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Knowledge production in refugee studies from the South: Theorization of refugee labour in the literature on Turkey

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Abstract

This article explores the case of the migration studies industry in Turkey, which has flourished over the past decade, through an examination of knowledge production on refugee labour. Focusing on research about Syrian refugees' labour and employment in Turkey between 2012 and 2018, the article discusses the ways in which refugee labour is articulated and studied to provide ground for a wider critique of migration-related knowledge production. This study aims to reflexively question academic outputs by (1) exploring the conceptual frames used broadly in research on refugee labour, and (2) developing an overview of the literature on Turkey with a focus on this topic. Through the case of the literature on refugee labour in Turkey, we explore the underlying political economy premises of migration research. This case serves as an example to argue that knowledge produced in a Southern context is mainly incorporated as case studies despite attempts to advance theoretical discussions, highlighting a North–South hierarchization of knowledge.

Keywords: labour; refugee studies; theory; knowledge production; North–South

1. Introduction

Scholarship on refugees continues to proliferate in line with the long durée of protracted global displacement and the emergence of new instances of flight due to conflict, war, or persecution. The proliferation of research on refugee populations in so-called 'transit' countries aligns with increased policy interest in Europe or the USA in controlling and governing migration (Chimni 2009; Van Hear 2011). Knowledge production on displacement necessitates examining the concepts relied on, research priorities, and the ways research influences policy and public debate and vice versa (Chimni 2009). As migration experts are often expected to produce policy-oriented or 'useful' knowledge, the influence of funding from the Global North and the setting of priorities on the production of knowledge must be examined (Van Hear 2011; Landau 2012; Nimer and Rottman 2020). It is also crucial to reflect on how 'categories, concepts and priorities' are developed and travel between academic, policy, and public spheres (Bakewell 2008: 432; Zetter 1991) affecting the ways scholarship on migration is directed, cementing power dynamics or opening possibilities for critique beyond policy or nation-state-centred priorities or neo-colonial relations (Van

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Hear 2011; Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Pisarevskaya et al. 2020). This article thus contributes to the special issue, 'Towards Reflexivity in the Study of Mobility and Diversity: Theories, Positionality and the Political Economy of Knowledge Production', by using the case of research on refugee labour in Turkey to explore inequalities in knowledge production and analyse how this knowledge is situated within global constellations of knowledge production.

The Turkish[1] context was selected, as a case, due to the relatively recent surge in research following the Syrian displacement to Turkey. While scholarship on refugees in Turkey began to appear in the late 1990s (Kirişçi and İçduygu 2009), much of the existing literature emerged after 2011—the start of the revolution in Syria. The growing number of Syrian refugees has been accompanied by the multiplication of research projects tackling different issues concerning their presence resulting in an extensive knowledge production on a(n), now, 'over-researched' population (Sukarieh and Tannock 2013). Based on current official figures there are around 3.1 million Syrian refugees registered under Temporary Protection[2] in Turkey (Presidency for Migration Management (PMM) 2024). Among those registered under Temporary Protection, around 56.7 per cent are between the ages of 15 and 64 years. Based on the latest information from Ministry of Labor and Social Security (2024), only 113,208 work permits were issued for Syrian nationals in 2022 indicating that many Syrian refugees are working informally. Preoccupation with labour has been a key focus for many scholars and, as will be discussed below, they have relied on diverse theoretical frames and approaches to discuss refugee work. The focus on labour, a subset in refugee studies, relates to multiple underlying agendas of political or policy interest as clearly manifest by scholars' use of multiple terms including 'refugees', 'immigrants', 'migrants', and 'guests' in their research on Syrian refugee labour. Research on refugee labour in Turkey then constitutes a rich dataset to explore migration knowledge production beyond the Global North.

The impact of policy priorities on refugee research and knowledge production has been explored previously to examine outputs and types of collaborations that arise (Chimni 2009: 17; Van Hear 2011; Landau 2012). The penetration of capitalism into knowledge production in academia (Münch 2014; Jessop 2017), has led to unequal power dynamics between the Global North and Global South in terms of academic production trends and division of labour. Division of academic labour between 'North' and 'South'[3] epistemologically, results in knowledge produced in the 'South' being assigned the status of 'data' with a need to prove relevance for northern scholars or provide perspectives from the ground (Alatas 2003; Landau 2012: 555; Ergin and Alkan 2019; Sukarieh and Tannock 2019). Reduced to 'data', southern research then fails to contribute to 'theory' beyond providing case studies or proof to support theoretical arguments developed in the North (Cerwonka 2009). Academic division in knowledge production is not limited to attaining theoretical significance, but manifests in other areas, ranging from the type of content produced (i.e. ideas, utilization of concepts, methodology used, theoretical reflection, etc.) to the language used,[4] writing practices, publication venues, citations, and so on (Landau, 2012: 557). In the case of migration journals, McNally and Rahim (2020) highlight that most migration research is authored by scholars based in high-income countries. These practices reflect hegemonic dimensions that hint at the always unequal distribution of scholarly power, reputation, and resources (Haraway 1991; Landau 2012). These include, but are not limited to, the inequitable partnership experiences of researchers from the Global South working on research projects funded and led by institutions in the Global North, which shape knowledge production and dominant narratives in the field (Abu Moghli and Shuayb 2022; Shivakoti and Milner 2022) to the unacknowledged yet vital role that field assistants play in the implementation of research on refugees (Sukarieh and Tannock 2019). While the rigidity of the South–North boundaries has been critiqued, these different engagements

