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IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF QUEER MIGRANTS

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IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF QUEER
MIGRANTS IN THEIR HOST COUNTRIES
AND THE ROLE OF NGOS

A Master's Thesis

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To *mom*



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NGOS

The Graduate School of Economics and Social Sciences
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By Mehmet Kızıklı

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Visual Studies.

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ABSTRACT

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION OF QUEER MIGRANTS IN THEIR HOST COUNTRIES AND THE ROLE OF NGOS

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M.A. in Media and Visual Studies

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Drastic changes in life, such as migration, impact identity and shape how one understands their environment. In this process, the host country's attitude plays a huge role in the adaptation of migrants to their new ecosystem and surroundings. Cultural similarities, attitudes of NGOs, and inclusive policies have an impact on creating safe spaces, along with positive attitudes of members of the host country. While Türkiye ranks second in the world for hosting refugees and other people in need of international protection (UNHCR, 2024), the prejudice against the immigrant community is a notable problem. Combined with persistent hostility toward the LGBTQ+ community, queer immigrants in Türkiye face several challenges in their everyday lives. As this study grounds in a constructive understanding of identity, it aims to understand how queer immigrant individuals negotiate these marginalized identities using Kiesling's (2022) stance theory. For this purpose, in-depth semi-structured interviews and social media scrollbar interviews were conducted with eight queer migrant participants recruited

through snowball sampling. Findings reveal the migration experience leads to a deep self-reflection among queer migrants. In their social lives, their queer identity plays a key role rather than their migrant identity. As the intersection of these identities remains complex, language (both Turkish and Lubunca) plays a key role in belonging and identity expression. Participants also emphasized the need for queer-led NGO support that encourages legal awareness, community building, and solidarity.

Keywords: Immigrants, Immigration, Queer Identity, Identity Construction, Social Media, Non-Governmental Organizations



ÖZET

KUİR GÖÇMENLERİN KENDİLERİNE EV SAHİPLİĞİ YAPAN ÜLKELERDE KİMLİK İNŞA SÜREÇLERİ VE STK'LARIN ROLÜ

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Göç gibi hayatımızdaki köklü değişiklikler, kimliği etkilemekte ve hem psikolojik hem de fiziksel etkilerle kişinin çevresini nasıl anladığını şekillendirmektedir. Bu süreçte, ev sahibi ülkenin tutumu yeni çevreye uyum sağlamada büyük rol oynamaktadır. Kültürel benzerlikler, STK'ların tutumları ve kapsayıcı politikalar, ev sahibi ülkenin olumlu tutumuyla birlikte güvenli alanların yaratılmasında etkili olmaktadır. Türkiye, mültecilere ve uluslararası korumaya ihtiyaç duyan diğer insanlara ev sahipliği yapma konusunda dünyada ikinci sırada yer alırken (UNHCR, 2024), göçmen toplumuna yönelik önyargılar kayda değer bir sorundur. LGBTQ+ topluluğuna yönelik süregelen düşmanlıkla birleştiğinde, Türkiye'deki queer göçmenler günlük yaşamlarında çeşitli zorluklarla karşılaşmaktadır. Bu çalışma, bağlamsal ve dinamik bir kimlik anlayışını temel aldığından, Kiesling'in duruş teorisini kullanarak queer göçmen bireylerin bu marjinalleştirilmiş kimlikleri nasıl müzakere ettiklerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla, kartopu örnekleme yoluyla sekiz katılımcıyla derinlemesine yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ve sosyal medya scrollbar görüşmeleri yapılmıştır. Bulgular, göç deneyiminin kuir göçmenler arasında derin bir özdeşleşmeye yol açtığını

ortaya koymaktadır. Sosyal yaşamlarında, göçmen kimliklerinden ziyade kuir kimlikleri kilit bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu kimliklerin kesişimi karmaşık olsa da, dil (hem Türkçe hem de Lubunca) aidiyet ve ifade için kilit bir araç olmaya devam ediyor. Katılımcılar ayrıca yasal farkındalık, topluluk oluşturma ve dayanışmayı teşvik eden kuir odaklı STK desteğine duyulan ihtiyacı vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göçmenler, Göç, Kuir Kimlik, Kimlik İnşası, Sosyal Medya, Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

From an early age, I have been fascinated by how we can adapt according to our social interactions. This fascination grew more prominent as I was introduced to feminist literature. Butler's (1990) explanation of performance instantly made sense to me. This fascination continued during my undergraduate education as a linguistics student, where I developed a keen interest in language use and identity. From Eckert's (1989) study on high school cliques to Kiesling's (2004) finding on the different connotations of the word *dude*, it was safe to say that I found my area of interest. While there were several studies on different marginalized groups in the literature, the lack of studies focusing on queer and immigrant identities and understanding these identities in socio-political spheres, where it is dangerous or unwelcoming to express, took my interest to study queer migrant identity specifically in Türkiye.

Even though homosexuality is not banned in Türkiye, queer community face difficulties in several aspects of their lives, especially when compared to the Western countries. With 2025 being declared as the Year of the Family, the government has hardened its discourse on queer community and LGBTQ+ rights organizations. Along with the government, society is also not welcoming towards the queer community. While the government and

society walk parallel with their view on queer rights, there is a difference in attitudes when it comes to immigrants. With the start of the Syrian war in 2011, immigrants became a hot topic in Turkish politics. With the migration of Syrians, Turkish society had to discuss the immigrant movement in Türkiye. While the government generously implemented open-border policies, the society reacted to immigrants, mainly Syrians, and formed an anti-immigrant stance. NGOs working on migration and immigrants started to gain importance in 2011. They also created another significant study area: what is the role of NGOs' in the policy-making process and their impact on the immigration. It is no surprise that NGOs advocating for queer and immigrant rights are essential when discussing the history of these movements. Before diving into the purpose of this study, it is necessary to understand the current situation of LGBTQ+ and immigrant communities to set the stage for the grounding of this research.

1.1. Queer Community in Türkiye

The modern LGBTQ+ movement in Türkiye began in the 1970s when support groups formed in Ankara and Izmir. With the coup d'état in 1980, effeminate performers and halted gender-confirming surgeries were banned, causing the LGBTQ+ community, especially trans individuals, to be repressed along with a media-driven fear campaign (Gurel, 2017). Despite these challenges, the community found ways to organize in remote parts of cities to socialize and discuss their problems (Erol, 2011). In this political atmosphere of the 1980s, the LGBTQ+ movement found a place under the anti-militarist, atheist, and feminist Radical Democratic Green Party, as the party claimed (Erol, 2011; Gorkemli, 2012; Partog, 2012; Tapinc, 1992). While the Radical Democratic Green Party introduced LGBTQ+ rights to politics, its stance forced other political parties to take a stand.

With the emerging LGBTQ+ activism in the public sphere, in 1990, a queer group called “Rainbow” collaborated with a German group, and they organized the first lesbian-gay parade in 1993 in Istanbul under the name of “Christopher Street Day” (Çetin, 2015). However, the Istanbul Municipality banned the parade as they found it “contrary to the values and traditions of Turkey” (Lambdaistanbul, 2022; Ince Yenilmez, 2017). The ban on the first parade fuelled the establishment of Lambda Istanbul, where they cooperated with feminist groups (e.g., Mor Çatı) and other organizations, such as İnsan Hakları Derneği (Lambdaistanbul, 2022). Interactions with other organizations played a crucial part in the LGBTQ+ movement, as a 1983 law restrained the foundation of LGBTQ+ organizations until the law was changed with EU negotiations in 2004.

While Lambda was based in Istanbul, it also built a close relationship with KAOS GL, an LGBTQ+ organization in Ankara that began publishing in 1994 (Atalay & Doan, 2020; Erol, 2011; Lambdaistanbul, 2022; Biz Kimiz, n.d.). A significant milestone was achieved with KAOS GL on the parade of International Workers’ Day in 2001 in Ankara, where queer activists gained media attention by linking their cause for equality to broader struggles for workers’ and students’ rights (Erol, 2011).

Figure 1. 2023 Istanbul Pride March



While the EU negotiations lightened the restrictions against LGBT organizations, it was no surprise that the newly established Justice and Development Party's (AK Party) agenda of LGBTQ+ rights was also in line with the political atmosphere of the early 2000s.

However, the stance of the AK Party on the LGBT movement changed throughout the years. Today, as the Turkish state and society grow more conservative, religious, and oppressive, the anti-LGBT sentiment is also getting stronger (Özbay, 2015). Queer people are being watched more closely and are barely tolerated even in certain neighborhoods of big cities like Istanbul or Ankara (Özbay, 2015). Withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention can be seen as the starting point of opposing the LGBTQ+ movement in the new decade of Türkiye, as the decision was based on the manipulation of the convention by the LGBTQ+ community to normalize homosexuality in Türkiye, which is “incompatible with Türkiye's social and family values” as the current government claimed (Presidency of Türkiye Directorate of Communication, 2021).

