



12

From Refugee to Trader: In the Footsteps of Marco Polo

Dilek Zamantılı Nayır

12.1 Introduction

Migrant mobility has been on the rise in recent years. According to Faist (2000) and Collyer (2005), macro-level factors, such as the political, economic and legal context of a country, and meso-level factors, such as social relations, explain this phenomenon. Migrant mobility from Syria to Turkey (as in many other countries in the region and around the world) was fueled by exactly these factors. The first Syrian refugees began to cross into Turkey in April 2011. Turkey's expectation was that the Assad regime would not last long (www.ntv.com, August 24, 2012) and that it was appropriate to extend to the newcomers a legal framework known as "temporary protection". As the Syrian civil war raged on, a massive humanitarian and refugee crisis arose. Since the beginning of the war, over 9 million Syrians have been uprooted, with nearly 5 million fleeing to countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Iraq (Smith 2016). Recipient countries were forced to shoulder considerable financial burdens and

D. Z. Nayır (✉)

Marmara University in Istanbul, Istanbul, Turkey

e-mail: dznayir@marmara.edu.tr

political shocks (Lazarev and Sharma 2017), and the Syrian refugee crisis was called “the most challenging in a generation-bigger than the Rwandan genocide and laden with the sectarianism of the Balkan wars” (Onishi 2013). In the meantime, Syrians have become the largest refugee population in the world (4.7 million), ahead of Afghans, Rwandans and Iraqis. In addition, more than 7 million internally displaced people have repeatedly been forced to flee the fighting, precariousness and destruction in their home countries (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre 2017).

High-intensity conflicts usually occur in low and lower middle-income countries, which are often surrounded by other non-high-income countries.¹ Turkey was one of the neighboring middle-income countries that were affected by the refugee crisis and soon became one of the largest asylum recipients in the world. Receiving refugees was not a new phenomenon for Turkey, however. From the 1920s into the mid-1990s, the Turkish republic received many Muslim refugees, such as Albanians and Tatars from the Balkans (Kirisci 1996). In 1989, more than 300,000 Pomaks and Turks fled Communist regime in Bulgaria and sought refuge in Turkey. The government, in line with a law from 1934, considered them to be of “Turkish descent and culture” and opened its door to them and granted them the possibility of acquiring Turkish citizenship. In 1991, Turkey saw yet another mass influx of refugees, as close to half a million people fled Saddam Hussein’s violence against Kurds and other minorities in northern Iraq (Kaynak 1992; Ihlamur-Öner 2013). Especially from the 1990s onwards, Turkey became increasingly known as a migration hub on the route to Europe (Lyngstad 2015; Danis 2006), making irregular migration a major issue of discussion between Turkish and European authorities.

Moreover, during the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, the Turkish government and pro-government media outlets made their case to support Syrian refugees by appealing to national pride and religious solidarity (Lazarev and Sharma 2017). Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey’s prime minister at the time, said that, “For our Syrian brothers who are asking when God’s help will come, I want to say: God’s help is near.” He also proclaimed, “You are now in the land of your brothers, so you are in your own home” (<http://english.sabah.com.tr/National/2012/05/07/pm-erdoganaddresses-syrians-in-refugee-camp>). Whereas a large part of the population sympathized with the misery of the Syrian population at the

beginning, the persistence of the conflict and the growing number of refugees created tough challenges for Turkey. For example, it became clear that refugees were not about to return home anytime soon and that the government had to start thinking about urgent issues such as education, employment, health, shelter and other needs of Syrian refugees.

