

Between Placelessness and Place-Giving: Migration as a Social Space of Gap and the Threshold Politics of Identity

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the phenomenon of migration and refugeeedom within the context of Turkey, not solely through the lens of migrants' integration processes, but also by critically focusing on how the host society actively constructs and conditions these processes. In the current literature, migration is often conceptualized through one-dimensional frameworks that position the migrant as a passive subject expected to adapt. However, contemporary migration dynamics entail not merely individual adaptation, but multilayered processes of cultural, political, and symbolic negotiation and mutual transformation. In this regard, the study introduces the concept of the "Societal Void Zone" (SVZ) to describe the uncertain, negotiated, and often resistant space that emerges between migrants and host communities.

The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in social identity theory, acculturation models, and the concept of liminality. The newly developed notions of displacement and place-giving are employed to conceptualize the two poles of this relational field. *Displacement* denotes the migrant's struggle to reconstruct spatial and identity-based belonging; *place-giving* refers to the host society's conditional and regulated forms of inclusion. The threshold space that arises between these poles embodies neither full exclusion nor full acceptance, and constitutes a critical terrain for rethinking migration sociology.

The study is based on a mixed-method survey conducted with both migrant individuals and host community members. Data were collected using quantitative (Likert scale) and qualitative (open-ended) instruments and analyzed through the lenses of social exclusion, identity tension, and symbolic boundary production. Findings indicate that integration is not merely a matter of individual effort or institutional policy, but a complex and symbolic process of negotiation, recognition, and spatialized belonging.

Taking the case of Turkey as a focal point, this article aims to offer a new conceptual vocabulary for migration studies, challenge linear discourses of integration, and reconceptualize migration as a site of encounter, friction, and transformation rather than as mere movement from one place to another.

KEYWORDS: Belonging, Displacement, Identity, Integration, Liminality, Migration sociology, Mutual transformation, Place-giving, Societal Void Zone, Turkey

1. INTRODUCTION

Although migration has long been one of the main areas of discussion in sociology, it is still mostly addressed through frameworks that center the migrant and position him as a subject who is "obliged to adapt" (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2013; Berry, 1997). While these approaches focus on the psychosocial adaptation of the migrant individual, they do not focus enough on how the host society constructs this process, how it draws boundaries and how belonging is produced. However, contemporary migration movements are not limited to individual adaptation or political integration; they are a process of mutual transformation and reconstruction in cultural, symbolic and social terms.

When we look at Turkey specifically, the phenomenon of migration and refugee status has become particularly visible with the Syrian civil war that began in 2011. Turkey has quickly become the country hosting the largest number of refugees in the world and has had to seek answers to this new reality at both a social and institutional level (Kirişci, 2014; İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016). However, this process has not only been the subject of public policies or legal regulations; it has also brought with it the question of how the host society redefines the form of the relationship it establishes with migrants in daily life and its own identity through this relationship. This encounter produces a deep field of social negotiation that expresses more than the spatial movement of the migrant. This study proposes three original conceptual proposals to understand this negotiation space between migration and settlement: placelessness, place-giving, and the space of social void (SVO). *Placelessness* describes the situation in which the migrant loses his place not only physically but also emotionally, symbolically, and identifiably. *Place-giving* shows how the place offered to the migrant by the host society is actually conditioned, limited, and often hierarchical. The space that emerges between these two poles is neither complete exclusion nor unconditional acceptance; on the contrary, it is a liminal space full of uncertainty, negotiation,

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resistance, and the reproduction of meaning. This threshold is one of the main grounds for rethinking the sociology of migration (Bhabha, 1994; Turner, 1969; Sayad, 1999).

II. PURPOSE

The main purpose of this study is to develop a new theoretical approach that does not reduce the phenomenon of migration to the integration processes of migrant individuals only; instead, it addresses the interaction between migrants and host societies within the framework of processes of mutual transformation, symbolic negotiation and identity reconstruction. The one-way integration models that are dominant in the existing literature focus on the migrant's capacity to adapt to society, while not focusing enough on how the host society conditions and limits this process. This gap becomes even more evident in societies with complex migration dynamics, such as Türkiye, which is both a transit and destination country. In this context, the original contribution of the study emerges on three levels:

- At the conceptual level, the concepts of “placelessness”, “space-giving” and “space of social void (SVA)” are proposed to analyse the migration experience. Placelessness describes the multi-layered exclusion and lack of place of the migrant; space-giving describes the limited and conditional acceptance offered to the migrant by the host society; and SVA describes the area of uncertainty and negotiation that occurs between these two situations.
- At the theoretical level, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), acculturation strategies (Berry, 1997) and the liminality approach (Turner, 1969; Bhabha, 1994) are brought together to present a multidimensional framework that can explain the migration experience at both individual and societal levels.
- At the field-based level, the findings based on surveys and open-ended interviews conducted with migrants and host community members in Türkiye are used to analyze how this theoretical framework is reflected in the local context. In this respect, the study not only provides a theoretical contribution but also presents an empirical basis supported by field data.

In this context, the study proposes to reconsider the fundamental questions of migration sociology and to analyze migrant-host society interactions with a transitional, negotiatory and relational approach instead of fixed identities and static integration goals.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of migration has been addressed in a multidimensional manner in different disciplines of social sciences for many years. Studies in the fields of sociology, social psychology, anthropology and political science have focused on the adaptation processes, identity formations, social exclusion and integration policies of immigrant individuals (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2013; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). However, this literature largely positions the immigrant as a “passive subject who must adapt” and analyses of how the host society constructs this process are often limited (Berry, 1997; Ager & Strang, 2008).

The psychosocial difficulties experienced by immigrants in the process of transitioning to a new society are directly related to social identity and belonging relationships. According to social identity theory, individuals define their identities through the social groups they belong to, and these belongings shape both self-perception and social behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). While immigrants strive to preserve their cultural identities, they are also under pressure to adapt to the norms and values of the host society. This dual tension leads to identity conflicts and belonging dilemmas, especially in young immigrants (Berry et al., 2006; Phinney, 1990).

The acculturation process can create psychological effects such as trauma, stress, alienation and social isolation at the individual level (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001; Fazel et al., 2005). These effects limit the daily lives of immigrant individuals as well as their capacity for social participation. In this context, the presence or lack of social support systems plays a critical role in maintaining psychosocial health (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Ai et al., 2003).

The attitudes of host societies towards immigrants are one of the most important factors that determine the level of integration of immigrants. Esses et al. (2010) emphasize that media and political discourses have serious effects on the perception of immigrants. While negative representations lead to immigrants being coded as a “threat” and increasing social prejudices, inclusive policies can facilitate immigrants’ more effective participation in society. An important point to note here is that integration is shaped not only by the efforts of the immigrant but also by the border-drawing practices of the host society (Soysal, 1994; Kymlicka, 1995).

Although immigrant-host society relations are often addressed in the literature within the framework of integration, multiculturalism or assimilation, these concepts often interpret migration as a one-way and static process. However, as Sayad (1999) also stated, migration is not just a matter of “coming” or “going”; it is a state of not being one, of not being able to find a perfect place. The concepts such as *placelessness*, *place-giving* and *social void space suggested by this study* aim to overcome this deficiency and to understand migration as a simultaneous transformation process of both the immigrant and the host.

In recent years, the concept of liminality has offered new perspectives in the literature on migration studies. While Victor Turner (1969) defined liminality as temporary and liminal situations in the social structure, Bhabha (1994) interpreted this situation through the unfixability of cultural identities and the hybridity that occurs in the intermediate spaces. These perspectives provide functional frameworks for analyzing situations in which migrants can neither belong to the place they come from nor fully integrate into the place they arrive at.

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Studies conducted in the context of Syrian refugees, particularly in Turkey, generally focus on areas such as integration policies, social services, education, and employment; however, the transformative nature of migrant-host society relations has not been analyzed in sufficient depth (Kirişçi, 2014; İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016; Şahin Mencütek & Buz, 2019). Therefore, the conceptualization of the social gap area (SBA), which was developed to provide both a theoretical and conceptual contribution to the existing literature, aims to make visible the liminal area where migrants and host societies encounter, resist, and negotiate.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in order to conceptualize the relational and symbolic interaction areas between immigrants and host societies, under the direction of Prof. Dr. Derya Berrak in the Department of Sociology at St. Clements University, with the contribution of graduate and doctoral students in the departments of sociology and psychology. The study examines the immigrant experience not only in terms of individual integration processes, but also in the context of social negotiation, symbolic border production, and mutual identity transformations.

The research was conducted in Istanbul, Gaziantep and Izmir provinces between January 2 and March 24, 2025; a mixed method approach was adopted. In this context, surveys and semi-structured interviews were used together to provide both qualitative depth and quantitative prevalence.

