedly rooted in the inadequacy of democratic rights.

Conclusion

We can argue that trade unions cannot operate freely, their capacity to oppose the system is limited, unionization rates do not reflect reality, and they continue to exist under state control in Islamic countries. The suspicious attitude of authorities towards trade unions in Islamic countries leads to restrictions on trade union autonomy and, consequently, to limited trade union activities. Additionally, due to factors such as late industrialization, the inability to break the chain of economic backwardness, the exploitation of natural resources, and the establishment of authoritarian regimes, trade union rights are not effective enough.

Although Islam doesn't restrict individual or collective rights, the limitations on collective rights in Muslim-populated areas typically stem from governments, leaders, and employers (Yorgun, 2020, p. 318). We should also note that in Muslim societies, there is a widespread liberal approach characterized by the capitalist economic system, a dominant free market, unlimited competition, and opposition to government intervention. It is a serious contradiction for Muslims to discuss the struggle of trade unions against the poverty and exploitation created by a non-Islamic economic system instead of debating how compatible the capitalist system is with Islamic principles.

The primary purpose of both Islam and trade unions is justice. Employment contracts that align with Islamic values should also encompass the principle of justice. Despite having legal equality in employer-employee relationships, the unequal bargaining power between workers and employers often leads workers to accept conditions that employers impose. Hence, it is necessary to analyze unionization, collective bargaining, and the right to strike in Islamic societies and to create proper environmental conditions to improve industrial relations, particularly those involving trade unions.

Civicizing the Civic Space in North Macedonia: The State, International Networks, and Cultural Existence

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The Eurocentric world and history of human thought examine topics such as politics, the state, society, and the individual through a narrative centered around Ancient Greece, Rome, the Enlightenment, and the modern period. The literature on civil society, too, has followed a similar path, tracing its roots back to Aristotle. However, it is possible to say that the modern state and the bourgeoisie developed the concept of civil society in Western Europe from the 17th century onward, and it became an essential part of democratic regimes by the 2000s. Although it does not seem possible to find a definition of civil society that everyone agrees upon, it can be roughly described as covering all forms of civic associations, organizations, and networks aimed at promoting common goals and interests and are in the space between family, business sector, political parties, and government sector (Kacarska, 2011, p. 72).

Like other non-Western European societies, the Balkans attempted to build civil society primarily with a Jacobin approach. The long 19th century, the war-torn 20th century, kingdoms, constitutional monarchies, communist states, and ultimately, 11 different nation-states that transitioned into democratic regimes all produced different structures and forms of civil society. The construction of civil society became one of the most important agendas, especially with the democratization of the region after 1990. This de facto situation reached its peak during the process of Europeanization in the 2000s. As the region was trying to manage its transition, it also sought to create a civil society space through non-state organizations. However, given the late modernization, inefficient market, and the state, society, and individual model that is produced by an ineffective bureaucracy, it seemed unlikely that a strong civic space could be established in a top-down manner. We can argue that during this process, Balkan societies, which clung to contemporary values like democratization and Europeanization as their compass, created different forms of civil society that were dependent on political parties, engaged with international organizations, and embedded in social groups while struggling greatly in civicizing the civic space.

History of Civil Society in North Macedonia

North Macedonia is one of the countries that best represents the Balkans with its demography, strategic location, history, and conflicts. The country, which was known as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes after 1918 and later as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia after 1945, eventually

Protests in North Macedonia, 2015.

Source: Boris Grdanoski, AP Photo

gained independence in 1991. Then, through the processes of democratization and integration with the EU, it adopted the Western European model of the state, society, politics, and the individual. While the country's ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse population experienced a history of conflicts, instability, and failed states, constitutional reforms in 2001 and 2017, along with pressure from EU norms, have pushed the country toward a more stable and structured framework. The construction, regulation, and organization of the civic space have taken place within the context of these challenges and solutions.

The first civil society organization in North Macedonia was registered as a sports association in 1941. According to the public central register, as of May 2023, a total of 14,985 civil organizations or associations are registered in the Republic of North Macedonia. 53.72% of these organizations are currently active, and the highest percentage (41.59%) of active organizations operate in Skopje. Similar to Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, the wars and armed conflicts that occurred in the region between 1990 and 2001 had a significant impact on the formation of different civil society organizations in North Macedonia. The establishment of numerous humanitarian aid organizations during this period further highlighted this influence.

Since it has not experienced a dominant ethnic group governing the state that the modern state requires, North Macedonia could not establish a regular and stable model of state and society until the first quarter of the 21st century. This systemic crisis has significantly impacted civil society as well. The failure to build a modern state and the inability to cultivate awareness of the public sphere have led to the failure of civil society to develop on a healthy basis in terms of its autonomy, financing, and connections with international networks. In this context, the inability of the civil space to civicize has resulted in different distorted forms, often directed by political parties and shaped by international networks and organizations for various purposes while also providing legal frameworks for closed communities.

Trajkovski divides the perception of civil society in North Macedonia after 1990 into two periods. While in the first period, from 1990 to 2001, civil society was seen as an anti-state element, in the second period, from 2001 to the present, it is perceived as an element cooperating with the state. Trajkovski further subdivides the second period into three sub-periods: 2001-2008, 2008-2017, and 2017 to the present. The distinguishing feature of the first sub-period is that the state began to see the civil society sector as a partner in the formation and implementation of public policies. Also, the state's financial, legal, and institutional support to civil society organizations increased during this period. An increasing number of civil society organizations began to receive financial support from the government and to focus on areas such as social care and services, anti-corruption efforts, environmental

Table 1. Total Number of Registered Civil Society Organizations in North Macedonia According to Their Legal Form

Year	Social - Humanitarian Associations	Sports Associations	Cultural Associations	Professional Associations	Ecological Associations	Foundations	Other Social Organizations, Foundations and Associations	Total Number of Associations
2013	2	7	9	1	4	4	202	**229**
2014	2	9	6	1	1	8	225	**252**
2015	0	11	8	1	1	3	173	**197**
2016	2	3	3	2	1	1	204	**216**
2017	0	3	5	5	0	8	263	**284**
2018	1	11	3	3	3	4	282	**307**
2019	1	2	4	1	1	8	329	**346**
2020	1	3	3	0	1	2	250	**260**
2021	3	5	3	0	1	7	271	**290**
2022	3	4	8	2	3	11	355	**386**
2023	0	5	1	3	2	3	178	**192**
Total	**15**	**63**	**53**	**19**	**18**	**59**	**2732**	**2959**

Source: Kajoli Bujar & Rama Ariton, 2024, p. 13

issues, the protection of human and minority rights, gender equality, refugee support, humanitarian activities, and the decentralization process. In the period from 2008 to 2017, the ruling political party increased its dependency on civil society organizations, and the Open Society and Soros Foundations, as part of international networks, organized protests against the government; thus, it marked a different era. In this period, which is also referred to as "de-Sorosization," the influence and funding of the EU and international organizations were at the center of civil society organizing in the post-2017 period after the defeat of the current government, and topics such as democracy, human rights, women's rights, environmental and climate change issues, and digitalization were highlighted.

Muslims, Opportunities and Forms of Civil Society

If we exclude the period from 1918 to the early 1930s, Balkan Muslims remained outside the public sphere and organizations until the 2000s. While there were some forms of organization during the constitutional monarchy period after the Ottoman Empire, repression increased with the dissolution of parliaments. We also observe that under communist regimes between 1945 and 1990, Balkan Muslims were confined to their homes, kept outside of public life, and continued their lives under constant surveillance. Although the 1990s brought democratization, Muslims in the region only began to associate the concept of civil society with humanitarian organizations as they continued to live in the shadow of war and armed conflicts until 2001. After 2001, the EU process has made it possible for countries to organize in the public sphere, be visible, and raise awareness for the public good. With great motivation and enthusiasm, civil society organizations emerged in fields such as culture, art, education, humanitarian aid, and religious education. While countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Greece had different experiences, they faced common challenges such as managing relationships with the state, inexperience in resource mobilization strategies, and inadequacies in creating accountable institutional structures and cultures. Similarly, due to the lack of qualified human resources and the fact that nation-states largely constructed

Charity activities of the Organizata Humanitare El Hilal, 2023.

Source: Organizata Humanitare El Hilal

Muslims as "the other," Muslim communities were able to be organized in fundamental areas such as education, culture, and humanitarian aid—areas where the state has failed to provide services for this social group—rather than in areas addressing issues and solutions relevant to the "high" culture. With democratization, the presence of religion in the public sphere has led to the transformation of communities into NGOs. Furthermore, as a result of the current global culture and open society processes, many communities from the Islamic world have been able to organize in this sphere.

The presence and organization of Muslims in civil society in North Macedonia, while resembling the processes of Balkan Muslims, differ from the developmental processes of the dominant Macedonian civil societies in the country. The presence and organization of Muslims in civil society in North Macedonia, while resembling the processes of Balkan Muslims, differ from the developmental processes of the dominant Macedonian civil societies in the country. Macedonian Orthodox Christian groups, secular Albanians, and other ethnic groups have institutionalized themselves with the funding and support of the EU and the state. Nevertheless, Muslims, who have long been among the social groups neglected by the state and have lower income levels due to marginalization, have been organized to address issues such as lack of access to higher education and the threat of extinction of their culture and language. In this context, Muslim civil society organizations have naturally remained distant from the expected actions of the civil sphere, such as influencing, criticizing, and advocating for policies related to the economy, foreign policy, health, and education that affect all citizens in the public sphere.

Ethnic issues have not only shaped the political agenda of the country, they have also significantly influenced the civil sphere. The majority of civil society organizations that operate outside international networks have been built around affiliations such as ethnicity, identity, culture, and tradition. While organizations known for addressing the issues of Muslims, such as the Makedonya Türk Sivil Toplum Teşkilatları Birliği, Forumi Rinor Islam, Organizata Kulturore Humanitare Merhamet, ADEKSAM, and the Organizata Humanitare El Hilal have largely performed without support from the state, they have sought to provide services in areas where the state has failed to offer adequate solutions or services. Turkish, Albanian, and many other civil society organizations have carried out projects in education, culture, and humanitarian aid with funds from the diaspora in the country and especially from various Islamic countries, with Türkiye being the primary source of support.