Although it is generally expected that immigrant refugees constitute a financial and social burden (Tumen 2016) on the host nation, Bizri (2017) suggests that entrepreneurship is often an alternative for refugees. Not all refugees who settle into a new host country seek employment, and while profit is the main motivation behind entrepreneurship for economic immigrants, for refugees, the goal is also about integration into their host communities. In other cases, refugees that are burdened by administrative red tape, or those who cannot find decent jobs in their host countries, resort to entrepreneurship to support themselves. Forced displacement often puts refugees into environments they are entirely unfamiliar with and unprepared for. This is why they seek to fulfil two overriding concerns: blending in with their new environment and making ends meet. Here, entrepreneurship offers an alternative (Sak et al. 2017). Although research which focuses on refugee entrepreneurship is insightful, it is rather scarce (Turcotte and Silka 2007; Wauters and Lambrecht 2008). There is a significant shortage of policies and mechanisms to facilitate refugee entrepreneurship in most middle-income host countries (Sak et al. 2017). In their study, Wauters and Lambrecht (2008) point out that refugees may have entrepreneurial characteristics distinct from those of other immigrants. Identifying and studying those characteristics at this point in time is particularly important (Bizri 2017).

In this chapter, the particular story of Ali Dede is told. Ali Dede is a 50-year-old Syrian refugee, who used to be an architect in Syria, but had to shut down and sell his home and business due to the outbreak of war. He sought refuge in Turkey. Ali Dede's reason to leave the country was both acute and anticipatory. On the one hand, he began to sense the danger, because he was seeing the developments in the country and prepared himself for the worst case scenario by accumulating resources. But when he was put in jail, his situation became acute. Through his connections in Turkey and knowledge of the language, he was the first point of

contact for many of his friends. The interview for this chapter was held in July 2017, and Ali Dede told us about his life in Syria, the reasons for his flight, and his experiences in Turkey (Fig. 12.1).

The interview was held at a small café in July 2017. Ali Dede came with his brother, who is a medical doctor and was visiting from Qatar, but he left during the interview. Below are two photos of Ali Dede's son and daughter.

The contribution of this study lies in explaining how social capital can influence the success and survival of entrepreneurial startups established by refugees (Collins 2016; Sandberg et al. 2017), identifying the dynamics in this process. This offers a valuable extension to theory and an avenue



Fig. 12.1 Photograph of Ali Dede

for future research. Since inductive methods can effectively address “grand challenges” and develop insightful theory (Eisenhardt et al. 2016), this study employs a qualitative interpretive case analysis as a means of qualitative research into the phenomenon we are examining. As qualitative case study analysis is considered a preferred approach when answering “why” and “how” questions (Yin 2014), the author tried to delve deeper into the motives and behavior of a refugee entrepreneur to discern any distinct characteristics that distinguish entrepreneurial ventures of refugee entrepreneurs from other types of entrepreneurship.

12.2 Country-Specific Information and Data

Modern Turkey was founded in 1923 from the remnants of the defeated Ottoman Empire by national hero Mustafa Kemal, who was later honored with the title Ataturk or “Father of the Turks”. Under his leadership, the country adopted radical social, legal and political reforms. After a period of single-party rule, an experiment with multi-party politics led to the 1950 election victory of the opposition Democrat party and the peaceful transfer of power. Since then, Turkish political parties have multiplied, but democracy has been fractured by periods of instability and military coups (1960, 1971 and 1980), which in each case eventually resulted in a return of formal political power to civilians. From 2015 and continuing through 2016, Turkey witnessed an uptick in terrorist violence, including major attacks in Ankara, Istanbul and throughout the predominantly Kurdish southeastern region of Turkey. On July 15, 2016, elements of the Turkish armed forces attempted a coup that ultimately failed following widespread popular resistance. Following the failed coup, the Turkish government instituted a state of emergency in July 2016 that has been extended to July 2017. The Turkish government conducted a referendum on April 16, 2017 that will, when implemented, change Turkey from a parliamentary to a presidential system.

Turkey has a long history of being a country of asylum and was among the original drafters of and signatories to the 1951 Geneva Convention. Recently, with the arrival of Syrians, Turkey has become the sixth-largest recipient of refugees in the world (UNHCR Mid-Year Trends 2013). However, beyond the mass influx of Syrian refugees, Turkey has also seen

a significant increase in the number of individual asylum applications. According to the UNHCR, with almost 45,000 applications in 2013, Turkey became the fifth-largest recipient of individual asylum seekers among 44 industrialized countries, up from the 15th position in 2010 (UNHCR Asylum Trends 2013). Turkey has received refugees in the past, too. From the 1920s into the mid-1990s, the Turkish republic received more than one and a half million Muslim refugees, ranging from Albanians to Tatars from the Balkans (Kirisçi 1996).