Research Group:

Purposive sampling method was used in the selection of participants. The research is based on two main sample groups:

- The survey group included 375 participants.
 - 200 immigrants (Syrian, Afghan, Iraqi, Iranian, from different socio-economic profiles)
 - 175 host community members (locals, public employees, students, tradesmen, etc.)
- In the qualitative interview group: In-depth one-on-one interviews were conducted with 40 individuals.
 - 20 immigrants (10 women, 10 men)
 - 20 local individuals (of various ages, education and professions)

All participants have been residing in Türkiye or the relevant city for at least 4 years.

Data Collection Tools:

In the study, both survey and semi-structured interview data were collected. The tools are structured as follows.

Survey Form:

The survey form (See Appendix-1) applied to 375 people consists of closed and open-ended questions. The sections structured with five-point Likert-type scales are as follows:

- Perceived Discrimination Questionnaire (PAQ): To measure the levels of exclusion that participants experienced or observed.
- Belonging and Recognition Perception Scale (ATA): To evaluate the emotional and symbolic belonging of individuals to the place and society they live in.
- Symbolic Boundary Perception Scale (SBS): To measure the host society's border drawing styles and social distance towards immigrants.
- Social Trust and Contact Index (TGTE): Frequency and quality of mutual contact and level of social trust.
- Demographic Information Form: It includes variables such as age, gender, education, occupation, duration of residence, nationality, and language proficiency.
- Open-ended questions: By being included in thematic analysis together with the interviews, it enabled the conceptual framework to be concretized through individual narratives and formed the basis for testing the theoretical originality of the study in the field.

Table I.

Theme	Aim	Question Example
Belonging & Displacement	Analysing the spatial and emotional belonging relationships of immigrants and host individuals	"Can you share a moment when you felt most like you belonged or didn't feel like you belonged in this city?"
Representation & Recognition	Revealing experiences such as symbolic visibility, being ignored, and stereotyping	"Have you ever encountered a situation that made you feel invisible in this society? Can you explain?"
Boundaries & Space-giving	Determining the society's 'hospitality', 'making room' or 'exclusion' reflexes on an individual level	"Do you think 'being a guest' is a temporary situation or permanent? What does this concept mean to you?"

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Social Contact & Social Space Area	Analysing the forms of encounter, conflict, rapprochement and divergence in immigrant-native interactions	"Why is it easy or difficult for you to establish relationships with the host community? Can you give an example?"
Alternative Future Proposal	Analyze the solution-generating and transformative perspectives of the participants.	"What do you think should be done to establish more fair and equal relations between immigrants and locals?"

Semi-Structured Interview Form (See Annex-2):

The interviews were conducted one-on-one, audio-recorded, and lasted approximately 45–60 minutes each. Questions focused on the following themes:

- Individual and collective dimensions of the immigration experience
- The meaning of concepts such as “guest”, “local”, “host”
- Bordering, visibility, silence and forms of resistance
- Encounter experiences in places such as neighborhood, school, workplace
- A sense of belonging, recognition and being ignored
- The connections that are established or not established in daily life

In order to test the validity and applicability of the semi-structured interview form, one-on-one pilot interviews were conducted with a total of 12 participants (6 migrants, 6 host individuals) in different districts of Istanbul between January 2–15, 2025. The participants were diversified in terms of age, gender, education level and duration of migration; each interview was conducted by audio recording. The interviews were conducted in the Fatih, Bağcılar, Kadıköy, Üsküdar, Şişli and Esenler districts of Istanbul, which stand out with their socio-cultural diversity.

Migrant participants were selected from individuals who had been residing in Türkiye for 4 to 10 years, while host participants were selected from individuals who were born, raised or had been residing in Istanbul for a long time. Participants included 6 females and 6 males, aged between 23 and 41, with education levels ranging from primary school, high school, undergraduate, graduate and doctorate levels.

This socio-demographic diversity made it possible to test how the interview questions resonated in different contexts and to assess the validity of the conceptual framework proposed in the study. Pilot interviews were evaluated in terms of conceptual consistency, comprehensibility and emotional permeability of the form; as a result of content analyses conducted by two independent researchers, some questions were simplified and culturally difficult expressions were restructured. In this direction, the final version of the interview form was created.

Data Analysis:

In this study, a mixed methods approach was adopted; both data types were evaluated in a complementary manner depending on the theoretical framework of the study.

The data obtained through the survey were analyzed using the SPSS 28.0 package program. In the first stage, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage) regarding the demographic distributions and scale scores of the participants were calculated. In the second stage, in order to test significant differences between certain variables, t-test for independent samples, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and, when necessary, assumption checks such as Levene's Test were applied. In addition, correlation analysis was also performed for some multivariate relationships.

These analyses were conducted to understand the differences between the levels of belonging, exclusion, symbolic border experience and social contact of immigrant and host individuals. The findings were categorized in a way that supports the conceptual framework of the study.

Qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews were analyzed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2022 software. Thematic analysis method was adopted in the qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding process was carried out in three stages:

- Preliminary Coding: Interview transcripts were carefully read to identify meaningful sentence and expression clusters, and each piece of data was converted into open codes line by line.
- Creating Categories: Codes that are similar in meaning are brought together and grouped under higher-level categories according to their content density.
- Theme Construction: Codes and categories were restructured in relation to the theoretical framework of the study and final themes were created.

The coding process was carried out separately by two independent researchers experienced in qualitative research; the codes obtained were compared and an agreement of 87% was achieved. When necessary, code combination or separation processes were

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carried out with the contribution of a third expert. This process was planned to ensure the internal reliability and validity of the study.

The main themes obtained during the thematic analysis process overlapped to a high extent with the theoretical concepts of the study and were grouped as follows:

- Dislocation: The disruption of physical, symbolic and emotional belonging.
- Space-giving: The limits and conditions of the space that society grants to the immigrant
- Social Gap Area (TBA): Situations of neither complete exclusion nor complete inclusion
- Invisibility and Recognition: Symbolic forms of exclusion, stereotyping and silence
- Resistance and Micro-politics: Individual and collective resistance strategies used by migrants in everyday life
- Symbolic Thresholds: The spatial and cultural functioning of concepts such as “guest”, “stranger”, “other”
- Mutual Contact: Daily encounters, conflicts and rapprochements in immigrant-native relationships

Ethical Process:

This research was conducted with ethical approval document number 2024/61148 from the St. Clements University Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, their privacy was assured, and data usage limits were clearly stated.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Traditional approaches to understanding migration and integration processes are largely based on individualistic frameworks that center on the migrant. These approaches focus on examining the extent to which the individual adapts to the new society, what strategies he/she adopts, and how he/she integrates into the social structure (Berry, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). However, these approaches only center on the effects of migration on the migrant, while giving limited space to how the host society shapes this process and the areas of mutual transformation that emerge in the migrant-native encounter. In this context, the study aims to analyze the phenomenon of migration from a more relational, multifaceted, and dynamic perspective.

Social Identity Theory and Identity Negotiation:

Social identity theory argues that individuals construct their sense of self through group memberships and that social interactions are shaped by the constant reproduction of these identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). For immigrant individuals, this process represents a negotiation between the desire to preserve their cultural identities and the need to be accepted in the host society. This situation can lead to identity conflicts and a sense of “being in between,” especially for young immigrants (Phinney, 1990; Berry et al., 2006).

Cultural Adaptation Strategies and Integration Models:

Berry's (1997) four-strategy acculturation model—integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization—is an important framework for describing the relationships immigrant individuals establish with the new society. However, it is clear that this model does not focus sufficiently on the ways in which the host society “makes room,” “shows room,” or “draws space.” For integration to be successful, not only the immigrant's efforts but also the quality of the space the society provides to the immigrant are decisive (Ager & Strang, 2008).

Liminality, Hybridity and Threshold Space:

Turner's (1969) concept of liminality describes threshold situations in which individuals can neither fully possess their old nor their new identities during periods of social transition. Bhabha (1994) interpreted this temporary state through the unfixability of cultural identities and hybrid structures formed in cultural intermediary spaces, and addressed the experience of immigration in this context. The immigrant establishes an incomplete connection with both the place they came from and the place they arrive at; in this context, the phenomenon of immigration points to a liminal, temporary but productive social ground.

Conceptual Framework and Conceptual Development:

This study rises on a critical ground that invites us to rethink the conceptual frameworks offered by the existing literature on the sociology of migration. While the existing academic background frequently positions the migrant as a displaced subject that needs to adapt and is expected to be intervened at the policy level, it is observed that the normative structure of the host society, its symbolic power mechanisms and border-drawing practices are not made sufficiently visible (Ager & Strang, 2008; Castles et al., 2013; Portes & Zhou, 1993).

