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The Impact of the 1966 Earthquakes on Migration and Social Change: A Case Study of Varto (Türkiye)

1966 Depremlerinin Göç ve Toplumsal Değişim Üzerindeki Etkisi: Varto (Türkiye) Örneği

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of the 1946 and 1966 Varto (Türkiye) earthquakes on migration and social change, with a particular focus on migration to Istanbul and Germany. Located at the intersection of sociology of disaster and sociology of migration, it explores how adaptation to new cultural contexts affected migrants' social and cultural lives, particularly their marriage patterns, family structures, and gender dynamics, in part giving way to the emergence of the *Almancı* identity and the role and the importance of "home" and "homeland" for these migrants. The article also addresses internal migration to Istanbul, emphasising the significance of neighbourhoods, *hemşehri* relationships, and village associations as "buffer mechanisms," which also caused to the revival of tribal structures within the context of migration. Drawing on the first-hand, personal accounts, I highlight the immediate trauma and loss caused by the earthquakes, reviewing the limited scientific research

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on the long-term social and psychological impacts of the disaster. I examine the social issues arising from "forced migration" after the earthquake, including state support and accommodation in boarding schools. Although these schools provided educational opportunities outside Varto, which facilitated social advancement, they also separated families from their children, profoundly influencing family structures. Finally, the article analyses the traditional architecture in Varto after the (1946 and) 1966 earthquakes, which developed not only as a post-earthquake reflection but also as a response to internal and transnational migration. Here, the focus is on the use of new materials and construction techniques, the integration of modern elements, and the associated shifts in local daily practices.

Keywords: *earthquake and social engineering, migration, trauma, Germany, social change, hemşehri associations, gender*

Öz

Bu makale, 1946 ve 1966 Varto (Türkiye) depremlerinin göç ve toplumsal değişim üzerindeki etkilerini, özellikle İstanbul ve Almanya'ya yönelik göçlere odaklanarak incelemektedir. Afet sosyolojisi ile göç sosyolojisinin kesişim noktasında yer alan bu makale, yeni kültürel bağlamlara uyum sağlama sürecinin göçmenlerin toplumsal ve kültürel hayatlarını, evlilik yapılarını, aile ilişkileri ve toplumsal cinsiyet dinamiklerini nasıl etkilediğini ele almakta; bu süreçte Almancı kimliğinin ortaya çıkışını ve "ev" ile "memleket"in göçmenler için önemini vurgulamaktadır. Makale, ayrıca İstanbul'a yönelik iç göçleri ele alırken; mahalleler, *hemşehri* ilişkileri ve köy derneklerinin "tampon mekanizmalar" olarak önemine değinmekte ve göç bağlamında aşiret yapılarının yeniden canlanmasına yol açan etkilerini incelemektedir. Makale birinci elden, kişisel anlatılara dayanan görüşmelerden yola çıkarak, depremlerin neden olduğu ani travma ve kayıpları vurgulamakta; felaketin uzun vadeli toplumsal ve psikolojik etkileri konusunda sınırlı olan bilimsel araştırmaları da eleştirmektedir. Deprem sonrası ortaya çıkan "zorunlu göç" ile ilgili sosyal sorunlar, yatılı okullardaki barınma olanakları da makalenin bir başka önemli boyutudur. Bu okullar, her ne kadar Varto dışında eğitim fırsatları sunarak toplumsal ilerlemeye katkıda bulunsa da, aynı zamanda aileleri çocuklarından ayırarak aile yapıları üzerinde derin etkiler yaratmıştır. Son olarak, makale (1946 ve) 1966 depremlerinin ardından Varto'daki geleneksel mimariyi incelemekte; bu mimari değişimlerin yalnızca deprem sonrası bir yansıma değil, aynı zamanda iç ve ulusötesi göçe bir yanıt olarak geliştiğini de öne sürmektedir. Burada, yeni malzemelerin ve inşaat tekniklerinin kullanımı, modern unsurların entegrasyonu ve buna bağlı olarak gündelik pratiklerdeki değişimlere odaklanıyorum.

Anahtar sözcükler: *deprem ve sosyal mühendislik, göç, travma, Almanya, sosyal değişim, hemşehri dernekleri, toplumsal cinsiyet*

The one at the Afyon Train Station

Remember the little girl at the Afyon train station, you know,
How she had taken off her shoes before boarding the train;
Think of the Varto earthquake, and the aid sent from the West
A box of powdered milk and a bra.

The man had whitewashed his walls with powdered milk,
His wife, had hidden away the bra, unsure of what it was,
Thinking to use it as earmuffs in winter;
My God, was it truly during your childhood days? …

A throng of people sat on the doorways,
I wish I had loved you only for this.

Cemal Süreya, Güz Bitiği[1]

Introduction

Earthquakes, inherently classified as "natural disasters," are thought to be distinct from "man-made" disasters like wars. However, their impact extends beyond physical destruction, sparking multifaceted social and political debates that transform them into significant societal events. They can trigger immediate devastation, while also driving long-term cultural, psychological, and socio-economic shifts for the humans who endure them. One such shifts, are internal and external migration movements in Türkiye, and have been, for the most part, driven by several earthquakes.

This is no wonder, the word "earthquake" first evokes notions of destruction and death; followed by solidarity, collective suffering, and pain. Over time, as the earthquake recedes into the past, concepts such as trauma, homelessness, orphanhood, poverty, helplessness, crisis, chaos, harm, exploitation, migration, and injustice emerge. These concepts also point to social disasters that will manifest as different consequences of earthquakes.

The 1966 Varto earthquake, which is the point of departure for this article, remains a significant collective trauma in the memory of Vartoers, now dispersed across various parts of Türkiye and Europe, even decades after the catastrophe. As I argued elsewhere (Gedik, 2008), one can feel the most impactful aftershocks of earthquakes not just on earth but among the people-this is what I called the migration after the 1966 Varto earthquake a "social aftershock." Discussions surrounding post-earthquakes may raise questions regarding the causes of the earthquake, the preventability of its damage, overcoming its consequences, and whether anything has been learned from these events.

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This is why great earthquakes like that of 6 February 2023, beyond being a natural disaster, is also "human" disaster because of its social, political, psychological, and economic effects on people.

Decisions regarding the protection of people from the deadly impacts of disasters are expected to be made by the political and social institutions of both state and local governments. However, as we have seen in the recent earthquakes, and as demonstrated by the media and public opinion, decisions about where and how people will live are often shaped not by scientific data and urban and regional planning, but by the priorities of political and social institutions or the desires of property owners. Therefore, when the earthquake of 6 February 2023 shook an immense area and killed several thousand people, the public immediately questioned all responsible political and social institutions. This is because these institutions are responsible for preparing people for disasters and protecting them from the lethal consequences. When they fail to fulfil these duties, the scale of the disaster becomes terrifying, and, as a result, these institutions are blamed. Therefore, as we saw in the earthquake of 6 February 2023, natural disasters once again proved to be highly sociopolitical and socio-economic events.

