

82. Same Border, Different Subject Constructions: The daily shopping visitors and the refugees across the Turkish-Bulgarian border in Kırklareli, Turkey¹

Aysun BULUNUZ²

Ayşegül BAYKAN³

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Abstract

The Turkish-Bulgarian border at the town of Kırklareli embodies different realities and representations with respect to different subjects, namely, for those who reside there, visit regularly from neighbouring countries via open and easy access, and for those whose paths traverse the town to -illegally- cross over to Bulgaria, the European Union territory. This article aims at contributing to border-studies by means of a study on how border residents in Kırklareli position two different subject identities for the 'others' that they confront along the border, and how they construct a subject identity for themselves in the process. Based on the findings of the fieldwork conducted through a series of semi-structured interviews, we argue, the border crossings of the daily Bulgarian shopping visitors and refugees or illegal immigrants moving in the opposite direction create a different hierarchy of 'self' and 'other', complicated by the fact that this is also a border between the European Union and Turkey. As members of the EU, Bulgarians crossing the border for daily shopping represent an advantageous and welcomed European 'other' for the local population, particularly for the local shopkeepers. However, in the process, they realize they themselves are Europe's 'other'. Illegal migrants trying to cross the border, on the other hand, represent an uninvited 'other' condemned to a 'Bare Life', a definition bestowed by Agamben, the social theorist.

Keywords: The Turkish-Bulgarian border, 'constructed others', refugees, Bulgarian shoppers, 'Bare Life'

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² Öğr. Gör., Kırklareli Üniversitesi, Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulu, İngilizce ABD / Lecturer, Kırklareli University, School of Foreign Languages, Department of English (Kırklareli, Türkiye), aysunblnz@gmail.com, **ORCID ID:** 0000-0002-4135-330X, **ROR ID:** https://ror.org/00jboe673, **ISNI:** 0000 0004 0399 5728, **Crossreff Funder ID:** 100018347

³ Prof. Dr., Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi, İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri, Kültürel Çalışmalar ABD / Prof., Yıldız Teknik University, Humanities and Social Sciences, Cultural Studies Department (İstanbul, Türkiye), baykanayse3@gmail.com, **ORCID ID:** 0000 0001 2337 3561, **ROR ID:** https://ror.org/0547yzj13, **ISNI:** 0000 0001 0842 3532, **Crossreff Funder ID:** 501100006560

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Aynı Sınır, Farklı Özne Yapıları: Kırklareli'nde Türkiye-Bulgaristan sınırındaki günlük alışveriş ziyaretçileri ve mülteciler⁴

Öz

Kırklareli'ndeki Türkiye-Bulgaristan sınırı, orada ikamet edenler, komşu ülkelerden açık ve kolay erişim yoluyla düzenli olarak ziyaret edenler ve yolları -yasadışı olarak- Avrupa Birliği toprağı olan Bulgaristan'a geçmek için şehirden geçenler gibi farklı özneler açısından farklı gerçeklikleri ve temsilleri barındırmaktadır. Bu makale, Kırklareli'nde sınır sakinlerinin sınır boyunca karşılaştıkları 'ötekiler' için nasıl iki farklı özne kimliği konumlandıklarını ve bu süreçte kendileri için nasıl bir özne kimliği inşa ettiklerini inceleyen bir çalışma aracılığıyla sınır çalışmalarına katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bir dizi yarı yapılandırılmış mülakatla gerçekleştirilen saha çalışmasının bulgularına dayanarak, günlük alışverişe gelen Bulgar ziyaretçiler ile ters yönde hareket eden mülteci veya yasadışı göçmenlerin sınır geçişlerinin farklı bir 'ben' ve 'öteki' hiyerarşisi yarattığını ve bunun aynı zamanda Avrupa Birliği ile Türkiye arasında bir sınır olması nedeniyle karmaşıklaştığını tartışmaktayız. AB üyesi olarak, günlük alışveriş için sınırı geçen Bulgarlar, yerel halk ve özellikle de yerel esnaf için avantajlı ve memnuniyetle karşılanan bir Avrupalı 'öteki'yi temsil etmektedir. Ancak yerel halk bu süreçte kendilerinin de Avrupa'nın 'ötekisi' olduklarını fark etmektedirler. Sınırı geçmeye çalışan yasadışı göçmenler ise, sosyal teorisyen Agamben'in tanımıyla 'Çıplak Hayat'a mahkum edilmiş davetsiz bir 'öteki'yi temsil eder.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türkiye-Bulgaristan sınırı, 'inşa edilmiş ötekiler', mülteciler, Bulgar alışverişçiler, 'Çıplak Hayat'