If we remember that sociology is a science of concepts, this invisibility is not only an empirical deficiency; it is also a result of the epistemological tendencies towards which conceptual production is directed. The basic claim of this study is that migration should be considered not only as a social phenomenon but also as a threshold that re-establishes sociological understanding itself. In this context, new types of encounters shaped through the experience of migration necessitate the production of new meanings not only at the individual level but also at the conceptual level (De Genova, 2013; Glick Schiller & Levitt, 2004).

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At this point, the local accumulation of Turkish sociology makes strong contributions to the theoretical orientation of this study. Sencer Ayata (1992) has demonstrated that migration in the context of Turkey is not only a spatial movement but also a struggle area where class, cultural and ethnic boundaries are redefined. Nermin Abadan-Unat (2002) has emphasized that the migrant is not only a physical subject but also a cultural agent carrying meanings and identities by reading migration as a “communication and value transfer process”. Çağlar Keyder’s (2005) findings that citizenship and belonging are negotiated on the level of daily relations strengthen the necessity of this study to explain the migrant-host society relationship not only with legal statuses but also with social recognition practices. The intellectual framework developed by İlhan Tekeli (2008) on city, identity and space shows that migration turns into a search for spatial recognition together with identity-based dislocation.

These domestic perspectives intersect with conceptual critiques in the international literature. Bhambra (2007) questions the Eurocentric nature of sociological understanding; Nando Sigona and De Genova (2013) have shown that conceptual structures themselves are limiting, defining immigration as the “unexpected subject.” Sara Ahmed (2004) has pointed to the affective dimension of immigration, emphasizing that belonging is not only a legal or cultural but also an affective negotiation.

Within this conceptual density, the framework developed by Gabor Maté (2021) on trauma reminds us of the need to question the linguistic boundaries of social sciences. According to Maté, trauma is not just an event; it is a rupture in which that event cannot be interpreted, expressed, or named. Sociological analysis is often handicapped by this silence; it works with conceptual schemes that cannot adequately grasp displacement, loss of belonging, and emotional ruptures. Therefore, concepts themselves, like migrants, must be displaced, repositioned, and transformed.

For these reasons, the study proposes three conceptual proposals that draw on the field and theory: *placelessness*, *place-giving*, and *social void space (SW)*. These concepts are not only descriptive categories; they are also analytical tools that aim to expand the boundaries of sociological imagination by drawing on the everyday experience of migration.

Sociology is often embedded in an epistemology constructed on “fixed categories”: *native/immigrant*, *insider/outsider*, *center/periphery*. However, the phenomenon of migration is a formation that invalidates these dichotomies and demands new conceptual intermediate spaces. These three concepts were developed precisely to make visible these intermediate spaces, unfixable thresholds, temporary but constitutive cracks.

The conceptualization effort put forward here is important not only for introducing new terms to the language of sociological analysis, but also for questioning the normative assumptions on which this language is based. Because the concepts used in trying to understand a phenomenon are often the carriers of the ways of seeing that frame that phenomenon (Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1972).

In this context, “placelessness” should be considered as the suspended state of the migrant’s relationship not only with space but also with recognition, representation and belonging. “Place-giving”, on the other hand, enables the analysis of the host society’s conditional inclusiveness policies and boundary-building practices rather than the migrant’s capacity for adaptation. “Social Gap Area (GGA)” aims to conceptualize the liminal negotiation area that occurs between these two axes and is often left out of sociological analysis.

The theoretical infrastructure on which these concepts are based includes a critique directed not only at migration studies but also at sociology’s own meaning-making regime. The concepts developed do not only describe a social situation; they are also representative of a new epistemological sensitivity required to make that situation visible.

Because migration is not only a change of place, but also the displacement of meaning, identity and visibility along with the place. Therefore, migration also requires the mobilization of sociological thought. It is not only people who migrate; concepts also migrate, change context and evolve into new meanings.

The conceptual triad proposed by this study is an invitation not only to understand the migration experience in the Turkish context, but also to question the political nature of the categories that sociology uses to explain migration. These concepts, which take shape at the thresholds of everyday life, focus on the cracks that seem theoretically marginal but are actually inherent in the establishment of the social center. In this respect, the field of placelessness, place-giving and social void can be considered not only as concepts, but also as a method proposal, a way of thinking and perhaps a language proposal that will contribute to sociology transcending its own internal boundaries.

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Figure I.

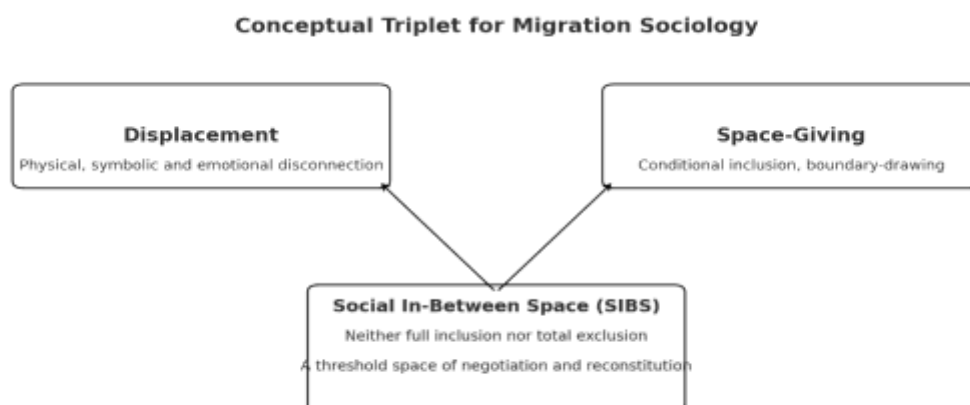


Figure 1. Conceptual Triad for the Sociology of Migration: Placelessness – Place-giving – Social Void Space

This conceptual structure aims to analyze the experience of immigration not only as an individual adaptation process but also as a symbolic, spatial and relational negotiation area with the host society. The concepts represent a new theoretical framework developed to analyze the liminal states and forms of power that often remain invisible in the sociology of migration.

VI. RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

General Structure of the Research:

This research was conducted in order to conceptualize the relational and symbolic interaction areas between immigrants and host societies, under the direction of Prof. Dr. Derya Berrak in the Department of Sociology at St. Clements University, with the contribution of graduate and doctoral students in the departments of sociology and psychology. The study examines the immigrant experience not only in terms of individual integration processes, but also in the context of social negotiation, symbolic border production, and mutual identity transformations.

This study aims to analyze the effects of encounters between migrant individuals and host society members on daily life practices, perceptual representations, and symbolic border productions in a multi-layered manner. The research was conducted in six different districts of Istanbul with high socio-cultural diversity between January 22 and March 24, 2025. The implementation process was structured with both broad-based field studies and in-depth analyses based on individual narratives.

Within the scope of the field study, tendencies regarding social belonging, exclusion and representation experiences were revealed through a structured questionnaire form with 375 participants; in addition, deeper, contextual and affective layers were analyzed through interviews conducted with a total of 40 individuals selected from the immigrant and host society.

Structural Properties of Scales and Reliability Analysis:

The survey form developed within the scope of the research was structured to evaluate the experiences of immigrant and host community members regarding social belonging, visibility, recognition and future perceptions with a holistic approach. The scale items were gathered in three main dimensions, the theoretical basis of which is associated with conceptual suggestions:

- **Belonging and Displacement (A1–A10)**: Consists of items that question individuals' sense of spatial and identity belonging and measure their experiences of displacement.
- **Visibility and representation (B1–B25)**: Focuses on experiences related to social recognition, representation in the public sphere, and symbolic boundaries.
- **Contact with Society and Perception of the Future (C1–C6)**: These are statements that address the social relations established with the host society, the level of mutual understanding, and the sense of belonging to the future.

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A total of 41 items under these thematic headings were evaluated with a 5-point Likert-type rating scale (1: *Strongly Disagree* – 5: *Strongly Agree*). All items were created by associating them with both the conceptual framework and empirical observations.