The 2023 earthquake revealed striking parallels with the 1966 Varto earthquakes, underscored the explore the enduring relevance of "social aftershocks", and inspired me to reconsider my earlier study. Thus, this article departs from the core findings in my fieldwork I conducted in Varto, Istanbul and Mersin between 2002 and 2005 as part of my doctoral studies (Gedik, 2008), and later in 2008 and 2012 in various cities in Germany, where I explored the key social, cultural, economic, and linguistic transformations in Varto. It specifically provides insights into the effects of migration on family structures, gender dynamics, and cultural identities of migrants in Istanbul and Germany. By exploring these changes, my previous study highlighted the long-term impacts of natural disasters on migration and the resulting shifts in local communities both in Türkiye and in Germany,[2] now I aim to take these analyses into new dimensions.

Climate and weather-related events and other forms of natural disasters have significantly influenced migration patterns throughout history. Building on this perspective, this article connects the themes of migration and social change to the case of Varto and argues that similar causes are likely to produce comparable outcomes. Understanding these patterns is crucial for minimizing future impacts and fostering resilience. While earthquakes and other disasters cannot be entirely prevented—just as migration in their aftermath is inevitable due to physical and socio-economic constraints, the scale of destruction can be mitigated. In a country like Türkiye where 94% of the landmass is in a seismic zone, no region is entirely safe. That said, however, safer living spaces can be constructed to reduce the impact of earthquakes.

1. Theoretical and methodological framework

This article is located at the intersection of sociology of migration and sociology of disasters in the example 1966 Varto earthquakes. According to Thomas Faist, a leading

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scholar in migration sociology, migrants are persons who settle in countries other than their country of origin. Furthermore, migration is a movement that involves not just a permanent relocation but includes various forms of mobility, such as seasonal work and the return migration from previous destination countries (Faist 2020: 3-6). In the case of Türkiye, migration to Germany has been primarily thought in relation to *Gastarbeiter Migration* (guest worker migration) and is often broadly framed as being driven by "economic reasons." While this perspective is accurate, it is incomplete. Drawing on sociology of disasters, my research aims to expand this framework by examining the case of Varto, illustrating the deeper complexities behind these so-called "economic hardships."

Sociology of disasters explores how people perceive, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters, examining factors like race, class, gender, and age that influence vulnerability and survival. It investigates evacuation decisions, the role of popular culture in shaping perceptions, and prevalent disaster myths (Herring 2013, 927). This article builds on the work of Lars Clausen (1985) and Wolf R. Dombrowsky (1985; 1987; 1995), connecting the study of disasters to migration, especially as the potential for widespread displacement grows in our interconnected world. Approaches to understanding the impact of natural disasters on migration vary, ranging from statistical analyses to systems approaches (Belasen and Polachek, 2013: 311). However, focusing on personal narratives and testimonies is crucial for capturing the human experience, as disaster-induced migration involves diverse groups such as guest workers, refugees, and academics. Furthermore, in some cases such as droughts one can speak about "nomadic migration" in search of water, while in other cases, impoverished populations-particularly in developing countries-mobilize only after extended waiting periods (Hering, 2013: 312). These specific examples highlight that the link between disasters and migration is complex and multifaceted. It should not be oversimplified into a single, one-way pattern; instead, it reveals a network of diverse and interconnected causes and effects.

In the context of the 1966 earthquakes, migration from Varto took place as individual internal migration and as guest worker migration to Germany that developed as a part of "social engineering."[3] This is because guest worker migration was seen as a solution to the increasing economic decay and unemployment in Türkiye in the 1960s. While some saw this as a positive factor, however, it also became a source for further problems for the people experiencing migration, doubling the "after-shocks" of the earthquake. Therefore, it is crucial to consider this phenomenon within a broader context of disaster-induced displacement.[4] Studies (Ingham, Islam & Hicks (2019) highlight the growing significance of climate change in exacerbating disaster risks and displacement globally. Comparing the Varto experience with cases influenced by climate-related disasters can offer insights into the diverse factors shaping migration decisions and the long-term consequences for affected communities.

Although my research also draws on reports and post-earthquake observations by geologists and seismologists, the core of my analysis is based on interviews with people

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from Varto who migrated to major metropolises like Istanbul and various cities in Germany. These personal testimonies and narratives from earthquake witnessing provide invaluable insights, revealing how both the earthquake and the migration experience are remembered. Using Jan Assmann's framework, these memories can be categorized as communicative and cultural; the former referring to everyday, living memories expressed through storytelling, rituals, and personal recollections; the latter consisting of official, monumental records that canonize the event (Assmann, 2018). Moreover, as someone from the region, having personally experienced the retelling of earthquake stories and memories as a child, I saw them being shared and reshaped by different people over time, which adds another layer to my understanding of the lasting impact such disasters have on collective memory.

2. Varto: Impressions on geography, topography and history

Located in Türkiye's Eastern Anatolia region, Varto lies in the upper Murat area of Muş Province. Covering 1,418 km² (17.3% of the province), it sits at an altitude of 1,650 meters, surrounded by Muş to the south, Tekman and Hınıs to the north, and Solhan and Karlıova to the west. The district's rugged terrain is dominated by the Şerafettin (2,544 m), Hamurped (2,879 m), and Bingöl (3,194 m) Mountains, with features like the Great and Small Hamurped Lakes and numerous streams, including the Goşkar and Gulciye Rivers. The region's vegetation reflects its continental climate, comprising steppe plants, meadow grasses, and oak forests (Gedik, 2008: 34-36).

Austrian botanist Karl Georg Theodor Kotschy (1813-1866) documented Varto's geography, flora, and culture during his 1859 expedition. He vividly described the Bingöl Mountain's rugged peaks, fortress-like cliffs, and numerous shallow lakes, earning it the name "the mountain of a thousand lakes." Kotschy also observed the stark contrast between the northern slopes, with withered vegetation, and the Goşkar canyons, where plant life bloomed vibrantly. He highlighted the region's abundant water sources, including springs and funnel-shaped basins, as well as the fertility of its soil and productive harvests (Kotschy, 1860: 69–70).

The tectonic Varto basin, locally called "Gola Varto" or "Çala Varto," stretches 12 km wide and 40 km long along the Varto Fault Zone. Kotschy remarked on the unique use of manure for heating, a necessity in a region with limited forests and abundant livestock. Village settlements, shaped by security concerns and harsh winters, resembled anthills, with houses partially dug into the ground and covered in ash and soil. He noted the prevalence of chronic eye diseases among locals, likely due to environmental conditions. Despite these challenges, the region thrived with buffalo herds, trout-filled rivers, and diverse wildlife like bears, foxes, and partridges. Kotschy's accounts reflect Varto's challenging environment and the resilience of its people, who adapted their lives to the demands of nature. His detailed observations remain a testament to the region's natural beauty, cultural richness, and the interplay between geography and daily life.

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3. Varto's geography and climate and their influence on the economy and socio-political organization

A comprehensive understanding of Varto requires an analysis of how social organization influences its political and economic structures and how these, in turn, are shaped by the region's climate and geography. Located in tectonically active zones, Varto faced challenges such as natural disasters and environmental degradation, hindering the sustainable development of the region and its population. The region's short growing season limits agricultural opportunities, threatening food security and economic diversification for its residents. While sparse forests and extensive grasslands promote livestock farming, animal husbandry and related products play a leading role in the local economy.

Varto's economic organization is closely tied to its social and political structures. In harsh conditions, communities are compelled to develop cooperation and resilience, often leading to tribal-based systems of organization, which shape collective identity, with traditions and local leadership serving as mechanisms to address challenges. In tightly knit communities, solidarity, supported by strong kinship ties, is vital.