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with knowledge production highlight the continued relevance of recognizing how knowledge production is hierarchized and assigned a differing value.

In practice, theory is often formulated in the North and 'applied' to southern cases and then travels back to the North in the form of confirming, disconfirming, or extending instances of non-geographically bounded theoretical work (Ergin and Alkan 2019). Faced with a pressure to integrate the international (i.e. northern) sphere through a self-perpetuating evaluation system, southern scholars are pushed to become peripheral case providers and struggle to counter the dependency (Manzenreiter and Wieczorek 2008). In addition, much of the literature produced by scholars in the South is geared towards framing outputs in policy terms (Landau 2012: 556). In parallel, language bias operates in citation patterns, with papers written in English more likely to be cited (King 2004). The language issue has epistemological implications that go far beyond the learning capabilities of non-English speakers as monolinguistic domination assumes that academic concepts and categories are interchangeable between different contexts and cultures (Garcia Ramon et al. 2006). This is a characteristic shared across many fields including Area Studies, Women's Studies, or Ethnic Studies (described as the new form of Area Studies by Wallerstein, 1997) in favouring northern scholars and points of view (Spivak 1999), whereby some scholars are silenced in terms of both methodology and output (Chakravarty 2015). This study aims to investigate the political economy of knowledge production taking the research on refugees in Turkey as a case study. It delves into academic production trends and the development of theoretical frameworks to analyse refugee labour, thereby focusing on the role of research in the global South in knowledge production processes. Aligning with Yukseker and Celer (2024), in this special issue, this article illustrates how knowledge production and concepts travel (or not) within the European Union (EU) and beyond it, taking Turkey as a case. While Yukseker and Celer (2024) show how the concept of 'integration' is translated into the Turkish context, we seek to complicate the ways refugee labour has been conceptualized. Through research on refugee labour, we demonstrate what is theorized by van Reekum and Schinkel (2024), in this special issue, that the racial institution of the global operates by way of conceptual, classificatory, and ocular practices that inform what 'migration' comes to mean.

The constitution of the field of migration scholarship has necessitated constructing migration as 'problematic' through the production of a population(s) of interest for study (Anderson 2017). Refugee labour, unlike other domains such as health or education, has been the subject of much analysis and theorization given the perceived problem it poses for protection considerations (Long 2013). Refugee labour threatens to blur the distinction between 'refugees' and 'migrants' and is problematized in public debates as it brings to the fore questions of 'deservingness' (Strasser 2021). Focusing on research examining Syrian refugee labour in Turkey then provides a means to explore knowledge production within a narrowed temporal and topical frame, using this refugee situation as a case study. The prioritization of 'evidence informed' policy (tackled in greater depth by Dodevska (2024), in this special issue) places particular responsibilities and limitations on researchers informing research agendas (Sukarieh and Tannock 2019). The academic scholarship on Syrian refugees in Turkey then presents fertile ground to explore the ways 'products', so to speak, are generated and the theoretical framings underlying them.

We first outline the conceptual frames used to examine the refugee labour nexus by developing a typology of the theorization of refugee labour in broader scholarship on displacement. This typology is then brought into conversation with a textual analysis of literature published on Syrian labour in the Turkish case. By examining how the emergent themes in the literature on Turkey align with or diverge from existing debates in broader refugee studies, we then analyse how few papers focusing on Turkey seek to expand on existing theoretical engagement by introducing new concepts based on their empirical work. Exploring how few of these authors are cited, highlights the ways their research is

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exclusively relied on as case studies of a displacement context, rather than for the concepts they put forward as a theoretical contribution. By investigating the formulation of refugee labour as a subject of study in the Turkish case, we highlight the underlying political economy premises of research and contribute to wider discussions on knowledge production at the intersection of the field of displacement and labour.