Reliability analyses regarding the internal consistency of the scales were assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The table below presents the number of items and reliability coefficients for each subscale:

Table II. Structural Properties and Reliability Levels of Scales

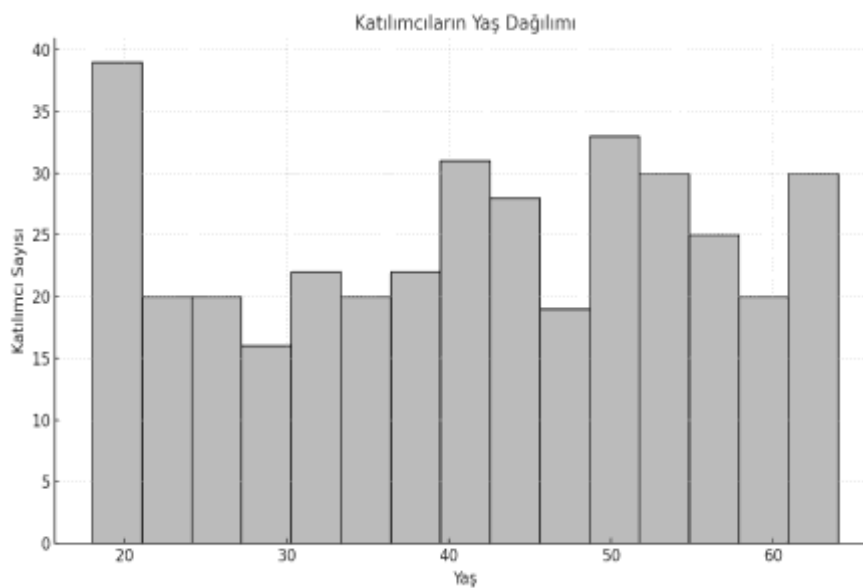
Scale Title	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Belonging and Displacement	10	0.964
Visibility and Representation	25	0.985
Contact with Society and Perception of the Future	6	0.944

The table, Cronbach's Alpha values of all three subscales are above .90, which shows that the items measure a holistic structure with high internal consistency. Especially the extremely high alpha value of .985 obtained in the "Visibility and Representation" subscale shows that the scale can strongly capture experiences of symbolic recognition and exclusion. While the "Belonging and Dislocation" scale reliably reveals the emotional spatial ruptures of individuals with a value of .964; "Contact with Society and Perception of the Future" offers a powerful tool in measuring social contact and ties of belonging with a value of .944.

Demographic and Socio-Cultural Profile:

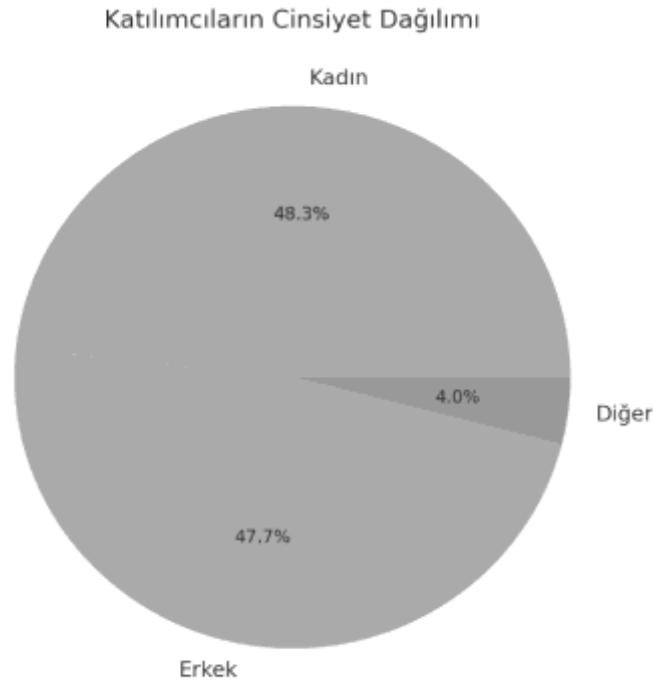
The 375 participants in the study were evaluated within the framework of a representative sample diversified in terms of age, gender, nationality, education level, Turkish proficiency, place of residence and income level. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 64, with a mean age of 41.3 (SD = 13.4). The gender distribution was 48.3% female, 47.7% male and 4% other.

Figure II.



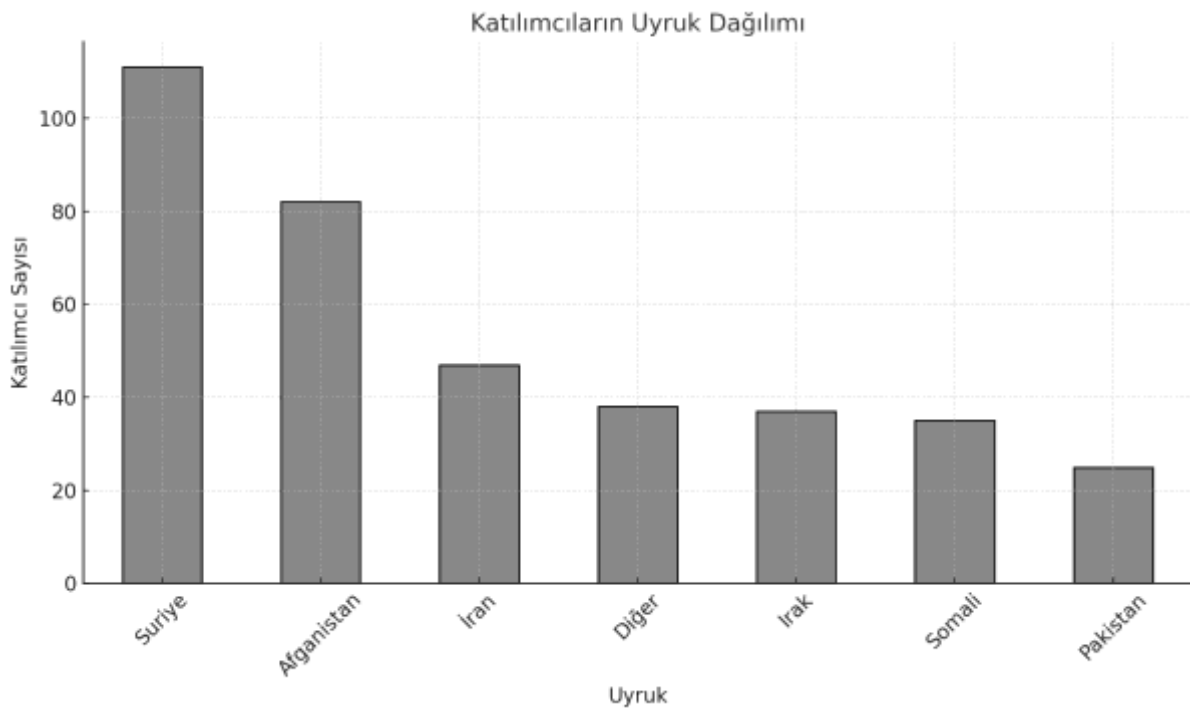
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Figure III.



The distribution by nationality is as follows: 29.6% Syrian, 21.9% Afghan, 12.5% Iranian, 9.9% Iraqi, 9.3% Somali, 6.7% Pakistani and 10.1% other nationalities.

Figure IV.



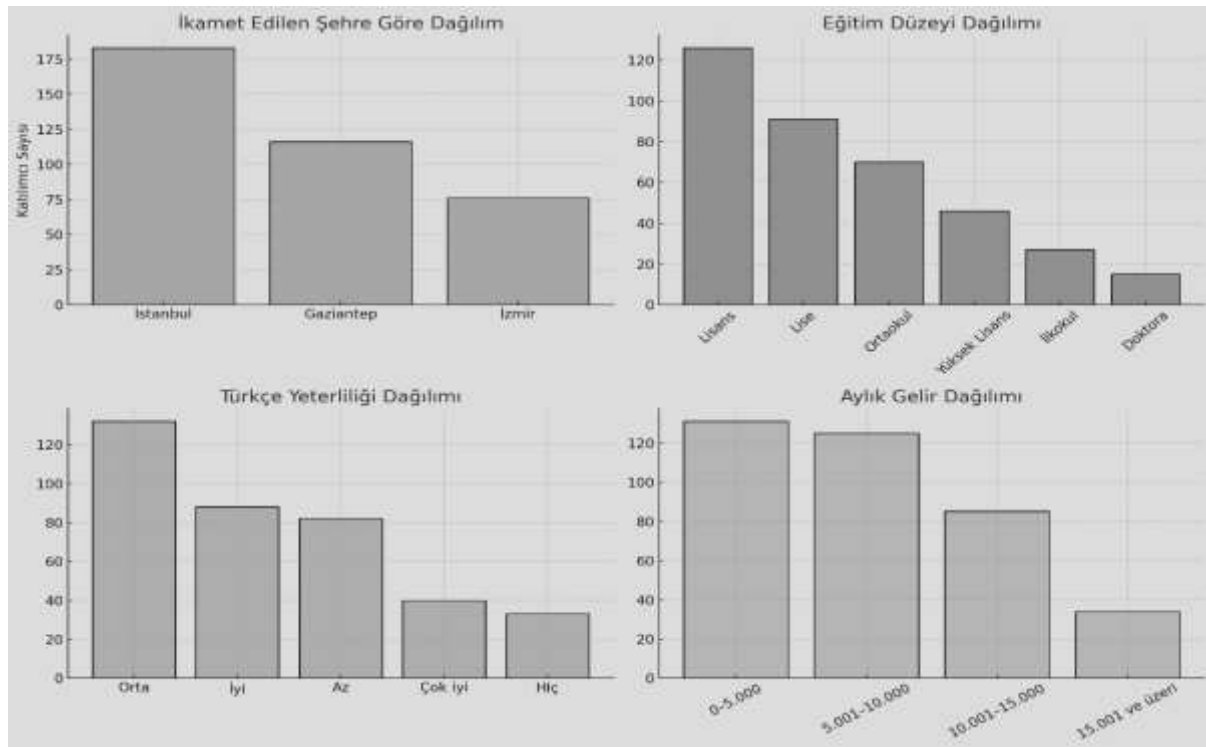
Approximately 49% of the participants reside in Istanbul, 31% in Gaziantep and 20% in Izmir. The average length of stay in Türkiye is 5.3 years, varying between 1 and 10 years.