1. Introduction

In today's so-called 'global world', people, refugees, immigrants, traders, smugglers, travelers, tourists, or daily visitors across the world, try to cross borders for one reason or other. In the climate of tumultuous clashes at different border sites, especially after the 1990s, the border problematic has begun to be discussed extensively over permeability or lack of it thereof, *vis-a-vis* different contexts and subjects. Moreover, today's borders are being studied not merely on basis of territoriality of the states as in legal or political studies, but also in the sense of Soja's definition of a *thirdspace* (Soja, 1996). That is, through a new approach to space, associating it with issues of identity, and culture. Briefly, Soja (1996) presents *firstspace* as real/material space, *secondspace* as referring to an imaginary space, and *thirdspace* to personify the various cultural encounters between different communities (p.6).

The border between Turkey and Bulgaria was drawn by the Istanbul Treaty on September 29, 1913, as agreed upon by the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. Since then, throughout history, the border became

⁴ Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.

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permeable with population exchanges during Ottoman times and later by the migration of Turks living in Bulgaria to homeland. However, starting around 1990s, as the respective nation-states increased their influence, the permeability became quite limited. During the last decade, especially after Bulgaria became a member of the EU, once again, it has become a random occurrence for Bulgarians to cross the border for daily visits and shopping purposes, while thousands of refugees, who see it as a gateway to Europe through Turkey, risk their lives trying to cross the same border in the opposite direction. In other words, we deem it as imperative to “understand a border as a constant, contextual work in progress, dependent not only from its material set-up but also from the everyday social construction of the here, we and them” (van Houtum, 2021, pg.36).

From that perspective, the present study aims to analyze the Turkish-Bulgarian border as maintaining a dynamic and contentious essence.⁵ Firstly, we analyze how this border is crossed every day by Bulgarians within the frame of cross-border mobility practices such as cross-border shopping and tourism. Secondly, in contrast, the study focuses on how this same border turns into a door of hope for refugees coming from the Middle East, trying to flee to Europe. Therefore, we aim to read those crossings at the border between Turkey and Bulgaria through its permeability and dynamics, in accordance with different and conflicting subject positions of the border crossers.

2. Methodological framework

This study aims to reveal the meanings and experiences of the border between Turkey and Bulgaria, which is either permeable or quite rigid depending on the time and relations of politics between Turkey and Bulgaria-Europe, through empirical data gathered in Kırklareli. Qualitative research methods have been the primary tool of analysis, since they offer the possibility of document analysis, participant observation and in-depth interviews put together. We preferred to use semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions during the one-to-one communications that took place with the participants. Given the accounts of the participants, the Turkish-Bulgarian border in Kırklareli in this study is presented as an example case of border-phenomenon, categorizing border people within typologies that interact within the border zone, similarly to an approach taken by other studies (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Gray, 2002; Saukko, 2003; Hamersley and Atkinson, 2007; Guazzo, 2007). Twenty-three subjects from among the border landers, the border villagers, border crossers, shopkeepers, and Bulgarian citizens coming to shop in town, were interviewed via voice recording, or sometimes by note-taking. In some cases, some of the interviews were done in a group talk, especially the ones in border villages.