2. Methodology

Through a literature review of broader debates on the refugee studies-labour nexus, we identified four key concepts that inform a typology of approaches to refugee labour. The four main themes identified were: *Labour Market Impact*, *Livelihood and Labour Absorption*, *Utilitarian Approach*, and *Refugees as Labour*. These themes were adopted as codes. Subsequently, an in-depth textual analysis of the literature examining Syrian refugee labour in Turkey was conducted using a 'scoping review' approach. This approach aims to map the conceptual boundaries of a topic or field and the main sources and types of evidence available (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). The scoping review involved reviewing identified relevant studies, namely qualitative and quantitative studies published as articles in academic journals, working papers, book chapters, and reports (produced by think tanks based on empirical research), in Turkish and English. Resources in 'English' and 'Turkish' were collected using the keywords 'Syrian refugees in Turkey' and 'labour market', 'employment' in the initial searches in academic search engines such as EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, DergiPark (ULAKBIM), Web of Science, ScienceDirect, DOAJ, and INFORMS PubsOnLine for the period 2012 until May 2020 to exclude papers focusing on the impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) on refugees. The final dataset consists of 125 documents.[5]

The authors systematically reviewed, analysed, and classified the collected literature. The literature was organized using the database programme Excel, including details such as paper title, author(s), publication year, publication type, abstract, summary of the conceptual approach, study aims, methodology, study population, and main outcomes and results if relevant (Petticrew 2006). Following Charmaz (2014), grounded theory coding to 'validate the match between the codes and the texts' was adopted when examining the theorization of refugee labour in the scholarship on Turkey. This consisted of the researchers separately conducting a coding of the resources to classify them. We then compared the codes (themes) identified from the broader migration scholarship with those emerging in Turkey-focused resources, subsuming the theoretical or conceptual positions adopted by authors. The process thus included two main phases: an initial phase involving coding all collected resources followed by a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequently emergent code to sort, synthesize, and organize the data. The dataset was then brought into conversation with the typology identified from the broader refugee studies highlighting alignments, divergences and attempts to advance or theorize beyond existing debates (refer to Annex I for the full list of coded resources). Finally, using Google Scholar, we provide an analysis of the citation of the two articles that seek to advance theoretical discussions on refugee labour based on the Turkish case to examine how their contribution circulates and how their theoretical discussions are used and expanded on (or not) by other scholars. Thus, this step aimed to explore aspects of knowledge circulation.

3. Shifts in theoretical conceptualization: From refugees' livelihood to refugees as labour

Reviewing the literature on labour and displacement with an eye to the theorization of refugee labour reveals a complex research agenda. The emerging typology highlights four key approaches/strands to refugee labour: (1) impact of refugees on the labour market;

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(2) livelihood and labour absorption of refugees; (3) labour integration as development; (4) refugees-as-labour. Discussing the emergence of the strands here aims to better situate the development of refugee labour as an object of study and to then examine alignment and divergences in the literature on the Turkish case.

3.1 Strand I: Impact of refugees on the labour market

Demographic and economic studies, as of the 1960s, have examined labour migration, their impact on the labour market and on 'natives', especially concerning incoming guest workers to Europe (Abramitzky, Platt Boustan and Eriksson 2012; Borjas 2014). A similar approach is adopted in instances of mass migrations with studies exploring the impact of refugee arrival and labour. Relying on classical economics and statistical approaches, this literature rarely distinguishes between migrants and refugees in terms of the political underpinnings of statuses or the political relations that produce these statuses. Instead, they measure the impact of the population influx almost as an event in a natural experiment. Studies within this strand develop indicators and understandings of the impact of refugee arrival on employment rates and wages among other factors. Within this strand, refugees, as the population under question, are divested of their specificities beyond that of national difference (Rusnock 2018). Indeed, this research perspective functions uncritically along a 'politics of society' approach, in other words, a society (species, population) which must be defended through state racism and arising when a single society is split into a [super]race and [sub]race (Foucault 2003). This perspective impacts the ways migration is constituted as a policy problem (Anderson 2013) or leads to the subjugation and subjectivation of individuals, through the 'biopolitics of otherness' (Fassin 2001, 2011).

3.2 Strand II: Refugees' livelihoods and labour absorption

With an increasing trend of refugee self-settlement in non-camp settings and the protraction of displacement within camps in many contexts, research emerged focusing on refugees' economic lives or livelihood to better reflect the reality that refugees were more than merely aid recipients (Werker 2007; Jacobsen 2014; Jacobsen and Fratzke 2016). This literature was developed to fill a much-needed gap in knowledge. It also highlighted the problematic that refugee labour raised, as it cast suspicion on refugees' need for protection and deservingness of aid. This strand builds on previous literature about migrant labour (Castles and Miller 2003), highlighting the significance of informality, and the reliance on self-employment and ethnic niches to counter disadvantages experienced in the job market. Exploring income-generating activities in and out of the camp became a focus of study, including discussion of the internalities of refugee economies (e.g. ethnic composition, location, survival techniques, etc.). However, the impact of external factors, class, and racial (or ethnic) dynamics influencing labour or shaping labour markets remained understudied. Literature within this strand touches upon authorities and aid agencies' reluctance to formally recognize refugee economic participation due to the ways it is perceived to threaten refugee-ness as a concept and refugee protection (Long 2013). The shift towards studying refugee economic activities indicated a recognition of refugees as economic actors who may become resilient or self-reliant beyond international organizations or authorities' problematizing of their economic activities.