In the last 35 years, the state and society model produced by North Macedonia has not sufficiently met the standards of developed democracies. The gaps in this process have created an excessive dependency on the country's political parties, international networks, and religious structures.

Civil Society in the Island of Democracy in Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan

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The formation of modern Kyrgyz civil society is directly related to Kyrgyzstan's independence and its subsequent political evolution. During the Soviet era, Moscow's refusal to grant member states the constitutional right to act independently on certain issues while considering local differences and its opposition to the local population's limited ability to practice their language, culture, and religion led to protests occasionally. However, it has become normal for such protests to be suppressed by force in a short time. The "perestroika"[1] announced in April 1985 marked the beginning of a revival and claims of independence from Moscow by union states. The three Baltic states took the leading role during this period—Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia—which were more independent and developed compared to Central Asian countries, and many anti-communist informal groups emerged in these countries. Many organizations, leading the Latvian Popular Front (Latvijas Tautas Fronte, LTF), the Popular Front of Estonia (Eestimaa Rahvarinne), and the Lithuanian "Sąjūdis-Movement" (Lietuvos Sąjūdis) movements, began to rebel against the communist regime explicitly.

This wave, as in the rest of the Soviet Union, also influenced Kyrgyz youth. The main trigger for the collective protest initiative in Kyrgyzstan, starting among the younger segment of society, was the housing issue, which emerged as early as the 1920s and was known to the government but overlooked. Despite the migration of Kyrgyz youth from rural areas to cities starting in the 1920s, no solutions were proposed for their housing problems, and they were subjected to exclusion. Young people requesting land to build homes were ignored due to the discriminatory policies of local officials. Meanwhile, housing was immediately allocated to people from other nationalities, particularly those from Russia to Soviet Kyrgyzstan, forcing Kyrgyz youth to live in makeshift housing rented out by these newcomers. This issue reached its peak when Kyrgyz youth, treated as second-class citizens in their homeland, seized agricultural lands around the capital and began constructing homes there between April and June of 1989. The communist government's repression to stop this illegal act led to the transformation of a social issue into a struggle for independence. In June 1990, the youth, aiming to resist state repression through

1 Restructuring.

collective action, united around the "Ashar" civil and political movement, marking the first civil society action in modern Kyrgyzstan's history (Чоротегин, 2015).

The leadership of Kyrgyzstan's social awakening was taken on by intellectuals such as writers Chinghiz Aitmatov, Tugalbay Sydykbekov, Kazat Akmatov, and Kenesh Jusupov, along with directors like Tolomush Okeyev, Bolot Shamshiev, and Dooronbek Sadyrbayev, who actively supported the movement. The fact that the first meeting place of the Kyrgyzstan Society of Young Historians, announced on June 3, 1989, was the conference hall of the Kyrgyzstan Writers' Union and that Chinghiz Aitmatov, who was in Moscow at the time, provided indirect support, further proves our argument (Чоротегин, 2015).

The advancement of Kyrgyzstan's civil society organization to a higher level occurred with the establishment of the Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement, encompassing all informal organizations. The Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement, which played a significant role in laying the foundations of an independent Kyrgyzstan in 1990-91, has since been the starting point for numerous political parties that have been influential in politics to this day. The political and oppositionist character it assumed at its inception can still be observed in contemporary civil society organizations (Курманов, 2004, pp. 8-9).

"Imported" vs. "Domestic" Debate

As is well known, Kyrgyzstan gained its independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the civil initiative-based organizations, unions, and movements in the country were established to resist the communist regime, in which Russians held a superior position. Western countries, particularly the United States, which applauded the eventual downfall of the USSR and socialism in the global ideological competition, quickly launched efforts to teach democracy and market economy principles to the post-Soviet states, which had just gained independence.

Starting in 1993, civil society organizations in Kyrgyzstan that were entirely funded by Western countries began to emerge, thanks to the financial and technical support provided to institutions that adopted democratic values and aimed to operate in this field. The biggest grant providers were organizations like the U.S. Agency for International

A protest against the results of the parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan, 2020.

Source: Vladimir Voronin, AP Photo

Development (USAID), Counterpart Consortium, the American Bar Association, and the National Democratic Institute. Between 1996 and 1999, financial support for civil society initiatives in Kyrgyzstan reached its peak (Жусупов, 2008, p. 42). Thanks to financial support, we can see that a significant number of civil society organizations officially began operations during this period. In the following years, the growth trend in these organizations continued steadily. According to 1994 data, Kyrgyzstan had 14 political parties, 10 civil movements, and over 800 civil society organizations officially operating. A general characteristic of civil society organizations in the early years of independence is that the majority were established for humanitarian aid purposes (Бектанова, 2016). According to data from the decade after 2006, these numbers increased dramatically, reaching 8,000. This figure was the highest among Central Asian countries at the time (Jailobaeva, 2013).

However, the increase in numbers cannot be attributed solely to the technical and financial support provided by external sources. The post-Soviet government's support for democratic changes in society, along with the adoption and implementation of laws on "Civil Society Organizations" and "Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations" in the early months of independence, also removed obstacles to the development of the civil society sector (Бектанова, 2016). The legal regulations regarding the official licensing and operations of civil society organizations continue to be updated and developed according to the needs of the time. Thanks to all these supports, civil society organizations, particularly those addressing social issues, education, and human rights, have come to be informally referred to as the "third sector" (Жусупов, 2008, p. 43).

As of November 22, 2011, the total number of non-profit organizations in the country was 16,262, consisting of 4,623 associations, 3199 foundations, 5659 organizations, 690 unions, and 2,091 other types of entities (Фирдоус, 2015, p. 122). According to the most recent data from 2023, the total number has reached 29,130. Of these, 10,313 are associations, 7504 are foundations, and 11,313 fall into other categories (24.kg, 2023).

Challenges Faced by Civil Society Organizations

Financial Resources

From 1990 to the present, Kyrgyzstan's civil society has experienced a fluctuating trajectory, acquiring specific characteristics unique to Kyrgyz society as a result of various events. Civil society in Kyrgyzstan, both in the past and today, has not been free from challenges. Financial issues are a primary issue, particularly for organizations established with international funding. On the other hand, due to the country's still developing banking sector, it isn't easy to fully and transparently manage the funds that civil society organizations receive from

Table 1. Distribution of Income Sources for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan

Source of Income	Percentage in Total Resources
International Grants	64%
Personal Donations	9%
Working Capital	8%
Membership Fees	8%
Local Grants	4%
Business Donations	3%
State Support/Grants	2%
Others	2%

Source: Jailobaeva, 2013

external sources. According to 2005 data, 64% of the financial resources for civil society organizations were derived from grants provided by international organizations (Jailobaeva, 2013).

As we can see from Table 1, personal donations account for only 9%, local grants for 4%, and business donations for just 3%; in other words, if external funding, which constitutes two-thirds of the resources, is cut off, the likelihood of a civil society organization continuing its operations is very low. Unfortunately, no more recent data than the 2005 figures on this matter is available.

The weak local support for civil society organizations can be attributed primarily to the conditions imposed by the developing economy. The second reason may stem from certain Western-backed civil society organizations highlighting issues that conflict with Kyrgyz society's religious and social values, such as homosexuality, and representing Kyrgyzstan negatively on the international stage. Another adverse effect of civil society organizations relying on foreign funding is that the foreign institutions providing financial support may use these organizations as a tool for pressure and lobbying against the local government. A prime example of this can be seen in the crisis between the U.S. and Kyrgyzstan. During the power vacuum that occurred in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, an ethnic conflict arose, leading to the imprisonment of an individual sentenced to life in prison for "inciting ethnic hatred," "organizing mass disorder," and "killing a state official (police)." In 2015, this individual was awarded a human rights award by the U.S. Department of State (Мотинов, 2015).

The Kyrgyz government unilaterally terminated the agreement made with the E.U. for cooperation on July 21, 2015, citing that the U.S. action threatened Kyrgyz society's unity (Правительство Кыргызской Республики, 2015). The U.S. Embassy in Bishkek stated in an official announcement on July 23, 2015, that "the U.S. has provided a total of $2 billion in assistance to support Kyrgyzstan's democratic transition since 1993, and this decision will lead to the cessation of ongoing projects in the country" (Посольство США в Кыргызской Республике, 2015). In a subsequent announcement on the matter, they further listed all the projects

The advancement of Kyrgyzstan's civil society organization to a higher level occurred with the establishment of the Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement, encompassing all informal organizations.

A sign at a protest in Kyrgyzstan in 2022 reads "Protect freedom of speech!" in support of freedom of speech and media.

Source: Aibek Biybosunov, RFE/RL

supported, particularly those aimed at strengthening state institutions, institutionalizing civil society, and ensuring the transparency of government decisions (Посольство США в Кыргызской Республике, 2015).

The Influence of Russia

Another issue arises from the differences in civil society policies and the levels of freedoms granted by neighboring and strategically allied countries to Kyrgyzstan. Despite the image of representative democracy projected to the outside world after gaining independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian countries have largely continued with authoritarian governance. The use of force by these countries against civil society organizations, particularly those with opposing views, and the resort to legal barriers in this regard have indirectly influenced state-civil society relations in Kyrgyzstan as well.