Both the tradesmen in the city and visitors from Bulgaria coming to shop daily were interviewed on the permeability of the border, which has become a significant economic tool for all. The narratives obtained from the in-depth interviews with the tradesmen are compared to the interviews with Bulgarian shoppers coming on daily basis. However, discussions with the Bulgarian shoppers took a longer time, and was more challenging than interviewing local people working in various sectors in Kırklareli. As Bulgarians came mostly on day trips or for short-stays to shop, eat, drink, and spend leisure-time, they were less willing to spare time to contribute. In their words, they “*don't have time for research*” and were highly focused on their shopping activity. They often rejected corresponding by stating “*you see; we are in a hurry because we are shopping right now*”. Another obstacle was the language barrier. Most of the Bulgarians could speak neither Turkish nor English, hence, they stated “*we can't help you because*

⁵ This study is based on the PhD dissertation of Aysun Bulunuz, titled “*At the Border Between Turkey and Bulgaria: A Multifaceted Study On the Town of Kırklareli*”. Present article aims to offer the findings of the study on the two ongoing processes of cross border movements, namely, by the economically motivated daily crossers and the trespassing refugees, and constitutes a section of the larger study undertaken within the dissertation.

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we speak very little Turkish". Nevertheless, Turks living in Bulgaria but coming to the Turkish side for their shopping were more willing to talk, and young Bulgarians who spoke English fluently have contributed as well.

Naturally, this study remains quite limited in terms of interviews with irregular immigrants who are trying to cross the border 'illegally'. As it is asserted by İçduygu and Sert (2015), it was challenging to gather data, especially on the issues like irregular migration "due to its clandestine nature" (pg.146). As Aras (2020) asserts in his study on smugglers on the eastern border of Turkey, that limitedness was because of the fact that both smugglers and irregular migrants tend to "cross the border during the dark nights", which "reinforce(s) ontological ambiguity and hiddenness" (pg.142). They, in a way, become or try to become invisible because of illegality of their operations and fear of being apprehended and sent to the removal center immediately after they are pushed back at the border by Bulgarian forces. In addition, the tight control of the gendarmerie in the region greatly reduced our opportunity to talk to and interview with these subjects. For these reasons, we came across only one singular case of an irregular immigrant who had been in the Pehlivan köy Removal Centre for a short duration, a Turkmen woman, Gülnaz. In the interview, which we arranged as a phone call after her release, as she is still enrolled as a student at Kırklareli University, she told us how she was apprehended and taken to the removal center and what she experienced there. The information provided by Gülnaz was significant, in the sense that, it raised questions on the arbitrariness of border management and the legal status of immigrants in the country. Also, the accounts of those living in border villages on encountering the trespassers of the border and the interviews with the employees of the Kırklareli Migration Administration were very informative on illegal migrants.

3. Theoretical foundation: selective permeability of the border

As stated earlier in introduction, we presented our approach to border as a case of *thirdspace*, as termed and explained by Edward Soja, the renown Social Geographer. In that direction, to assert the multiple meanings that the border gains in Kırklareli, we offer an image of two side-by-side posters on billboard, advertisements at the entrance of the market square in the city center (see Figure 1). On the first billboard, we see a poster of the municipality of Kırklareli, which is a municipality of the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP), i.e. the Republican People's Party. It is in Bulgarian language and advertises for a high-end covered market⁶ to be set up every Sunday beginning the 27th of November 2022, clearly targeting the Bulgarian cross-border shoppers.



Figure 1: Two billboard advertisements in the marketplace of Kırklareli (photo taken by us).

⁶ 'Sosyete pazarı' in Turkish which can be defined as a marketplace where counterfeits of many expensive brands are sold at affordable prices.

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The second poster next to it is also prepared by CHP, which is the main opposition party in Turkey. This poster, on the other hand, emphasizes the 'disturbing' effect of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers who are frequently caught on Turkey's borders. We see the image of party's chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and a quote representing his political view on the border, promising "(W)e will withdraw all the refugee treaties imposed on Turkey by the EU and we will take back the control of our borders". In the headline of the banner, he declares, "We will say good-bye to all refugees in two years".

To be more precise, the first poster gives the message that the border is very flexible, that you cross it on a Sunday just to shop at the town marketplace. On the other hand, the billboard next to it claims they will tighten the borders so much so that no one can slip over. The two side by side advertisements regarding the border represent the different meanings and representations of the border for different subject positions. First and foremost, this image declares that the border is apparently selective in terms of its permeability. Furthermore, it is an example for two ongoing contradictory arguments on the state of the world, on the one hand, the idea of a "borderless world" in the era of globalization, and on the other, increased security for borders against migrants. Hence the question remains as to for whom the borders are permeable (Paasi et al., 2019; Paasi and Ferdoush, 2023).