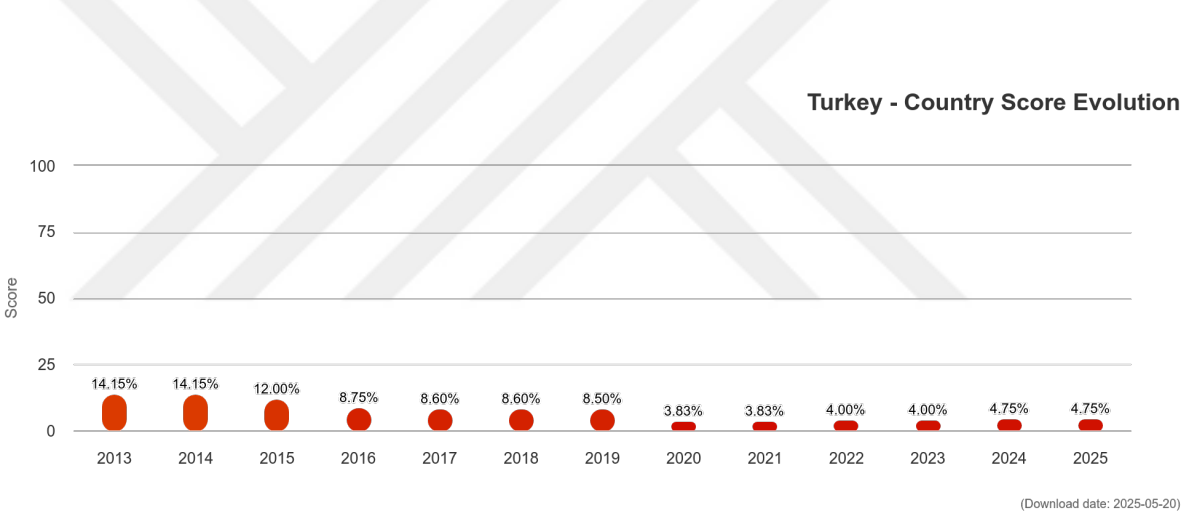
These statements continued in the same year as President Erdoğan claimed that the LGBTQ+ movement and identities are perversion that should be hindered at any cost to

protect the Turkish family by showing zero tolerance on associations and people who are supporting LGBTQ+, adding that the government is addressing the issue in new constitutional amendment package (Euronews, 2021; Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye, 2023). In 2022, the first of the Great Family Meeting was held in Istanbul to protect family values and to say no to ‘LGBT propaganda.’ While the government declared 2025 as the ‘Family Year,’ they stated that the low fertility rate in 2023 is related to the ‘LGBT issue’ (“Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan Duyurdu,” 2025). With the draft law proposal on the amendment pack, LGBTQ+ organizations and identities, especially the trans identity, are mainly targeted (Özgenç, 2025). For instance, the start of a legal gender affirmation process is aimed to change from 18 to 21, requesting to be permanently deprived of the ability to reproduce for gender affirmation process, there is imprisonment to illegal gender affirmation operations for those who performed and who have them performed on, and imprisonment for those who encourage, praise, and promote attitudes and behaviors contrary to biological sex at birth and public morality (Özgenç, 2025).

While the government acts on the protection of the family, queer community is left on its own devices. According to ILGA-Europe’s 2025 Rainbow Map, which annually ranks 49 European countries on a scale based on laws and politics that directly affect LGBTQ+ individuals’ human rights, Türkiye is ranked third from the bottom, as can be seen in Figure 2 and even if the score of Türkiye was never high enough to be safe for queer people, it has been declining continuously, which can be seen in Figure 3 (ILGA-Europe Rainbow Map, 2025). Some of the examples of the laws and policies against queer community include the rejection of gay men to serve in the military on the principle that being gay is a mental health problem or not accepting blood donations from people who had homosexual intercourse. Another issue with the rejection of gay men in the military is that no law prevents the publicization of the identity of LGBTQ+ individuals, which

servants and private sector employees, it has been found that out of 96 public employees, only 3,1% of them are openly queer in their institutions, whereas the percentage rises to 21,3% out of 197 participants in the private sector (O’Neil et al., 2023a; O’Neil et al., 2023b). In the same research, 25% of the civil servants stated that they had witnessed discriminatory attitudes or practices against LGBTI+ employees, and 54.2% stated that they encountered hate speech against LGBTI+ people in their institutions. In private sector research, these numbers are 11% and 32,5%, respectively (O’Neil et al., 2023a; O’Neil et al., 2023b).

Figure 3. Evaluation of Türkiye on Rainbow Map Throughout the Years



In line with the restrictive state policies and implementations, anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes are prominent in Turkish mainstream media. Alongside the prevalence of hate speech and negative representations, which have reached a rate of 63%, there is a rising trend in the news coverage of LGBTQ issues from 2020 to 2023 (Tar, 2024). The highest hate speech on the media was seen during the 2023 election period, where several calls were made for LGBTQ+ associations to be closed on news and columns (Tar, 2024). Another example is the Radio and Television Supreme Council’s (RTÜK) imposing fines on productions of digital platforms, such as Netflix and Disney+, for including ‘homosexuality’ in their content (RTÜK, 2023). Lately, RTÜK signed a protocol with the Istanbul Family

Foundation to fight LGBT in every digital media and television (‘RTÜK Homofobik İşbirliğini Duyurdu’, 2025).

The visibility of queer community in the social sphere is also limited and under pressure in Türkiye. For instance, the last official Pride March was held in 2014 in Türkiye, and since then, it has been banned by public authorities every year, citing security and public concerns. For instance, the Istanbul governor banned the 2023 Istanbul Pride March as he tweeted, “We will not allow any activity that would weaken the family institution,” and announced that 113 people were arrested in the march (Colak & Sahinkaya, 2023). On 2023 Pride Month, queer marches and activities such as picnics or games were banned not only in the most significant metropolitan cities, such as İstanbul, Ankara, and İzmir, but also in much smaller cities, such as Eskişehir, Kocaeli, and Datça by citing public morality (ÜniKuir, 2023).

1.2. Immigrant Community in Türkiye

Türkiye has a vital place in migration routes as its geographical position creates a bridge between Asia, the Middle East, and the West. Whether it is a forced or voluntary migration, many people pass through Türkiye, while some end up staying permanently. There are over 4 million foreigners in Türkiye (Keskin, 2023), and almost 1 million have a residence permit (Presidency of Migration Management, 2025a). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the number of refugees and other people needing international protection has been confirmed as 3.1 million in Türkiye (UNHCR, 2024). The conflicts in neighboring countries, such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, are also among the factors for Türkiye to have immigrant communities. The Syrian community is the most significant, with 2.7 million under temporary protection (Presidency of Migration, 2025b). Although there are no official numbers for queer immigrants in Türkiye, according to the study conducted by Kivilcim (2017) with officials

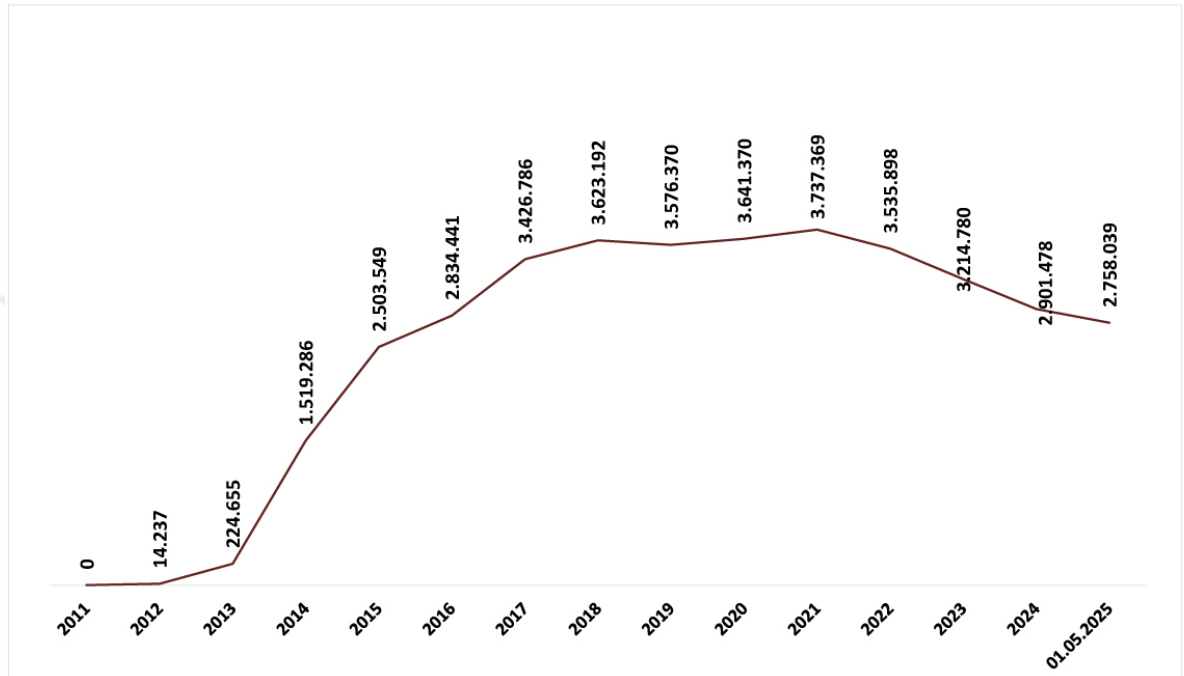
from the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM), there are 250 queer Syrian refugees registered in the system, and the number is believed to be higher as most of the queer refugees are afraid to come out and reveal their true identities.

It is important to mention the historical background of immigration in Türkiye to understand its relationship in society. The most significant migration movement started with the foundation of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923 until the late 1990s, when approximately 1.6 million people migrated from the Balkans, primarily from Greece (İçduygu & Sert, 2015). During this period, the Republic accepted individuals identified as Muslims, Turks, or those deemed adaptable to Turkish identity (İçduygu & Sert, 2015; Tolay, 2015). From the perspective of the government and society, this population was considered to be returning to their homeland and not studied as migrants under the scope of migration studies until Kirişçi introduced the ‘old’ and ‘new’ migration terms to the field (Tolay, 2015). The ‘old migration’ implies the migrants of Turkish origin or culture, and ‘new migration’ implies the arrival of the non-Turkish population to Türkiye (Kirişçi, 2006; Tolay, 2015). With these definitions, the first mass ‘new migration’ to Türkiye was considered to start with the Iranian revolution in 1979 (Kirişçi, 2003; Tolay, 2015). Since then, Türkiye has been a popular destination for transit migration, where people stay for a short period to move into European countries (İçduygu, 2005).

The most recent mass ‘new migration’ started with the Syrian war in 2011. The Syrian population under temporary protection peaked in 2014 at 1.5 million. This population reached its highest in 2021, with 3.7 million, as seen in Figure 3. Today, 2.7 million Syrians are under temporary protection (Presidency of Migration Management, 2025b). In the early years of the Syrian war, the Turkish government carried out an open-door policy with hospitality, reinforced by religious solidarity and shared history (Lazarev & Sharma,

2015; Saracoglu & Belanger, 2019). However, over 14 years since 2011, there has been discomfort in Turkish society, specifically against the Syrian community.