3.3 Strand III: Utilitarian approach to refugee labour integration

A third strand of researchers builds on the previous strand and pushes it further by arguing that refugee labour must be harnessed for their contribution to the labour market or to the development of their host countries (particularly in a Global South context). As in the previous strand, refugees' work is discussed in terms of livelihood and employment rather than as labour power meeting global labour market needs (explored in Strand IV). Refugees, as agents, are then approached as potential contributors to the market in the

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event that the appropriate state infrastructure is established to regulate and govern their labour—through work permits or other schemes. This approach positions labour market integration as a necessity due to increased protracted displacement (Harrell-Bond 1995; Long 2013), moving beyond trying to understand the type of economic activity engaged in as in Strand II.

Scholars have examined the economic and societal value generated by including refugees in host countries' workforce. Within this strand, Long (2013) argues for the need to incorporate economic rights into the definition of refugee without negatively affecting considerations for protection. A definition of refugees that excludes economic participation reduces avenues to capitalize on refugees' economic participation (Long 2013). Other scholars called for host countries to adopt a utilitarian approach and integrate refugees into the labour markets to serve the national self-interests of developing local economies (Betts et al. 2014) and/or benefit from international support for economic integration programmes (Lenner and Turner 2019). This neoliberal approach constitutes refugees as 'assets' on which to 'capitalize'. Although international law concerning refugee rights continues to focus on protection at the expense of economic rights, for various actors (e.g. international organizations such as UNDP, etc.), the trend shifted towards refugee work not only being accepted but being required.

It is argued that the right to work and access to labour markets contributes to refugees becoming self-reliant, rebuilding their lives, securing dignified work, and contributing to host communities (Zetter and Ruaudel 2016). Employment generation lies at the core of development strategies in this type of Humanitarian-Development Nexus (HDN) approach, promoted as the main platform for sustainable livelihoods (Jacobsen and Fratzke 2016). Host countries face increased pressure to open their labour markets to refugees and provide them with the right to work through national-level regulations or laws (Zetter and Ruaudel 2016). In 'Refugee Economies', Betts and Collier (2017) criticize the livelihood approach (i.e. Strand II) for being an abstraction from broader holistic analysis of refugees' economic lives, and propose considering refugees' skills, talents and aspirations. Researchers in this strand suggest that adopting a capacities approach instead of a vulnerabilities approach can create new opportunities for refugees (Betts and Collier 2017). They offer a broader political economy view that shapes possibilities for refugee 'self-reliance' including examining factors shaping refugees' production, consumption, finance, and exchange activities to explain variations in economic outcomes among refugees within a single displacement context (Skran and Easton-Calabria 2020). While in Strand II resilience is examined descriptively, Strand III explores how resilience can be enhanced by development initiatives and interventions. Betts and Collier (2017) advocate for a fresh approach to refugee 'integration' in countries of first reception to reconcile refugees' needs and wishes for self-sustainability with host governments' security concerns and aversion to long-term integration. This approach replaces the vocabulary of 'refugee burden' with 'refugee asset' in recognition of capabilities but also places greater responsibility on refugees beyond achieving self-reliance, as in Strand II, to contributing to their host country (Betts and Collier, 2017; Betts 2011). It also shifts emphasis from refugees' right to protection to their economic activities supported by developmental concepts and language; referred to as 'neo-developmentalism' (Canefe 2018). Zetter (2019) explains that HDN's underlying structural conditions reproduce a model of development and dependency by maximizing the utility of and harnessing refugees' 'human capital', 'entrepreneurial experience', and potential labour and skills according to a model whereby 'peripheral' states are dispossessed of capital and resources at the expense of the metropole (Harvey 2004). The inflation of informal labour markets in the Global South by the arrival of refugees serves the interests of the metropole by consolidating low-wage production costs in these countries. Refugees then face the task of meeting developmental goals, contributing to local economies, filling labour shortages, and becoming self-reliant actors to prove that they are

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deserving of protection/right to remain. Refugees as subjects are formed as 'self-reliant' and flexible actors who must meet economic needs and realities of the host society, and global economy (Zetter 2019). While 'self-reliance' has received some criticism for how the concept is deployed, researchers argue for its continued use albeit with caveats on the ways it can be achieved in theory and practice (Cole 2020; Skran and Easton-Calabria 2020).