As clearly demonstrated in *Figure 1*, certain borders are quite permeable for the citizens of one state, while they are no-passing zones for the citizens of others. According to van Houtum and van Naerssen (2002), bordering, ordering and othering have become intertwined concepts: "this paradoxical character of bordering processes" reinvents "new or latently existing differences in space and identity", while trying to remove "territorial ambiguity and ambivalent identities in order to shape a unique and cohesive order" (van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002, pg.126). Border is where simultaneously existing spaces of inclusion and exclusion are located. The modes of bordering between Turkey and Bulgaria similarly are becoming diverse and selective and the residents indispensably categorize the border crossers in a hierarchy of othering. In those terms, the border presents a space of freedom and inclusion for Bulgarian daily shoppers, the category of the global citizen, but is a space of exclusion for the refugees or irregular and transit migrants. Hence, the two categories are respectively categorized hierarchically. The border has had different effects on the identities of the locals as well. This study aims to demonstrate how the othering process has a transposing effect on the borderlanders on the Turkish-Bulgarian border in Kırklareli. To put it shortly, how they recreate their 'self' depends upon how they relocate their constantly changing 'other'.

4. The space of one border town: a different place for different subjects

4.1. Border crossings of Bulgarian daily visitors coming to shop

Through a series of concepts and occurrences, such as border trade, cross-border shopping, and border city as a tourist destination, we will discuss the implications for the local community how they define themselves as "us", and how they distinguish themselves and Bulgarians as "them". These distinctions will be obviously quite different from the distinctions they make *vis-a-vis* the illegal immigrants. To start with, cross-border shopping tourism develops and thrives if borders are sufficiently permeable both physically and psychologically (Timothy&Butler, 1995; Makkonen, 2023). In this context, the Turkish side of the border has taken a step that will significantly affect both the physical, psychological, and paperwork permeability of the border for Bulgarians. On July 27, 2022, by the rule that came into force by the dictate of the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Bulgarian citizens gained the right to enter Turkey even without a passport, but only with their IDs.

Elements of familiarity and similarity that exist between Turkey and Bulgaria have contributed historically for the resulting cross-border movements. However, during the last decade, economic

factors have become especially important in determining the direction of border mobility. In other words, economic differences between two neighboring countries are today, in general, the main determinants of border openness. According to Boehmer and Peña (2012); “The larger the income gap between neighboring states, the less open the wealthier states will be to the people of the poorer neighbor, but the more open the poorer state will be to people from the richer nation” (pg.279). Hence, the direction of mobility between two neighboring countries that use different currencies might well be explained by which country's currency is more valuable. For instance, in December, 2023, one Bulgarian Leva (BGL) corresponds to about sixteen Turkish liras. As the value of BGL increased, Turkey became more attractive for the Bulgarians for economic and recreational purposes, especially at the border provinces of Edirne and Kırklareli. Therefore, the residents and tradesmen in Kırklareli are gaining familiarity with Bulgarian shoppers who cross the border by cars or buses, in local supermarkets, corner stores, jewellery stores, greengrocers, and in malls. The interviews conducted among residents pointed to similar observations regarding this process. As Özlem, the store manager of a clothing brand, states:

The depreciation of the Turkish currency has greatly affected our business. During the pandemic we worked only for the Bulgarians ... There are the sales targets given to us by the firm, thanks to the Bulgarians, we reach these targets. The local people complain, but we are very satisfied.

Border crossers tend to behave rationally and buy goods that are at lower prices than in their home country. They are well aware that their savings outweigh the actual costs of their travel expenditures even if they purchase common consumer goods (Makkonen, 2023, pg. 272). In interviews, shoppers who came from Bulgaria pointed to the fact that the reason they crossed the border for shopping was because border crossing is easy and advantageous for them. Besides, a larger variety of products here were cheaper for them, or because they were not able to find those products in Bulgaria, and maybe because they just wanted to spend their leisure-time doing shopping. For instance, in the words of Rositsa, a Bulgarian shopper who came with her husband and daughter to the mall:

Crossing the border is so easy and it is an advantage. We do not have any problems crossing the border, we can cross with an ID... To Kırklareli, we usually come for shopping, we buy food, cheese, vegetables, fruit, dairy products, baklava, etc. When we eat dinner and dessert, for the three of us here it costs only fifty Leva, which is very advantageous for us.