Figure 4. Distribution of Syrians Under Temporary Protection by Year



According to a study conducted by Seyidov (2021), Turkish society believes that Syrians have limitless freedom and access to the social services in Türkiye which citizens cannot benefit from the same privileges. The citizens who live in the same neighborhood with the Syrian refugees were also uncomfortable with rumored crimes that refugees were involved (Seyidov, 2021). On the other hand, according to Kariperk (2017), the desire of Syrian university students in Türkiye to return to their home country leads to adaptation and integration problems. Although it is common for civil society organizations (CSOs) to help governments with the cohesion of immigrants and refugees, in Türkiye, the government's relationship with CSOs, as well as the negative approach towards immigrants in society, creates a complex relationship for these organizations to find a balance between the expectations of state officials and the immigrant communities (Ozdora Akşak & Dimitrova, 2022). For instance, the government favors Islamic-related

NGOs while closing some of the I/NGOs that are seen as a threat to the nation (Aras & Duman, 2019). These faith-based organizations (FBOs), mostly known for strengthening patriarchal values, claim to have better community relationships (Atalay, 2017).

Meanwhile, international NGOs compromise to conduct their project in Türkiye without misaligning themselves with the government's political stances (Kayali, 2023).

The unsettling atmosphere towards migrants in society was displayed in many forms throughout the time. For instance, in 2021, the Bolu city council approved charging foreigners for water in dollars ("Bolu Belediye Meclisi'nden Karar," 2021). In the same year, a group of people attacked Somali businesses in Ankara, where they also assaulted some of the business owners ("Ankara'da Somalilere Saldırı," 2021). Another incident took place in the previous year when a group of 20 people assaulted two Syrian teenagers and stabbed one of them while making racist statements (Akdeniz, 2020). One of the most significant reactions from society happened when groups of people attacked Syrian businesses and households while stating that they did not want Syrians in the country, as the homicide of a Turkish citizen by a Syrian immigrant caused the uprising ("Ankara Altındağ'da Irkçı Saldırı," 2021). However, the most momentous reaction from society was observed in Kayseri in 2024 when a group of people set fire to Syrian businesses and attacked households as they reacted to the news that a minor was harassed by a Syrian man ("Kayseri Olayları," 2024). This incident echoed nationwide and caused similar reactions in six other cities (Korkmaz, 2024). LGBTQ+ activist Iris Mozalar criticized the attacks on social media and was arrested after a while, as the posts were believed to be publicly provoking hatred and hostility (Kaos GL, 2025).

Considering the challenges immigrants face, the situation is more challenging for vulnerable groups within the immigrant community. LGBTQ+ and Syrian women immigrants are afraid to speak about their situation in Türkiye (Söylemez, 2014). Housing

is the biggest problem among queer immigrants as most of them stay in their workplaces, where they are also harassed and threatened to be removed from their jobs (Ayber, 2015). The reported cases of harassment of LGBTQ+ immigrants stayed low as most of them do not know about their legal rights. For instance, in 2016, a Syrian queer immigrant was found dead in Istanbul even though he and his friends filed a complaint after he was kidnapped by a group of people and sexually harassed five months prior to his death (Tar, 2016). The lack of knowledge on the legal rights of immigrants primarily affects immigrant trans women and makes them even more vulnerable than trans women with Turkish citizenship (“Transfobik Cinayet: Suriyeli Trans Kadın,” 2016). As queer immigrants have to hide their identities both in Turkish society and in their communities, they do not feel safe in Türkiye (Karakaş, 2017). Queer Syrian immigrants are exposed to multiple trauma because of anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes and racism (Karakaş, 2017). The government-based discrimination is also another issue for queer immigrants. In the 21st Pride March, Lebanese, Iranian, Russian, Portuguese, and Australian queer immigrants were arrested and sent to removal centers even though the Iranian queer immigrant had an international protection ID (“Onur Yürüyüşü Gözaltıları,” 2023).

Considering the socio-political environment of Türkiye, this study aims to understand immigrant and queer identity construction in challenging environments and how these two identities simultaneously exist in queer immigrant individuals’ lives. While answering the identity construction of queer immigrants, the study will find out the interviewees’ stance on NGOs and their expectations of them. In this regard, semi-structured in-depth interviews and scrollbar interviews were conducted with eight queer immigrant individuals to answer these questions:

RQ 1. How does the migration experience impact the identity of queer migrants in Türkiye’s current socio-cultural context?

RQ 2. *What role does social media play in negotiating and reflecting migrant and LGBTQ+ identities?*

RQ 3. *What is the role of NGOs in the construction (and communication) of queer migrant identities in Türkiye?*



CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Identity and Identity Construction

This research is grounded on Kiesling's definition of identity construction, stance, and stancetaking. According to Kiesling (2013), identity is not an innate inclination of an individual but rather something constructed and needs to be renewed. This constant renovation of identity makes it appear stable. Identities are negotiated in interactions and have to be recognized and interpreted by others, and this is why an individual cannot construct an identity at any given time (Kiesling, 2013). The definition of identity Kiesling (2013) proposes is "a state or process of relationship between self and other; identity is how individuals define, create, or think of themselves in terms of their relationships with other individuals and groups, whether these others are real or imagined" (p. 450). This might seem like a very general definition of identity. Still, this definition shows not only the relationship between language and identity but also the dynamic process of the speaker's language usage to build relationships. Another critical point of this definition is the social nature of the identity: an individual has to relate to society, whether on an individual or a group basis (Kiesling, 2013).

This aspect of relationality is called 'intersubjectivity.' Kiesling derives the term from an influential study of Bucholtz and Hall (2004), in which they explain the term as follows:

On the one hand, the subject is the agent, the performer of social processes; on the other hand, the subject is the patient, subject to social processes. 'Intersubjectivity' emphasizes that identification is inherently relational, not a property of isolated individuals (Bucoltz & Hall, 2004, pp. 493-494).

This definition shows two crucial aspects of identity. The first one is that identity depends on the negotiation of intersubjectivity between the self and any number of individuals.

Secondly, identity categories are embedded in a cultural and ideological context independent of an individual's control (Kiesling, 2013). The complexity of identity comes from the fact that different categories of identity (such as sex/gender, ethnicity/race, and socioeconomic class) can simultaneously have relationships with each other (Kiesling, 2013). Thus, the fact that identities are intersectional and layered makes it essential to understand that the intersectionality of several identities can create something entirely new (Kiesling, 2013).

The complexity and intersubjectivity of identity lead us to Bourdieu's (1977) term of *habitus*. *Habitus* stands for a person's conscious set of predispositions or choices, including walking, talking, and interacting in a particular way (Kiesling, 2013). These predispositions look innate when choices are repeated and, thus, automatized (Kiesling, 2013). Interactions with other people constitute a part of *habitus* and are bound by culture, as challenges and rewards that people encounter in their social circles shape their actions and choices (Kiesling, 2013). As a result, those who share similar *habitus*es form networks with each other. Drawing on Bourdieu, Eckert (2000) developed the concept of 'linguistic style' to describe the characteristic ways individuals or groups speak.

According to Kiesling (2013), linguistic style, like *habitus*, is shaped by both unconscious habits and occasional conscious choices. These discussions on *habitus* direct us to the fact that people can participate actively in the identity construction process, which makes the process agentive (Kiesling, 2013).

Even if an individual's habitus tells a lot about an identity, the social categories that are part of the habitus are not always apparent to others. Additionally, people do not directly reflect on these categories. They use indexicality to rely on them. Kiesling (2013) defines the term index as follows:

An index is a type of sign in which the signified is inherently or directly connected to its signifier. A non-linguistic example is "dark clouds and thunder mean rain": the clouds and thunder are experienced almost always with rain, and therefore we make a meaningful connection among them (Kiesling, 2013, p. 457).

Kiesling uses the studies of Silverstein (1976, 2003) and Ochs (1992, 1993) when explaining the importance of indexical meaning in the relation of identity and language. Indexicality can be either direct or indirect (Ochs, 1992). While direct indexicality refers to an immediate connection between language and the stance, act, or identity, if this relationship is established with association, it is called indirect indexicality (Kiesling, 2013). In indexicality, context has a crucial place because those meanings are related to the context of the speaker and their identity, even when solely linguistic forms can be helpful in the creation of an identity (Kiesling, 2013). Thus, when a form is uttered, the subject of the utterance, societal and interactional contexts, and the exact meanings that are made have a crucial impact on indexicality (Kiesling, 2013).

Cultural ideologies are connected with each other when we think about indexicalities. The term 'indexical field' is used by Eckert (2008) to capture the fact that a single variable can have multiple meanings at multiple levels. According to Eckert (2008), the indexical field is "a constellation of meanings that are ideologically linked. As such, it is inseparable from the ideological field and can be seen as an embodiment of ideology in linguistic form" (p. 464). The indexical field shows that people use linguistic features to invoke specific meanings, especially related to stances, as a way of indexing identity (Kiesling, 2013). Speakers and listeners tie the indexical cues to broader ideological structures, and these networks reflect the impressions on certain stances that people possibly take

(Kiesling, 2013). This approach reflects the idea that identities are dynamic and relational. The linguistic variables, thus, help a speaker to index an ideological culture of meanings that are connected to stances, behaviors, roles, and social categories, which are also intertwined (Kiesling, 2013).

For the variables with ambiguous meaning, specific meanings are created through context and the intersection of each interaction in these contexts (Kiesling, 2013). This means that the present context and every previous interaction influence the meaning-making process (Kiesling, 2013). This emphasizes the bidirectional relationship between variation and identity, as “meanings are both created and invoked in particular interactional contexts” (Kiesling, 2013, p. 463).

In conclusion, language variation and social relationships through layering multiple indexicalities construct an identity (Kiesling, 2013). These indexicalities use semiotic sociocultural ideologies as construction components and indicate many types of relationships speakers orient to during the interaction (Kiesling, 2013). This is why identity construction is never truly independent or solely dependent on society, on the contrary, it depends on their ongoing dialogue. In other words, it is dialectic.