12.3 Personal History of Reasons for Leaving Syria and Traveling to Turkey



Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey's prime minister at the time of our study, called Syrian refugees "our brothers", a term that implicitly emphasized the common religion between Turks and Syrians (Karaveli 2013). Ali Dede, the entrepreneur studied in this paper, took his word literally and chose Turkey as a country instead of Europe, because he originally was from Turkey, or from the Ottoman Empire, to be precise. His fam-

ily emigrated to Syria 270 years ago. Actually, “it is in our family to immigrate”, he said humorously, from Turkey to Syria, and back to Turkey again. Ali Dede’s great-great-great grandfather was Grand Vizier Hekimoğlu Ali Paşa, who lived in the time of the Ottoman Empire in the late seventeenth–early eighteenth century. Ali Paşa was born in Istanbul in 1689 as the son of Dr. Nuh Efendi, who was the personal medical advisor of the Ottoman Sultan. His father originally came from Venice and had been educated at the University of Padua in Italy. According to stories told within the family, Ali Dede told us, Hekimoğlu Ali Paşa’s father met a Turkish girl and fell in love with her. He followed her to Istanbul and converted to Islam to be able to marry her. His son, and Ali Dede’s great-great-great grandfather Hekimoğlu Ali Paşa, held important military and diplomatic positions within the Ottoman palace and eventually married Safiye Hanim, who was an influential woman in the Sultan’s palace. He served in different regions of the empire on various levels, from Cyprus to Syria and from Rhodes to the Balkans. So when Ali Dede came to Turkey, he was actually not a complete stranger to Turkey, but rather, he was returning to a land which he was familiar with.

12.4 Business Data and History of Setting up Business

The Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity report stated that immigrants were twice as likely as non-immigrants to start a new venture (Fairlie 2015). This is not surprising, as when refugees flee, they usually have to do something different from what they did in their homeland and only rarely have the opportunity to do the same job in their new country. Chiswick and colleagues (2005) pointed out that international migration, including refugee flows, tended to involve occupational changes due to the lack of the perfect transferability of language, job-related skills, labor market information and credentials, particularly in the short term. This was true for Ali Dede as well, though only partially. Ali Dede was an architect in Syria, but he was a tradesman as well. Ali Dede studied architecture in Aleppo and was involved in construction activities in Syria before the outbreak of the

war. In addition to the construction of factories and office buildings, he also was dealing with production and trade of textile products. He owned a fabric factory (which he had built himself) and was selling his textile products to nearby countries. But he lost his assets during the war. Now, in Turkey, he buys fabric and textile products from Bursa (a town in Turkey famous for its silk, since the city is along the famous Silk Road and the first silk cocoons were brought here with caravans).

When refugee entrepreneurs are displaced, it is not only their profession that they often have to leave at home—they also have difficulties transferring their (monetary) capital from one country to another. However, what they do carry with them is their web of relations, a culture of doing business and sector-specific expertise. With the help of these relations, refugee entrepreneurship has the potential to facilitate private sector development, not only through employment generation, but also through diversification of the existing production and trade capabilities (Sak et al. 2017). Ali Dede also brought his network connections with him. His customer base was built on that which he had already known from Syria. But it was not easy to reestablish relationships with these customers. The Syrian war not only meant that he had to leave the country and start his business from scratch, but that his former customers initially went in different directions, too. Ali Dede lost contact with his customers when he was arrested:

I was put in jail for 2 years. ... one of the telephone conversations I had with a Syrian friend was obviously recorded. I had a friend who had escaped to Turkey. He called me and asked “Where are you, I am in Turkey!” ... and asked for help. I was in Syria at the time. On the phone, I gave him the names of some friends who could help him. Later I found out that this call had been recorded... so they put me in jail ... You see, I have many many Turkish friends, BY is one of them. He was working for the Human Rights Association When he came to Syria and asked for me, they told him I was under arrest. He interfered immediately, he came to Damascus to free me. There was swap—for two Syrians, two Turks were let free ... this is how I left prison.