Notably, Russia, which is known for its strict approach to this matter, amended its federal law on "Non-Profit Organizations" in 2012. This legislation requires civil society organizations that receive any financial support from abroad (whether from state or private entities) and participate in political activities (even indirectly) to register as "foreign agents" (Кашин, 2012, p. 17). To a large extent, the law proposed by three members of the Kyrgyz Parliament in 2014 was inspired by the Russian law dated May 26, 2014 (International Center for Not-For-Profit Law [ICNL], 2014). Despite opposition from local civil society representatives and international organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, and the United Nations human rights subunits, the bill passed its first and second readings in the Kyrgyz Republic Ministry of Justice (Human Rights Watch, 2015; Freedom House Kyrgyzstan, 2015). However, growing protests, signature campaigns, and international pressure ultimately led to 65 out of 111 members voting against the bill in the final vote held in 2016, ending the initiative (Азаттык Үналгысы, 2015). Ten years later, Member of Parliament Nadira Narmatova revived the previously rejected bill, successfully bringing it back into discussion, and the law officially came into effect in April 2024. In order to soften the reactions from the public, only the term was changed, and "foreign agent" was replaced with "foreign representative" (ООН, 2024; The Diplomat, 2024).

As a result, we can see that Kyrgyz civil society has a modern history of 35 years, and ups and downs have naturally marked the process. It is nearly impossible to address the country's development journey in the civil society sector without separating it from the concepts of democracy, freedom, and independence. Despite numerous changes in power and the influences of global players, it maintains the characteristics it acquired at its inception. This area has not yet been comprehensively and systematically researched, so it is quite challenging to paint a broad picture.

Muslim Nobel Laureates in Science

MOHAMMAD ABDUS SALAM - *NOBEL PRIZE IN PHYSICS (1979)*

Mohammad Abdus Salam is the first Muslim scientist to receive the Nobel Prize. He was born in Pakistan and completed his PhD at Cambridge University. Abdus Salam developed the "electroweak unification" theory with Sheldon Glashow and Steven Weinberg. This theory proved that the electromagnetic force and the weak nuclear force could be unified into a single fundamental force. It was considered a revolutionary advance in particle physics, and Abdus Salam won the Nobel Prize in physics in 1979.

AHMED ZEWAIL – *NOBEL PRIZE IN CHEMISTRY (1999)*

Ahmed Zewail was born in Egypt and completed his PhD at the University of Pennsylvania. Zewail won the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1999 for his work in "femtochemistry," a technique that makes it possible to watch in real-time how chemical bonds are formed and broken, allowing chemical reactions to be observed on a femtosecond (10-15 seconds) time scale.

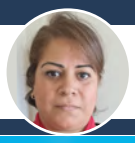
AZIZ SANCAR – *NOBEL PRIZE IN CHEMISTRY (2015)*

Aziz Sancar was born in Turkey and completed his PhD at the University of Texas. Sancar has conducted scientific studies on how cells protect their genetic information through methods such as “nucleotide excision repair (NER)” and “base excision repair (BER)” along with his studies on DNA repair and cellular response processes. He won the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 2015 for his research on mapping cellular mechanisms for repairing damaged DNA and preserving genetic information.

MOUNGI BAWENDI – *NOBEL PRIZE IN CHEMISTRY (2023)*

Moungi Bawendi was born in France and received his PhD at the University of Chicago. Bawendi is known for his work on “quantum dots” and his research on nanocrystals, solar cells, electroluminescent devices, and nanosensors that can inhibit tumors. He won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2023 for his research on the discovery of quantum dots and the understanding of their properties.

Leading Science: Muslim Nobel Laureates in Science



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The Nobel Prize is a prestigious award granted to individuals who have made important contributions to science, literature, and peace. Among Muslim scientists, Mohammad Abdus Salam (1926-1996), Ahmed Zewail (1946-2016), Aziz Sancar (1946-), and Moungi Bawendi (1961-) have made significant contributions to their respective fields and earned Nobel prizes in science with their groundbreaking works. This article provides an in-depth look at these four Nobel laureates' lives, works, award-winning projects, lifestyles, and research environments.

Mohammad Abdus Salam

Mohammad Abdus Salam, the first Muslim scientist to receive the Nobel Prize, was born in 1926 in Jhang, Pakistan. His passion for physics was inspired by his grandfather, Gul Mohammad. Abdus Salam's father worked as an education officer in a poor neighborhood in Punjab state. Even at 14, his exceptional abilities were apparent when he achieved the highest marks on the Punjab University entrance exam, which attracted significant attention.

Initially studying Urdu and English literature at Government College University, Abdus Salam later discovered his interest in mathematics, published a thesis on Srinivasa Ramanujan's problem, and graduated at the top of his class. After completing his studies at Government College, he earned a scholarship to the University of Cambridge, where he graduated with high honors in mathematics and physics, earning the prestigious Smith's Prize for his contributions to physics ("Abdus Salam Facts," 2024). Later, he served as a mathematics professor at Government College University and became the Head of the Mathematics Department at Punjab University. His academic journey brought him back to Cambridge, where he joined St. John's College as a mathematics professor, supported by a fellowship from the Pakistan Academy of Sciences ("Abdus Salam Biographical," 2024). In 1965, Abdus Salam established Pakistan's first space program and founded the Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Science & Technology (PINSTECH), initiating nuclear research, including work on atomic bombs. Additionally, he collaborated with the Theoretical Physics Group (TPG) to develop nuclear weapons design and contributed to the country's nuclear weapons program.

In 1979, Abdus Salam was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for his work on the electroweak unification theory, a collaboration with Weinberg and Glashow. This achievement marked a historic milestone in Pakistan's scientific history and represented both personal success and international recognition for his homeland. Moreover, he continued his research on the Grand Unified Theory through the Pati-Salam model, which highlighted similarities between quarks and leptons (Matthews & Salam, 1952). These works remain influential today and serve as a foundation for young researchers.

Mohammad Abdus Salam, the Nobel Prize award ceremony, 1979.

Ahmed Zewail, the Nobel Prize award ceremony, 1999.

Ahmed Zewail

The second Muslim scientist to win a Nobel Prize, Ahmed Zewail, was born on February 26, 1946, in Damanhur, Egypt. He completed his undergraduate and master's studies at Alexandria University, followed by a Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania ("Ahmed Zewail Biographical," 2024). Zewail received multiple prestigious international awards, including the Wolf Prize in Chemistry (1993), the Tolman Medal (1997), and the Priestley Medal from the American Chemical Society (2011). In the same year he received his Nobel Prize, Zewail was also honored with Egypt's highest state decoration, the Grand Collar of the Nile.

Zewail was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1999 for his pioneering work in femtochemistry, which involves studying the dynamics of chemical bond formation and breaking using ultrafast laser techniques. His work revolutionized the understanding of chemical reactions at the femtosecond scale (10^{-15} seconds), paving the way for significant applications in fields such as energy conversion, biomolecular processes, and the development of new materials (Bao, 2002). This achievement elevated Egypt's global reputation in the scientific community, serving as both the pinnacle of his career and a profound honor for his nation ("Ahmed Zewail Interview," 1999).

Zewail's innovations opened new avenues for research across diverse domains by enabling the observation of chemical reactions on a femtosecond timescale. This technique has inspired young scientists and facilitated advancements in areas ranging from nuclear and weapon technologies to biology, chemistry, and materials science (Jiang et al., 2024; Robinson & Küpper, 2024). These breakthroughs have laid the groundwork for the development of innovative technologies and transformative research across disciplines. Ahmed Zewail's scientific impact is evident in his prolific publication record, with over 200 papers referencing his femtochemistry work by 2024. He garnered nearly 3000 citations in Web of Science, over 5000 citations in Google Scholar, and achieved an impressive H-index of 32. Zewail dedicated his life to science until his passing in 2016, leaving a lasting legacy that continues to inspire researchers worldwide.

Aziz Sancar, the Nobel Prize award ceremony, 2015.

Aziz Sancar

Born in 1946 in Türkiye, Aziz Sancar is the third Muslim scientist to win a Nobel Prize. He is a physician, academician, biochemist, and molecular biologist. Sancar graduated from Istanbul University's Faculty of Medicine in 1969 and began postdoctoral research at Johns Hopkins University and later the University of Texas in 1970 with a scholarship from TÜBİTAK. His persistent dedication to his studies allowed him to rapidly advance his academic career (Ulupınar, 2023). Currently, he serves as a professor of biochemistry and biophysics at the University of North Carolina (UNC) and leads a laboratory at the same institution ("Aziz Sancar Biographical," 2015).

Sancar's Nobel-winning work focused on DNA repair mechanisms and cellular response processes. His research illuminated pathways such as nucleotide excision repair (NER) and base excision repair (BER), which highlights how cells protect their genetic information. Additionally, he made groundbreaking contributions to understanding the molecular basis of circadian rhythms, unraveling the genetic regulation of the circadian clock.

Due to his perseverance, disciplined work ethic, and resilient determination, Sancar earned numerous prizes, including several awards from TÜBİTAK in Türkiye. Among his most notable achievements is mapping cellular mechanisms for repairing damaged DNA and preserving genetic information, which earned him the 2015 Nobel Prize in Chemistry. This milestone not only marked a peak in his career but also significantly elevated Türkiye's visibility in the field of science internationally, which has made him a role model for younger generations ("Aziz Sancar Interview," 2015). In 2022, TÜBİTAK launched the Aziz Sancar Overseas Postdoctoral Research Fellowship Program in his honor. Selected researchers have the opportunity to conduct postdoctoral studies in Sancar's laboratory under his guidance (TÜBİTAK, 2024). His efforts have also facilitated the integration of Turkish scientists into global research networks, creating opportunities for collaboration on international projects.

As of 2024, Sancar continues to contribute to research on DNA repair mechanisms, the circadian clock, and developing new therapies for genetic diseases and cancer. His work is documented in Web of Science, which reports over 5000 SCI-Expanded citations and a remarkable H-index of 55. With more than 500 publications, Sancar remains a pioneering figure in the global scientific community (Kose, Sancar & Jiang, 2023).

Moungi Bawendi, the Nobel Prize award ceremony, 2023.

Source: Nanaka Adachi

Moungi Bawendi

Born in France in 1961 to Lebanese parents, Moungi Bawendi is the fourth Muslim scientist to win a Nobel Prize. He is renowned for his groundbreaking work on quantum dots, earning the 2023 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his discoveries and for explaining the properties of these nanostructures ("Moungi Bawendi Facts," 2023).