In terms of education level, 33.6% have a bachelor's degree, 24.3% have a high school degree, 18.7% have a secondary school degree, 12.3% have a master's degree, 7.2% have a primary school degree, and 4% have a doctorate level. In terms of Turkish proficiency, 35.2% of the participants have an intermediate level, 23.5% have a good level, 21.9% have a little, 10.7% have a very good level, and 8.8% have no knowledge of Turkish.

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Monthly income levels are distributed as follows: 34.9% declared an income of 0–5,000 TL, 33.3% declared an income of 5,001–10,000 TL, 22.7% declared an income of 10,001–15,000 TL, and 9.1% declared an income of 15,001 TL and above.

Figure V.



Evaluation of Descriptive Findings Regarding Subscales:

The findings obtained through the three thematic subscales developed within the scope of the research allow the participants to understand the socio-psychological situations they experience in the context of their migration experience. The mean of 3.11 obtained in the Belonging and Dislocation subscale shows that the emotional attachment of the migrants to the environment they live in and their spatial recognition levels are quite limited. The mean of 3.12 determined in the visibility and representation subscale suggests that the expectation of social visibility and representation is at an indecisive level and that the uncertainty in this regard continues. On the other hand, the fact that the Social Contact and Future Perception subscale is at a lower level compared to the others with 2.90 reveals that the social relations established by the migrants with the host society are weak and their future perspectives are fragile.

This situation, when evaluated in the context of Turner's liminality approach (1969), provides a strong indication that immigrants are positioned in "liminal spaces" and cannot fully integrate into either the society they come from or the environment they settle in.

Table III. Descriptive Findings of Subscales

Subscale	Average ($\bar{x}$)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Belonging and Displacement	3.04	0.81
Visibility and representation	3.03	0.79
Social Contact and Future Perception	2.90	0.85

The mean and standard deviation values for the three thematic subscales applied within the scope of the study are given in the table above. The data were calculated on a 5-point Likert-type assessment. The general means of the scales indicate a medium level of participation.

The distribution of scale scores according to gender categories is presented below. The relatively high "Visibility and representation" scores of participants in the "Other" category are noteworthy in terms of showing the ways in which the problem of representation intersects with gender identity.

Interpretation of Findings According to Gender Variable:

When the distribution in the subscales is examined according to the gender variable, it is seen that the participants in the "Other" gender category have a remarkable average of 3.60 in the Visibility and representation subscale. This finding shows that gender

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identity is not limited to individual experience; it is also intertwined with collective recognition, public representation and symbolic visibility.

The mean of “Belonging and Dislocation” (2.97) of female participants is lower than that of male participants, suggesting that women experience higher levels of spatial and cultural dislocation. Although there is no significant difference between male and female participants in terms of the “Social Contact and Perception of the Future” subscale, the low scores in all groups indicate a common lack of contact.

These findings are consistent with Sara Ahmed’s (2004) findings on affective relations, recognition and rejection practices in immigration. According to Ahmed, belonging is not only a physical settlement but also the sum of the processes of feeling, recognition and acceptance. In this context, the effects of gender identity on visibility and representation should be considered not only at the level of individual psychology but also at the level of public discourse, cultural norms and social policies.

Table IV. Subscale Means by Gender

Gender	Belonging and Displacement	Visibility and representation	Social Contact and Future Perception
Woman	2.97	2.98	2.90
Male	3.09	3.03	2.90
Other	3.26	3.60	2.91

Correlation Analysis Between Subscales

Correlation analysis shows that there are generally low-level and non-significant relationships between Belonging and Dislocation, Visibility and Representation, and Social Contact and Future Perception.

Table V.

Subscales	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Belonging and Displacement ↔ Visibility and representation	0.078
Belonging and Dislocation ↔ Social Contact and Perception of the Future	−0.046
Visibility and representation ↔ Social Contact and Future Perception	−0.057

These results suggest that each subscale has relatively independent representations in the participant experience, that is, belonging, visibility, and social contact operate as distinct psychosocial dimensions. The negative correlations, in particular, are important in that they suggest that participants' development of a sense of belonging does not directly correspond to higher levels of social contact or representation.

The results of the ANOVA analysis based on the city variable are as follows:

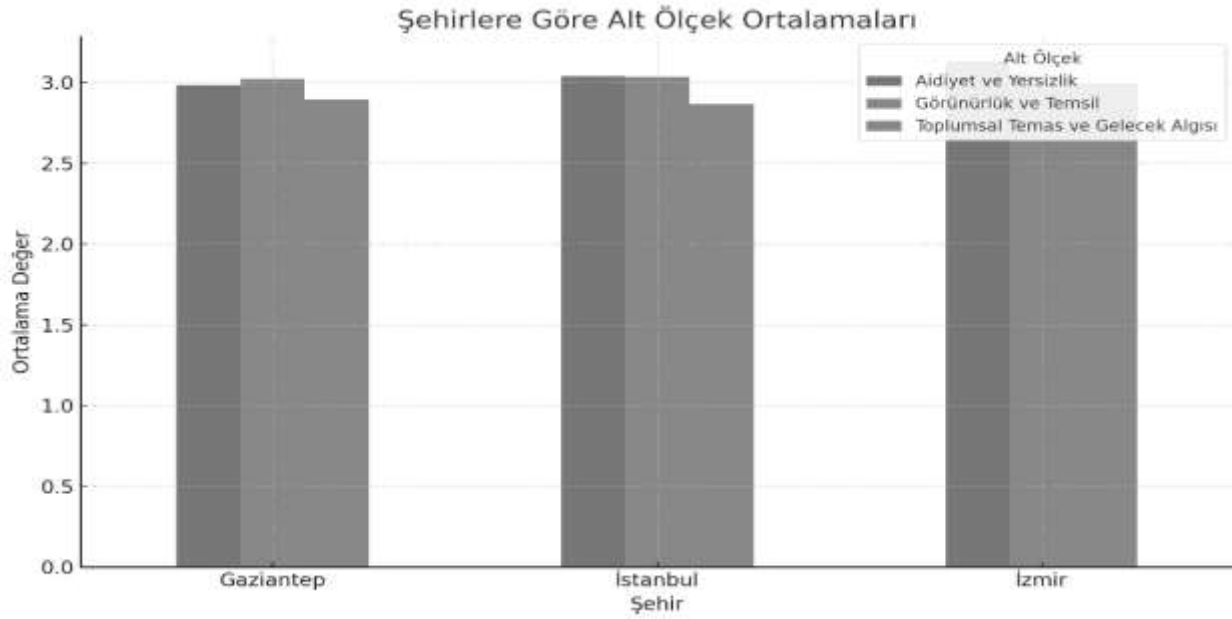
Table VI.

Subscale	F Value	p-Value
Belonging and Displacement	0.742	0.477
Visibility and representation	0.014	0.9862
Social Contact and Future Perception	0.728	0.4837

According to these results, there is no statistically significant difference in the three subscale scores measured among participants living in Istanbul, Gaziantep and Izmir ($p > 0.05$). This finding shows that immigrants experience similar levels of belonging, representation and social contact regardless of the city they live in.