But of course my customers did not wait for me ... When I was exporting my products out of Syria, I had a good business ... my markets were in Libya, Algeria, Iran, Tunisia, Yemen, Iraq, Saudi Arabia ... then the war

break out and I lost contact with my customers, I lost their contact details, their addresses, their telephone numbers when I was in prison ... But later I found out, that my customers in the meantime took my products and went to Chinese suppliers, and had them produced in China much cheaper ...

After his arrival, Ali Dede was able to further develop his social and business network, as he was culturally and ethnically close to Turkey; in fact, he had Turkish origins. What's more, Ali Dede and his ancestors belong to the spiritual (Islamic) Mevlevi Order, which was established in Turkey (former Seldschuk/Ottoman Empire). This order is known to advocate "a life based on 'adab and erkan'" (discipline and rules of conduct). In their conduct, members of the Mevlevi Order are kind, graceful, discreet and never go to extremes in behavior or in speech. This form of presenting oneself was noticeable during our interview with Ali Dede, who placed his right hand on his heart and inclined his head slightly, implying "you are in my heart" – as the members of this order do during salutation. Mevlevi individuals even have a particular handshake. They seize and kiss the back of each other's hands, indicating mutual respect and equality. This is a greeting from "soul to soul" and denotes equality. Every part of the Mevlevi system of behavior bears a symbolical meaning, such as taking soft steps or showing respect to their daily appliances, and they participate as whirling dervishes in "Sema" rituals, which are considered an extension of their daily lives.² Ali Dede frequently mentioned he was proud of his spiritual ancestry. During our interview, Ali Dede mentioned his connections and the fraternity bonds he had with the members of the Mevlevi order, both in Syria and Turkey. It was very apparent that these connections helped him adjust to his new environment. He mentioned that a Turkish television network had come to his home (in Syria) and produced documentaries about "The Mevlevi Heritage in Aleppo". During the conversation, Ali Dede often directed the conversation to his dervish (Mevlevi) ancestors, his proud heritage and the lifestyle which was connected to the spiritual principles of the founder of the order, Mevlana Rumi. During the interview, he occasionally recited phrases from Rumi's poems to explain that he was open to friendship, connection and tolerance. When explaining the approach he

practices in his relationships, he mentioned some of the seven counsels of Mevlana Rumi, “In generosity and helping others be like a river; in compassion and grace be like the sun; in concealing others’ faults be like the night, in anger and fury be like the dead; in modesty and humility be like the earth; in tolerance be like a sea... either look as you are or be as you look”.

12.4.1 Individual Enablers and Constraints

Quite often, refugees were self-employed in their homeland prior to the escalation of strife and, upon immigration, want to restart their businesses as a means of making a living in their host countries. Frequently, those ventures are very successful and even proliferate into other product/service markets (Bizri 2017), largely due to the social capital that those entrepreneurs are able to construct (Casson and Giusta 2007; Lans et al. 2015), both individually and as a family (Bizri 2017). According to Samers (2009, p. 35), social networks are “webs of interpersonal connections, often made out of relatives, friends or other associations, forged through social and economic activities that act as conduits through which information, influence and resources flow”. Granovetter (1973) characterizes family and friends as the “strong ties” within a network. More distant connections are referred to as “weak ties”. According to Granovetter (1973), strong ties tend to stay in close contact with each other, which means that information is shared within the group, but new information is rarely taken into the network. “Weak ties”, on the other hand, are more important in a network, as they are loosely connected and also connected with different networks, which results in new information inflow (Borgatti et al. 2009; Granovetter 1973). When attempting to connect the concept of social capital with weak and strong ties, Putnam (2000) distinguishes between bridging and bonding capital. Bridging capital is created by social networks enhancing communication with the wider society, whereas bonding capital is the main source of bonding and solidarity between migrants. Bridging capital illustrates Granovetter’s (1973) argument on the strength of weak ties, whereas bonding capital illustrates the strength of strong ties.