Bawendi has published over 200 works on quantum dots, which have garnered more than 20,000 citations, including over 1500 in 2024 alone. He continues to research quantum dots and their applications actively. In addition, his work extends to nanocrystals, solar cells, electroluminescent devices, and nanosensors capable of inhibiting tumors (Shi et al., 2024). Bawendi's prolific contributions include an H-index of 97, over 30,000 citations, and more than 360 publications, with nearly 3000 SCI-Expanded citations in 2024 alone.

When he won the Nobel prize, Bawendi recounted in an interview: "I think it's so important to be well-read, to understand history. Science is a part of history. To understand science's role in our community and the world. You need to understand all these other things." ("Moungi Bawendi Podcast," 2024). His study of solution-phase sample-averaged single-particle spectroscopy of quantum emitters with femtosecond resolution has opened the door to innovative quantum emitter technologies, highlighting the importance of understanding history and context in science (Shi et al., 2024). Bawendi's work not only advances theoretical knowledge but also holds significant potential for practical applications in energy, medicine, and technology. His pioneering efforts in quantum dots have positioned him as a leading figure in contemporary chemistry and nanoscience.

By introducing new paradigms in their respective fields, Abdus Salam, Zewail, Sancar, and Bawendi have advanced scientific progress both in their home countries and globally, inspiring countless scientists around the world.

Sonuç

The Nobel laureate Muslim scientists—Mohammad Abdus Salam, Ahmed Zewail, Aziz Sancar, and Moungi Bawendi—have made groundbreaking discoveries and significant contributions to the world of science. By introducing new paradigms in their respective fields, they have advanced scientific progress both in their home countries and globally, inspiring countless scientists around the world. Their achievements have not only influenced the scientific community but also had profound societal and cultural impacts. While working abroad, these scientists collaborated with researchers from diverse backgrounds, fostering knowledge exchange and initiating influential collaborative projects. Their success is rooted in strong scientific foundations, mentorship, and a disciplined approach to research. However, had they remained in their home countries, the limitations of local scientific infrastructure might have hindered their ability to conduct research at the same level. Therefore, their stories highlight the importance of global collaboration and the role of supportive environments in nurturing scientific excellence, serving as a testament to the transformative power of education and research.

How Do We Address the Digital Divide in Education?

Cem Koray Olgun
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As digitalization and digital transformation continue to reshape our daily lives, the role of information and communication technology (ICT) tools is growing rapidly. However, we cannot say that access to these tools is equally distributed across societies. Technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), blockchain, cloud storage, and 5G networks have enabled people to perform multiple tasks digitally. Yet, access to ICT remains unequal, which echoes the mistaken belief from the early 2000s that the Internet would soon be universally accessible. The OECD's description of digital transformation as a "double-edged sword" in its report on digital transformation published in 2021 is not a simple metaphor. On a global scale, the impact of digitalization is becoming increasingly evident as digital transformation accelerates. However, it's also clear that the inequalities stemming from the digital divide are widening during this process.

This inequality is defined by the concept of digital divide in the literature. The digital divide, which can be defined as the unequal distribution of access to information and communication technologies (ICT) and users' skills related to these technologies across countries and social hierarchies, generally

consists of three levels. The first level digital divide focuses on the inequality of ownership and access to ICTs; the second level digital divide focuses on the inequalities caused by having or not having the usage skills of ICTs; and the third level digital divide focuses on the inequality of creating income or benefits by using ICTs. Although there is a tendency in the literature to accept that the first-level digital divide has largely disappeared globally, 2.9 billion people living in developing countries still have limited access to and use of the Internet (OECD, 2021, p. 25). For instance, in Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, half of the adult population still does not have internet access despite rapid progress in internet connectivity over the past decade (World Bank, 2021, p. 2). In Africa, it is estimated that fiber optic networks may never reach around 30% of the isolated rural population. Even worse, 600 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa still do not have access to electricity, and this is not expected to change by 2030 (OECD, 2021, p. 31). Therefore, these data show that the first-level digital divide has not yet been resolved. According to Van Deursen and Van Dijk (2019, p. 355), who are prominent figures in this field, the first-level digital divide is still important because, in addition to the problem of internet access, there are still problems in ownership and access to equipment such as computers, smartphones, tablets, etc., printers, software, and hard drives. Moreover, it should not be overlooked that ownership and access issues related to such tools, commonly observed in certain regions globally—particularly in Africa—can also be observed locally in specific areas.

The second-level digital divide focuses on inequalities in possessing the skills to use information and

Students at the ICT training program organized for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda.

Source: Thomson Reuters Foundation

communication technologies (ICT). Proficiency in these skills is crucial and is becoming increasingly significant in societies. Because digital transformation has not only heightened the necessity of using ICT tools in existing jobs but also made their use indispensable in potential new roles that may emerge. On the other hand, this shift could reduce unskilled employment due to the automation of certain tasks that can now be performed without human intervention. However, the OECD's 2019 report on digital transformation highlights that, in recent years, new job opportunities have emerged, particularly in sectors requiring high levels of digital engagement. As the report emphasizes, the individuals who will be employed in these sectors are those with advanced skills in utilizing ICT tools (2019, p. 88).

On the other hand, the third-level digital divide differs from the first and second levels, focusing on inequalities among individuals with full access to technological tools and usage skills. This type of inequality highlights the disparities where users with adequate access and skills still fail to achieve the same income or benefits (Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015, p. 32). While the third-level digital divide is particularly relevant in developed countries, as previously emphasized, the first and second levels remain critical challenges for much of the world.

Digital Inequality and Education

It is important to emphasize that the digital divide contributes significantly to inequalities in education, profoundly impacting young people. The first and second levels of the digital divide—inequalities in access to and ownership of ICT tools and the ability to use them—pose serious challenges for both the education and future prospects of youth. In Türkiye, for instance, unresolved issues surrounding access and ownership have also hindered young people's ability to develop digital skills. A study on this topic focused on students attending public and private universities in Türkiye (Demir, Olgun & Özsöz, 2023), examining the effects of the first-level digital divide. In this context, access to ICT tools was analyzed in

> ***Access to and ownership of ICTs decrease as one moves from urban centers to rural areas in Türkiye.***

terms of fixed internet connections and computer ownership. The findings revealed that ownership and access to ICT tools are linked not only to individuals' income levels but also to their place of residence. However, the impact of residence is not regional; rather, it follows a pattern where access and ownership decrease as one moves from urban centers to rural areas, which highlights the importance of addressing inequalities in ICT ownership and access.

The experience of switching to distance education, especially during the pandemic period, has clearly demonstrated the importance of ownership and access to ICT tools. Household size and the number of school-age family members became particularly significant factors. As the number of students studying from home increased, so did the demand for access to and use of ICT tools. Therefore, the fact that schools had to step aside, so to speak, as a physical institution during the pandemic period has created a more unequal situation for such large and low-income families. This inequality undoubtedly hinders the acquisition of usage skills. The skills for using ICT tools, especially among university students, tend to remain within the department they are studying. Students often acquire only the level of ICT skills they deem necessary. Of course, it will be easier to overcome this problem in the future with the widespread use of digital skills courses such as robotic coding starting from primary education. However, the first step to overcome this problem is to completely eliminate ownership and access to ICT tools. This problem is also mentioned in the Twelfth Development Plan of Türkiye (2023, p. 154). The Plan outlines several policies and measures related to education, including the following: "Correct use of technology in education will be ensured, technological literacy will be increased and inequalities arising from technology use will be reduced."

In conclusion, we can see that the primary condition for eliminating inequalities arising from the digital divide is the elimination of inequalities in education. Removing these inequalities will also facilitate acquiring digital skills, as individuals' interest in developing such skills will increase when ownership and access are no longer obstacles. Considering the importance of acquiring digital skills in the cultural and social capital of individuals today, it is obvious that the effect of these improvements in education will have positive social reflections.

2024: CURRENT MUSLIM AFFAIRS AT A GLANCE


KAMALA
EARN MY VOTE
FREE PALESTINE
REE PALESTINE
BOYCOTT ISRAEL

Evaluating the International Legal System through the Case of Israel at the ICJ

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The Legal Foundations of South Africa's Genocide Case Against Israel at the International Court of Justice

Based on Article IX of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948 Convention), South Africa, relying on the competent jurisdiction provided by the ninth article, brought a case against Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Following the initial hearings held on January 11-12, 2024, the ICJ announced its interim decision regarding urgent requests for provisional measures on January 26, 2024, 14 days after the first hearings. According to the aforementioned ninth article of the 1948 Convention, disputes between the contracting parties relating to the interpretation, application, or fulfillment of the present Convention, including those relating to the responsibility of a State for genocide or for any of the other acts enumerated in article 3, can be submitted to the International Court of Justice at the request of any of the parties to the dispute.

According to the second article of the 1948 Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such: killing members of the group; causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

According to the third article of the Convention, genocide; conspiracy to commit genocide; direct and public incitement to commit genocide; attempt to commit genocide; complicity in genocide are punishable acts and natural persons who commit these acts are subject to punishment under Article IV of the 1948 Convention. In the case brought before the ICJ, the respondent state is judged in terms of its international responsibility for the internationally wrongful act of genocide attributed to it. The court authorized to prosecute natural persons (in other words, individuals) for specified crimes is the International Criminal Court (ICC).

South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, 2024.

Source: International Court of Justice

The ICJ prosecutes states for their international responsibility regarding state responsibility due to an international wrongful act. Individuals are prosecuted for international criminal responsibility before the ICC.

Some of the international obligations arising from international wrongful acts are peremptory norms of international law, also known as *jus cogens* norms. The existence of such norms is confirmed in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. Jus cogens norms are imperative rules of international law that cannot be deviated from by any state or replaced by a subsequent general rule of international law of the same nature. The prohibition of genocide is an example of a jus cogens norm.