Following earthquakes, internal and external migration have reduced unemployment and diversified economic resources. Remittances from Vartoers working abroad, colloquially referred to as *Almancı*,[5] have bolstered the local economy (Gedik, 2010, 2011). Nonetheless also with some negative impacts, these remittances included not only money but also goods such as clothing, medicine, household appliances, and even school supplies. The most outstanding negative impact is that the Vartoers have become dependent on these remittances, as the animal husbandry and agricultural production were decreased.

4. Earthquakes in Varto from a historical perspective

Varto and its environs, located at the intersections of the North Anatolian Fault System and the East Anatolian Fault System, have witnessed several devastating earthquakes in history, including those in 1784, 1866, 1916, 1946, 1950, 1966, and 1971. Because of the lack of sufficient documentation about many earthquakes since the 1700s, their impact on human life in the area remains unclear. Information about early quakes, particularly those in 1784, 1866, and 1916, often comes from notes by geologists, seismologists, and the reports of foreign consulates. Most prominently, geologist N. N. Ambraseys, renowned for his research on the history of earthquakes and historical seismic events, provides us with some information about these earthquakes (Ambraseys 1997: 293; Gedik, 2008: 372).

The earthquake that struck on 13 July 1784 was a catastrophic event that had a lasting impact on the region, resulting in considerable damage and a high death toll. N. N. Ambraseys notes that it caused extensive damage in Erzincan, Erzurum, Karlıova, and Varto, with an estimated death of 12,000 people (Ambraseys 1997: 293; also, Koçyiğit 2005). Considering the population density at the time, this loss equated to about 50% of the population. The earthquake of 12 May 1866 also left a disturbing mark on greater Varto region, causing massive destruction (Ambraseys 1997: 290–291). It destroyed the entire area, including the eastern part of Kiğı, reaching Varto. Based on second-hand accounts or oral testimonies,

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reports from the French and British consulates in Erzurum also mention this disaster as razing almost the entire population in the area.

The 24 January 1916 earthquake, although significant in magnitude, remains poorly documented due to the wartime circumstances of the period. Ambraseys states that the 1916 earthquake was detected by European stations and had a magnitude of 7.2. Due to censorship during World War I, extraordinarily little information has survived about the earthquake. As a result of the war and the Armenian deportations during this time, earthquake news was heavily censored, so there was no widespread dissemination of it. Foreign newspapers in the Ottoman Empire were largely shut down or they were operated under German control. Limited information about the earthquake was sought from German archives, but most documents were lost during the war (Ambraseys, 1993: 293).

The most significant earthquake until the 1966 earthquake was that of 31 May 1946. However, there is truly little information about this catastrophe. The accounts provided by the mining and petroleum engineer Cevat Eyüp Taşman, who conducted research in the region after the earthquake, remains the primary source of information on this event. Taşman underlined that the earthquake that struck at 5:15 a.m. on 31 May1946, lasted for 17 seconds, resulting in 839 deaths and 343 injuries, as well as the total or partial destruction of 1,986 buildings (Taşman, 1946: 287). He underlined that because many people were already outside in the fields, the earthquake led to a relatively lower percentage of fatalities in residential buildings. With a normal population of 13,000 and 2,355 buildings, the death rate was 6.4%, while 84% of the buildings were either partially or completely destroyed. It is important to note, however, that the considerable damage to buildings was more attributable to the use of poor construction materials, such as round stream boulders and irregularly trimmed poplar and willow wood, rather than the severity of the earthquake itself (Taşman, 1946: 291). Despite these written reports, the villagers from Varto underlined that the death toll in the 1946 earthquake could be much higher than what has been recorded. In short, the most significant earthquakes since the beginning of the twentieth century were those of 1946 and 1966. Although two others (1950 and 1971) took place in Varto, they did not result in large-scale loss of life or property, and did not leave a significant mark in the memory of the region's people or in the records.

4.1 The 1966 earthquakes and migration

The two 1966 earthquakes of 1966 are the focal point of this study due to their major impact on Varto, particularly in triggering mass migration and subsequent transformations. Prior to the earthquakes, the 1965 census recorded Varto's population at 33,689 (Muş İl Yıllığı 1967). However, the devastation caused by the 1966 earthquake significantly reduced the district's population. By 1967, Varto was recorded as the least populous district in Muş Province, according also to data from the Muş Provincial Yearbook. The long-term impact of this migration is evident today. As of 2024, Varto's total population, including its villages, is 30,183, showing minimal growth over nearly six decades. This suggests that a population

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equivalent to Varto's current size now lives elsewhere, underscoring the lasting effects of the earthquake and the resulting displacement, which continue to shape the region 58 years later.

As the individuals I interviewed in Varto noted, there was a desire to migrate following the 1946 earthquake. However, the material conditions for migration were not yet favourable. Most importantly, there were no proper roads or vehicles available for travel from the villages. The first wave of mass migration occurred with the 1966 earthquake, primarily to western Türkiye and Germany. Through social networks, particularly the *hemşehri* networks established during this time, Varto residents continued to migrate (Gedik, 2011). Over time, social networks expanded and became stronger, ultimately becoming indispensable tools for migrant solidarity.

After the earthquake, the housing and socio-economic problems in Varto could not be resolved immediately and several families started to migrate in Türkiye. Although in general rescue attempts had failed, several rescue teams came to the region-including student groups from Türkiye—and several countries sent money and materials. Rıza Tolay, who was the village head of Raqasa had underlined that, if one is to account for the money sent by the Saudi King Faisal alone, it added up to £ 70,000 which the Turkish newspapers also confirmed (Dünya, 24 August 1966; Hürriyet, 24 August 1966). Also important in this earthquake is that the recently signed guestworkers agreement with Germany came to the rescue, since Varto was identified as a "priority region" for guest worker migration.

4.2. Migration from Varto to Istanbul

In my interviews, the earthquake survivors stated that they did not initially have the intention to migrate in the first days after the earthquake; however, they later developed the intention to migrate due to the failure to address their urgent post-earthquake needs in a timely manner. Mustafa Işıkbaş, one of the first people to migrate from Varto to Istanbul, recounted his journey to Istanbul as follows:

> After the earthquake [of 1966], we stayed for a few months in a hut built for us by the government. Then, in the fall of 1966, we migrated to Istanbul. We entrusted our animals to my *musahip*[6] Cafer Sarıkaş. Since we didn't know what awaited us in Istanbul, we didn't sell our animals, thinking that we might return. We took one of our cows, slaughtered it, and brought it to Istanbul with us because we were afraid, we might starve in an unfamiliar place. (Mustafa Işıkbaş, 19 August 2005)

Furthermore, he explained that people did not want to migrate, but they had no other choice and wanted to distance themselves from the trauma and the aura of the place created by the earthquake, even if temporarily. Although he thought of migration to be temporary, he could not fully realize this desire. His wife, Perihan completed their migration story as follows:

> We trusted our relative Hüseyin Aşan, who had gone to Istanbul in the 1940s, and went to live in Çeliktepe in Istanbul. My parents had gone to Gültepe in Istanbul before us and had rented a house. Since we stayed in a tent provided by Kızılay in Çeliktepe, people called us "gypsies." We were the only family staying in tents in the middle of Istanbul. We had no shoes. Our clothes were old and worn out. Perhaps it was because of our miserable state that they called us "gypsies." My parents explained our situation to the landlords.