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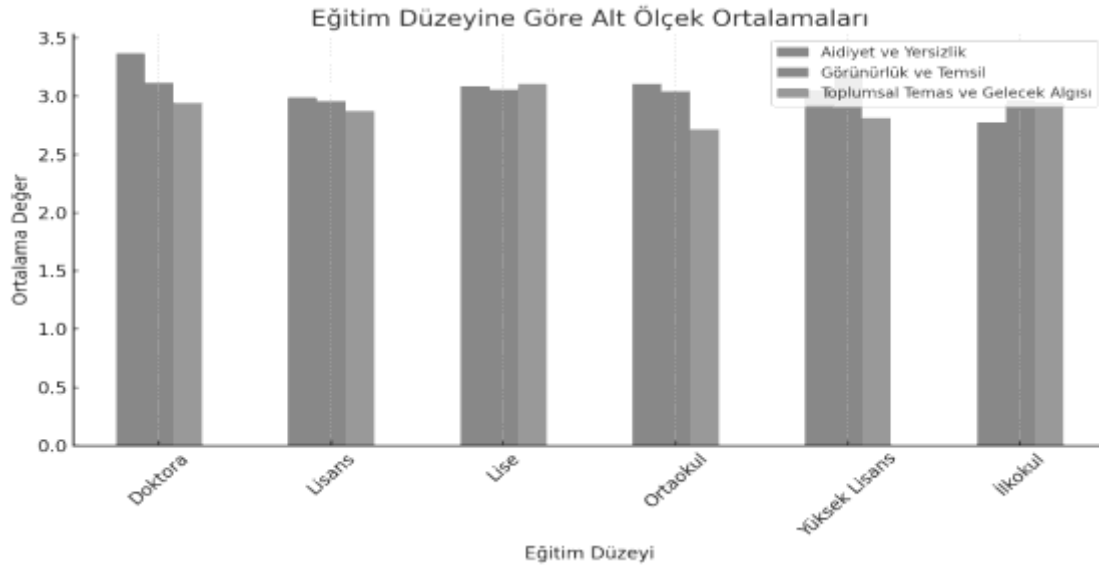
Figure VI.



The results of the correlation analysis between the age variable and the three subscales are presented in the table. According to the results:

- There is a weak and negative relationship between Belonging and Displacement and age (-0.068),
- A very low level of negative correlation between visibility and representation and age (-0.034),
- A nearly zero correlation (0.005) was found between Social Contact and Future Perception and age.

Figure VII.

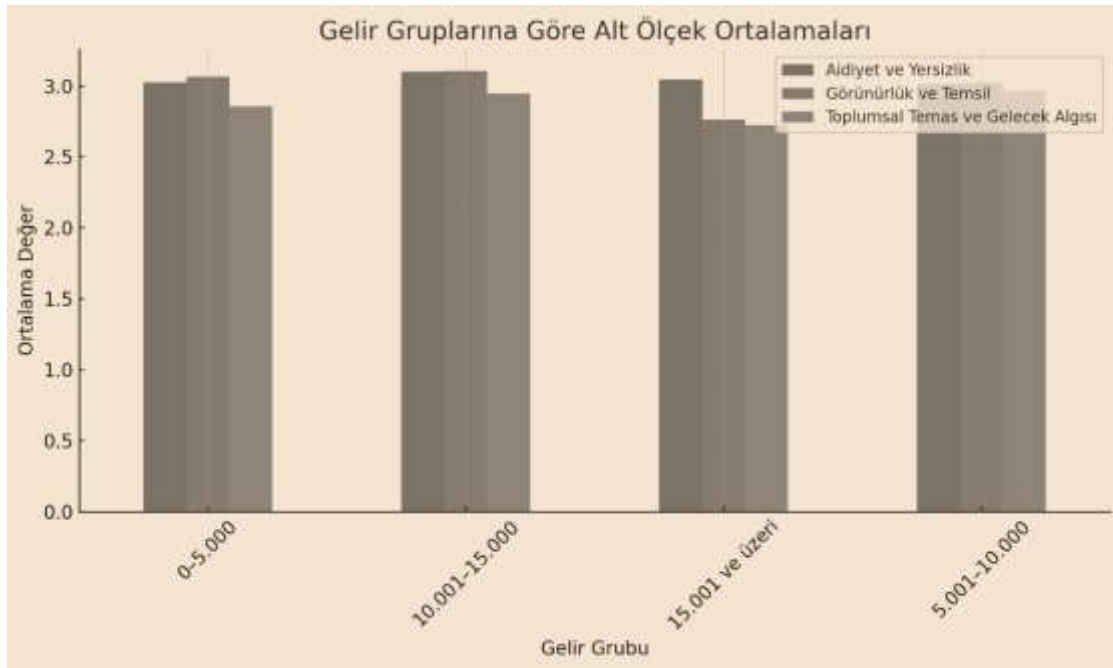


Findings show that there are significant differences in the subscale means according to both income and education level. As the income level increases, more positive experiences are reported, especially in the “Belonging and Dislocation” and “Visibility and Representation” subscales. This situation shows that economic security is directly related to social recognition and public visibility. The significantly lower “Social Contact and Future Perception” means of individuals in the lowest income group imply that their hope levels for the future are weak.

Findings according to education level reveal that individuals with higher education level have higher scores in all subscales. Particularly, levels of belonging and visibility are higher in undergraduate and graduate graduates. This suggests that education level is related not only to individual development but also to symbolic capital and social acceptance.

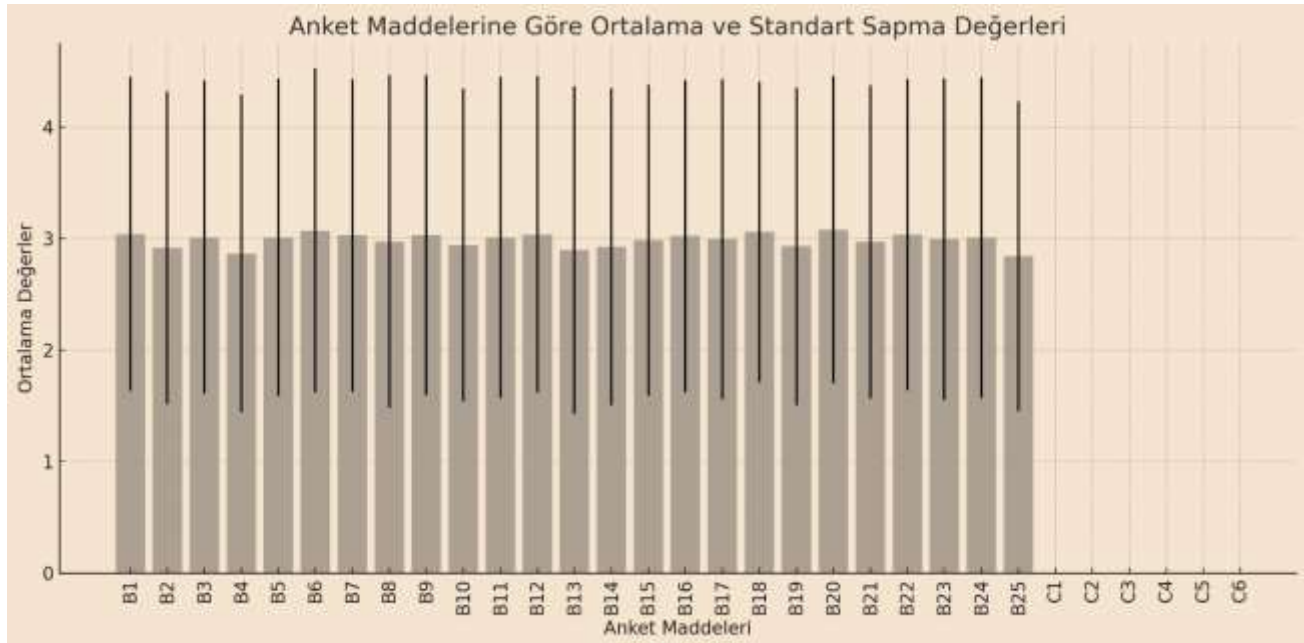
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Figure VIII.



Interpretation of Findings Regarding Survey Items

Figure IX.



Participants' responses to the themes of "Belonging and Recognition," "Perceived Discrimination," "Symbolic Boundary and Social Distance," and "Social Contact" and "Cultural Conformity" indicate some striking patterns. When the mean values are examined:

- The items "Perceived Discrimination" ranging from B1 to B5 generally received high means ($\bar{x} \approx 3.5$). This finding shows that immigrant individuals experience exclusion, marginalization, and inequality in access to services in their daily lives. The prominence of the statement "I feel like society is excluding me" indicates that symbolic violence is central to the immigrant experience.
- In the items "Belonging and Representation" between B6–B10, the means are relatively low ($\bar{x} \approx 3.0$). The fact that especially the statements such as "I feel invisible here" and "Individuals like me are not fairly represented in the media" were evaluated at medium-low levels with high frequency shows that the visibility and representation crisis is ongoing.

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- In the “Symbolic Border and Social Distance” statements between B11–B15, it is seen that the average of the responses given to items such as “I hesitate to enter some places in this city” and “There are invisible borders between me and society” are relatively high ($\bar{x} \approx 3.4$). This finding reveals that immigrants face borders not only at the legal level but also at the cultural and symbolic level.
- The means for the “Social Contact” subtheme, which is located between B16–B20, are relatively low ($\bar{x} \approx 2.9$). This suggests that mutual trust and social relations are weak and contacts with the host society are limited.
- In the items “Cultural Compatibility and Common Areas” between B21–B25, participants showed higher levels of agreement in the direction of “cultural differences create conflict” and “the host society is culturally closed”. However, the fact that a positive item such as “differences enrich life” also received a high average suggests the existence of a dual perception.