The Bulgarians were also aware of the advantages of improvements in both visa regulations and cross-border infrastructure such as roads, and paperwork at the gates. The husband Svetoslav agreed with his wife Rositsa:

There is a very big change in the border. Previously, the border was too strong, and the documents, the people, no one could speak English. Now it is easy, they speak English and help us... We come to shop here in Kırklareli mostly for food and cleaning products. Prices here are lower than in Bulgaria.

Apparently, cross-border shopping in Kırklareli is motivated by a combination of factors. These factors range from lower prices, lucrative currency exchanges, and broad product selection, to being at a familiar and within a proximate distance, and/or to feel a sense of excitement due to having the chance to spend leisure time in the authenticity of the other side (Prokkola, 2010; Gelbman and Schweitzer, 2023; Makkonen, 2023). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the potential impacts of one-way cross-border shopping on the locals in Kırklareli in particular. In the following section we aim to discuss the issue through the lens of local merchants, customers and residents who feel disadvantaged and as outsiders in their own place, and how they position their ‘self’ in comparison to the Bulgarian ‘others’ coming from the European side of the border.

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4.2. Reactions of the locals to the European 'other': "We don't want to be the A101⁷ of Europe"⁸

While cross-border shopping is supposed to appear as a tool of economic development and help create dynamic lines of integration where people, histories and economies meet, here at the Turkish-Bulgarian border along the town of Kırklareli, it has created a huge contrast between the two neighboring communities in terms of 'economic ability to travel' and 'the right to travel'. The main reason for this, according to the interviews with locals and Bulgarian shoppers, is Bulgaria's accession to the European Union. They indicated that Bulgaria's EU membership has inevitably made this border an EU border and it has all the characteristics of a typical EU border. Since the EU maintains an "asymmetric conditionality" by providing free movement only among member countries, the border between Turkey and Bulgaria refunctions as unequal lines (Paasi et. al, 2019, pg. 13). For instance, in her interview, Yasemin who works as a store manager in a household store, states:

Being a border city and not being able to cross the border as we wish is a big disadvantage. Actually, being close to the border is an advantage if you have a visa and passport. However, they (Bulgarians) are much more advantageous, I'm jealous, frankly...Of course, imports and exports are good things, and the inflow of money is a very good thing, but it should be on equal terms.

Clearly, the one-sided mobility makes a distinction, in locals' sayings in Kırklareli, between 'our' poorer country for the locals in Kırklareli and 'their' wealthier country of 'Bulgarians' and causes the feeling of inequality to be more visible between communities. That's to say, like other cases across the world, Paasi reflects (Paasi et al. 2019), border is so penumbral that it seems invisible and soft for Bulgarians and yet it appears hard and significant for the locals in Kırklareli. Interestingly, at the start of this study, we assumed the locals and shopkeepers would categorize Bulgarians as the 'other', but through this ethnographic study we observed that the locals' feelings are rather directed to themselves, constructing themselves as constituting and as becoming the 'other' in respect to a more advantaged group. In other words, the conclusion can be drawn that, the locals do not actually exclude the Bulgarians as outsiders, foreigners or, as 'others', but rather feel themselves as excluded. In contrast to the exclusionary attitude by the local community towards other categories of foreigners such as refugees and illegal immigrants, it is possible to see the feeling of exclusion of the insiders due to the existence of a more advantageous European 'other' in their territory. As Paasi (1996) asserts in his article on inclusion, exclusion, and territorial identities, "even if boundaries are always more or less arbitrary lines between territorial entities, they may have deep symbolic and historical meanings for social communities, and they may also generate action" (pg.3). For instance, in her interview, Şeyma, the store manager of one of the biggest clothing stores in the city centre in Kırklareli, implied that the one-way mobility on this border was due to the economic and political differences between the two countries and that she felt like a foreigner in her own place:

In fact, they (Bulgarians) only come for shopping...but we never go there, because everything is expensive for us, they ask for a visa, passport, and stamp fee, I want to go there, but right now it is very difficult... Think about it, we live in Turkey, but we can neither dress well, eat good quality food nor do good quality social activity as they (Bulgarians) can do here. Soon they will be locals and we will be foreigners.