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> They said, "We found a house, but our daughter and son-in-law are still staying in a tent." My parents' landlord, Mr. İbrahim, who was an Alevi from Erzincan, came to visit us and got a temporary house for us in Fener from the state. That's how we got out of the tents. (Perihan Işıkbaş, 19 August 2005)

Mustafa Işıkbaş mentions that İbrahim, being both an Alevi and someone who had experienced the 1939 Erzincan earthquake, empathized with them and helped them considerably:

> Through Mr. İbrahim's efforts, the government gave us a job at the Paşabahçe glass factory. After work, we went back to our tents in Çeliktepe, but my wife, children, and the tents were gone. I was terrified. I asked the children playing around what had happened to the tents. The government officials who had taken down the tents had told the children: "Tell the tent owners to come to Fener when they return from work." So, I went and, after asking around, found my wife and children. The state placed us in an empty Greek house. Several families, like ours, who were also victims of the earthquake, shared the same house. (Mustafa Işıkbaş, 19 August 2005)

He explains that İbrahim gave constant help and that he made every effort to find a job near their new home:

> We, 20 earthquake survivors, went to the Istanbul governor to ask for jobs nearby. At first, the governor scolded us. Later, we found Kemal Bey, who was a CHP member, who treated us like a father. Kemal Bey said in a meeting that we wanted to make a living through our own labour, and because of that, we were given jobs at the local electricity office near our neighbourhood. (Mustafa Işıkbaş, 19 August 2005)

These narratives not only depict the migration process but also highlight the significance of fictive kinship in migration. As illustrated by Kemal Bey, who appeared to be an Alevi, such kinship networks provide crucial social support and facilitate migration. The importance of these networks has, in fact, grown with the rise of mass migration (Gedik, 2011).

Later, Mustafa Işıkbaş learned that the government was going to build houses for earthquake victims in Varto. Due to the difficulties of adjusting to Istanbul, his desire to return to their village began to outweigh his desire to stay. In 1967, they returned to their village. Mustafa Işıkbaş became the village head and held this position for about four years. He believed that education was the best way to escape poverty, and they returned to Istanbul for their chrildrens' education.

> In 1971, we decided to return to Istanbul. To leave nothing behind, I sold my animals and my ox-driven cart and bought a house in Gültepe with that money. In 1984, I sold the house and the land in the village to my nephew, who was living in Germany. With that money, I bought a house in Gazi Mahallesi. (Mustafa Işıkbaş, 19 August 2005)

The narratives of migration illustrate how individuals focused on survival and rebuilding their lives in the wake of the earthquake. For those who moved to Istanbul, this process was not merely about relocation, but also about establishing connections within social support networks and reconnecting with their roots.; and also contributed to the transnational migration patterns. In the following section, I will explore how the 1966 earthquake influenced transnational migration and how these movements connect deeply to the ongoing social and economic changes in both the home and host countries.

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4.3 The 1966 earthquake and transnational migration

Just a few years before the 1966 earthquake, Türkiye had signed a labour agreement with Germany on 30 October 1961.[7] Using this agreement as leverage, the Turkish Employment Agency allocated about 15% of the labour requests from Germany to regions of natural disasters, which also had weak socio-economic structures. The goal was to strengthen the economic situation in disaster areas and reduce unemployment. Applications from earthquake survivors who wanted to work abroad were prioritized, as if they had applied two years earlier (Arslan, 2012). While fewer than a thousand people from Varto had gone abroad for work before the earthquake, after the disaster, this number reached tens of thousands. Şükrü Arslan, expressed the following:

> Though it was rare, some people from Varto had gone to Germany as workers since 1961. For example, my cousin Hüseyin came to Germany in 1961, and he tried to persuade me to come, but I didn't want to. However, after the earthquake, I had no choice but to go to Germany. We lost thousands of lives in the earthquake, and there was severe damage. Because of this, we were prioritized. On October 19, 1966, we left Varto. To help us earthquake victims, German doctors came to Muş with the head of the Turkish Employment Agency in Ankara and examined us there. They said we were poor, had suffered greatly from the earthquake, and that we should not incur additional expenses travelling to Istanbul. After being examined in Muş, they sent us to Istanbul. In Istanbul, they gave us the addresses of the companies in Germany where we would work. In the evening, they sent us to Munich by train from Sirkeci station with a translator. (Şükrü Arslan, 17 March 2007)

The sizeable portion of the labour requests from Germany coming from disaster victims was seen as an important opportunity for the social and economic development of Varto and as a solution to unemployment.

Between 1961 and 1973, more than 90% of those who migrated from Varto to Germany were Alevi. This can be explained by the fact that Alevi heterodoxy can be described as more liberal compared to Sunni orthodoxy. This can be due to several factors, including Alevi being more open to change and adaptation as well as Alevis' emphasis on spiritual flexibility, making them more open to new environments and cultural integration (Gedik, 2019; 2018). Unlike some more rigid orthodox frameworks, Alevism's adaptability might have helped individuals and communities navigate the challenges of migration. Secondly, the role of community support networks could have played into the Alevi mobility in Varto, as Alevis valued on collective decision-making and mutual support within their communities. This communal spirit made it easier for Alevi migrants to build strong social networks in new locations domestically and internationally. Third, the pluralistic and inclusive nature of Alevism fostered a mindset, which was more accepting of cultural and religious diversity, helping them adjust to different social and cultural contexts in places like Germany and other parts of Europe. Last, given their historical marginalization in Sunni-majority regions, Alevis may have viewed migration as an opportunity to seek better social and economic conditions while avoiding discrimination. Their resilience and history of adapting to

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challenging circumstances prepared them for the uncertainties of migration and have them rely on community ties in transnational context (Gedik, Birkalan-Gedik&Madera, 2020).

Considering these different attitudes, the humorous comments of one my Sunni informants, who had a shop in Varto-centre, are as follows:

> Working for the "infidel" and taking their money was considered *haram* by us, the Sunnis. This is why we did not want to migrate to Germany. But when our Alevi fellows working in Germany brought money to Varto, we would sell things to them, and that money coming from Germany, was not considered *haram*. (Y.D. 4 August 2004)

However, since both Alevi and Sunni communities came from the same tribal culture and system, the attitudes of migrant workers toward their families and the changes in the family were similar. All those who were the first to migrate and work as labourers from Varto were men. Women and children joined them much later, through family reunification in Germany.

Vartoers not only moved to other countries but also entered a completely different world and time, that of industry. These villagers, skilled tillers on earth and expert shepherds, and who had never been to a big city in Türkiye, found themselves as industrial workers in Germany, working on conveyor belts or in the coal mines. This is because, before the earthquake Varto had a subsistence economy: the villagers only produced for their own needs. The land owned by farmers was continuously divided among growing family members, meaning that production could only meet the basic needs of the farmer's family. In Germany, they encountered a set of new terms: industrial culture and time, punctuality, work discipline, shifts, and assembly lines—many innovations they had to learn and live with. Besides these, there was a different language, a different religion, and a different social life. For the earthquake-survivor migrant workers from Varto, adjusting to all of these would naturally take years. These workers had first encountered automobiles during the 1946 earthquake, and despite this, many of them began to work in the automotive industry and started making cars in factories in Germany. They lived with the trauma of the earthquake, homesickness, their new work life, and being expatriates all at once (Gedik, 2008).