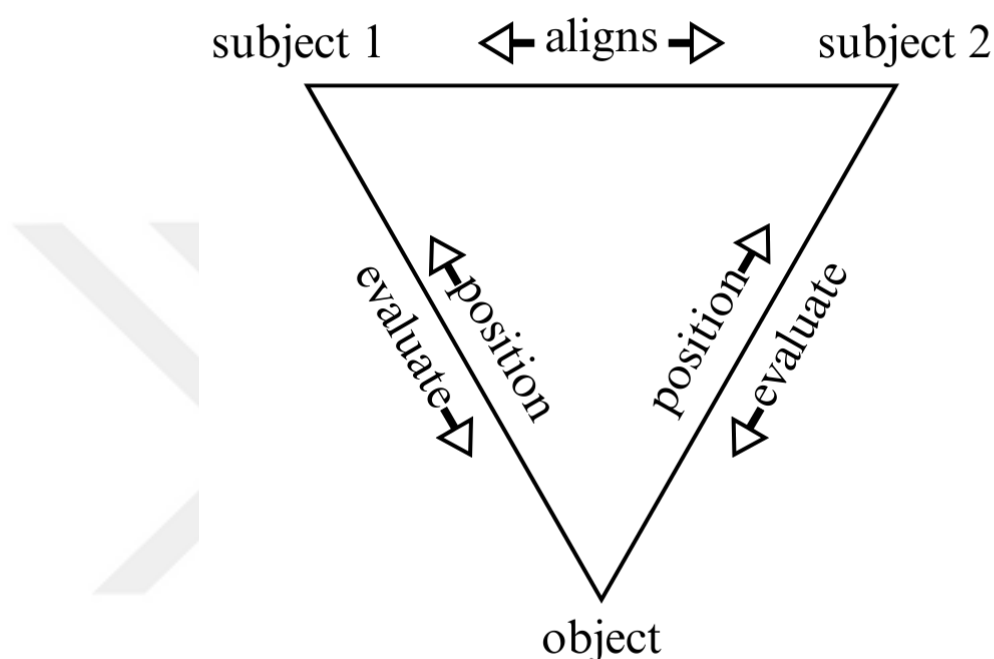
2.2 Stance and Stancetaking

Stance and its variant stancetaking are one of the essential aspects of Kiesling’s (2013) definition of identity construction. In broad definitions, stance is taking a position based on someone’s utterance in a conversation (Jaffe, 2009; Kiesling, 2022). In more systematic terms, Du Bois (2007) defines stance as:

(...) a public act by social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms), through which social actors simultaneously evaluate object position subjects (themselves and others), and align with other subjects, with respect to any salient dimension of the sociocultural field (Du Bois, 2007, p. 163).

Du Bois (2007) demonstrated this definition with a stance triangle, as seen in Figure 5. According to this triangle, each stance act has three complementary elements. These are evaluations of an object, positioning of the subject, and (dis)alignment with other subjects.

Figure 5. The Stance Triangle (Adapted from Du Bois, 2007, p. 163)



For instance, subject 1's utterance evaluates an object and positions themselves in relation to it. Subject 2, then, responds by evaluating the same stance object and positions themselves. Based on the relationship of these utterances (dis)alignment is produced between subjects. This whole interaction is considered a single stance act. An important part of the stance triangle is its dialogic perspective. The term is drawn from Bakhtin's (1981) theory of dialogicality and used by Du Bois (2007, 2012). Dialogicality means that every utterance is actually engaged with other utterances that have been spoken before them (Du Bois & Kärkkäinen, 2012). According to Kiesling (2022), what makes the stance triangle useful is that it enables one to identify stance clearly, encodes the important parts of the act, and shows the dialogic, intersubjective nature of the stance. In

other words, stance is practised in interaction and negotiated when a speaker signals a stance and other speakers decide to resist or take up that stance (Kiesling, 2022).

When it comes to the definition of stance and stancetaking, there are instances where these two terms are used for different reasons. Jaffe (2009) states that a speaker adopts a stance to associate with, align, or oppose a stance object. According to Snell (2018), a speaker's use of language and other semiotic resources to position themselves and others in an interaction, establish social boundaries, and assert particular knowledge, statutes, and authority is considered as stance (p. 670). Stance generally informs individuals about shifts in styles as people communicate and discuss their knowledge about others' language, culture, identities, and habits (Williams, 2025). For instance, Jaffe (2009) explained that a shift in linguistic style, such as using a minority code, in a formal setting could index a stance that reflects an individual statement or an ideology, as the language that is chosen or not is a statement on its own. On the other hand, this can be considered as stancetaking as it can be interpersonal, including what individuals say to others, the rationality behind their utterances, and the various points of view they choose to use (Jaffe, 2009). Individuals can adopt or react to various stances, including multiple aspects such as gender, identity, knowledge, memory, space, narrative, political points, or multilingualism (Williams, 2025). As Kiesling (2009) states, "stancetaking is always a speaker's primary concern in conversation" (p. 179).

Considering the vague boundary between the definition of these two terms, Kiesling (2022) prefers to use the stance and stancetaking interchangeably most of the time. According to Kiesling (2022), the most important difference between them is that stancetaking is a dynamic verb, which indicates stance, a static noun, is intersubjectively negotiated in interaction. Yet, he states that, in all of the studies on stancetaking "are

focused on some way that the animator relates to their utterance, the content of their utterance, or their interlocutors” (Kiesling, 2022, p. 416).

2.2.1. Linguistic Style

As Kiesling (2013) mentioned while explaining identity construction, linguistic style is part of identity construction. Eckert (2000) introduced the concept of “linguistic style” to delineate the distinctive communication styles of individuals or groups, drawing on Bourdieu. According to Kiesling (2013), linguistic style is influenced by both unconscious habits and sporadic conscious choices, similar to *habitus*. Similarly to Kiesling (2013, 2022), Johnstone (2009) also emphasizes that linguistic styles surface from stancetaking strategies, which the speakers repeat because of their relevance or advantage in particular interactions. Style is mainly associated with intersectionality or social identities (Biber & Finegan, 1989; Ochs, 1992; Eckert, 2000). Style can be defined as the stabilization of repeated patterns of stancetaking (Johnstone, 2009). Because of its repeated patterns, people made generalizations about its features (Johnstone, 2009). The generalization aspect of linguistic styles shows that they are highly identifiable. This can lead to some of them being named by society or a group (Johnstone, 2009). Because of their social and ideological indexes, they can be part of a differentiation strategy (Irvine, 2001; Johnstone, 2009).

Considering these properties of a linguistic style, I discuss Lubunca as a linguistic style. Lubunca emerged in the Ottoman Empire between the 16th and 18th centuries, used by sex workers (Kontovas, 2012). The term Lubunca means the language spoken by ‘Lubuns.’ The origin of the word is ‘lubni’, which is used for a woman sex worker (Kontovas, 2012). Lubunca is highly influenced by Romani, Turkish, French, and Greek and continued to be explicitly used among trans sex workers after the Ottoman Empire to protect themselves from the police officers and to communicate freely between

themselves (Kontovas, 2012). Today, it is used by queer community regardless of their occupation. Lubunca exhibits differences in its usage in social practices as it is a component of queer identity. Similar to Lubunca there are other queer styles around the world, such as Polari from Britannia, Kaliarda from Greece, and Swardspeak from Philippines.

In sum, identity construction is a dynamic and interactional process that includes how individuals position themselves and others based on the context of the interaction. Stance and stancetaking help to understand how positioning appears in these interactions. As identities are intersectional and complex, they are also bound to ideologies and social structures that we are part of. In this research, I use stance and stancetaking to understand the intersecting identities of migrants in Türkiye, where they face many challenges due to intersectionality. With the help of these conceptual frameworks, I expect to understand how queer migrants and refugees negotiate these identities in their everyday life and what their stances indicate for both their self-understanding and position towards the members of the host Turkish society. Based on these indications, I predict that there will be suggestions for policymakers and NGOs.

Additionally, as suggested by Kiesling (2022), stance and stancetaking can be applied not only in sociolinguistics studies but also in diverse fields of social sciences. Based on the literature review, even if the methods are varied across fields, the studies on identity and identity construction were limited to belonging and integration. Those who applied stance and stancetaking mainly focused on language and linguistic aspects. I believe that applying stance and stancetaking in different fields will strengthen the conceptualization of identity constructions, enable us to comprehensively understand the issues queer migrants are facing on a daily bases, and eventually be able to propose recommendations to deal with identity challenges.

2.3. Identity, Belonging and Integration

As leaving one's country and the immigration process are already challenging, settling in a host country brings several other problems for immigrants. Expressing the hardships and discomforts in a host country creates a challenge for immigrants. For instance, Goodman, Burke, Liebling, and Zasada (2014) stated that asylum seekers in refugee centers tend to downplay the problems they have faced to not come across as ungrateful, which disrupts the improvement of the living conditions of the refugees. Similarly, Podgornik-Jakil (2020) also stated that even if they protest for better conditions, they depend on the support of the locals to be taken seriously and, most importantly, find a peaceful way to protest (Podgornik-Jakil, 2020). If the host country has a negative perspective of an immigrant group, it creates stress for them, and understanding of collective identity is damaged (Burford-Rice et al., 2020). Wehrl, Klehe, Kira, and Zikic (2018) also found that immigrants had problems with their self-worth and sense while trying to adapt to a new country and build a new life for themselves and their families. In this problematic process, they try to belong and find several coping responses to negotiate their sense of self (Wehrl et al., 2018).

In the literature, immigrants' identity, self, and belonging have been studied using numerous theories from different fields. For instance, Prins, van Stekelenburg, Polletta, and Klandermans (2013) used a narrative approach in their research with Moroccan-Dutch young adults, and found that the participants discussed their identity based on the discrimination they faced in Dutch society and shared their practices against injustice. Their findings suggest that even though individual experiences prevent the definition of a permanent identity for the community, the disadvantaged Moroccan-Dutch identity became prominent among the group, which also shows their position in Dutch society (Prins et al., 2013). Meanwhile, using the liberation psychology approach (Sonn & Fisher,

2003; Sonn & Lewis, 2009), Cicognani, Sonn, Albanesi, and Zani (2018) conducted a study with Moroccan descent young people in Italy to understand how they make sense of their social exclusion and racism experiences. They found that young people are active and flexible in navigating the challenges they encounter as migrants, and they resist discrimination in the host country through several strategies (Cicognani et al., 2018). Intersectional identities of the young migrants (such as class, gender, and other social dimensions) play a role in how they position themselves within society, making meaning of their experiences, and negotiating their identity construction process (Cicognani et al., 2018).