Ali Dede is successful because of his networks and social contacts. When listening to his story, we noticed that he mentioned his friends, customers and other business connections more than family and relatives. This shows that Ali Dede is making use of the “strength of weak ties”. For Ali Dede, the reasons for his success are not related to the classical entrepreneurship characteristics that are pointed out in the literature, such as willingness to take risks or achievement orientation. Ali Dede frequently mentioned that his relationships, his connections and his networks helped him establish and grow his business. This emphasis is typical for many emerging countries, where economic institutions are not as developed as in the West and where collectivistic cultures prevail and network connections are necessary to conduct one’s business.

12.4.2 Community Enablers and Constraints

Although there are reported crimes involving Syrians on a weekly basis, the Turkish public is not as sensitive as other European countries to the origins of the refugees. There are no political movements such as the far right “Alternative für Deutschland” (Alternative for Germany – AfD), for example, that base their platforms on anti-immigration policies. Turkey seems to have an easier time absorbing Muslim refugees due to a shared history (Koru and Kadkoy 2017) and because the Turkish government, as well as the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency of Turkey (AFAD), have repeatedly expressed their openness to receiving refugees irrespective of their ethnic or religious background. There are still occasional reports highlighting discrimination as well as a sense of insecurity among members of minority refugee communities (The Inexistent: Syrian refugees outside camps, 2013). There is an unhappiness that grows as prices rise—especially rental prices in towns along the Syrian border—and wages fall, as more and more refugees enter the informal labor market (Limits of Hospitality 2013, p. 27.). Also, in larger cities like Istanbul, studies show that immigrant entrepreneurs potentially face discrimination in employment, capital markets and even in consumer markets (Borjas and Bronars 1989; Coate and Tennyson 1992; Wauters and Lambrecht 2008). Not only are there cultural and language barriers, as well as excessive regulations and compliance requirements, but there are also stringent policies governing the financing of their startups (Dana and Morris 2007).

Studies confirm the negative role that ethnic discrimination plays in excluding immigrant entrepreneurs from certain sectors of the economy (Jones et al. 2014), leading immigrant refugees to consider self-employment as a way out of poverty (Bizri 2017). Ali Dede has no clear opinion on this issue. He thinks that some people do treat him well in Turkey, but some others do not. He does not have feelings of danger or insecurity in the country as such, and although he himself did not face any particular problems, he said that some Syrian friends had reported bad experiences. Ali Dede points out that in Turkey there are good and bad people, just like everywhere. He says that he was lucky and did not meet any harmful people. Ali Dede got citizenship through his acquaintance and because of his Turkish origins and his religious fraternity bonds, but not everybody is this lucky.

First they give you a house, they rent you a flat, and after a year they increase the rent although there is nothing like that in the contract. Either accept this, or go ... this is what they say.... Everybody thinks, that the Syrians got citizenship immediately, the moment they enter the border ... but this is simply not true. I got citizenship, yes, because I am a Turk originally anyway... before the war, my friend, the MP had promised me to grant me Turkish citizenship. My ancestors, my great great fathers were grand viziers. So I told the MP ... you promised me citizenship, be an honourable man and keep your word...

Sutter (2012) found that initially migrants, and especially refugees, help each other out. It is not uncommon for immigrant refugees to cluster together, forming networks of interconnected individuals who find ways to complement one another (Bizri 2017). According to Docquier and Rapoport (2012), these networks are formed for the generation and exchange of entrepreneurial ideas (Bizri 2017). During this process, social networks are considered valuable assets which provide access to power, information, knowledge and capital, in addition to access to other networks (Elfring and Hulsink 2003), leading to stronger business relationships and increased trade (Bizri 2017). This is further supported by previous research that emphasizes the importance of networks and the networking process (Jack et al. 2008), thus contributing to the success of

a new venture (OECD 2010). Ali Dede sees himself in an advantageous position because he speaks the local language and knows the country better than most. He says that he helps everybody who needs help, especially young people who have only recently arrived in Turkey.