Bulgarian shoppers, as the advantageous group from the other side of the border, make the locals aware of their alienation in their own community. Apparent, inequality in terms of mobility and shopping

⁷ A101 is a discount retailer market that provides cost-effective consumables at affordable prices throughout Turkey.

⁸ Avrupa'nın A101'i olmak istemiyoruz.

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between the two neighboring countries results in causing resentment and frustration on this side of the border. In interview, Hülya, a shop assistant in a furniture store, states:

Excuse my French but, my country has turned into a 'yol geçen hani'⁹, and I am the one who provides service. It would be ridiculous to expect the opposite to happen. I mean, no one should hope that they (Bulgarians) will give us visa exemption as well. Fundamental changes are required here that will take at least 20 years. I don't think that we have any ties other than shopping. They are making use of Turkey now and, at least they are thanking us for the service.

Likewise, that feeling of inferiority, or being marginalized as the 'other' of Europe appears in Filiz's statement, who is the manager of a supermarket in the mall. In her words:

Beyond the economic gain that we get thanks to the Bulgarians, I would like to express my discomfort, not only as a supermarket manager but also as a citizen. We don't want to be the A101 of Europe.

In fact, the statements above clearly demonstrate the emergence of the marginalization of those who fall outside of desirable categories among the communities separated by a border line. Paasi (1996) in his work offers the concept of "mental maps", that's, maps that exist in the mind, where there are different conceptions of the border by the individuals living on either side of it (pg.22). The other side of the border, though it is physically proximate, can be mentally distant by the "discriminatory practices of mobility regimes that still render many people immobile in a supposedly interconnected global village" (Paasi et al, 2019, pg.154). Aynur, the shop assistant in the furniture store, emphasized the inequalities between 'them' and 'us' by stating: "*I've never been there, for example, but I would like to go while they're coming and going like this*".

Free mobility and right to travel were issued as rights to EU citizens especially since the 1993 Maastricht Treaty and the declaration of the Schengen common travel area in 1995. However, the right of non-EU citizens in terms of mobilities and travel and visa and passport regulations to cross EU borders have become restrictive, differentiated and unequal (Paasi et al, 2019, pg.127-133). The exclusionary practices and unequal power dynamics found at the threshold between the EU and non-European countries are of special importance for Kırklareli which rests on the border between Turkey and Bulgaria, a member of the EU.

4.3. The bare life of refugees along the border

There have as well been many 'others' trying to cross the border, but they are identified differently altogether. That's to say, while the locals feel themselves as foreigners in their own land due to the existence of more advantaged European 'others', the illegal immigrants encountered at the border, most of whom from Syria or Afghanistan, are positioned at a different level in the hierarchy of otherness altogether. To express the ingrained social, political, and ethical complexity of the situation, it is best to offer a more theoretical analysis first.

The concept of 'Bare Life' by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (1998) represents the situation of those who try to cross the border illegally in the best possible way. Agamben asserts that there are two forms of lived life as we understand it today. The first one is 'bio', a qualified life, and the second is 'zoē', the natural life. *Zoē*, is the life of *homo sacer*, that is the 'Bare Life', not qualified as in citizenship or humanity, but left in the realm of sovereign power to be regarded in exception (to humanity and law), hence within the domain of right to eliminate or kill. The case of the illegal immigrants who, half-naked, pushed to-and-fro, off the Turkish-Bulgarian border may thus be regarded as an example of 'Bare Life' as such. When illegal immigrants caught by the Bulgarian border police at the border are looted off their

⁹ A Turkish idiom which means a place where passengers frequently stop by all the time.

possessions, then pushed back to the Turkish side of the border (see *Figure 2*), it seems, all that remains for them is life at the level of *zoē*. The fact that they are left for dead, half-naked in a forested land where the temperature drops to minus degrees at midnight reveals the fact that they can be killed and this is not seen as a murder, or as in Agamben's perspective, not as a "homicide", and hence reveals the excessive harshness of the conditions of treatment of illegal migrants and the magnitude of the refugee crisis on the border (1998, pg.71).