Boland (2020), on the other hand, conducted a case study with a group of young migrant Muslims in Madrid to understand the role of identity and the use of cultural practices in navigating belonging. The findings showed that hybrid identity and practices are used as tools to connect with several groups to negotiate inclusion and belonging (Boland, 2020). Boland (2020) also found that pro-immigrant policies influence the level of belonging, yet participants stated that they still deal with discrimination for other aspects of their identity. Contrary to the regular belief of the host country, participants expressed their attachment to Madrid and/or Spain (Boland, 2020). Similarly, in the study of Karlsen and Nazroo (2013) with Muslim groups in Britain, Germany, and Spain, the sense of belonging was already high among the participants, yet holding a citizenship firmly impacts defining oneself as British, German, or Spanish. On the other hand, while participants who faced discrimination felt less at home, social support from the host country impacts their sense of belonging positively (Karlsen & Nazroo, 2013).

Koburtay, Refai, and Haloub (2020) used social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) along with the acculturation framework (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2006) to understand the cultural inclusion and exclusion practices of Syrian refugees in the work

environment in Jordan. Their findings showed that while experiences with the host country differ for every participant, the cultural proximity between Jordan and Syria keeps refugees satisfied with the host country's attitude towards them (Koburtay et al., 2020). However, economic problems, harsh work environment, and their legal conditions are the main determinants in their inclusion/exclusion practices, which play a role in the (re)shaping the identities of the participants (Koburtay et al., 2020). As immigrants face unexpected situations, their identity needs (for instance, continuity and control of self-identity) are also affected during migration process (Koburtay et al., 2020).

While studies show that religion does not play a significant role in migrants' sense of belonging (Karslen & Nazroo; Boland, 2020), policies and social factors are undeniably important for migrants to understand and create their identities. Losoncz and Marlowe (2020) found that identity construction is highly related to structures. They stated that financial and social support are crucial for the well-being of Sudanese Australian migrants and policies that accept and protect their rights (Losoncz & Marlowe, 2020). This way, migrants are able to create solid identities, which eventually increases their sense of belonging and enables them to see themselves as equal individuals in the host country (Losoncz & Marlowe, 2020). Rather than forcing the host country's values, meeting on the middle ground by supporting positive self-development, engaging with the problems of the migrants, and creating safe spaces where they can express their culture has a positive impact on their identity construction process (Losoncz & Marlowe, 2020). The findings of Salgado and Silvia (2018) about the importance of culture in the integration process is also suggesting to be accepting and understanding towards their culture. In their study, Salgado and Silva (2018) found that for migrant women, maintaining cultural heritage in the process of integration and education level impacted the process. On the other hand, most participants agreed on the importance of learning and adapting to the

host country's language and culture (Salgado & Silvia, 2018). However, there was resistance to integration in the lower-educated group, which created inconsistency in their identity (Salgado & Silvia, 2018). Additionally, while the lower-educated group preferred to be private about their cultural heritage and accepted to adapt to the host country, there was resistance in the higher-educated group's social inclusion as they stated that they value a multicultural society (Salgado & Silvia, 2018). Another study that shows the impact of host country's attitude Ahmadi, Ahmadi, and Zandi (2022) conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 adolescents to understand how second-generation Iranian immigrants interpret their national and ethnic identities in Sweden. They also use secondary data from the studies of second-generation Iranian communities in the USA to compare their data with different cultural settings (Ahmadi et al., 2022). They found that the social identity construction of second-generation Iranians in the USA and Sweden differs. One of the most critical factors for these differences is the host countries' culture and their society's approach to immigrants (Ahmadi et al., 2022). For instance, in Sweden, Iranian adolescents express their identities by creating multicultural identities, while Iranians in the USA create nationalist, "reactive identities" for themselves (Ahmadi et al., 2022).

2.4. Queer Immigrant Identities

Studies on queer immigrants were also indicating similar problems and findings with the literature on immigrant identity. An early study on Latin lesbian immigrants by Acosta (2008) showed that different parts of identities, such as class, race, and sexuality, constantly repositioned during the migration process. In this study, Acosta (2008) stressed how flexible racial, class, and sexual identities are during negotiating different identities in different circumstances. Similarly, Carillo and Fontdevila (2014) interviewed 80 gay and bisexual Mexican immigrant men in the USA to understand the interpretation of

same-sex desire in the pre- and post-migration process. They have found that these changes are subjective and cannot be generalized to the community (Carillo & Fondevila, 2014). Generalizing that queer migrants from the global south shift to global north practices when they arrive in the West is problematic as it suggests that there are no cultural changes in the homeland of queer immigrants, and this understanding can affect queer asylum decisions negatively (Carillo & Fontdevila, 2014). In a recent study, Alessi et al. (2020) also handled how queer migrants from Muslim countries were affected by Islamophobic attitudes in the West (Amsterdam and Vienna, in this case) and lack of connection in immigrant communities. It has been discovered that discrimination from a host country harms integration, which can be subtle, like in Amsterdam, or overt, like in Vienna (Alessi et al., 2020). They also found that LGBTQ-friendly organizations have a role in feeling belonging to the host country for queer immigrants. There are also harassment and threats from host countries' LGBT community and immigrant community towards queer immigrants (Alessi et al., 2020). Another study on queer Muslim women in France was conducted by Lara (2022), asking the question of how queer Muslim immigrant women negotiate their identities in France. Lara (2022) found that queer Muslim immigrant women redefine secular and Muslim identities and also queering the religion not only in real life but also on social media to find their own communities. Even though the host society, the Muslim community, and the LGBT community in France sometimes discriminate against them, these women found a way to express their identities and their understanding of self (Lara, 2022).

2.5. Language Ideology

While policies and structures play an important role in migrants' integration into society and in constructing resilient identities, the language and language ideology of the host countries are other factors that contribute to these processes. In a study on forced

migrants' integration process in Luxembourg, Kalocsányiová (2018) found that participants adapted to language ideology and learn the primary language of the country not only because it was required for integration but also to survive in the host country as participants stated that (standard) French help them to find better jobs. The participants stated that proficiency in the national language is necessary for social practices. In another study with Latin Americans living in Germany, Jansen (2023) stated that positioning English as a global language was a prominent ideology among the participants as they use it to socialize with other immigrants, in the work environment, and in university classes. Their position on the global language, English, is also part of a reaction to German monolingualism in the country, as they were dissatisfied with the fact that they faced problems in their everyday lives because of the lack of English in society and institutions (Jansen, 2023). In an ethnographic fieldwork with a group of Iraqi Turkmen women refugees in Türkiye, Saygı (2023) points out that participants had a strong connection with their national identity as they chose to disalign with Turkishness, which they see as a mere reflection of historical association. According to Saygı (2023), they connected with their refugee identity in Türkiye because of exclusionary practices in Turkish society. However, depending on the context, they could associate themselves with either of the identities, which had different indexes, with the help of their Arabic and Turkish language proficiency.

In another study, Erdoğan-Öztürk and Sağın-Şimşek (2023) researched the identity negotiation and language ideologies of Syrian refugees in Türkiye. Drawing from Bourdieu's (1991) idea that language practices are never neutral but shaped by linguistic capital and symbolic power, they show how the exclusion and discrimination of refugees are also linked to the silencing of their native languages or multilingualism (Erdoğan-Öztürk & Sağın-Şimşek). Based on participants' experiences, they discovered that the

Arabic language is silenced in public spheres due to the meanings attributed to being Arab, refugee, and Arabic language in Türkiye (Erdoğan-Öztürk & Sağın-Şimşek). They also concluded that the language choices are considered as participants' stances as their choices reflect on their identities and are related to the ideologies and attitudes of the society they live in (Erdoğan-Öztürk & Sağın-Şimşek). It is also stated by Capstick (2020) that migrants carry their homeland language ideologies to the host country. Using multi-sited ethnographic methods and interviews while focusing on one participant who left his home country and moved to a host country, Capstick (2020) found that these ideologies are influenced by migrants' language use in both countries, which also affects their communication choices. The study shows a preference for mixing languages in online spheres, while English is preferred in more public spaces, as it is considered prestigious among Pakistani Muslims (Capstick, 2020). The language use of migrants is tied to their identity construction as their understanding of self shifts due to changes in their social status during the immigration process (Capstick, 2020).

2.6. The Role of NGOs in Immigration

NGOs can be essential to establishing the integration process in a host country. In a study where Dimitrova and Ozdora-Aksak (2022) compared the strategies of Bulgarian and Turkish Migration NGOs, it was found that the attitude of the NGOs in both countries are shaped by their level of independence, their relationship with the government, and dominant public opinion. Additionally, the legal and political contexts were found to be the main factors influencing NGO strategies (Dimitrova & Ozdora-Aksak, 2022). According to a study by Seyidov (2019), in Türkiye, NGOs also have an important role in creating a network between government, refugees and host society. However, the opportunities provided to Syrians in Türkiye are insufficient and unsystematic, creating a problem in the integration process (Seyidov, 2019). These problems should also be

considered within the broader changes in migration governance in Türkiye, which have been shaped by the increasing involvement of the EU since the early 2000s as Üstübcü (2019) suggested. Especially after 2008, new laws and institutions have introduced more rigid categories such as legal migration, irregular migration, and international or subsidiary protection, showing how EU externalization policies were gradually internalized in the legal framework (Üstübcü, 2019).