Ali Dede says that he is happy in Turkey with his family, but that he wants to return to Syria when the war is over. His factory burnt down in Aleppo, and he lost everything he had, but still he says “we cry every day because we miss our country”. He says that during his visits to Central Asia, he thinks frequently of Aleppo; in particular, he is reminded of Syria in Buhara in Uzbekistan, and “his heart aches”.

12.4.3 Institutional Enablers and Constraints

Today, lower- and upper middle-income countries host 65% of the world’s refugees. In terms of the labor market integration of refugees in such countries, the largest obstacle is the lack of availability of formal employment opportunities, both for domestic populations and for refugees. The most important barrier for formal employment is the lack of policy frameworks to offer work permits to refugees (Sak et al. 2017). The Syrian refugees are no exception. The AFAD survey (2013) found that three-quarters of responding non-camp Syrians at some point looked for a job (Syrian Refugees in Turkey, 2013 Field Survey Results, p. 10), but that current Turkish labor laws made it very difficult for Syrian refugees to obtain work permits and seek employment in the formal economy. They would need to have a valid passport, as well as a residence permit, and the employer would need to show that a Turkish national could not be found for the position. According to Sak et al. (2017), only 13,000 Syrians refugees received work permits in Turkey out of a total of 2.8 million registered refugees (Sak et al. 2017). As a consequence, the inability to work legally has created an underground labor force for adult and child workers in industries such as construction, textile manufacturing and heavy industry, as well as in the agricultural sector. There are reports of Syrian refugees travelling all the way from provinces along the Syrian border to the Black Sea region to work as seasonal agricultural workers (ORSAM Report 2014).

In contrast to growing reports in the Turkish media about the number of Syrians that seek employment in the informal sector and thereby risk serious exploitation, many refugees have managed to bypass this problem by establishing their own business. Observers of neighborhoods populated by Syrian refugees in Istanbul, Gaziantep or elsewhere will notice the bustling economic activity resulting from bakeries, businesses, travel agencies and restaurants run by Syrians. Syrian entrepreneurs even export to neighboring countries, again making use of their extensive networks in and outside the country. A new Turkish-Arab economic space is taking shape that is relatively independent of Turkey's traditional industrial hub. Before the war, Istanbul (the largest and most western city in Turkey) was the export leader to Syria, with 616 million dollars in 2011. Now, Gaziantep is the leader, with 426 million dollars in 2016, while Hatay exports 214 million dollars. Both of these cities border Syria. Part of this development could be due to Syrian businessmen who resettle in these provinces and bring with them the knowledge of and familiarity with their home market. This allows for a more integrated economy across the border. There is currently no data to establish this causal link, but anecdotal evidence gathered throughout the region suggests that this might well be the case (Koru and Kadkoy 2017).

Ali Dede is a typical example of a refugee who had to give up his profession because his diploma was not accepted in Turkey, leading him to self-employment. In his case, entrepreneurship is, of course, not entirely new to him. Ali Dede studied Architecture at the prestigious Aleppo University, and he complains that his diploma is not accepted in Turkey.

Unfortunately I cannot work as an architect in Turkey. They don't allow it. There is no Turkish Consulate in Damascus (where I would have to bring my diploma to apply for equivalence). Since Syria and Turkey are foes at the moment, they won't provide information to each other and refuse each other's academic achievements. Wherever I go, they say "sorry, there is no such system!