International obligations arising from peremptory norms of international law are obligations *erga omnes*, which means that each state owes them to the international community as a whole. Any state can invoke erga omnes obligations against any other state. According to the UN document A/RES/56/83, international responsibility arising from the violation of an erga omnes obligation can be invoked by any state against the state responsible for the violation.[1]

South Africa's application against Israel in the ICJ is a submission arising from a serious violation of an erga omnes obligation stemming from a jus cogens rule, and it is based on Article IX of the 1948 Convention, which automatically confers jurisdiction and authority on the ICJ. Under this automatic jurisdiction, Israel is not required to accept the jurisdiction of the ICJ. Article IX of the 1948 Convention regarding extraordinary automatic jurisdiction has allowed South Africa to submit its application.

1 Hakkı Hakan Erkiner, Devletin Haksız Fiilden Kaynaklanan Uluslararası Sorumluluğu, Seçkin Publishing, Ankara: 2023; UN Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, Article IV, see p. 287.

The legal team for South Africa after the hearing, International Court of Justice.

Source: @sahouraxo, Twitter

Interim Measures in the Genocide Case Against Israel at the International Court of Justice

On January 26, the ICJ has issued the following rulings against the State of Israel:

- In accordance with its obligations under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, in relation to the Palestinians in Gaza, Israel will desist from the commission of any and all acts within the scope of Article II of the Convention, in particular, killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to the members of the group, deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, and imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.
- It will ensure that its military, as well as any irregular armed units or individuals do not commit any acts described previously.
- It will ensure that people do not engage in direct and public incitement to commit genocide or attempt to commit genocide, and insofar as they do engage therein, steps will be taken towards their punishment.
- It will take all measures within its power to prevent the deprivation of access to basic services and humanitarian assistance urgently needed to alleviate the adverse living conditions faced by Palestinians in Gaza.
- It will take effective measures to prevent the destruction and ensure the preservation of evidence related to allegations of acts within the scope of Article II of the 1948 Convention.
- It will submit a report to the Court on all measures taken to give effect to this Order within one month.

The fact that the South African State's application was not rejected in this interim decision and that the indicated measures were ordered means that ICJ did not deny the existence of the danger of genocide. In the decision, the ICJ only announces its ruling on interim measures, while it will declare its decision on the existence of genocide at the end of the case.

International Criminal Responsibility and the Jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court

There are two types of responsibility for acts committed under international law. The first is the international responsibility of states for wrongful acts under international law. In cases such as the case instituted by South Africa against the State of Israel for wrongful acts in violation of the 1948 Convention, the competent international court is the International Court of Justice. The proceedings here are not criminal but rather a determination of responsibility and reparations such as restitution, compensation, and satisfaction. Essentially, states do not have criminal responsibility in international law, but they have international responsibilities arising from wrongful acts under international law, which are not of a criminal nature. The second type of responsibility for acts committed in international law is the international criminal responsibility of individuals, or in other words, the international criminal responsibility of natural persons. The competent international court in this regard is the International Criminal Court. Here, individuals are prosecuted for international crimes. While the State of Israel is on trial at the International Court of Justice for its international responsibility, the competent court to prosecute individuals such as the president, prime minister, foreign minister, ministers, politicians, and soldiers for the international crimes they commit is the International Criminal Court. Indeed, in 2021, the ICC declared itself competent to prosecute international crimes committed in the occupied Palestinian territories.

On May 22, 2018, the government of the State of Palestine applied to the ICC. It was Palestine's

Pro-Palestinian activists watch the hearing at the International Court of Justice, 2024.

Source: Peter Boer, Bloomberg

fourth application to the Court for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed by Israeli civilians and forces. However, three years later, on February 5, 2021, the ICC Pre-Trial Chamber, on the referral of the ICC Office of Prosecutor, ruled that the ICC has jurisdiction over the territories mentioned in Palestine's referral to the Court. In the specified ruling, it was declared that the ICC has jurisdiction in Palestine which is recognized as a state under Article 12(2)(a) of the Rome Statute, and has the right to self-determination. Since October 7, 2023, there have been numerous complaints and applications against Israeli state officials to the ICC Office of Prosecutor, along with evidence regarding severe and serious international crimes committed in Gaza. These crimes include genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression as defined in the Rome Statute. These crimes include genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression as defined in the Rome Statute. Currently, there are no ongoing cases initiated by the ICC Office against Israeli state officials for the mentioned crimes. However, investigations are continuing.

According to the established rule of attribution in the international responsibility of states, first, the conduct of any state organ is considered an act of that state under international law, whether the organ exercises legislative, executive, judicial, or any other functions, whatever position it holds in the organization of the state, and whatever its character as an organ of the central government or of a territorial unit of the state. The second, the state organ includes any person or entity which has that status in accordance with the internal law of the state.[2] Hence, there are individuals who have created the threat of genocide whose existence was not denied in the ICJ's interim decision. According to the mentioned attribution rule, the individuals committing the acts attributed to the state in state responsibility are natural persons, namely individuals. Therefore, those persons representing the State of Israel should also be prosecuted in the ICC.

2 Hakkı Hakan Erkiner, Devletin Haksız Fiilden Kaynaklanan Uluslararası Sorumluluğu, Seçkin Publishing, Ankara: 2023; UN Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts, Article IV, see p. 277.

Since October 7, there have been numerous complaints and applications against Israeli state officials to the ICC Office of Prosecutor, along with evidence regarding severe and serious international crimes committed in Gaza.

Türkiye-Syria Regime Normalization: Is the Zeitgeist Enough for Reconciliation?

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In the fourteenth year of the Syrian crisis, Ankara's initiative to normalize relations with the Bashar al-Assad regime has become a major topic of discussion in recent weeks. Due to its 911-kilometer-long border, it was inevitable that Türkiye would be affected by the crisis in its neighboring country. Türkiye engaged in serious shuttle diplomacy early in the crisis to encourage the Syrian regime to implement reforms. However, after it became clear that the Assad regime was brutally suppressing peaceful protests and would not tolerate even the slightest opposition, Ankara began supporting Syrian opposition forces. Following the severance of ties with the regime, Türkiye refrained from establishing diplomatic relations with Syria for an extended period.

Nevertheless, particularly in the last few years, developments both in Syria and across the broader Middle East have brought the issue of Ankara reconciling with the Syrian regime back to the agenda from time to time. With Russia, one of the main actors in the Syrian crisis, becoming more involved, meetings between Ankara and Damascus were held in Moscow from late 2022 onwards (Özer, 2022) with officials from intelligence services and defense ministries from both sides. In fact, just before the 2023 Turkish Presidential elections, a quadrilateral meeting, including the foreign ministers of both countries, was held again in Moscow (Yıldırım, 2023). Despite these meetings, the process stalled due to two preconditions set by the Assad regime:

- Turkish troops to withdraw from Syria (The Assad regime describes the current situation as an "occupation").
- Türkiye to stop its support for the Syrian opposition (The Syrian regime refers to the Türkiye-backed Syrian opposition as "terrorists").
- The Assad regime made it clear that the normalization process with Türkiye could not move forward unless these two preconditions were met.

However, following a meeting between Alexander Lavrentiev, Special Envoy of Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the Assad regime in Damascus in June 2024, there seemed to be a slight softening in the regime's rhetoric towards Türkiye. During the meeting, Bashar al-Assad's remarks were conveyed to the media, stating that "Syria is open to all initiatives regarding Syrian-Turkish relations based on respect for the sovereignty of the country over all

Bashar al-Assad and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 2010.

Source: Reuters

its territory and the fight against terrorism and its organizations" (Musa, 2024). Nonetheless, it was also reported in different channels that the regime had not changed its position significantly and was still expecting Türkiye to publicly promise to withdraw from Syria and announce a withdrawal plan. Following these events, President Erdoğan repeatedly expressed his desire to normalize relations with the regime. He even mentioned that they could invite President Assad to Türkiye at any time, and if Assad refused, they could meet in another country to overcome "resentment" between them ("Erdoğan'dan Sayın Esed'e," 2024). With Iraq also getting involved, there have been discussions about a possible meeting between Erdoğan and Assad in Baghdad since April.

Following President Erdoğan's conciliatory approach, where he referred to Bashar al-Assad as "Mr." Assad, and the attacks on Syrian refugees in Kayseri, there were incidents of anti-Türkiye sentiment in northern Syria at the beginning of July. During these protests that were likely manipulated, the Turkish flag was burned, Turkish authorities were attacked, Turkish trucks were targeted, and clashes occurred between Turkish forces and the Syrian National Army (Hülaku, 2024). Several Syrians lost their lives in these incidents. However, calm was restored in the region shortly afterward.

Zeitgeist and Seeking Peace

In the context of talks with the Syrian regime, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan stated, "The spirit of the times compels us to seek peace" ("Hakan Fidan'dan Suriye ile Normalleşme' Açıklaması," 2024). Fidan also sought to reassure that the normalization process with Syria would not negatively impact the Syrian refugees in Türkiye or the Türkiye-backed Syrian opposition. It is understood that the main issue Fidan referred to with the concept of the spirit of the times is the Gaza crisis and the potential for this crisis to trigger a regional war. Ankara seems to believe that Israel's aggression in Gaza could escalate to involve Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, and thinks that in such a situation, Türkiye must minimize its problems with neighboring countries, establish strong relationships, and avoid the spread of conflicts. On the other hand, the possibility of Trump winning the U.S. presidential election and subsequently increasing Washington's unconditional support for Israel,

which could make Israel even more reckless and aggressive, might push the entire region into a much more dangerous and unpredictable situation. Thus, this possibility is driving Ankara to take preemptive action. Türkiye has normalized its relationship with countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, with which it had troubled relations, by gradually resolving its problems since 2021. During this period, tension in the region decreased, and many parties increased their reconciliation efforts with countries with which they had contentious relations.