5. Remembering Varto Earthquakes

Geologists or seismologists offering us numbers on earthquakes and provide information about the formation processes and causes of the earthquakes. However, few of these sources address the events that follow earthquakes, what I called "social aftershocks." As I alluded earlier, narratives about earthquakes, such as testimonies and personal experience stories contain important insights about disasters.

Dursun Duyan, who experienced both the 1946 and 1966 earthquakes and went to Germany as a guest worker, recalled the earthquakes:

> In the 1946 earthquake, our village had 46 households, and 96 people died. People were killed by earth and stones because the roofs were made of earth and the walls were made of stone, which were up to a metre thick. Also, the earthquake happened early in the morning while everyone was sleeping. The entire village was lying outside. There were no tents either. The government couldn't provide much help because our country was

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> poor at that time, and there were no resources. In the 1966 earthquake, 18 people died in our village. These were mostly women and children because it was harvesting season. The men were working in the fields, so only women and children were at home, and the majority of the casualties were women and children. (Dursun Duyan, 10 August 2004)

Duyan also recalls how they "met technology" after the 1946 earthquake and how nervous they were:

> In the 1946 earthquake, we saw a car for the first time, and we were terrified. Everyone thought that we were living the apocalypse. It was not like anything we had ever known. We hid ourselves in fear. Then we learned from our village head, Mahmut Sarıkaş, that the car belonged to the governor of Muş. In the 1966 earthquake, we saw an airplane and a helicopter for the first time. We experienced the same fear and anxiety because of these strange vehicles flying in the sky. A lot had changed over the years since the 1946 earthquake, and we had learned so much. (Dursun Duyan, 10 August 2004)

There have also narratives telling extraordinary experiences. For instance, in the interviews that I conducted with elderly I heard stories of people who were mistakenly thought to be dead but, tragically, had been buried alive. In another one, which I also heard as a child from my mother, the person is saved. One such story is about a man from Varto who, while serving in the military, learned that an earthquake had struck Varto. With a special permission, he arrived in his village in the evening and wanted to take a shortcut through a cemetery to reach his village, Raqasa. Hearing his footsteps, someone in the grave calls out to him, telling him not to be afraid and asks for his name. The young man calls for people from the nearby houses. They open the grave and look inside, discovering that the woman in the grave is still alive. By taking her out and bringing her home, the woman is saved.

Another story is as follows: A mother who lost both of her sons regularly visits their graves. However, one time, while crying at their graves, she hears them call out, "Mother, save us." When she insists on telling those around her about what she heard, people think she has suffered a great trauma and try to convince her that it is impossible for the dead to speak. However, they are unable to change her mind, and in the end, they decide to open the graves so that the poor mother might find some comfort by seeing her dead children. However, when they open the graves, they find that the mother was right: the children had torn their shrouds and embraced each other before they died after being buried.[8]

In stories like this, whether true or not, due to the absence of heavy machinery and emergency rescue teams, the earthquake survivors tried to rescue those trapped under the rubble with their own hands. Since the survivors' pickaxes and shovels were also buried under the rubble, it took a long time to reach the people trapped beneath. The locations of those trapped were shifted due to aftershocks, and rescuers were delayed in reaching them.

Some stories about the earthquake also reflect local beliefs. It is especially believed that certain *yatır*s[9] watch over and protect people. During the 1946 and 1966 earthquakes, people say that three of these tombs (Goşkar Baba, Hazır Baba, and Çadır Baba), located are located on the summits of the mountains protected them. Some people believed that "the villages

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under the skirts of these tombs were not damaged in the earthquake, which is why the nearby villages believe that these tombs protected them" (Kocadağ, 2001: 43).

The severe damage and deep wounds caused by earthquakes in Varto have been reflected particularly in its oral tradition, folk dances, and music. Besides, folk tales and songs describe how the earth "swallowed" people, villages, and animals. These descriptions are important since oral tradition becomes the main source to highlight the experiences of people in the face of limited number of written sources.

6. The impact of the 1966 Earthquakes on social structure and networks

Until the 1966 earthquake, social and political organization in Varto was structured around tribes. Earthquake survivors who migrated outside Varto discovered different forms of production and social relationships. Those who went to Germany as labour migrants to work in factories in big cities like Istanbul or graduated from boarding schools[10] were at the forefront of this social change. They began bringing new ideas and practices back to Varto related to everyday life and work, such as individuality, worker rights and unionization, which owe their origin mostly to their experiences in Germany. These concepts, rooted in their industrial experiences, were adapted in Varto as part of a broader movement towards democratic participation and the improvement of daily life in the village, where people sought to apply these principles to enhance both social relations and their well-being.

This social transformation became more evident after 1973, when women in Germany started working after the family reunification.[11] Women's economic independence also influenced decision-making and sharing of responsibility within the family. For example, in the 1970s, Turkish migrants in Germany who returned to Varto for their summer vacations would often drive their own cars to minimize travel costs and carry more belongings. Travelling the approximately 7,000–8,000 km between Germany and Varto required multiple drivers to take turns for safety and comfort. Consequently, women in Germany obtained driver's licenses to commute to work, shop, and share driving duties. At a time when the number of cars in Türkiye had not surpassed half a million, it was both fascinating and emblematic of change to see women of migrant families driving cars in Varto during the summers.

Hüsniye Ülkü, a woman active in the Varto *hemşehri* association in Ümraniye, Istanbul reflected on key turning points in her life, namely on the interaction between the earthquake and education, and her journey out of Varto:

> In 1970, just as after the 1966 earthquake, I was sent to a boarding school in Siirt-Kozluk. Later, they sent me to Trabzon Teacher Training School. However, due to the left-right political conflicts, I left the school and returned to my village, Mışko. Since I had no work in the village, I eloped with the person I loved at the age of 16 and got married. After my husband finished high school, my father-in-law sent us to Istanbul in 1985 to stay with a friend of his. My father-in-law had previously built a *gecekondu* (squatter house) near his friend's place in Istanbul, which he gave to us. His friend also helped us with finding work. And so, we've been here for 20 years. (Hüsniye Ülkü, 28 January 2007).

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Hüsniye Ülkü's story reflects the complex dynamics of internal migration and education processes following the 1966 earthquake. Her journey begins with her family sending her to boarding-school, showcasing how disasters could prompt educational opportunities for some. However, her decision to leave school amid political conflicts illustrates how external factors can disrupt young people's education. Her choice to marry when young reflects societal norms and familial pressures shaping life choices, especially for women. On the other hand, her migration to Istanbul, facilitated by her father-in-law's social connections, highlights the critical role of support networks in navigating urban life. The *gecekondu*, a squatter house, provided shelter, and her father-in-law's friend assisted in securing employment, showing the importance of social capital in overcoming the challenges of migration.