He says the reason why everything went well for him is his connection with a member of parliament, who he is connected to in the Mevlevi sect. Ali Dede says that ideally he would like his brother to

settle in Turkey, as well. But the process seems more difficult than it was for Ali Dede. His brother lives in Qatar and earns 5000 dollars a month, but he loves Turkey and wants to immigrate, because it is a modern, Islamic country. But nowadays, it is almost impossible to get a visa. In fact, Ali Dede has many friends who want to immigrate—engineers, doctors and other professionals—but the consulate is no longer granting visas. Ali Dede believes that this is because Europe does not want refugees any longer. Ali Dede's firm has been registered with various trade chambers, and he says that he was able to do so because he spoke the language. When they came to Turkey, some fellow Syrians went into the textile trade as well, and some of them even opened factories, but, because of the high taxes and factory rents in Turkey, had to close them shortly thereafter and move to Egypt. In spite of all the difficulties encountered, and the inadequate institutional frameworks in Turkey, Ali Dede feels close to his new country.

... Europe is a cold place ... cold in every sense. Here it is no problem whether you are Muslim, or Arab or Syrian ... well, sometimes they say, go where you came from, go back home, go to Syria ... but in Europe, there is racism, they are afraid of Muslims. ... some of my relatives are in Switzerland, Germany, Belgium and Greece. They live under completely different conditions there. They got a flat, they don't have to pay rent, they got furniture. So they are comfortable there ... but they want work. They get tired of sitting at home the whole day. Especially the men want to work, but they don't get an occupation. Here it is opposite. Everybody can work, there are opportunities everywhere, but you have to pay for everything.... And on top of it comes ... here the streets are full, it is lively... but Europe is not.

12.5 Conclusion

Ali Dede was selected as an exemplary entrepreneur because of his ability to tell his story in a way that reveals, with transparency, the various peculiarities of his entrepreneurial behavior. His openness and willingness to tell his story encouraged the author to probe deep into the “why” and “how” of the process and thus “illuminate and extend relationships

among constructs or develop a deeper understanding of processes” (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). The selected refugee entrepreneur, Ali Dede, was generous and transparent with information, not only telling his “story”, but also offering possible explanations as to why things happened the way they did.

For our analysis, the case study methodology was used. Evidently, a single case study creates numerous concerns about the limited generalizability of results, the lack of credibility of the researcher’s procedures and the nature of qualitative data, which does not permit robust analytical measures (Yin 2014). Such limitations of single case study research have turned researchers away from single case studies due to lack of rigor. However, case studies help to explore significant phenomena under extreme circumstances. According to De Massis and Kotlar (2014), a “single holistic case study typically exploits opportunities to explore a significant phenomenon under rare, unique or extreme circumstances”. This description rings true with our experience, in which it was not easy to locate a successful enterprise started by a refugee entrepreneur who was endowed with unique social capital (Bizri 2017). Case studies are especially relevant here because they enhance “understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (Eisenhardt 1989), particularly when settings, human and physical, are enduring (Bizri 2017).

Although Ali Dede had been living in Syria, leading a good life with family and friends, circumstances forced him to flee to Turkey; in his own words, “he was swept through the air like a leaf in the autumn wind”. When coming out of prison in Syria, he fled over the border between Syria and Turkey with his family. Thinking back to his ancestors, collecting all his past connections, he called upon his old friends, customers and brothers from the spiritual Mevlevi order to establish a new network, and in doing so, connected the old and the new. His great-great grandfather came from Istanbul to the east, and the whole family settled in Aleppo, Syria. Now, the war has forced Ali Dede and his family to move westwards again, but his business again leads him further east, to Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and even China. Ali Dede is a lone trader in the footsteps of Marco Polo, going west and going east, exchanging not only goods, but also culture, art, religion, language and every other element of civilization.

Notes

1. For the 2017 fiscal year, according to the World Bank categorization, low-income economies are defined as those with a GNI per capita of \$1025 or less in 2015; lower middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between \$1026 and \$4035; upper middle-income economies are those with a GNI per capita between \$4036 and \$12,475; high-income economies are those with a GNI per capita of \$12,476 or more.
2. http://www.mevlana.net/mevlevi_order.html. Seen on November 2nd, 2017.

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