Before the outbreak of the Gaza crisis, Türkiye was also engaged in a similar normalization process with Israel. However, with the genocide in Gaza, the normalization process between Israel and Türkiye was put on hold. And the final link in this chain of diplomatic normalization efforts was Syria. After the Assad regime gained control of approximately two-thirds of Syrian territory through military means with the support of Iran and Russia, it was expected that Ankara would intensify its efforts to normalize relations with Syria.

Türkiye's Expectations from Normalization with Syria

Beyond positioning itself in the context of the potential regional war mentioned earlier, Türkiye primarily has three main objectives in normalizing relations with the Assad regime:

- Ensuring Türkiye's border security,
- Preventing the establishment of a YPG/PKK-controlled statelet in northeastern Syria,
- Facilitating the return of Syrian refugees in Türkiye to their homeland.

However, when we examine these objectives, it seems unlikely that Türkiye will be able to address these issues through normalization with the Syrian regime. In fact, we can argue that Türkiye is more likely to be at a disadvantageous position at the end of this normalization period.

Although the Assad regime has regained control over much of the country through military means, it lacks the state capacity to control its borders fully. The regime shares sovereignty with Russia and Iran, and Iran-backed militias control Syria's borders. Thousands of Iran-backed Shia militias (particularly around Aleppo) are stationed near the Turkish border, posing potential future security threats to Türkiye. In short, securing the borders through reconciliation with the Assad regime seems unlikely under the current conditions. Moreover, the idea of eliminating a PKK statelet through a joint Türkiye-Syria intervention against the PYD/YPG doesn't align with the realities on the ground. Because the Syrian regime's army has collapsed entirely in the war, and without the support of Iran-backed militias on the ground and Russian air support, the regime lacks the capacity to carry out any military operations in the country. In other words, the regime has no capacity to fight the YPG. Furthermore, the Assad regime has no intention of fighting the YPG/SDF. Today, the regime forces and YPG groups are cooperating along the Turkish border.

Another point to consider is that the Assad regime does not perceive the YPG as a significant threat as it perceives the Türkiye-backed Syrian opposition. Drawing on its long history of cooperation with the PKK before 1998, the regime believes it can eventually reach an agreement with the YPG/SDF. Indeed, the YPG/SDF consistently asserts that they do not have a separatist agenda and that they see themselves as part of Syria, thereby seeking a way to reconcile with the regime. However, although there have been many meetings between the two sides, often mediated by Russia, none led to an agreement. Nevertheless, the current situation indicates that even though it is not symbiotic, the parties have a pragmatic relationship.

When it comes to the issue of refugees and asylum seekers, Türkiye's expectations from the regime do not align with the realities on the ground. First and foremost, the regime is unwilling to accept Syrian refugees back into the country, viewing them as dissenters and even "traitors." Additionally, those who were forced to leave Syria often send financial support to their relatives who remained behind. This flow of money into Syria from abroad helps keep the economy afloat, and the regime is reluctant to lose this financial lifeline. Moreover, the regime is quite satisfied with the demographic changes that occurred as a result of the Syrian war and believes

that the departure of people during the conflict has created a more homogeneous structure within the country. For example, General Jamil Hassan, head of the Syrian Air Force Intelligence, once stated, "A Syria with 10 million trustworthy citizens is better than a Syria with 30 million vandals" (Lucas, 2018). Also, many reports have documented human rights abuses experienced by those who trusted the regime's guarantees and returned to Syria. The country's destroyed infrastructure, the worsening economic crisis, and the lack of a self-sustaining ecosystem further hinder the "voluntary" return of Syrians. A large portion of the Syrian population is already living in conditions of severe humanitarian need. Therefore, it seems unlikely that Türkiye will achieve its third objective regarding the return of refugees.

Moreover, if Türkiye were to withdraw its troops from Syria, it would be very easy for the regime, with the support of its allies, to attempt to reclaim by military means the regions under the control of Syrian opposition forces, where over five million Syrians currently live. It's important to remember that the Assad regime recently attacked a Turkish military base in the al-Nayrab area of Idlib. In such a scenario, millions of Syrians would flee to the Turkish border. The regime already gave Türkiye a preview of this in 2020, when nearly a million people were forced to move toward the Turkish border due to the attacks by the regime and Russia. This crisis, along with Russia targeting Turkish soldiers in Idlib, compelled Türkiye to launch Operation Spring Shield against the regime. The operation caused significant losses for both the regime and the Iran-backed militias. Following the Spring Shield Operation, large-scale conflicts across Syria ended to a great extent. There has been no change within the borders of the control zones in Syria since March 2020. During this time, the actors of the civil war have consolidated their control over these areas.

Different Normalization Attempts with the Syria Regime: Experiences with the Arab States and the European Union

Two main patterns emerge when we look at other normalization attempts with Syria. The first is related to Arab states, and the second is to the European Union. Arab countries have intensified their efforts to normalize relations with the Syrian regime since 2018. The United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, and Jordan gradually normalized ties with Syria. Then, Saudi Arabia normalized its ties with the country, and in May 2023, Syria was re-admitted to the Arab League. Bashar al-Assad also participated in the last two Arab League meetings in Jeddah and Manama. The primary motivations for Arab states

Free Syrian Army soldiers holding Turkish and Syrian flags, 2019.

Source: AP Images

> ***If Ankara believes that the geopolitical situation and realpolitik require engaging with Syria, it would be beneficial to carefully establish its rhetoric and the level of its diplomatic engagement in the normalization process.***

to pursue the normalization process were to send Syrian refugees back to their home country and to curb the drug trafficking (Captagon) flowing into their countries from Syria, which has turned into a narco-state. During these processes, the Assad regime dictated its terms to the Arab countries and got what it wanted. However, Arab states failed to overcome the problems of Syrian refugees and the Captagon trade. Following normalization, there was minimal refugee return from countries like Lebanon and Jordan to Syria (Cengiz, 2022). As a result, Lebanon started returning refugees to Syria forcibly. Additionally, Jordan, unable to curb the drug trade after normalization, had to launch airstrikes on regions in Syria where drug smugglers were located. In short, Arab states experienced a defeat in their normalization efforts.

When we look at Western attempts to normalize with the regime, the situation is as follows: Generally, in the West, and specifically within the European Union, there are two camps regarding the normalization process. Countries like the United States, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom oppose normalization with the Assad regime and want to pursue their current policies. On the other hand, the foreign ministers of eight countries—Austria, Cyprus, Greece, the Czech Republic, Croatia, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Italy—sent a letter to the High Representative of the EU, Josep Borrell (Hamidi, 2024). In this letter, these countries argued that the EU's 2017 Syria strategy is not working, that the balance in Syria has shifted in favor of the Assad regime, and therefore proposed establishing relations with the regime. The Italian government even went a step further by officially appointing an ambassador to Damascus. The main issue behind the desire of European Union countries to normalize relations with the Syrian regime is to prevent potential refugee influxes from Syria. Because people from Syria, including areas not affected by war and controlled by the regime, are living in poor conditions and attempting to cross into Europe illegally.

Türkiye's normalization attempt, on the other hand, stands out as a different pattern from these two. The country already hosts millions of Syrian refugees, and Ankara views Syria through the perspective of national security. Therefore, it is crucial to follow a well-established strategy in the normalization effort. Because there is a significant difference between Türkiye's expectations from the process and the regime's demands. The Assad regime believes it has won the war in Syria, that it holds a strong position against Türkiye, and that time is on its side. Therefore, it sets the bar high in terms of demands for normalization and is in no rush.

In conclusion, if Ankara believes that the geopolitical situation and realpolitik require engaging with Syria, it would be beneficial to carefully establish its rhetoric and the level of its diplomatic engagement in the normalization process. Otherwise, the process, which is already fraught with risks, could be vulnerable to potential manipulations.

After a Year of Boycotting Israel

Şükrü Çağrı Çelik
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Over the past year since October, Gaza has endured unimaginable suffering, and the pain continues unabated. Tens of thousands of people, including women and children, have lost their lives. Israel's military operations have intensified while targeting hospitals, mosques, churches, and even so-called "safe zones." Tragically, many governments and communities around the world have either remained silent about these atrocities or, worse, legitimized Israel's actions by framing them as acts of self-defense and offering support. On the other hand, countless individuals with a sense of justice refused to stay silent. They took to the streets to protest this genocide and began boycotting Israel and the companies that supported its actions. Numerous boycott lists have been created, and the boycott movement gained momentum across the globe.

But how successful has the boycott been, particularly in Türkiye? Answering this question can be quite challenging. To date, academic studies examining the economic impact of the boycott are very restricted. While a few studies were published in Indonesia and Malaysia, it remains challenging to draw broad conclusions about the boycott's success or evaluate its impact specifically in Türkiye.

We can examine several key indicators to assess the boycott's effectiveness in Türkiye. One approach is to analyze search statistics for products on the boycott list using Google Trends. For this purpose, the data presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 below has been compiled through Google Trends analysis. The first figure focuses on searches for "Israeli Brands," while the second reflects searches for "Israel Boycott."

> ***While many governments and communities around the world have remained silent about Israel's genocide, countless individuals with a sense of justice refused to stay silent.***

Activists hold a banner that reads "Free Palestine, Boycott Israel", Australia, 2024.