As there are different statuses for refugees, these implementations are trickier and more problematic for LGBTQ+ refugees. Koçak (2020) examined how deserving refugee status affects queer refugees and analyzed the role of UNHCR in the asylum-seeking process in Türkiye. Koçak (2020) collected data from participant observation and 94 interviews with queer refugees, UNHCR workers, and UNHCR implementing partners. As queer refugees must prove their queer identities to stay in Türkiye, this process creates problems with authenticity (Koçak, 2020). Koçak (2020) stated that queer refugees feel the obligation to make "fake cases" to prove their queerness and deserve resettlement. Even though there can be problems with the settlement of (queer) refugees, NGOs have an important place in immigrants' lives when they finally settle in a host country. While this study only focuses on specifically queer refugees who are asylum-seekers, this study will extend its scope to queer migrants from various ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Held (2023) studied the experiences of queer refugees in queer spaces in their host countries. She examined queer refugees' experience in support groups and night-time free time activities in the UK, Germany, and Italy (Held, 2023). Held (2023) collected the data from the SOGICA project. They interviewed queer asylum claimants, refugees, policymakers, NGOs, and legal representatives. As the study found out, queer refugees find LGBTIQ+ spaces ambivalent because they believe the whiteness of these spaces

makes them feel uninvited (Held, 2023). They also found support groups compelling even though power imbalances in those spaces occasionally make them uncomfortable.

As a result of unfair policies by governments and policymakers, a new identity called “undocuqueer,” which means undocumented queer, emerged as a form of resistance. Cisneros (2017) interviewed 31 self-identified “undocuqueer” immigrants, and the subjects stated that they are dealing with understanding identities as one-dimensional. They are primarily against the stereotypical understanding of being LGBTQ and immigrant. While this can be seen as extreme, queer immigrants indeed have a vital role in activism in the West. On the other hand, Ayoup and Bauman (2019) argued that queer immigrants in Europe influenced social movement organizations (SMOs) as they can stay connected to their homeland politics while they can express their gender and sexual identity freely in their host countries and push SMOs into transnational queer activism. As they stated, thanks to migration, queer activism flourished and created solidarity globally (Ayoup & Bauman, 2019)

2.7. Social Media & Community Building

Spaces that NGOs created for (queer) immigrants are not the only places for them. Social media platforms are also where (queer) immigrants connect with the host society and share more information with their groups. Bayramoğlu and Lünenborg (2018) studied how digital media help queer refugees to empower themselves. The study conducted in Türkiye and Germany showed that along with social media activism, dating applications could help create coping strategies and belonging for refugees. They collected the data from non-participant observation, digital data, and semi-structured interviews (Bayramoğlu & Lünenborg, 2018). They found that social media platforms help queer refugees adapt to their host countries swiftly and increase their self-esteem (Bayramoğlu & Lünenborg,

2018). However, some queer refugees resist this process as pre-defined identity categories prevent them from socializing and feeling comfortable (Bayramoğlu & Lünenborg, 2018).

A positive effect of social media was shown by Aziz (2022) when he interviewed fifteen Rohingya members to understand “how transnational digital engagements foreground the construction of the Rohingya diaspora, and subsequently how the transnational identities are negotiated and mediated online” (Aziz, 2022, p. 1) and he also used social media scroll back interview. He analyzed participants’ identity negotiation on online platforms. He suggested that social media activism creates visibility and is a way of resistance for the immigrant community. Another study on identity and media has been conducted by Yin (2015). The study focuses on the relationship between the identity construction of immigrants and cyberspace influence. Yin (2015) used interviews and online texts together to explain the impact of ethnic media on immigrant identity construction. Yin (2015) showed that online homeland media is a source of authentic Chinese identity for migrants in New Zealand, and it enables Chinese immigrants to create a collective togetherness with their homeland (Yin, 2015). Relevant to cyberspace and its influence on immigrants, Gonzales (2017) showed that disadvantaged groups socialize easily on the Internet, but face-to-face socializing is more challenging for them. As participants felt more comfortable with online communication, the Internet can be a bridge to help disadvantaged groups in society (Gonzales, 2017). Gonzales (2017) used the social diversification hypothesis for this study and analyzed the data with ecological momentary assessment (EMA).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews and social media scroll back interviews of eight transnational queer individuals and activists in Türkiye. The process of identifying and persuading interviewees for this study was challenging as there is a general anti-LGBTQ+ stance in Türkiye, and many queer migrants we reached out were hesitant to participate. As the current AKP government sees the LGBTQ+ community as a potential threat against the institution of family, and high level of distrust by the queer community toward the judicial system, queer immigrants prefer to hide their queer identities to avoid any potential circumstance that will risk their residency status in Türkiye, as explained in the previous chapters.

3.1. Ethical Procedure

Since queer immigrants are highly marginalized in Türkiye, the subject of the study also requires sensitivity. So, the questions were prepared with this sensitivity in mind and were tried not to ask offensive questions. For interview questions, some of the thesis and dissertations on (queer) immigrants were decided as a starting point, such as Choubak's (2014) study on identity negotiation of the first generation queer immigrants in Canada, Saastamoinen's (2017) study on Iranian queer refugees' sense of belonging, Terzoglu's (2020) thesis on belonging of queer migrants in Sweden, and Ahmad's (2020) dissertation on migrants' motivation on dealing with transnational political activism. Some of the

interview questions from these studies were considered helpful for this research topic and adapted accordingly. After the questions were prepared, approval from the Ethics Committee of Ihsan Dogramaci Bilkent University was obtained on May 22, 2024. Once the participants gave their consent, I explained the aim of the study and the conditions of the interview. Before each conversation, I made sure they were aware of their rights regarding the data they shared and how that data would be stored. A consent form were signed before the interviews and read out to the participants.

To create a safe space and make participants comfortable, face-to-face and online meetings were offered to the participants. For online meetings, the time and date were decided mutually between the interviewee and the interviewer. For face-to-face meetings, the participants were asked if they had a preferred place on their minds. If they did not suggest a location, the cafes known for being LGBTQ+ friendly were selected as a meeting spot. The participants were also asked to review the interview questions before the meeting. They were told they could inform me beforehand and did not need to answer any uncomfortable questions. Another vital aspect to make them feel comfortable was to talk about their everyday life. In these pre-interview chats, I also introduced myself thoroughly as I wanted to create a safe environment. This way, participants did not shy away from answering questions, and their answers offered sincerity.

3.2. Data Collection - Semi-structured Interview

As the semi-structured interview method creates the opportunity to develop active communication between the interviewer and the interviewee, it was preferred as one of the methods of this study to ask carry-over questions, giving them space to make themselves apparent (Galletta, 2016). It may be challenging for participants to answer some of the questions as the topic of the thesis deals with sensitive topics, yet with semi-structured interviews, it is easier for both the interviewee and the interviewer to ask follow-up

questions and comment on the questions. This allows participants to clarify their answers and add further information which helps to understand the identity construction of queer immigrants.

The adaptable nature of the semi-structured interviews allows one to navigate through unexplored subjects while staying relevant to the study topic (Galletta, 2016).

Additionally, it helps to delve into particular issues that arise in each interview (Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess, & Ladany, 2005). Thanks to these qualities, the method provides a deeper understanding of the complexity of queer immigrant identity and enriches the study. Considering that semi-structured interviews provide details about personal and complex experiences (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016), it enables the interviewer to stay on the topic without getting off track thanks to this adaptability. Since this thesis is about marginalized identities, a semi-structured interview methodology can enhance the findings' overall quality because of its qualities within itself. Studies that preferred the semi-structured method, such as Özdora Akşak and Dimitrova (2022), Prince et al. (2013), and Held (2023), support the idea that semi-structured interviews enrich the data and enable the discussion of topics that researchers could not predict.

3.3. Data Collection - Scroll Back Interview

Another method that was used in this study was the scrollbar interview method. This method was first used to understand the archival nature of Facebook while involving the participants as interpreters of their data (Robards & Lincoln, 2017). The participants were seen as 'co-analysts' of these digital traces as the researchers and participants discussed and made sense of them together (Robards & Lincoln, 2017). Robards and Lincoln (2017) suggested that this method can be used for other social media platforms, such as Twitter (now X) and Instagram, as these platforms also provide information on historical data of

the users through scrolling back in their timelines. Merging scrollbar interview results with in-depth analysis is helpful to strengthen the data, especially for marginalized groups and activists. In the context of this study, the data collected from the archives can shed light on the struggles and daily lives of the queer immigrants. Participants' social media archives are also helpful for them to strengthen their stances and to clarify and emphasize specific points related to their identities, pasts, or ideologies.

Scrolling back can help bring out detailed stories from participants' mediatized lives, but it also opens up the chance of coming across things they didn't plan to share, which might feel uncomfortable or even difficult to talk about (Møller & Robards, 2019). As queer immigrants are already distressed about living in Türkiye, the interview process was explained to them beforehand in order to avoid such mishaps. During the interview process, they were asked to share their social media posts with me only if they felt truly comfortable and willing to do so. According to several studies conducted with minorities, scrollbar interviews helped to understand the social media practices of the participants and provided a deeper meaning for research as the participants explained their own data to researchers (Aziz, 2022; Moran & Gatwiri, 2022; Moran & Robards, 2020). In the scope of this study, participants explained their Instagram stories to me and discussed whether their posts were considered part of social activism. They explained the background on the decision of sharing and not sharing queer and/or immigrant related topics on their social media accounts.

3.4. Participant Selection

For findings to effectively address the research questions, it is crucial to establish specific requirements (Robinson, 2013). For this study, queer migrants over the age of 18 living in Türkiye who speak Turkish or English were recruited. Only the participants who were in

Türkiye for at least six months were selected for the study. Participants who were unable to hold a face-to-face meeting were asked to use video conferencing applications.

In order to avoid confusion, an immigrant is defined as a person who is arriving at the destination country, and a migrant is defined as someone who has moved to another place in general terms (Douglas, Cetron, & Spiegel, 2019; UN DESA, 1998). Thus, people who have changed their location for whatever reason are considered migrants and called immigrants from the point of arrival country. When it comes to the definition of 'queer', Halperin (1997) defines the term as "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (p. 6). For this study, queer is understood as an identity that challenges heterosexuality and gender norms. These definitions were applied while recruiting participants for this study and kept in mind while writing the thesis.