3.4 Strand IV: Refugee-as-labour

In the strands above, refugees are approached as populations that can contribute economically and/or are portrayed as economically relevant to host economies. However, studies rarely discuss refugees as labour nor do they address the systematic incorporation of refugees as labour within the global economy (Samaddar 2017; 2018); it is their 'refugeeness' that is emphasized rather than their 'labouring' potential. In the process of distinguishing refugees from labour migrants, certain avenues for analysis remain underexamined.

Scholars have explored refugee labour exploitation through processes of racialization and labour subordination. Rajaram (2018) argues that understanding refugees' position as surplus labour requires examining how refugees are incorporated into existing social, racial, and hierarchical relations. Analysing the ways in which 'illegal' migrants are rendered a surplus labour force, De Genova (2019) argues that migrants meet labour market demands and the deportation of few migrants reminds other 'illegal' migrants of their constant disposability. This rationale extends to refugees, as, in many instances, refugees' informal labour, if discovered by authorities, serves as grounds to undermine their claim for protection or asylum status resulting in their 'illegalization'. As Piccozza (2021) explores, the move between statuses for asylum seekers in the EU contributes to the production of certain refugees as disposable labour. In addition, the dual market theory (Piore 1979) posits a stable demand for migrant labour in host countries based on the economic structure composed of a capital-intensive primary market (usually reserved for citizens) and a labour-intensive secondary market (relying on migrant labour). Here, replacing migrant labour with refugee labour highlights how the concept can be extended to displaced persons. Processes to direct or incorporate refugees into specific sectors or locations highlight the ways refugees are approached as labour power requiring organization and governance. Beyond processes to incorporate refugees as labour are the ways refugees may attempt to eschew formal infrastructure of intermediation and actualizing their labour market strategies (Altenried et al. 2018). The move to recognize refugees as agents complicates narratives promoting 'resilience' or 'self-reliance' while highlighting the multiple and layered ways neoliberalism influences refugee governance.

4. Researching Syrian refugee labour in Turkey

Refugee labour in the Turkish context is intimately tied to the migration regime in place which is affected by international considerations as much as domestic politics (İçduygu 2006; Kirşci 2012). Migration regime, a concept developed by Tsianos and Karakayali (2010), recognizes that different, at times contradictory or unaligned, policies and practices are relied on by state actors to govern refugee and migration populations across a region or within a nation-state. The migratory regime in place influences the conditions of presence (and labour) for different migrants and refugees. In the case of Turkey, the migration regime has been evolving over the years through the multiplication and segmentation of migration and asylum legal statuses. With respect to the labour market, the regime situates refugee labour, informal and formal, within the labour hierarchy determining the conditions under which refugees are incorporated. Turkey's migration regime results in refugees' overwhelming incorporation into sectors with high levels of informality, such as the textile industry, construction, and agriculture among others. With the increase in research on Syrian refugee labour in Turkey, the Turkish example presents rich ground to explore how

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studies—from a variety of disciplinary and methodological approaches—draw on or align with the four strands discussed above.[6] The analysis highlights the political economy underlying scholarship on Syrian refugee labour and the position of this research within broader debates on displacement and labour.

4.1 Impact of refugees on the labour market

Based on the coding and analysis process, the most numerically significant theme is the impact of the presence of Syrian refugees on Turkey's labour market. These consist mainly of research focusing on refugees' impact on the Turkish economy in general (e.g. Ayhan and Gebeşoğlu, 2020) or in relation to GDP, changes in housing prices, cost of living, internal migration patterns or production levels due to the arrival of refugees (e.g. Tumen 2016). In many cases, research on the economic impact relies on national-level statistics, such as GDP or regional or provincial-level data, while other research uses quantitative surveys focused on perception. Studying the impact on wages and employment among citizens aims to identify the influence of refugees' presence in the labour market (e.g. Aksu et al. 2018). Some research only highlights that refugees entering the informal economy has resulted in an increase in unemployment without investigating the dynamics further (e.g. Oğuz and Oğuz Binatlı 2017). In contrast, other studies demonstrate how refugee labour incorporation resulted in a shift towards formal employment (e.g. Ünlütürk Ulutaş 2016) or negligible unemployment among citizens (Tunaer-Vural 2020) among other implications. Literature within this strand entrenches citizenship boundaries presenting refugees as competition within the labour market. The formulation of refugees and citizens as populations and objects of natural experiments, risks de-politicizing migration overall but also working conditions. It shifts emphasis from exploitative conditions that all workers are subject to in the informal market, to the ways the introduction of a new population influences economic considerations, especially for citizens.