Similarly, Ali Rıza Özkan provides another vivid account of the impact of the 1966 earthquake on education and migration:

> After the 1966 earthquake, I was sent to school in Adana. I was very young, and I didn't know any language other than Zazaki. I missed my family and village terribly. I cried a lot because I couldn't understand anyone, and they couldn't understand me either. Later, I got used to school, learned Turkish, and school broadened our horizons immensely. After finishing school, I relied on my fellow villagers and went to Eyüp-Silahtar in Istanbul, where Varto locals had a kahvehane near the stone quarry. The café owners helped us by providing a place to sleep and helping us find jobs. Three or four of us stayed together in a dark, damp bachelor's room. The government had provided jobs to earthquake survivors from Varto at the Tekel factory in Cibali. My fellow villagers gave us information about the city and explained how urban life worked. Of course, back then, there were more job opportunities than today, but having connections was essential. After working in agriculture and livestock, suddenly becoming an industrial or textile worker was a big adjustment. This new work was very challenging for us. Today's generation is much luckier. Most are educated, have professions, and know more about the places they are moving to. (Ali Rıza Özkan, 28 January 2007)

Ali Rıza Özkan's story vividly illustrates the trauma, migration, education, and transition to working life in the aftermath of the 1966 earthquake. Sent to Adana, Özkan initially faced language barriers and homesickness, a common challenge for rural children adapting to boarding schools. His account highlights the critical role of hometown networks in facilitating urban adaptation, offering practical support in employment and housing. The transition from agricultural livelihoods to industrial and textile work underscores the difficulty of adjusting to new economic realities, reflecting broader patterns of rural-to-urban migration in Turkey.

While Özkan's experience was shaped by natural disasters and economic necessity, it also parallels contemporary migration challenges. Issues such as language barriers, cultural differences, difficulties in finding work, and efforts to adapt to a new life remain relevant across time. Furthermore, Hüsniye Ülkü's and Ali Rıza Özkan's narratives illustrate the significant impact of the 1966 earthquake on migration, education, and social dynamics. Their stories underscore the importance of support networks, the resilience of rural communities, and the transformative role of education. They also provide valuable insights into the economic and social transitions triggered by rural-to-urban migration in Turkey. Following the earthquake,

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many children from Varto were sent to boarding schools across Anatolia. Some later returned to Varto as government officials, contributing to the region's development.

6.1. The effects of the earthquake on family structures and marriage patterns

During the 1946 earthquake, the state identified household (extended family) heads through village chiefs and provided economic aid based on the number of households rather than their size. However, no housing was constructed for earthquake victims; only monetary assistance was provided. As a result, the 1946 earthquake did not lead to any changes in family structures. However, the 1966 earthquake changed the traditional extended family structure dramatically, as some family members perished, and others migrated. Before the 1966 earthquake, tribal-family relations were predominant, but after this date, family-state relations became more significant. The devastation caused by the earthquake led to reliance on state support more. As families faced losses and dislocation, the state stepped in to provide housing, financial aid, and social services, which strengthened the bond between families and the government. This shift was necessary for survival and adaptation in the aftermath of such a large-scale disaster.

Drawing on their experiences from the 1946 earthquake, during the 1966 earthquake, all married young couples and widowed women in Varto registered themselves as household heads for the first time. To maximize the benefits of earthquake aid and planned housing, large families were divided into multiple smaller households. After the 1966 earthquake, the traditional extended families living under one roof disappeared, giving way to neighbouring nuclear families who were still relatives. Shortly afterwards, nuclear families divided the shared property of the extended family among themselves. Thus, the 1966 earthquake not only introduced the nuclear family model but also fostered economically independent family units, permanently and irreversibly transforming the traditional household structure in Varto.

The 1966 Varto earthquake not only altered the traditional household structure but also led to a shift in marriage patterns, from endogamy to exogamy. People I interviewed in Varto, Istanbul, Mersin and several locations in Germany mentioned that before the 1966 earthquake, marriages often involved close relatives from the same village, primarily to avoid paying a bride price.[12] In addition, the paternal cousin marriage was favoured due to the inheritance rights. My interview partners, however, noted that after migration to Germany and the resulting improvement in the family's economic situation, marriages began to involve families of slightly higher social and economic status who were not relatives. As both a sociologist and an academic with a background of migration, I have personally observed this transformation as well. Migration provided the Vartoers with an opportunity to marry individuals from outside their kinship and social circles, and even individuals from even more distant places and from different religions and ethnicities.

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7. The impact of earthquakes on education

Until the 1950s, the literacy rate in Varto was very low. Türkiye, aspiring to become a modern country, launched an education mobilization through different nation-wide initiatives, which became important in the face of rural/urban division in the 1930s, which added up to about 80% of Türkiye's population. Yet, the literacy rate among them was only around 7%. In Eastern Anatolia, this figure was even lower-around 3% (DİE, 1995)-and this 3% certainly did not include women. One of the reasons for the higher literacy rate among men compared to women in Turkey's past was the mandatory nature of military service. Many men learned to read and write through *Ali Okulları* (Ali Schools), (1959-1975), which became a prime opportunity for soldiers performing their military service, speaking to the male population. The female population could not benefit from it, as women's lack of access to education in Türkiye was determined by strong gender roles. Girls were assumed to perform household chores at an early age, which was thought to prepare them for marriage and childcare, while boys were perceived as the productive force of society and encouraged to pursue education. Consequently, women's right to education was restricted for a long time. This was also partly true for Varto, where the Alevi community warmly welcomed education initiatives, recognizing the potential that literacy and formal education could create in everyday life.

In later years, education led to the emergence of the first teachers and civil servants from Varto. For the first time outside the district centre, a school was opened in the village of Raqasa. The first educated person from Raqasa, M. Zeki Bingöl, who also taught in Muş, encouraged his fellow villagers to pursue education (Avni Gedik, 27 October 2007).

In 1945, with M. Zeki Bingöl and the village head Mahmut Sarıkaş, villagers worked together to build a school, the first one in the village history. The villagers shared this joyous news with those doing their military service through letters. Mustafa Işıkbaş, one of the first literate villagers, describes how he acquired literacy skills:

> In our time, there weren't schools even in many districts. One day, I found an empty cigarette packet. I opened and flattened it, intending to use it as a notebook because paper was a very rare thing. I was eager to learn how to read and write. In our village, there was Rıza, the son of Köse Hasan, who had learned to read and write during his military service. I took the paper from the cigarette packet, went to Rıza, and asked him to teach me the alphabet. Rıza taught me a few letters. In 1944, I performed my military service. They were looking for candidates to become sergeants, and even those who knew a little of the alphabet were preferred. Because of my neat handwriting, instead of making me a sergeant, they assigned me as a clerk. Before that, they sent me to a short reading and writing course to improve my literacy. While I was in the military, I received my first letter from Hasan Işık. Hasan had also learned to read and write during his military service and had become a corporal. Hasan wrote that "with collective effort, a two-classroom school was built in the village. Students from neighboring villages and even distant villages were staying with their acquaintances in Raqasa to continue their education." Unfortunately, this school was destroyed in the 1946 earthquake. The village head converted a large house into a school. Later, in 1948, the state built a school for us for the first time. Sadly, this school was also destroyed in

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> the 1966 earthquake, and students had to be sent to boarding schools outside Varto to continue their education. (Mustafa Işıkbaş, 19 August 2005)

These words not only describe the state of education in the aftermath of the earthquake in Varto but also offer a poignant glimpse into the broader struggles and resilience of rural communities in Türkiye.