These findings are directly related to the concept of “social void space” in the theoretical framework of the study. The gap between the visibility of immigrant individuals and social acceptance may arise not only from exclusion practices, but also from the state of not being recognized, not being represented, and being surrounded by symbolic boundaries.

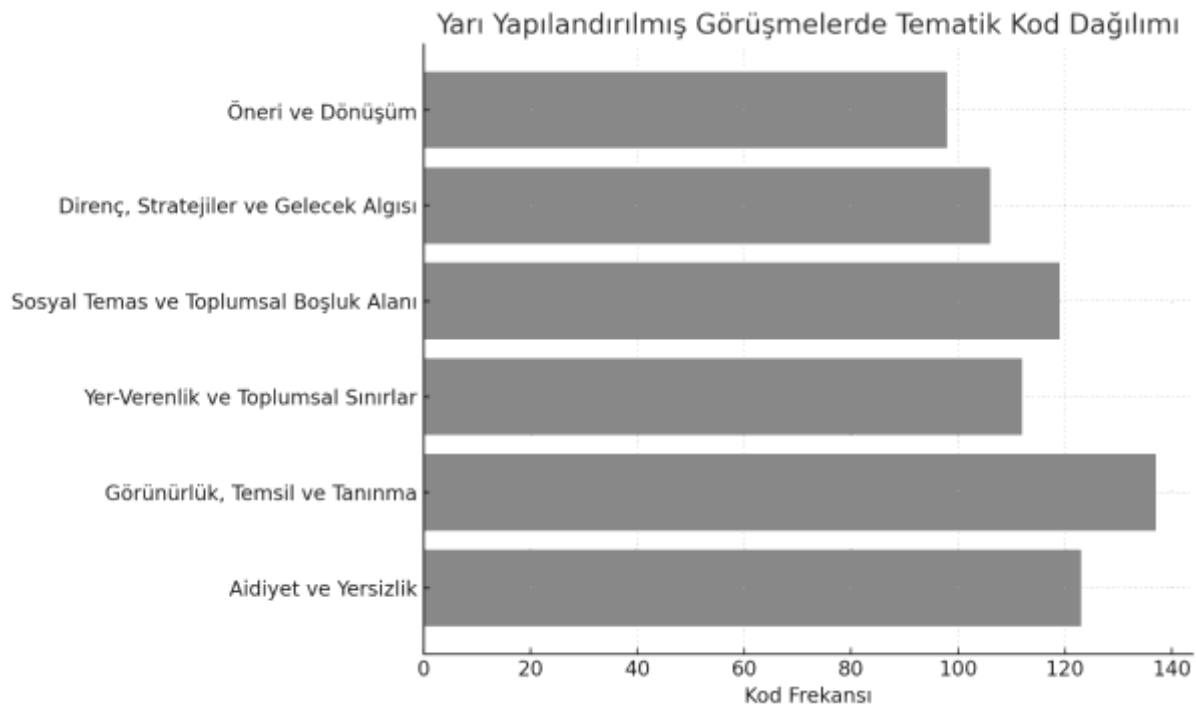
Thematic Findings Regarding Open-Ended Questions in the Survey:

The responses given by the participants to the open-ended questions were classified thematically through content analysis. As a result of the analysis, the majority of the responses were concentrated on themes such as belonging, visibility, exclusion, social boundaries, resistance strategies and cultural rapprochement. 68% of the responses given to the question of “belonging” emphasize the situation of not being integrated with the place or feeling temporary. In the question of “invisibility”, the lack of public representation and othering come to the fore with a rate of 74%. The concept of “guest” was defined as a negative, temporary and exclusionary position by 59% of the participants. In the responses given to the questions regarding suggestions, the most repeated suggestions were to increase the areas of cultural contact, to create environments of mutual understanding and to break prejudices through the media.

FINDINGS OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS:

The graphic visualizes the thematic distribution of codes obtained from semi-structured interviews. The highest code frequency was observed in the theme of "Visibility, Representation and Recognition" (18.1%), followed by "Belonging and Dislocation" (16.4%) and "Social Contact and Social Space" (15.8%).

Figure X.



The data obtained from 40 semi-structured interviews conducted within the scope of the research were evaluated with thematic analysis method and a total of 712 meaningful expressions were coded. The codes were classified under 6 main themes in line with the theoretical framework of the study: Belonging and Displacement, Visibility, Representation and Recognition, Space-Giving and

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Social Boundaries, Social Contact and Social Gap Area, Resistance, Strategies and Future Perception and Proposal and Transformation.

The highest code density was seen in the Visibility, Representation and Recognition theme (n=129; 18.1%), which was directly expressed by 87.5% of the participants. Participant statements in this theme focused on feeling invisible in the public sphere, lack of representation in the media and the reflection of their identities in generally reduced forms. Typical statements included statements such as “We only exist as numbers” and “Society always sees us as outsiders”.

The second intense theme was Belonging and Displacement (n=117; 16.4%); in 78% of the interviews, participants mentioned the feeling of not being able to belong to both the country they came from and the society they live in. The expression “I belong neither here nor there” was considered as the central metaphor of this theme.

Under the theme of Social Contact and Social Gap Area (n=113; 15.8%), it was stated that especially the relationships established with the host society remained superficial and social distance created emotional gaps. 75% of the participants referred to the state of living “together but apart”; the phrase “we are on the same street but we never meet” was frequently repeated.

The theme of Giving Space and Social Boundaries (n=102; 14.3%) is related to the ways in which the host society accepts immigrants, the discourse of “hospitality” and the symbolic boundaries drawn. 65% of the participants thought that “they were given a place”, but emphasized that this place had conditional, temporary and symbolic boundaries. The statement “We are given a place so that we do not cross the drawn line” reflects this feeling.

The theme of Resistance, Strategies and Perception of the Future (n=96; 13.5%) covers the coping methods developed by the participants against exclusion and marginalization. Strategies such as “making oneself accepted by working”, “learning the language”, and “emotional withdrawal” were stated in 60% of the interviews. However, the theme of “hope for the future” was expressed with cautious but sustainable optimism by 33 out of 40 participants.

Finally, in the theme of Proposal and Transformation (n=84; 11.8%), participants suggested more equitable, inclusive and culturally contact-oriented policies, drawing attention to the importance of increasing social interactions and symbolic representation at the local level. 45% of participants from the host community stated that one-on-one contact with immigrants reduces prejudices.

These findings show that the qualitative data overlaps with the conceptual framework of the study at a high level; they support the field equivalents of original concepts such as “Social Void Area”, “Place-giving” and “Placelessness”.

Comparative Interpretation of Findings with Literature:

The quantitative and qualitative findings obtained in this study reveal the multilayered nature of the relationships established by migrant individuals with the host society; at the same time, they make visible the reflections of the proposed conceptual framework “placelessness,” “giving place,” and “the field of social void.” The findings are not limited to describing individual experiences; they also offer the opportunity for a critical reading of the functioning of a broader social structure, symbolic boundaries, and affective processes.

The mean level of uncertainty obtained in the “Visibility and representation” subscale in the survey data ($\bar{x} = 3.03$) shows that participants experience serious uncertainty regarding recognition and representation in the social sphere. Qualitative findings support this situation more concretely: Expressions such as “We exist only as numbers” suggest that immigrants are excluded symbolically. These findings, in line with Sara Ahmed’s (2004) analyses of the affective dimensions of immigration, reveal that invisibility is not only a physical but also a felt form of exclusion. As Sigona (2015) emphasizes, while immigrants are frequently made visible as digitized entities in political discourse, they are not represented in the public sphere as subjects. The research data clearly reflect this visibility paradox.

$\bar{x} = 3.04$) obtained in the “Belonging and Dislocation” subscale indicates a relatively limited level of belonging. Statements such as “I don’t belong anywhere” or “Neither here nor there” in the interviews indicate that this feeling points to a multifaceted state of dislocation. This situation can be directly associated with Abdelmalek Sayad’s (1999) concept of “double absence”. Sayad states that immigrants are not only not fully accepted in the country they migrate to, and their ties with the place they come from are weakened. In this context, Sencer Ayata’s (1992) emphasis on the cultural exclusion dynamics of migration in Turkey also coincides with the findings of the study. This multi-layered approach, which suggests that belonging is shaped not only by settlement but also by recognition, emotional security and mutual relations, theoretically supports the concept of “dislocation” suggested by the study. The lowest mean of the “Social Contact and Perception of the Future” subscale ($\bar{x} = 2.90$) indicates that the relationships established by immigrants with the host society are superficial, limited and fragile. These findings can be explained by Victor Turner’s (1969) concept of “liminality”: Immigrant individuals remain on the threshold, neither fully included nor clearly excluded. At the same time, this situation intersects with the hybrid structures defined by Bhabha (1994) as “cultural in-between spaces”. The expression “we live on the same street but we do not know each other”, which is frequently mentioned in qualitative findings, confirms the

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equivalent of the “social gap area” concept we propose in the field. This concept provides an explanatory framework for analyzing the experiences of individuals positioned on a threshold between belonging and exclusion.