4.2 Refugees' livelihoods and labour absorption

Another emergent theme concerns refugees' livelihood and work conditions with a focus on the barriers and challenges faced to access jobs, the stratification of refugees within the broader economic system and the ways in which their labour incorporation has resulted in their production as a social class in Turkey. These generally consist of papers and reports exploring 'livelihood' conditions. The refugee population is often compared to the general Turkish population focusing on exploitation or undignified working conditions (Temiz Giysi Kampanyası 2019), (un)employment, wages or (in)formal employment (e.g. Knappert, Kornau and Figengül 2018) or experiences of deskilling (Koca 2019). Labour situations are examined in articulation with humanitarian aid practices in some cases (Sevinin 2019). Literature within this strand may focus on specific segments of the refugee population: Syrian seasonal agricultural workers (Uyan Semerci, Erdoğan and Kavak 2014), child workers, youth, or women (Yalçin 2016) or particular geographical locations (e.g. Sevinin 2019). These studies also outline general work conditions in specific sectors such as the role of different actors in regularization processes for the Syrian labour force (Danış 2016). Studies within this strand usually aim to highlight the need for protection for these populations and potential solutions to improve working conditions (Kirişci and Uysal 2019). Entrepreneurship activities are another focus with research exploring entrepreneurial opportunity structures (Atasü-Topcuoğlu 2019), challenges faced (Çakıcı, Yılmaz and Çakıcı 2016), impact on the overall economy (Akgündüz, Van Den Berg and Hassink 2018), and common strategies among refugee entrepreneurs (Kaplan and Bedük 2019).

Some studies also seek to inform the design of the transition from basic needs assistance to more sustainable livelihood opportunities for refugees (WFP and TRC 2019). The majority of these papers discuss the precarious conditions of refugee workers engaging in irregular labour in Turkey, and only few tie precarious labour conditions to global processes

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of production; however, these stop short of moving from the context's specificities to broader theorization of refugee labour incorporation. Through explorations of work conditions, this literature contributes to calls for dignified work conditions or countering neoliberal labour relations but falls short of moving from the context specificities to advance theorization of refugee labour.

4.3 Utilitarian approach to refugee labour integration

Some studies focus on refugees' potential contribution to economic development, meeting labour market demands, and programmes to improve refugee employment. They investigate businesses' needs, identifying obstacles and structural problems that prevent increased formal labour participation. Research explores policies to facilitate refugees' access to formal employment, the legal framework governing labour participation and continued challenges to formal employment (Sebestyen, Dyjas and Kuyumcu 2018). Much of the literature within this strand provides policy recommendations on labour market access aimed at increasing refugees' resilience, self-sustainability and improving formal labour incorporation. With a focus on these themes, research has examined existing employment among key groups, such as entrepreneurs (Uygur 2020), youth, and women (Topcu 2020). Some studies also review initiatives such as vocational or entrepreneurship training to highlight possible avenues for further intervention (Özcan 2016). Many of these studies approach refugee labour in terms of market needs and contribution to host society based on the HDN. With an emphasis on training and matching market needs, refugee labour is cast as an untapped potential for labour shortages and demands. Much of these debates remain centred around increased incorporation where needed and formalizing labour integration to ensure optimal economic benefit.

4.4 Refugee-as-labour

In line with Strand IV, some studies examine capital-state convergence in migration governance to produce precarity and flexibility in the labour force. Focusing on the systematic inclusion of refugees into exploitative conditions and their position as the new precariat in the labour market, few papers question the productiveness of citizenship boundaries for capital or connect migration governance to the state's collision with capital (e.g. Yalçin and Yalçin 2019). Studies demonstrate that state policies and the interests of capital converge in Syrian refugee governance in Turkey (Bélanger and Saracoglu 2020). Very few papers present analysis of the operational mechanisms such as informality of migrant labour, legal status, and resulting subalternization (Alpman 2019). The categorization, hierarchization, and racialization of labour are analysed as mechanisms of refugee labour exploitation. Legal status contributes to addressing labour shortages and providing cheap labour sources (Pelek 2020) and the hierarchization of labour contributes to division within the working class and citizen-migrant labour competition (Şahin 2015). Moreover, the racialization and hierarchization of labour are produced through discriminatory practices and unequal power relations (Pelek 2018), thereby contributing to maintaining the privileges of dominant identity—read citizenship (Korkmaz 2018). Alternatively, research demonstrates the ways differential inclusion is introduced into the refugee labour force with the celebration of certain 'enterprising subjects' (Gürsel 2017). With these processes, some Syrian refugee entrepreneurs and those with certain qualifications are celebrated and selectively included in perceived privileged positions, while other refugees continue to be included solely as cheap labour.