The 1966 Varto earthquake had significantly greater social consequences compared to the 1946 earthquake. In 1946, no children were sent outside Varto for schooling. Avni Gedik, who experienced both earthquakes and later migrated to Germany, describes the drastic changes in children's education brought about by the 1966 earthquake:

> After the 1966 earthquake, government officials, accompanied by gendarmes and village headmen, went from village to village, gathering children who were working in the fields, playing in village squares, or tending lambs by the roadside. They rounded them up into trucks, often without informing parents. The children were terrified and panicked, not understanding why they were being taken. This is how my two sons were taken away. Months later, we received letters from their teachers on behalf of our children, informing us of their whereabouts and well-being. We visited our children in boarding schools. In 1946, there were no roads or transportation in the region. But by 1966, roads had been built and improved for emergency relief efforts, making transportation much easier. For the first time, the government offered families the option of relocating to warmer parts of Western Anatolia. Thanks to this, we established networks beyond Varto through our children and migrating neighbors. (Avni Gedik, 27 October 2007)

Avni Gedik's son, Cemal, who was among the first students sent to boarding schools in Western Anatolia, calls the 1966 earthquake the "1966 Varto Revolution." He explains:

> Most of the first students to attend boarding schools became teachers. At the time, the country desperately needed teachers, and teaching was one of the few professions we knew. Our generation is predominantly made up of teachers. At higher education institutions, we were exposed to modern ideas, prompting us to question our lives and the state of our homeland. This is why our generation spearheaded the transformation of traditional gender roles in Varto during the 1970s. (Cemal Gedik, 17 May 2006)

The destruction of schools in Varto after the earthquake rendered education locally inaccessible. Sending children to free state-boarding schools was an urgent solution, particularly for the earthquake victims. In subsequent years, schools were built in many villages of Varto, enabling the next generation to attend primary school locally. However, by the late 1980s, some villages still lacked schools, and their children continued to attend regional boarding schools.

Ali Asker Işık, a teacher, recalls the painful moments as follows:

> Imagine being a small child. Your mother holds your hand and takes you to the truck you're supposed to board, but you don't want to leave. A huge crowd of women and children had gathered around the truck, all crying together. It was heartbreaking, like the bleating of lambs separated from their mothers. We were heading into the unknown… At the time, it was incredibly hard for us. But looking back now, I'm glad we went; otherwise, we would never have had the chance to get an education. (Ali Asker Işık, 31 July 2005)

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Berna Gündüz, a nurse living in Istanbul, reflects on how the earthquake gave her an opportunity she otherwise would not have had otherwise:

> The earthquake created a chance for me to receive education. Otherwise, even if my father had wanted to, he couldn't have sent me to school. There was no school in our village, nor did my father have the means to send me far away. At that time, boys were prioritized for education. But when the state mandated that all children attend school, parents couldn't object much. I went to a health college and became a nurse. (Berna Gündüz, 3 March 2007)

Education, seen by many earthquake-affected youth as a "saving" tool (emancipatory), was less often perceived as "liberating." Those who returned to their villages found few options to exercise their education's full potential. Engin Aras, who was 12 years old during the earthquake, recalls the newfound focus on education among the villagers:

> The earthquake gave us an opportunity to study, and everyone tried to make the most of it. For poor people like us, education was the only salvation. Many families who lost children in the earthquake were reluctant to part with their surviving ones, even for education. But I continued my schooling in Hatay-Reyhanlı and later graduated from Diyarbakır Teachers' School. (Engin Aras, 3 June 2007)

Aras, an idealistic teacher, voluntarily went to Hakkari, a region with a high need for educators. Reflecting on the earthquake's impact, he further notes:

> The earthquake brought about positive changes for Varto. It was perhaps the greatest favour God could have done for the people of Varto. No revolution could have changed Varto and its people as much as the 1966 earthquake did. Even those opposed to schooling sent their children to school because of it. (Engin Aras, 3 June 2007)

The earthquake also transformed Varto's trade culture. Mahmut Gedik recounts how it ended traditional caravan journeys:

> For centuries, Varto residents crossed the Bingöl Mountains to Erzurum with caravans to meet their needs. These journeys were arduous and adventurous, lasting several days. Even in my childhood, this tradition persisted. But the 1966 earthquake brought it to an end-not just the journeys, but also the stories and adventures tied to them. (Mahmut Gedik, 5 May 2006)

In summary, the 1966 earthquake was a pivotal moment for Varto, transforming its educational opportunities, social norms, and trade practices. Education became a pathway to socio-economic advancement, fundamentally reshaping the community's trajectory.

8. The impact of the earthquake on architecture

Prior to the 1966 earthquake, Varto was home to traditional architecture constructed from local materials that were well-suited to the climate. Houses built with stone, wood, and mud had long been a key part of the region's cultural and social identity. However, they were not of good quality that would endure earthquakes with higher magnitude. With the 1966 Varto earthquake, almost all of the homes and buildings in Varto were either completely destroyed or severely damaged to the point of being beyond repair.

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The aid and migration following the earthquake led to an increase in architectural diversity in Varto. Various aid organizations from both within Turkey and abroad built homes according to their own architectural principles. This resulted in a shift away from traditional architecture and the widespread adoption of modern, standardized buildings in the area.

The fact that earthquake and migration to Germany took place almost simultaneously, the migrants brought architectural examples inspired by different countries, which began to appear in Varto, leading to both a transformation of local architecture and a visible manifestation of globalization's effects at the local level.

Also important was the relief efforts after the earthquake regarding homes, which led to conflicts over resources, as some individuals without entitlement sought to gain these houses. Even today, there are people living in temporary earthquake housing in several parts of Varto . and some families are still on the waiting list for getting the houses they deserve after the earthquake. se names were mentioned for housing allocation are still waiting. On the distribution of earthquake houses,[13] Rıza Tolay, the village head of Raqasa at that time states:

> I wanted to secure enough aid for my villagers. Despite my efforts, the aid I received did not satisfy anyone. After the earthquake, aid (technical equipment, food, clothing, and money) was sent to Varto from many countries. Heavy machinery, transport vehicles (such as snowmobiles), and medical equipment were donated to the military. Other portable housing materials and sturdy tents were given to the Turkish Red Crescent. However, the Red Crescent sent tents to Varto that were unsuitable for our geographical conditions and impractical. Other materials and funds were shared among other state institutions. The government used this money to build tourist facilities in coastal cities like Antalya. If the aid sent specifically for the people of Varto had been used for Varto, several new Varto towns could have been built. Although the aid was intended for us, only a fraction of it reached us. To this day, no one from Varto knows exactly how much aid came from foreign countries. Instead of distributing the foreign aid to us, they wanted to send us to Germany, and we are still here. (Rıza Tolay, 3 May 2003)

Conclusion

Using frameworks provided by sociology of disasters and sociology of migration, this article focused on the impacts of the earthquakes in the example of Varto. Reflecting upon my earlier fieldwork and research findings, I have sought to connect issues of migration and social change in the face of the recent catastrophic earthquakes in Türkiye. What I present here is certainly only a small segment of years-long research, which originally included more lengthy narratives on both earthquakes and migration and cannot be discussed here at length due to space issue.

Beyond individual migration stories, the broader social dynamics deserve exploration. The 1966 Varto earthquake triggered a "social aftershock," reshaping collective identities and community bonds. Both internal migration within Türkiye and transnational migration to Germany created new kinship networks and cultural associations (*hemşehri*), crucial for adaptation and resilience in unfamiliar environments.