I used snowball and purposive sampling together for this study. Purposive sampling was applied to identify the participants. This way, the criteria for the participants mentioned before were fulfilled. Snowball sampling was applied when I posted the criteria on my public Instagram story. I also requested my social circle to share the post on their social media accounts and WhatsApp groups. Additionally, the same post was shared through a queer student club in Bilkent University, a WhatsApp group of master students at Boğaziçi University and in an email group of UniKuir. Participants reached me through Instagram or email. The information they gave was double-checked to see if they fulfilled the criteria. If there were no obstacles to be interviewed, the study aimed to explain one more time to ensure they understood clearly what they were voluntarily attending to. Hereafter, they were asked if they needed to see the interview questions beforehand. This was crucial to create trust between the interviewer and interviewee. Most of them wanted to see the questions before the interview, which shows the importance of this process.

At the end of the participant selection, the interviews were conducted with eight participants. The average age of participants is 23.5, the youngest is 21 and oldest is 35. As it can be seen in Table 1, only one of the interviewees did not have a university degree while five of them are undergraduate students and two of them are graduate students. During the interview process, six of the participants were accommodated in different neighbourhoods in Ankara, and two were in Istanbul. Three of the participants resided in Türkiye for education, and others migrated here for various reasons, such as war and conflict, family decision or to start a new life. The average time participants' spent in Türkiye is 6.6 years with highest being eighteen years and lowest being two years. Two interviews were from Pakistan, two from Syria, one from Morocco, one from Germany, and one from Somalia holding Italian citizenship. Five of the participants were identified as trans, an umbrella term that challenges traditional societal expectations of designated birth sex and corresponding gender expressions, while three of them identify themselves as cisgender gay men.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Interviewees

Interviewee ID	Age	Place of Origin	Years in Türkiye	Education Level	Current City
I-1	21	Pakistan	2 years	Undergraduate	Ankara
I-2	23	Pakistan	4 years	Undergraduate	Ankara
I-3	21	Syria	6 years	Undergraduate	Ankara
I-4	21	Somalia/Italy	18 years	High school	Ankara
I-5	24	Syria	8 years	Graduate	Ankara
I-6	35	Germany	9 years	Graduate	Istanbul
I-7	22	Morocco	4 years	Undergraduate	Ankara
I-8	21	Russia	2 years	Undergraduate	Istanbul

3.5. Interview Process

The interviews were conducted between 15 June to 25 November 2024. The interviews lasted approximately one and a half hours; the longest lasted two hours. The first participant, I-1, was reached out through queer student club. During the emails, it was asked if they have any other friends who would like to participate in the research. They reached out to I-2 and they were interviews together. I-3 and I-5 reached out as their friends shared the social media post about the research. They were both very willing to be part of the study. I was introduced to I-4 and I-8 through a friend. Then, I got in touch with them via Instagram. For I-6 and I-7, people from my social circle helped me to reach out to them.

When participants approved to be part of the study, they were asked if they preferred face-to-face or online meetings. Six of the interviews were conducted face-to-face while two of

them conducted online via Zoom. For face-to-face meetings, participants were asked if they have a preferred location to ensure their comfort and privacy. If they did not suggest a place, queer-friendly spaces or areas that are preferred among university students or artists were selected to make them feel comfortable. For instance, the interview with I-1 and I-2 was conducted in the resting area of a dormitory. They preferred to stay in the campus and after some consideration, the resting area was decided mutually. With I-4 and I-5, I suggested a coffee where artists and academics mostly preferred and known as queer friendly. I asked participants if they felt comfortable before the interview process. Both of them stated that they did not know the place before but liked the atmosphere. I-3 and I-7, on the other hand, suggested the place they felt comfortable with. The meetings took place in coffee shops in the interviewees' neighbourhood. For online meetings, interviewees and I decided on meeting time mutually, mostly considering the comfort and availability of them.

I conducted the interviews either in Turkish or English because of my language capacity. I asked the language preference to participants. Three of the participants preferred Turkish while the rest of them wanted to conduct the interviews in English. I-6 and I-8 knew Turkish to some extent but felt comfortable with English. Those who preferred English stated that they felt comfortable with explaining themselves in English. When it comes to Turkish, I-3, I-4 and I-5 were fluent or near fluent in the language. I-3 specifically stated that they wanted to conduct the interview in Turkish to practice their language skills.

During the interviews, the aim of the study was explained once more. Informed consent form was signed by the participants and it was read out to them to make sure it was understood thoroughly. They were reminded that they do not have to answer any question they feel uncomfortable with and they can reach out to me to change, include or exclude any answer they have given during the interview. This process was recorded with their

consent. After that, the interview started with demographic questions. As it can be seen in Table 2, the first part of the interview questions had twelve questions. The first seven questions were demographic questions, and the five questions were intended to warm them up to the other questions. From thirteen to twenty two, the questions were intended to understand the identity construction of the participants. These questions were mostly adapted from the studies of Saastamoinen (2017), Terzoglou (2020) and Choubak (2014) together with the questions determined by these studies. Last set of the questions, from twenty three to twenty six, included in order to understand the role of NGOs in the interviewees' life and what they expect from NGOs. These questions were adopted from Ahmed (2020) and Choubak (2014) along with questions after looking through these studies.

Table 2. Interview Questions with Their Origins

Question Number	Questions	Origins of Research Questions
	Warmup Questions and Demographic Information	
1-7	Demographic: Age, Sexual identity, Gender identity, Religion, Education (highest achieved), Relationship status, Country of origin	
8	How long have you been living in Türkiye? Which cities have you lived in before in Türkiye?	Saastamoinen (2017)
9	Why did you prefer to immigrate to Türkiye?	Saastamoinen (2017)
10	Have you lived in any other country before you immigrated to Türkiye?	Data-driven
11	How do you perceive LGBTQ+/queer rights and immigrant rights in your homeland?	Saastamoinen (2017)
12	How did you perceive LGBTQ+/queer rights and immigrant rights before you came to Türkiye and after	Saastamoinen (2017),

	you came to Türkiye? (Both the government's and society's perspective on these issues)	Terzoglou (2020)
	Open-Ended Questions on Identity	
13	How was the immigration process?	Saastamoinen (2017), Terzoglou (2020)
14	How was your experience of living in Türkiye as a queer migrant?	Choubak (2014)
15	Do you feel that you can express your sexual identity freely in Türkiye?	Saastamoinen (2017), Terzoglou (2020)
16	How do you identify yourself mainly? ("Who are you?" "what makes you you ?")	Choubak (2014)
16a	Can you elaborate on the impact of your sexual identity and/or migrant identity on your identity construction?	Data-driven
17	When you think about your queer and migrant identity, do you think that they have an impact on each other? If so, how?	Terzoglou (2020)
18	In what situations do you prefer to stress/express your queerness/migrant identity? Can you elaborate on your answer?	Data-driven
19	Do you think that the way you identify yourself has changed after the immigration?	Choubak (2014)
20	Have you ever felt excluded or discriminated against because of your migrant/queer identity?	Choubak (2014), Terzoglou (2020)
21	Are you active in a migrant/queer community of Türkiye/Ankara/İstanbul/etc.?	Saastamoinen (2017), Terzoglou (2020)
21a	Do you think the attitude of these communities towards sexual minorities and migrants is different from the rest of Türkiye?	Saastamoinen (2017)

22	Does religion have any effect on your identity?	Data-driven
	Open-ended Questions on NGOs	
23	Do you consider yourself as an activist? If so;	Ahmed (2020)
23a	Can you talk about your activism? (When did you first engage in activism, how often are you involved, what kind of activism it is, what encouraged you to be an activist, etc.)	Ahmed (2020)
23b	Do you think your contribution to queer immigrant activism has an impact on the cause in general? If so, how?	Ahmed (2020)
24	Have you ever connected to NGOs (before/during/after the migration) or attended any NGOs' activities/programs in Türkiye?	Ahmed (2020)
24a	Do you think that the NGOs cooperate with queer migrants in Türkiye?	Data-driven
25	What opportunities and obstacles do you see in queer migrant activism/movement in Türkiye?	Ahmed (2020)
26	With regards to everything addressed and didn't in the interview, in your opinion, what (e.g., services, programs, policy) would help queer immigrants transition better into Türkiye after settlement socially? Aside from the legal help regarding the immigration process for queer immigrants, what are some of the needs that should be addressed by services in order to help them adjust socially to Türkiye? (Adapted from Choubak, 2014)	Choubak (2014)

Some topics and questions that are not in the original set of questions were also discussed during the interviews. These discussions were determined during the semi-structured process of the interview. For instance, in the first three interviews, participants discuss the importance of a romantic partner in their process of adaptation. They also mentioned the

importance of speaking and learning the Turkish language. These topics appeared very naturally during the process. Thus, it was added to the next interviews.

After the semi-structured interview, scrollbar interview started by asking the participants if they shared posts related to Turkish politics, their homeland politics, and queer and/or immigrant movement on their social media accounts. I asked interviewees who said yes if they could find those posts and explain the content to me. Participants were reluctant to go through their social media posts. They preferred to look through their Instagram story archives. We discuss their posts and stories with them to understand if they consider them as part of activism. They gave insight on the aim of sharing posts on their homeland politics, queer movement in their homeland and hostland, spreading awareness and solidarity for queer/immigrants. However, when I asked if I can use their post on my thesis anonymously, none of them gave their consent, thus the posts could not be included as images yet they are discussed as content

3.6. Data Protection

Only I had access to the recordings of interviews, and transcriptions of them were done by me. I stored the audio of face-to-face meetings and the recording of online meetings on a personal hard drive. Before each interview, I told the participants that only my thesis advisor and I would have full access to the interview transcripts.

3.7. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed in multiple stages. In order to identify the main themes, I first carefully reviewed the transcripts several times and held conversations with the interviewees. Next, I utilized the Constant Comparative Method (CCM) (Creswell 2007). CCM, enables me to classify, code and define the categorization and connect them by comparing (Boeije, 2002). With this process, the interpretation of the previous data is compared with the new

data, relations between categories are brought out (Boeije, 2002). When the new cases do not bring anything new, the data is considered to be saturated and assigned to the existing category (Boeije, 2002). This method was also used in similar qualitative studies (Idemudia, Williams, & Wyatt, 2013; Ozdora & Dimitrova 2021). The main concepts were found through this iterative inductive method.