Figure 2: "84 illegal migrants caught at Kırklareli's border"¹⁰

Reading from Agamben's perspective, the "unlocalizable zone of exception" is becoming a permanent and visible place for the refugees or the illegal immigrants, unlike the '*homo sacer*' of Roman times who were sent out of *the polis* (1998, pg.19-20).

The villagers living close to the border hold a strong opinion concerning the presence of the illegal immigrants with a view that they constitute a burden for the country at large, but not without feelings of pity and empathy. A first-hand account of coming across immigrants is offered by Emine, a woman who lives in a border village:

Among Bulgarian border security, there are not only Bulgarians. There are also other European soldiers. They catch the refugees at the border, take their money and belongings and 'throw' them back here. Nearly naked, groups of men pass by here. Once we saw them covering their bodies with leaves and branches of trees. These things happen so often that we're tired of them. There are those who want food, or clothes, sometimes we can help them, and sometimes we can't.

Within the villagers' discourses, it is easy to hear a tone of pity. The illegal migrants emerging at the border have created a new category of 'them' who are different from 'us' for the residents of the villages. This feeling of pity mixed with empathy is in fact a way in which the villagers position their 'self' contrary to and in relation to those uninvited 'new others', the '*homo sacer*'. Take the young man, Fatih, for instance, who runs a coffeehouse in one of the border villages:

For sure, most of the immigrants can't cross the border, they come back after they are beaten up by the Bulgarian police, they don't come back without a beating. They are well going from here, but on the way back, they come back without their shoes, pants, and shirts on. They come and ask for help. We try to help as much as we can, because what if one day it happens to us?

In another interview Belgin, a 49-year-old woman in a border village, states that she had seen these people (illegal immigrants) for years, some of whom were found by a villager when they were about to

¹⁰ <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/kirklarelinde-sinir-hattinda-yari-ciplak-halde-84-duzensiz-gocmen-yakalandi/2566135>, 18 April 2022

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freeze in the forest, and some were found dead in the forest. Once again, Agamben's notion of '*homo sacer*' comes to mind, for they are the ones who are sent away from the '*polis*' and are allowed to die (1998, pg.71). -When asked whether they had a security concern about confronting those immigrants around their villages, Belgin answered:

No, we have no fear of them. Since they are miserable as it is, they don't have anything with them to hurt us. Sometimes, villagers find one in the forest when he is about to freeze or die. They even find some who were dead. One day, my husband brought one (a refugee man) to our home, he was not in good condition, so we gave him food and tea. He thanked me and prayed for me all the time...

In Emine's words:

We don't have any security problems... But there are petty thefts, for example, the fruits on our trees. We wake up one morning and see that none of the fruits are there. They broke into my neighbor's house over there once. Although they didn't take many things; they took his sack of walnuts.

The Bulgarian side of the border, by tracing the readmission agreement between the EU and Turkey signed in 2013¹¹, pushes back incoming immigrants and confiscates most of their documents, even their money, and personal belongings. Since Turkey did sign a readmission agreement with the EU, she must comply with the non-refoulement principle in the contract. The immigrants apprehended on the Turkish side by the gendarmerie, are sent to the Removal Center built in 2016 in Pehlivan köy in Kırklareli. Here, they are seen as living beings with no legal and political rights or identities. - Just as Agamben states, they can be neither liberated nor sacrificed (Agamben, 1998, pg.9). - They are kept in this center where their life needs are met at a basic level, where they live a '*Bare Life*', but are not deemed worthy of a '*bio*', '*a qualified life*'. Regarding the physical structure and living conditions of the removal center, Gülnaz, a Turkmen woman and one of the illegal immigrants who stayed in that center for a short time, offered the following picture:

It was a prison-like place...There were bunkhouses, there was a mess hall and a grocery store. The food comes in bulk, they give you plates, you take your food and everyone eats in their own room. There is a bathroom and toilet in every room. Since we didn't have phones and money to buy a telephone card, we didn't know how to call our families and friends.