Source: Asanka Ratnayake, Getty Images

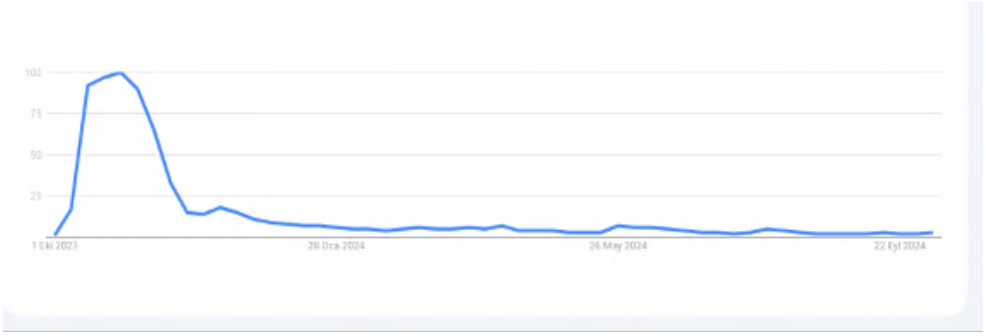

Figure 1. Google Trends Analysis: Searches for "İsrail Markaları" (Israeli Brands)

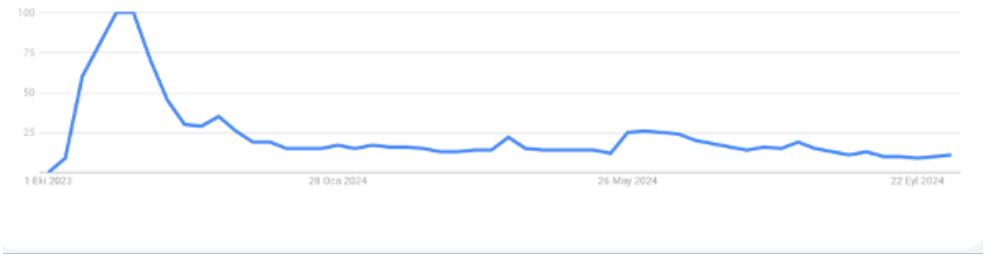

Figure 2. Google Trends Analysis: Searches for "İsrail Boykot" (Israel Boycott)

Following the analysis of these figures, it is evident that during the initial phase of the boycott after October 7, there was a significant spike in searches related to boycott lists. However, the number of searches gradually declined over time. While this trend provides a general impression, it does not fully reflect the success or failure of the boycott. People might have accessed the lists through other means, such as saving them offline or sharing them via social media, rather than repeatedly searching for them on Google.

To conduct a more accurate analysis, it would be necessary to examine the sales figures and financial statements of the companies listed in the boycotts over the past year. However, since companies are not obligated to publicly disclose such data, the analysis becomes more challenging. For publicly traded companies, financial data is accessible and offers insight into potential trends.

One example is Coca-Cola İçecek A.Ş., a company that frequently appears on boycott lists. Operating in Türkiye, it is partially owned (20.9%) by the international Coca-Cola Company, while the remaining ownership is as follows: Anadolu Efes Biracılık ve Malt Sanayi A.Ş. holds 40.12%, The Coca-Cola Export Corporation 20.9%, Efes Pazarlama ve Dağıtım Ticaret A.Ş. 10.14%, and Özgörkey Holding A.Ş. 0.79%. The remaining 28.86% is publicly traded on The Borsa Istanbul (BIST). Coca-Cola İçecek A.Ş. operates in multiple countries, including Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh, Jordan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Syria. The company's significant Turkish ownership, local production facilities, and employment of Turkish workers have led some individuals to exclude it from boycott lists.

Analyzing Coca-Cola İçecek A.Ş.'s stock performance since October 2023, we see a notable increase in its share price. Although there was a dip in stock prices at the onset of the events on October 7, this decline was temporary, and prices resumed their upward trend in the following days.

It's important to note that the company's stock performance is not independent of overall trends in The Borsa Istanbul (BIST). Some fluctuations in share prices can be attributed to broader market movements rather than company-specific factors. Furthermore, the stock market performance of publicly traded companies can sometimes diverge from their real-sector activities due to factors such as foreign trading activity or investor sentiment. Consequently, more than Coca-Cola's stock price is needed to provide a definitive measure of the boycott's impact on demand for its products in Türkiye.

Figure 3. Coca-Cola İçecek A.Ş. Operating Profit and EBITDA

Source: investing.com.

Another factor that indicates whether Coca-Cola has been affected by the boycott is its financial performance, as reflected in two key variables: operating profit and EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortization). The figure below illustrates the trends of these variables across quarterly intervals:

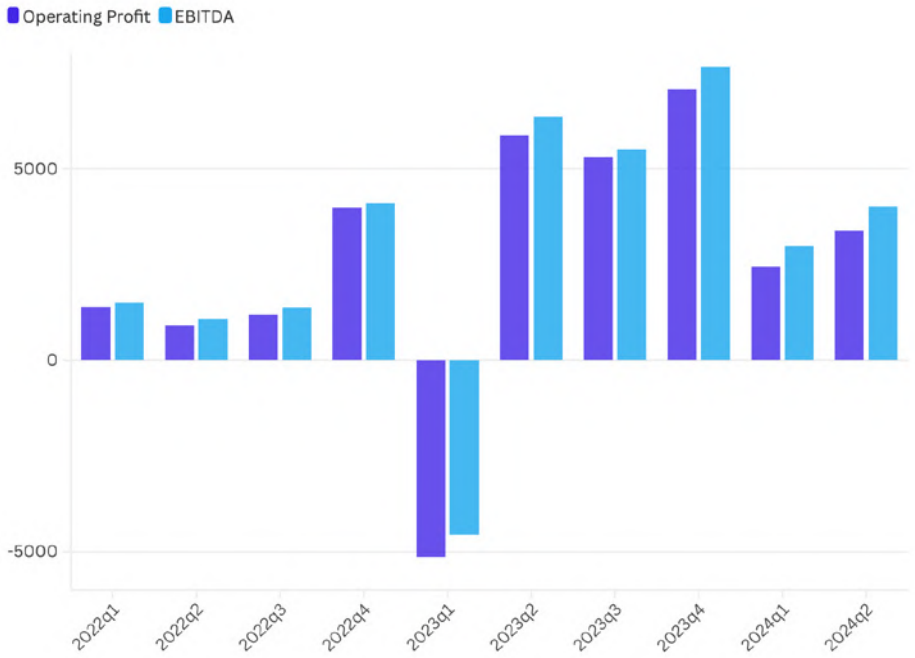

Figure 4. Sales Volume of Coca-Cola İçecek A.Ş. Products (Millions of Cases)

Source: Compiled based on data from the "Financial Data and Presentations" section of Coca-Cola İçecek A.Ş. Investor Relations.

The figure shows that after the earthquakes in February 2023, the company's operating profit and EBITDA significantly declined (2023 Q1). No noticeable impact on these indicators was observed after the boycott decision was made. Lastly, the sales volume of Coca-Cola İçecek A.Ş.'s products in quarterly periods has been examined. The following figure illustrates the sales data in terms of millions of cases across quarterly intervals:

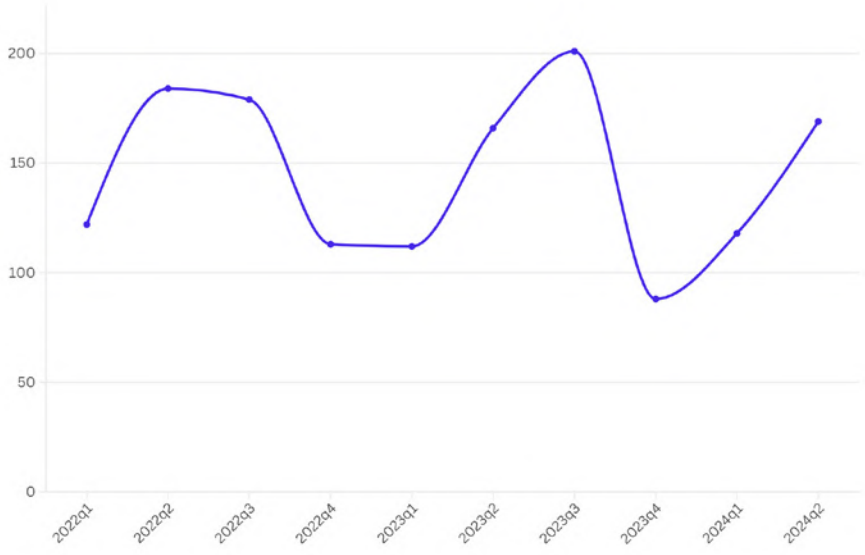

Figure 5. Sales Volume of Coca-Cola İçecek A.Ş. Products (Millions of Cases)

Source: Compiled based on data from the "Financial Data and Presentations" section of Coca-Cola İçecek A.Ş. Investor Relations.

After the boycott decision made in October 2023, sales volume declined in the fourth quarter of 2023. However, a decrease following the third quarter, which was characterized by high temperatures, is typical. A similar decrease was also seen in the previous year. Yet, the sharp contraction in sales volume was even lower than the previous year's drop. By the next quarter, the sales volume returned to previous levels.

Ultimately, it is not possible to definitively show the economic impact of the boycott, especially due to the difficulty in accessing data. Empirical studies conducted in the future will provide more accurate insights. However, it can be inferred that the interest in the boycott has diminished. This study has attempted to assess the impact of the boycott through the case of Coca-Cola İçecek A.Ş. When examining Coca-Cola's financial statements, there is no evidence of the boycott's impact in terms of operating profit and EBITDA. Although a decline in sales volume was observed in the fourth quarter of 2023, the decline cannot be attributed solely to the boycott decision, as seasonal factors also played a role. It is also important not to interpret the impact of the boycott solely through statistics. Several observations in Türkiye suggest that the boycott has had some qualitative success, even if not financially. For instance, companies have taken various steps to improve their diminishing public image. For example, Burger King changed its name to Börgır, and Algida ice creams concealed their logos in some places. As part of a marketing strategy, Coca-Cola redesigned its packaging with the statement, "This product is made in Türkiye." Additionally, the opening of "boycott markets" (markets where boycott products are not sold) in many parts of the country shows that there is, to some extent, public support for the boycott. However, whether the boycott will be sufficient and sustainable will become clearer in future studies.