Research analyses the flexibilization of refugee labour as mechanisms to produce insecurity and precarity (Oran and Savcı 2015; Şahin 2015; Şahankaya Adar 2018; Pelek 2020). Other mechanisms highlighted include de-qualification alongside market segmentation into a front and backstage whereby refugee labour disqualification ensures cheap labour for the backstage (Sert 2016). Precarious status as non-citizen results in refugees' taking on lower

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skilled jobs regardless of their qualifications and their incorporation into the secondary (backstage) market. These multiple processes are discussed as generating a 'labour surplus' (Dedeoğlu 2018), a 'surplus population' (Yalçin and Yalçin 2019) or a 'reserve army of labour' (Şahankaya Adar 2018) serving capitalist needs. Lower labour costs arising from controlling the rise in wages and perceived competition with citizens contribute to thwarting solidarity among workers (Çınar 2019) are central processes to neoliberal capital accumulation as well as increasing competitive edge on global markets (Pelek 2020).

Several papers also rely on broader engagement with precarity in the literature on refugee, or migrant, labour highlighting the specificities of the Turkish context (e.g. Şenses 2016). Şenses (2016) argues that refugee workers in Turkey constitute a 'new precariat' based on their living and working conditions. Ilcan, Rygiel and Baban (2018) and Baban, Ilcan and Rygiel (2021) expand the ontologies of precarity through the concept of 'ambiguous architecture of precarity' to include various relations, settings, and movements that shape the lives of refugees. They identify three forms of precarity that encapsulate both a condition of vulnerability and an element of ambiguity that shapes the condition; however, their analysis does not focus on labour.

5. Contribution to knowledge production

Most of the above-cited literature applies the concepts outlined in the typology of the broader literature on refugee labour, produced and disseminated in the Global North. Through the case of the literature on Turkey, we highlight how different strands of the typology are reproduced simultaneously and discordantly in the emerging literature. By bringing various research on refugee labour into the same frame, we sought to demonstrate the need for reflection on the typology and authors' engagement with specific strands without questioning the underlying political economy of knowledge production on refugee labour. Beyond this expectation of researchers working on refugee labour in the Turkish context, lies the question of how this literature then contributes to wider theorization of refugee labour.

While some of the publications sought to engage or advance concepts further (e.g. Ilcan, Rygiel and Baban 2018), it is only possible to examine few examples here. Pelek (2018) expands on existing theorization by introducing a new concept based on their empirical work. Pelek (2018) presents a new concept within the scope of refugee labour, namely 'fear of death and violence', utilizing it alongside 'fear of deportation' (De Genova 2002), and innovatively links the former to refugees' incorporation into exploitative labour relations and vulnerability in wider social relations. They argue that trauma and memory of violence experienced in Syria, influence the formation of subordinate subjectivity and positionality within labour relations. However, when examining the citations obtained by Pelek (2018) through Google Scholar, we observe that among the forty-three original references, the majority use the article to discuss the particularities of the agricultural sector and refugee incorporation into this sector given its labour intensity, low labour skills required, legal rights (work permit situation) of refugees, and their life/work conditions. Some refer to the 'ethnic hierarchisation' (Lulle 2021) or categorization (Dedeoğlu 2022) and the connection between the displacement of different ethnic groups and the labour market (Cassani 2021). In most cases, Pelek's attempt to present a new concept to advance theorization around refugee labour is largely ignored, except in one case where Pelek's concept of 'fear of death and violence' is used to illustrate the process of weakening of the bargaining power of refugees against employers, labour intermediaries, and different groups of workers (Çelik 2023).

In the case of Şenses (2016), the article seeks to modify the concept of precarity to address the particularities of the Turkish context. The analysis pushes for an expansion of precarity based on migration policies and varieties of capitalism as experienced in Turkey.

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Based on the Google Scholar search, the article received eighty-two citations, and after excluding doctoral and master's thesis and repeat entries, among the fifty-seven entries reviewed, only a few articles use Şenses' (2016) conceptualization of precarity as is or seek to build on it. In most cases, resources use the article to refer to exploitative work conditions characterizing refugee labour incorporation or the differential inclusion of refugees as labour. It is relied on to refer to the construction of refugee precariousness due to legal status (Alkan 2021; Bélanger and Saracoglu 2020), and the socio-spatial manifestation of refugee precarity in a neighbourhood in Izmir (Ceylan Oner, Durmaz-Drinkwater and Grant 2020). Tartanoğlu (2018) uses Şenses' (2016) conceptualization as it is to support her arguments concerning the positioning of female labour in the Turkish garment industry. Suliman and Weber (2019) mention it alongside other theorizations of precarity as part of a wider discussion on the concept and critique of its utility for analysing inequality. Wilmsen and Adjartey (2020) incorporate Şenses (2016) alongside other scholarship on precariousness with respect to displacement to analyse refugee resettlement in Ghana, utilizing it for analysis of a distinct context, while Ilcan, Rygiel and Baban (2018) and Baban, Ilcan and Rygiel (2021) seek to go beyond it in their conceptualization of a multidimensional and encompassing architecture of precariousness.