Just like the concentration camp, the refugee camps, detention centres or removal centres, as Gülnaz defines it, the Pehlivan köy Removal Centre is "*a prison-like place*" for the contemporary '*homo sacer*'. Hence, the refugees or illegal immigrants along the border represent a group that is not entitled to a humane life, are more disadvantaged than the disadvantaged non-European locals, and thus are further down in the ranking of '*otherness*'. They are positioned in a hierarchy of otherness that is apparently more marginalized and unwelcomed, compared to the perceived otherness that the residents of the town of Kırklareli feel for their '*selves*' or towards the Bulgarian daily shoppers.

¹¹ To resolve the migration crisis between them, Turkey and the EU signed an agreement called Visa Liberalisation Dialogue, the so-called EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement, on 16 December 2013. The main objective of this agreement is to establish, based on reciprocity procedures, the rapid readmission by Turkey the persons who do not meet or no longer fulfil the conditions for entry to the European Union, hence to Greece and Bulgaria as well, the neighbours of Turkey and members of the EU. The agreement includes provisions related both to the readmission of the nationals of the EU Member States and Turkey, and to the readmission of any other persons (including the third country nationals and the stateless persons) that entered, or stayed on the territory of either side, directly arriving from the territory of the other side. In order to fulfil the requirements of this agreement, thirty removal centres have been established in Turkey. In this context, Pehlivan köy Removal Center was established in Kırklareli, under the Ministry of Interior of the Turkish Republic in order to provide refuge and to carry out asylum procedures for the ones who are apprehended as '*illegal immigrants*' along the borders between Turkey and Europe. The center with a total construction area of 17.000 m² consists of dining halls, sports and conference halls, the offices of the General Directorate of Migration Management personnel, 126 accommodation rooms with a capacity of 756 people as well as technical facilities, such as a recycling building, and a wastewater treatment plant. The center is to carry out works and procedures related to the deportation of illegal immigrants from Turkey, and of the victims of human trafficking according to General Directorate of Migration Management, Law No. 6458 on Foreigners and International Protection.

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Arguably, it appears that, being and becoming a European constitutes a standard criterion for the ranking of otherness. For some of the visiting Bulgarians, illegal immigrants in Turkey constitute a threat for the country as well. In one of the interviews, Rositsa, a Bulgarian woman, claimed that it was difficult for Turkey to be accepted into the European Union because of those unwelcomed others:

Maybe in a few years, when Turkey enters the European Union, the Turkish people can also come to Bulgaria easily. However, Europe is very strict on the entry of countries into the Union, it is hard I know. Because of irregular immigrants and refugees around the Turkish borders, even though Turkey stops them, the European community would not accept Turkey to the EU in that way.

5. Conclusion

The residents of the border city of Kırklareli, and its surrounding villages, uphold strong views for and against those who pass through or reside in their town. The Bulgarian shoppers, as daily visitors with easy access are welcomed, as they are generating a 'positive border effect' through their contribution to the economy. Whereas, illegal migrants and refugees crossing the border, passing through the town to flee to Europe, on the other hand, are seen as *persona non grata* or as '*homo sacer*', whose lives are redeemed to 'Bare Life' by both sides of the border.

In this study, it has come to light that, local people living on the Turkish side of the border, in their encounters with the visiting Bulgarians as wealthy Europeans with liberal access and visas, are constantly confronted by the unevenness of their relationship, consequently situating themselves as the 'other' of the space that is across their border.

To conclude, the hierarchies of otherness along the Turkish-Bulgarian border in the town of Kırklareli, demonstrate the failure of the ideal of globalization and the dreams of a borderless world for all, the possibility of open borders and no borders (Paasi et al., 2019). Consequently, as presented in this study, while the border serves as an entry point for affluent tourists and shoppers who are EU citizens, it persists as an increasingly impenetrable obstacle for migrants from third-world countries first and for Turkish citizens as non-Europeans second. In consideration of all these complexities that our study has unearthed, we might, once again, argue that borders are complex spaces with entangled realities of physical space, political, ethical limitations and overlapping cultural and social realities.

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