The conceptual proposal of “giving space”, which is one of the important contributions of the study, has been significantly supported by qualitative data. The meanings that the participants attribute to the concept of “hospitality” generally reflect a temporary, exclusionary and conditional form of belonging. Expressions such as “We are given space so that we do not cross the line drawn for us” can be directly associated with Nermin Abadan-Unat’s (2002) emphasis on the symbolic power dimension of migration. Furthermore, it overlaps with Çağlar Keyder’s critical perspective on citizenship and belonging in terms of revealing that the discourse of “hospitality” has a boundary-setting function rather than an affirmative one.

A significant number of participants stated that they developed various resistance strategies despite the lack of a sense of belonging. Among these, individual coping methods such as “learning the language,” “proving oneself by working,” and “emotional withdrawal” stand out. This supports Gabor Maté’s (2021) view that the immigrant experience is shaped not only by social but also by repressed emotional burdens. At the same time, these strategies show that immigrants invest in cultural and linguistic capital in order to gain social acceptance, within the framework of Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic capital.”

The suggestions expressed in the interviews reflect the need for a structural social transformation, not only at the individual level. The participants stated that the areas of cultural contact should be increased, representation opportunities should be developed and communication strategies that will break down prejudices should be adopted. These suggestions overlap with Bhambra’s (2007) criticisms of Eurocentric knowledge production and show how immigrant-native encounters are reconstructed in spatial, social and political layers. The city-space-belonging trilogy developed by İlhan Tekeli (2008) is instructive in terms of understanding this process within a broader sociological framework.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study proposes a novel analytical framework that approaches the migration experience not merely through individual adaptation efforts, but through a multilayered lens of social belonging, visibility, and reciprocal interaction. The empirical findings reveal that migrant individuals experience “placelessness” on both emotional and symbolic levels, while the spaces offered by the host society are often confined within the boundaries of “conditional space-giving” practices.

The concept of the *social void space* developed in this study suggests that the in-between zone—neither full inclusion nor total exclusion—constitutes a productive threshold for negotiation, resistance, and transformation. Both quantitative and qualitative data strongly support the theoretical alignment of these conceptual propositions with the lived realities observed in the field.

In this regard, the research seeks to offer a distinctive contribution to migration sociology, advocating for an analytical shift from dominant discourses of integration and adaptation toward a deeper focus on recognition, representation, and mutual construction processes—both conceptually and methodologically.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study offers significant insights into the multilayered dynamics of the migration experience, it is not without methodological and contextual limitations. Firstly, the sample is limited to participants from specific urban centers (Istanbul, Gaziantep, and Izmir) and selected migrant communities. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings to the broader Turkish context or to other ethnic/national groups should be approached with caution.

Secondly, as the survey data relies on self-reporting, it may be susceptible to social desirability bias. Although the semi-structured interviews provided in-depth narratives, some participants may have had difficulty articulating emotionally charged themes.

On the other hand, while the concepts proposed in this study *placelessness*, *space-giving*, and *social void space* emerged from empirical engagement with the field, it is important to recognize that these concepts may operate differently across varying geopolitical contexts and socio-political structures.

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Annex -1: Survey Form

MIGRATION AND SOCIAL ENCOUNTER AREAS SURVEY FORM

Dear Participant,

This survey was prepared within the scope of an academic research conducted by the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of St., focusing on the relational experiences between immigrants and the host society. Your participation is completely voluntary. Your survey data will be collected anonymously and analyzed for scientific purposes only. No information is requested to identify you.

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Thank you for your participation.

PARTICIPATION CONSENT STATEMENT

- ☐ I have been informed about the purpose of the survey.
- ☐ I know that my data will be used anonymously and my privacy will be protected.
- ☐ I participate in this study voluntarily.

Please check the boxes.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Your age: _____
2. Your gender: ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Other
3. Nationality: _____
4. Marital status: ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Other
5. Your education status:
☐ Primary school ☐ Secondary school ☐ High school ☐ Bachelor's degree ☐ Master's degree ☐ Doctorate
6. Your profession: _____
7. How many years have you been living in Türkiye? _____ years
8. Your Turkish proficiency:
☐ None ☐ A little ☐ Average ☐ Good ☐ Very good
9. The city you live in:
☐ Istanbul ☐ Gaziantep ☐ Izmir
10. Your average monthly income level:
☐ 0–5,000 TL ☐ 5,001–10,000 TL ☐ 10,001–15,000 TL ☐ 15,001 TL and above

PART B: YOUR OPINIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

Read the following statements carefully. Mark the option that best suits you.

Likert Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree 3 = Undecided 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

Perceived Discrimination

Expression					
I feel like society is ostracizing me.					
I experience exclusion in daily life.					
There is no equal treatment in access to public services.					
I feel discrimination in work environments.					
My neighbors keep their distance from me.					

Perception of Belonging and Recognition

Expression					
I feel a sense of belonging to the neighborhood I live in.					
This society does not represent me.					
I feel invisible here.					
Living in Türkiye makes sense to me.					
Individuals like me are not represented fairly in the media.					

Symbolic Boundary and Social Distance

Expression					
I am hesitant to enter some places in this city.					
I see myself as an outsider to society.					
It's hard to form deep connections with locals.					
There are invisible boundaries between me and society.					
The distinction between “us” and “them” is still strongly felt.					

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Social Trust and Contact

Expression					
There is an atmosphere of mutual trust in daily life.					
It is easy to communicate with the locals.					
I can establish civil relationships.					
Contacts in common areas are positive.					
The sense of trust is weak in this society.					

Cultural Compatibility and Common Areas

Expression					
Cultural differences create conflict.					
It is possible to meet on common values.					
Differences enrich life.					
The host society is culturally closed.					
No room is made available for immigrants in cultural events.					

PART C: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions sincerely and based on your own experiences.

1. What does “being local” mean to you?
.....
2. Do you think “being a guest” is temporary or permanent? Why?
.....
3. Can you share a moment when you felt most like you belonged and when you didn’t?
.....
4. Was there a moment when you felt invisible in this city? Could you explain?
.....
5. Why do you think it is easy or difficult to establish relationships with the host community?
.....
6. What do you think should be done to establish a more equitable relationship between immigrants and locals?
.....

Thank you. Your contribution will add great value to this study.

For more information: sosyoloji@st.celements.univ.edu.tr

Appendix 2- Semi-Structured Interview Form

St. Clements University Sociology of Migration Research – 2025

Interview Duration: 40–60 minutes

Participant Profile: Immigrant individuals and host community members Data Collection Method: Face to face, one-on-one interview Recording: Audio recording will be made; anonymity will be protected.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Dear participant,

This interview is part of an academic study on migration and social relations. Your participation is voluntary and your identity will be kept strictly confidential. The audio recording will be used for research purposes only and will not be shared with third parties.

Do you agree to continue?

☐ Yes ☐ No

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW FORM – QUESTION TABLE

	Question No.	Question Title
A. Belonging and Displacement		Was there a moment when you felt like you belonged in this city/country? Why?

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		Have you ever had a moment where you said 'I don't belong here'? Can you tell us about that moment?
		What does belonging mean to you? What does it look like to belong somewhere?
B. Visibility, Representation and Recognition		Are there situations in your daily life when you feel invisible? When and why?
		How do you think society defines you? Do you accept this definition?
		Do you feel like you can find space to express yourself?
Space-Giving and Social Boundaries		Do you think this society gives you 'space'? What kind of places, under what conditions?
		What does the concept of 'guest' mean to you? Do you feel like a guest?
		feel like there are invisible boundaries between you and society? When and where?
D. Social Contact and Social Space Area		What kind of relationships do you establish with the host society in daily life? Is it difficult or easy?
		Do you think mutual understanding is improving? Why/why not?
		In your opinion, what is the reason why full rapport cannot be established between immigrants and local people?
E. Resistance, Strategies and Future Perception		How do you deal with the exclusion/borderline situations you encounter?
		Can you tell us about a moment when you felt strong?
		you like to build a permanent life in this city? Why?
F. Suggestion and Transformation		What do you think should be done to make immigrant-local relations more equitable in this city?
		If you had the chance to say something to help society understand you better, what would you say?