While Şenses' (2016) citations indicate a wider engagement and impact on discussions in the broader scholarship on displacement and theorization of precarity, this example and Pelek (2018) highlight the ways in which the hierarchization of knowledge production is enacted. Knowledge produced in the South by the South is often only adopted to serve as an illustration with limited engagement to nuance or advance theorization. This type of knowledge production is characterized by 'exploiting' 'their' words to develop concepts and theories rather than acknowledging 'their' words as concepts, theories, and knowledge (Hountondji 1992). As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2020) highlights, it is necessary to ask who is acknowledged as playing a significant role in the inception of theory, and who is relegated to the margins.

In order to break the 'academic neo-colonialism', cases in the 'Global South' can guide genuine theory-building efforts (Ergin and Alkan 2019). In the process, south–south connections and comparisons may increase the spread of new geographies in theory building (Robinson 2003). Jazeel and McFarlane (2010), on the other hand, draw attention to the importance of doing research in the North–South axis as part of building responsible and critical academic learning. We expand on these solutions by adding that knowledge production in the South should ideally focus on going beyond 'case studies', and venture into contribution to theory. Moreover, reference to these works should also engage with these contributions beyond approaching them as information about the conditions in a particular geography. However, much of the global political economy of knowledge production is such that researchers in the South are structurally limited to report-style description of the field, due to the precarity of academic jobs and dependence on third-party funding that often comes with 'policy relevance' stipulations. This implies that research produced in the South will often be led by a problem or solution-focused approach, and rarely would academics have the flexibility to engage in theorizing, a privilege reserved for the researchers in the North, with more university research funding and more secure positions.

6. Conclusion

Using as an example the way in which refugee labour is theorized and operationalized in research on emerging or current forced displacement contexts, this article calls for a broader discussion around power and knowledge production in (forced) migration studies. By examining the political economy of knowledge underlying existing research on refugee labour in Turkey, the article aims to guide future empirical studies' design and interpretation of findings and offers directions for future research. We demonstrate that exploring

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knowledge production about refugee labour in Turkey offers the opportunity to reflect on the formation of a body of knowledge in process in a context with an evolving migration regime. Linking studies on refugee labour in Turkey to the typology that emerges in the broader literature reveals that the majority of studies build on existing theoretical concepts largely produced in the Global North but rarely advance new ones. Through the examples of Pelek (2018) and Şenses (2016), we sought to demonstrate that even in instances where authors seek to advance the field by introducing a new concept developed from the context or to advance a concept, their work is usually cited as a case study; thereby limiting their role to that of case study producers in the larger global knowledge production chain. Indeed, there is a long history of implicitly and explicitly dismissing the intellectual and conceptual work of people positioned outside of the Northern Academy (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020).

Through the case study of the literature developed over the course of almost a decade, we argue that research on refugee labour engages with the various elements of the typology outlined to highlight the need to shift the North–South imbalance in knowledge production. By drawing such a panorama of the literature on refugee labour, this article contributes to discussions of the ways theorization on displacement may emerge from the South, and in particular from the Middle East and Turkey region, thereby going beyond a North–South divide. This article is, in part, a call for researchers to question how their scholarly research aligns with or diverges from the strands of the typology outlined, and to consider possibilities for moving beyond the existing conceptual realm. Simultaneously, it calls for questioning the mechanisms of knowledge production, the value assigned to research, and how research is assigned as either a mere case study or considered a theoretical contribution to broader debates. In line with other researchers (e.g. Shivakoti and Milner 2022), we advocate for the localization of knowledge production in studies on displacement. This may contribute to balancing power within the production of knowledge and increase recognition for the diversity of forms of knowledge production within the field, as well as highlight the possibilities that genuine co-production may bring to the fore.

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Notes

1. In the following, Turkey is positioned as part of the 'Global South' in relation to knowledge production on migration. Despite Turkey's history of westernization, its vibrant local academic culture, extensive higher education institutions, and an academic system that values international publications and reputations (Ergin and Alkan 2019), it remains at the periphery of theorization and can thus be qualified as part of the Global South as per Connell's (2007) approach. Connell (2007) argues that the inequality endemic to academic production aligns with western colonial domination.
2. Temporary Protection status was granted to Syrian refugees arriving to Turkey after March 2011 based on the Temporary Protection Regulation issued in 22 October 2014. Several regulation articles have been amended in 2018 and 2019. The regulation outlines the terms and conditions for Syrian refugee presence and their rights and obligations. In this article, the authors favour using the term Syrian refugees rather than Syrians under Temporary Protection.

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3. The use of North and South to describe practices and structures in academia corresponds to Connell's (2007) use to signify power differentials between locations.
4. Due to Anglo-American dominance, English is the dominant language for academic communication.
5. Student theses, and policy documents were excluded as the study focuses on the conceptual approaches underlying research about refugee labour.
6. In the following, only selected scholarly works are included due to the high number of articles covered. To see the full list of resources relied on, go to Annex I.

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