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Although there was a dip in stock prices of Coca-Cola İçecek A.Ş. at the onset of the events on October 7, this decline was temporary

Making the World Safe for Women? The Palestine Exception

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In theory, militarism and the indiscriminate killing of tens of thousands of civilians flout feminist principles that purport to advocate for the rights of women and children in particular. Nearly a year of Israel's genocidal war on Gaza -now extending into Lebanon- does, in fact, relegate the protection of women to (merely) "theory" with no practice. The neglect of Palestinian women and children's "suffering" (as US presidential candidate Kamala Harris understatedly put it) is staggering. In this brief article, I problematize the feminist/pro-woman declarations made in the 2024 Democratic National Convention, specifically in light of American policies toward Gaza. The instrumental versatility of liberal women's rights discourses, in this case, serves American imperialist (and pro-Zionist) stances through erasure. That is, it is striking that discussions of women's rights abound in the US presidential race—just not the women of Gaza. Such deliberate neglect of the well-documented, highly publicized plight of Palestinian women reflects inconsistencies in US foreign policy discourse and practices generally. My focus here is on women's rights in particular.

Women and US Foreign Policy

The argument that American-funded and -supported wars in the Middle East violate declared norms of human rights and women's rights is not earth-shattering. We all recall the distorted claims to protect Afghan women from the Taliban as a justification for the US invasion in 2001 (Abu-Lughod, 2002). This same determination to "save" Muslim women in Iraq, then Afghanistan, more recently as the Taliban has risen to power once again, is inverted when it comes to Palestine. Over twenty years later, it remains important to delve into such untenable discrepancies between US proclamations and its actual policies. The difference now seems to be a decided neglect of some women's rights (i.e., Palestinian women) by American politicians. Paradoxically, women's empowerment has become a centerpiece of US civil society support and assistance policies in the Middle East and North Africa. For the foreseeable future, issues of women's rights and gender equality are here to stay.

A protestor holds a sign that reads "Kamala, Earn My Vote, Free Palestine," USA, 2024.

Source: Aashish Kiphayet, Alamy

In addition to the tens of thousands killed, the million or more displaced and starved, their homes, hospitals, schools, and universities destroyed, the political impact of the war in Gaza cannot be overstated. The war debunks myths regarding America's safeguarding of the rules-based international order (Sadiki, 2024). The narrative of American commitment to women's rights has, too, been blown apart. As UN Women Special Representative in Palestine Maryse Guimond stated in July, "There are no safe places to be a woman in Gaza" (UN Women, 2024). It could be argued that the US does not purport to champion women's rights as a main policy priority. Unlike Sweden (previously), Canada, France, and other states, the US has not declared itself a party to the so-called "Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP)." It has not pledged to prioritize the rights, representation, and resources ensuring gender equality. (That would be too great an inconsistency for the world's largest military power.) Thus, unlike its allies France, Germany, and Canada, the US cannot be said to have violated tenets of FFP as such in the decisive case of Gaza (Saleh, 2024).

At the same time, the US claims to be a leading force for advancing the roles and rights of women across the globe. American agencies, from the National Endowment for Democracy to the US Agency for International Development (USAID), identify gender equality as a programming component. USAID even has a "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy" since 2023 that, among other things, aims "to eliminate Gender Based Violence (GBV)" around the world (USAID, 2023). The silence of American officials on Palestinian women is thus remarkable. A stark contrast has emerged between pointed American emphasis on supporting the women of Ukraine, Afghanistan, and even more recently Sudan, for instance, by Secretary of State Antony Blinken himself (US Department of State 2024).

Kamala Harris speaking at the 2017 Women's March, 2017.

Source: Kamala Harris, Facebook

Women and the (2024) Vote

At the domestic level, too, some aspects of some women's rights continue to dominate US political discourse, especially during this campaign season. In addition to the grueling war in Gaza, for weeks in July, one big story in American (and global) media was how President Joe Biden relented to the pressure urging him to bow out of the presidential race. The eventual nomination of his female Vice President, Kamala Harris, catapulted gender equality to the forefront of media attention. Her campaign has seized on this aspirational "first" of a female presidency, more possible than before after Hillary Clinton's loss to Donald Trump in 2016.

Hence, it has been no surprise that in Harris's race against Donald Trump, the Republic candidate being legally prosecuted for not just withholding of documents, fraud, but also sexual assault (Graham, 2024), her campaign has chosen to stress an uplifting message of female empowerment at long, hard-earned last. Viewers watching the 2024 Democratic National Convention (DNC) might think that the Democratic Party and the Biden administration revere mothers and champion women. Angling at the female vote, speakers from Hillary Clinton to Oprah

Deliberate neglect of the well-documented, highly publicized plight of Palestinian women reflects inconsistencies in US foreign policy discourse and practices generally.

A Palestinian mother and her baby, Rafah, 2023.

Source: Abed Zagout, Getty Images

Winfrey to Kamala Harris herself (PBS, 2024) hit on unmistakably feminist themes. Their tearfully told stories underscored the foundational influence of mothers, the historical struggles of suffragists, the tribulations of desegregating education, the cliched "glass ceiling" and the sanctity of bodily autonomy.

Nearly 11 months into Israel's "war on children" and onslaught on mothers, this long litany of American tributes to woman trailblazers and this preoccupation with female reproductive rights are particularly jarring. A party seeking to combat autocracy, model American democracy, and uphold freedoms at home and abroad actually flaunts immovable contradictions. However, these inconsistencies are not new. Over a century ago, notable American suffragists fought not just for women's enfranchisement but also against militarism, all while invoking motherhood and the protection of children. However, the US women's suffrage movement of the first wave of American feminism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was far from inclusive and egalitarian. The movement that achieved success in the 19th Amendment of 1920 was fraught with anti-black and anti-immigrant racism (Watkins, 2016). Clinton's comments suggest that at least for political party elites, the legacy of selective concern, this time internationalized to (not) include Arab/Muslim or Palestinian women, lives on.

Democratic National Convention speakers and supporters remarkably insisted a Harris administration would write a "new chapter" in the US's fight against tyranny. Liberal feminist discourse through the mouths of the conventions' speakers, however, reinforced a set of (illiberal) principles and practices: exclusion, dehumanization, and unbridled violence. Hillary Clinton invoked her Chicago-born mother, Dorothy, who came into a world where women were still prohibited from voting. Over the past 104 years, "every generation has carried the torch forward," she intoned. Now, "the future is here" with Kamala Harris poised to become President (TIME, 2024a)! However, this "future" does not include rights for all human beings, all women. The same politician who memorably proclaimed back in 1994 that "women's rights are human rights" overlooks the plight of women under bombardment by Israel

Palestinian women at a protest, 2015.

Source: Mohamad Torokman, Reuters

with American-made bombs. Clinton's human rights and women's rights are glaringly absent in Israel's US-backed war.

A celebration of mothers -former President Obama's grandmother, his mother-in-law, Michelle Obama as mother, and Kamala Harris's own mother- was a major theme of Barack and Michelle Obama's back-to-back speeches. "A tribute to her mother, to my mother and your mother, too." declared Michelle Obama to audience members and viewers (Obama, 2024). Media mogul-turned-political campaigner Oprah Winfrey joined the same pro-woman chorus. She stressed that Kamala Harris, unlike her rival, would guarantee women's freedom over their bodies, intimately linked to a foundational national myth in the US. "Because if you don't have autonomy over this…there is no American dream," she said dramatically, pausing mid-sentence and gesturing to her own form (TIME, 2024b). However, such autonomy does not register in consideration of Palestinian women, even in agencies such as USAID. One employee who prepared a presentation about pregnant women's starvation in Gaza was subsequently fired (Musgrave, 2024). Critical analysis made by development bureaucrats themselves is not acceptable when it identifies Israeli culpability in humanitarian violations against women specifically.

Where are the (Palestinian) Women?

The rallying cry of women's "autonomy" over their bodies may win votes in the US, but it seems irrelevant when it comes to Palestine. Even what Serene Khader (2018) calls Western "missionary feminism" that justifies imperial interventions selectively un-sees (Palestinian) women altogether. Expressing the primacy of core US interests in the Middle East through a showstopping, Hollywood-style performance, the DNC was a reminder of the insidious power of "gender mainstreaming." This approach, spearheaded in the 1990s by the UN, prescribes simply inserting women into existing policy processes and actions as a remedy for gender-based exclusion and discrimination. This same top-down approach has become a cornerstone

of international democracy and development aid. Would not an American female president be a flashy achievement for gender mainstreaming writ large?

To an extent, US official discourse mirrors the global parlance and policies of women's empowerment rooted in the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda aimed at greater inclusion of women in conflict situations. However, even this limited agenda, which is far from radical and does not dare to challenge the structural inequalities of imperialism, neoliberalism, and authoritarianism, is not taken seriously when it comes to Palestine and other Arab settings. A recent report by international experts concludes that the United Nations Security Council's "commitment to the implementation of its WPS agenda is conspicuously lacking," especially in Gaza, Sudan, and Yemen, among other locales (UKRI GCRF, 2024, p. 59).

All this is not an intent to side with one party over the other in US politics. Suspense builds, and it is difficult to predict which candidate will win in this tight presidential race. The point here has been to succinctly demonstrate the inconsistencies of the political rhetoric of a US administration. Contradictions, in this case, abound in declared commitments and actual policies regarding women's rights that must, after all, begin with the right to life and the right to give birth safely. Gender equality may be a buzzword in US and international politics, but after Gaza, it is clearer than ever that basic rights of any kind, let alone self-determination, are not on the American agenda when it comes to Palestine. The hollowness of women's rights rhetoric—not unlike that of democracy promotion—rings far beyond this horrifying, unprecedented war. As the flames of American-armed war engulf the region, political and civil society across the entire Middle East should take heed.

Gender equality may be a buzzword in US politics, but after Gaza, it is clear that basic rights, let alone self-determination, are not on the American agenda when it comes to Palestine.

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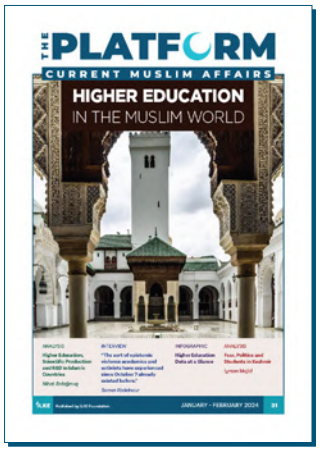

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