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Simultaneously, the transnational migration to Germany, facilitated by Türkiye's guest-worker agreements, introduced a new dimension to Varto's social fabric. The experience of migration extended beyond economic necessity, shaping identities and transforming family dynamics. The resilience and adaptability of these migrant communities were tested in unfamiliar cultural contexts, fostering new social norms that reverberated back home. For instance, women's participation in the labour market and the exposure to different social structures in Germany significantly altered gender roles and family structures in Varto.

This migration, induced by disaster, underscores the intricate relationship between sociological resilience and environmental vulnerability. The sociology of disasters teaches us that such events are not merely natural occurrences but deeply human experiences, intertwining with existing socio-political and economic structures. The Varto earthquake exemplifies how disasters can accelerate pre-existing trends, such as rural-to-urban migration and socio-economic diversification, while simultaneously revealing the inadequacies of state responses and infrastructure. These lessons remain pertinent today, as communities continue to grapple with displacement and resilience in the face of environmental catastrophes.

By framing Varto earthquakes' impact within broader migration dynamics, I recognize that disaster-induced displacement may not just a crisis but also an opportunity for societal transformation, nonetheless, one which has its consequences. Understanding these historical patterns can inform more holistic disaster preparedness and response strategies, emphasizing both physical reconstruction and social recovery. In this light, the legacy of the 1966 Varto earthquake transcends mere historical memory, offering crucial insights for navigating the complex interplay between disasters and human mobility in the present and future.

Last, this article underlines, much of our social science knowledge about earthquakes comes from reports primarily authored by geologists, seismologists, and geographers. Altogether, social scientists, anthropologists, and experts from other fields also have invaluable insights to offer, particularly when it comes to understanding the human cost of these disasters. To live more responsibly within the more-than-human world, we must embrace transdisciplinary collaborations not only in the aftermath of disasters but also in initiative-taking, planning, and preparation. This approach would ensure that responses to future catastrophes are more holistic, addressing both physical infrastructure and the complex social processes that shape recovery.

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Endnotes

1 Translated by Hande Birkalan-Gedik.

2 Since my childhood, I was already quite familiar with the process of our migration to Germany through family narratives. However, as I delved into to the subject in a more scholarly fashion, I was able to gain a more detailed understanding of the reasons for living in Germany as the child of a family who were, in a way, forced to migrate because of the earthquake. Varto earthquakes and migration not only became the key factors shaping my life but also they determined my academic trajectory, leading to sociology of disasters to become one of primary research area.

3 As I have noted elsewhere, migration from Varto began as individual internal migration during the 1940s and later expanded to include the first significant waves of migration to Germany as well as to major cities in Turkey. Most notably, many individuals moved to Germany as guest workers, since migration was perceived as a means to address the social, psychological, and economic challenges caused by the earthquake. In this context, the initial migration from Varto was not solely a matter of personal choice but rather a form of "social engineering." This process unfolded in two stages: first, the earthquake triggered the initial wave of migration; and second, subsequent migrations were driven by social networks, as people began to migrate to rebuild and reestablish their communities (Gedik, 2011: 162).

4 In fact, besides earthquakes, other forms of disasters such as climate warming, floods, hurricanes, and tsunamis can also trigger migration (Schmidt 2024). Some recent examples of disaster-induced migration include the flood-related migration from Bangladesh to India (Duque 2024). Ingham, Islam & Hicks (2019), whose findings in Bangladesh include the criticality of social networks and gender roles mobilities. The hindering of mobilities is also a fact, as the 2010 Haitian earthquake illustrates. Joos, Munro and Ribó, note that (2023), after the Haitian earthquake, where some 300.000 people died, the US military made "sure that there was no mass migration from Haiti to the United States" (2023, 2).

5 The term *Almancı*, which can be translated to English as *Deutschler*, refers to Turkish migrants in Germany. The term often carries mixed connotations of both admiration and criticism and involves a paradox: while migrants may gain prestige in their homeland, they face exclusion in German society. The term initially used for those working in Germany but broadly applied to other European destinations (for further discussion, see Gedik 2011; 2008).

6 A close companion or confidant.

7 Approximately three years after the labour agreement signed with Germany on May 15, 1964, Turkey signed a labour agreement with Austria. On 16 July 1964, Turkey signed its third labour agreement with Belgium. On 19 August 1964, Turkey signed a labour agreement with the Netherlands, followed by agreements with France on 8 April 1965, Sweden on 10 March 1967, and Australia on 5 October 1967. After the labour agreements with European countries and Australia, other agreements were signed with Libya, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and Gulf countries.

8 I first heard this story from my mother Gewez Gedik. The story was told also by the Hürriyet Newspaper, 21 August 1966, with the headline "The entire country is in mourning. The cries of those buried alive would not cease. It had made headlines with the title 'Save us!'"

9 Saints' tombs.

10 State boarding schools in Türkiye differs greatly from European boarding schools. These schools were typically attended by children from regions without local schools, orphans, or those from economically disadvantaged families.

11 Before the first foreigner law was introduced in 1965, family reunification was unrestricted. However, after 1965, only the spouse and children under 18 of a family member living in Germany became eligible for family reunion, if the family member had lived in Germany for at least three years (or one year in the case of guest workers from recruitment countries), was employed, and had an apartment spacious enough to accommodate his family members. Exceptions were allowed under specific conditions. In 1981, family reunification regulations became stricter: children had to be 16 or younger to qualify, and both parents needed to already reside in Germany. While these rules saw little change throughout the 1980s, it should be noted that on 23 November 1973, the Federal Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (BMAS) under the Willy Brandt government halted the recruitment of foreign workers for the German labour market. This halt in recruitment not only affected the hiring of new so-called guest workers from nearly all recruitment countries but also had consequences for the workers already residing in Germany.

12 Bride price (*başlık parası*) differs from dowry among the Kurds and Turks. The former refers to money or valuables that the groom provides to the bride's family. Its cultural significance lies in affirming the bride's worth, showing respect for her family, and compensating for the loss of labour, especially in rural communities

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where her absence reduces the family's workforce. Dowry (*çeyiz*), on the other hand, is something that the bride brings from her home, usually as material goods and remembrance but also could be money. Dowry is seen as a form of financial security for bride, which supports new household. In contrast, dowry consists of material goods that the bride brings from her father's family. This tradition serves as a form of financial security for the bride and helps support the newly established household.

13 Here, I use the term "earthquake houses" (*deprem evleri*) to refer to two types of housing constructed after the earthquake demolitions, based on the declaration of household heads. The first type consists of temporary shelters, often in the form of *baraka* (shacks) or prefabricated houses. The second type, known as *kalıcı konutlar* (permanent housing), are built by companies subcontracted by the state. These housing units were allocated not only to those who had actually lost their homes and required state assistance but also to the married sons who established their own nuclear families after they lost their homes and moved out with their nuclear families from the extended household. In this context, the men were recognized as household heads and women were only considered household heads if they were widowed.

Research and publication ethics statement: This article is drawn from the field research conducted for my doctoral dissertation (mostly between 2004-2007) that was published in German in 2008 in Germany. The article uses my further fieldwork research on the topic that took place between 2008 and 2012, which helped to expand and re-frame my findings in the light of contemporary theoretical insights. In its current form, the article has not been published elsewhere and has not been submitted for publication as a journal article or book chapter in any other journal or publisher.

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