In order to ease data processing, findings were presented in a continuous narrative that included direct quotes and experiences from the transcripts. Quotations can be used to strengthen the argument, present examples from experience, and engage the reader with the scenario (Sandelowski, 1994; Patton, 2002). In fact, when quotations are used with well-founded justification, it would lead to academic growth, increase transparency and methodological development (Eldh, Årestedt, & Berterö, 2020). However, while including quotations, it is crucial to protect participants' privacy, and present the data in a trustworthy fashion (Polit & Beck, 2016). As a consequence, anonymous IDs are given to the participants for this study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The findings chapter has eight sections in it. Each section provides information about queer immigrants' experience in Türkiye. Starting with immigrant experience, the sections share insights on interviewees experiences as queer individuals, their sense of feeling safe in several contexts, the problems they face as both queer and immigrant, their experiences on dating apps, the struggles they have faced because of language barrier, their social media practices, and lastly ending with their relationship with NGOs.

4.1. Decision to Move

As I started recording the interviews, I introduced myself and asked them about basic demographic information. Then, I continued with their decision to move to Türkiye.

I-1 and I-2 explained that they preferred the USA or Europe, especially considering the queer rights, but Türkiye was more affordable for education. They place Türkiye as a middle ground between Pakistan and the West. They are both from Pakistan and met at a

birthday celebration of their mutual friends. Settling in Türkiye as international students, they found the paperwork much easier compared to Europe. I-1 stated that he prefers to live in Türkiye rather than Pakistan as he could find more space to experience himself. He also never returned to his home country after moving to Türkiye. I-2 also shared that he was happy to be in Türkiye, as Pakistan is more conservative than Türkiye. Even though he spent most of his time on the university campus, except in some incidents, he faced no problems because of his sexual identity outside of the campus. I-2 also had a chance to visit Istanbul and stated that Istanbul is a better place for queer people compared to Ankara. He occasionally visited his family in Pakistan and had the opportunity to compare how his reflection changed since he could live his own life freely in Türkiye.

For I-3 (singular pronoun *they* will be used for I-3 from now on), moving to Türkiye was challenging. They were born in Syria and also lived in Lebanon and Saudi Arabia. He moved to Türkiye due to the Syrian war. They were raised in a secular neighborhood in Syria. They explained that they saw drag queens on Lebanese television while growing up. They said that “characters [in TV shows] that are seen as ‘immoral’ always went to Beirut,” and that is why they found Lebanon a liberal place to be. They never felt the need to hide their sexual identity until their family moved to Saudi Arabia, where they witnessed a classmate being physically abused because of being feminine. Around 2018, their family moved to Istanbul, Türkiye, to live in better conditions and for I-3 to have a better education. Everything they know about Türkiye is based on television and social media. They stated that there was an intense propaganda of the president Erdoğan. For them, Türkiye was a country with a strong economy and a welcoming society. Their father had Turkish citizenship, but other family members faced difficulties during the citizenship application process. They had to sign papers they did not understand, and I-3 ended up in a religious high school, which was difficult for them. However, society was indeed

welcoming towards them in the first years. They also faced many challenges in high school because of the language barrier, which affected their self-confidence and lowered their school performance.

I-4 was born in Italy to a Somali family, and his family decided to move to Türkiye when he was three years old. For most of his life, he lived in Ankara. At first, he taught Turkish, English, and Arabic to children and adults, then worked in a private institution. Despite being born in Italy and owning an EU passport, he felt at home in Somalia and preferred to embrace this identity. However, he preferred to live in Türkiye since he grew up here. He and his siblings could not get Turkish citizenship, but they were also unwilling to have one. He and his family faced some frightening incidents in Türkiye because of their skin color. I-5 was born in Syria. However, moving to Türkiye was not a choice but an obligation for him. He identifies as a Syrian Kurd who was raised in Arabic culture. At 16, he escaped the Syrian civil war with his family. Before that, his knowledge of Türkiye was based on TV shows and from his sister, who moved to Türkiye before them. While the childhood memories in Syria were blurry for him, he remembered the welcoming attitude of Syrians towards foreigners. I-5 and his family lived in many cities until they settled in Ankara. He applied for temporary protection, and he and his family faced no challenges during their applications. It was a relief for them that the officials could speak Arabic and English in the immigration center. The only bizarre situation to him was when officials asked for their religion and religious sect, as this information was never brought up while they lived in Syria.

I-6 was born in Germany and has lived in Türkiye for nine years. He arrived in Türkiye as an exchange student nine years ago and decided to stay after graduation. His boyfriend helped him settle here. As Germany has a considerable Turkish community, his curiosity about Turkish culture affected his decision. He came out as gay just before moving to

Türkiye. He also started packing up to move back to Germany as we conducted our interview. I-7 is a 22-year-old non-binary woman from Morocco. She has been in Türkiye for four years. She decided to move to Türkiye as she wanted more freedom. She came here during the pandemic, a complicated time for completing official paperwork. The most challenging aspect was that there was no guidance for integration or utilities that migrants could benefit from. The language barrier was another problem for her, as the information she could find was either provided to her in Turkish or not, and the scarcity of English-speaking people was challenging for her.

Lastly, I-8 is a 21-year-old trans-woman from Russia. She is a university student in Istanbul and makes a career by modeling. She was raised in Siberia. Due to laws against the LGBTQ+ community, she wanted to escape Russia. She transferred to an international boarding school in Armenia, and after graduation, she moved to Istanbul for her university education. She also started her hormone therapy in Türkiye. She explained how difficult it was for her to find a proper house. She stayed in hostels and found a place thanks to the trans community. She also stated that she had to do sex work during that time.

4.2. Immigrant Experience in Türkiye

Most interviewees agreed that their first time in Türkiye was challenging for them. They were struggling to socialize with other people. Racism and the language barrier were not quite helpful for them in adapting to a new country. I-3 stated that being an immigrant is possibly the most significant part of their identity, as every incident is related to that. They explained how the language barrier disrupted their education and led them into depression. They became reserved and had problems socializing. They were ostracized with the only Kurdish student in their classroom, which kindled their friendship. Similarly, I-4 also talked about how he and his Kurdish friend were the only two people who were bullied in the classroom because of their skin color. During the interview with I-5, while he was

talking about the problems he faced as a Kurdish Syrian, he said that “being Kurdish is worse than being Syrian in Türkiye. I thought Kurdish people were treated worse in Syria, but the situation is worse in Türkiye.”

All the interviewees commented on the high level of racism towards Middle Easterners, specifically towards Syrians in Türkiye. I-4 stated that a taxi driver once told him how much he wanted to murder Syrian immigrants. I-6 and I-7 shared that they both feel lucky enough because of the reverse discrimination of Turkish society towards white-skinned Western people, as they have also witnessed how they treated people from the Middle East. Similarly, I-7 finds racism towards her considerably manageable when she compares it to Turkish society’s attitude towards Arab people. However, according to I-3 and I-5, society welcomed them when they arrived. The situation worsened throughout the years as a result of the rising Syrian immigrant population and recession in the economy, which also triggered hatred towards the Arab population in general. I-3 explained how it was difficult for them to find a house and a job because of their name, despite having Turkish citizenship. They shared about the racist attitude of employers towards them and said that they were creating problems so as not to give them the job. I-5 was also a child laborer and abused by his employer.

I-4 also experienced racism in the work environment, but it was not coming from his employer. He had to deal with the racist attitudes of the parents of his students. He explained that parents were uncomfortable with the fact that their children’s teacher was black. Some of the parents tried to change their children’s classrooms. In one incident, a parent assaulted him and said, “go back to your own country, you dirty *zenci*,” which is an offensive slang used for black people in Türkiye. Having all family members being doctors and interns, he also shared their hardships in the hospital. For instance, a patient who broke his sister’s nose said that they were afraid of getting infected because of her. In

another incident, a patient caused trouble after seeing that a black doctor was going to perform surgery. I-4 also mentioned that someone spat at his face and told him to turn back to his country. One time, he had to deal with an older person who assaulted him on the bus, stating that he was occupying their space in their own country. He said, “if you have a light skin color, you are considerably lucky. The darker your skin color, the more hatred you are subjected to.” In parallel to that statement, I-3 also complained about the difference in their Western friends’ experiences. They said that they were smoothly finding houses, most of the time they did not have to work at a job, and people were willing to be friends or date them. They stated that “the problems that white foreign students face are not the same as us [people of color (POC)].”

While interviewees viewed university campuses as the safest places, it does not protect them from racism. For instance, the racism I-3 faced in one of Ankara’s most progressive universities and neighborhoods upset them. I-7 also stated that “Turkish society is racist as even progressive people are confusing racism with loving your country.” Meanwhile, I-5 was teased by his professors with racist questions as his professor referred to him as Afghan, even though he knows he is from Syria, and I-2 was discriminated against by one of his classmates in a group project because of his ethnicity. I-7 also talked about how it was challenging to make new friends due to a lack of English-speaking events, which is a common problem for interviewees studying at a university. I asked interviewees if they are participating in any of the activities of an international community or school club. However, those who were in the undergrad program stated that they do not feel comfortable in those events, either because of homophobia or the discrimination towards Middle Easterners. In I-1’s experience, Turkish people prefer to hang out with other Turkish students, which downsizes their social circle.

While housing, job search, and social life are challenging for POC interviewees, white and Western interviewees have also experienced similar problems. I-6 talked about the issue he had with the police officers as they came to his house daily for a long time to ensure he had not committed any fraud regarding his residency. He claimed that the government is making moving to Türkiye difficult “even for Europeans.” In his social life, he said he was lucky to have a boyfriend who showed around and introduced I-6 to his circle. I-8 also could not find a house for a long time, but in her situation, her trans identity also complicates her experience. Similar to POC interviewees, I-6 and I-8 were fetishized because of their skin color. I-8 had also had a hard time finding a social circle. She did not want to socialize with her Russian identity, so she stayed away from immigrant communities for a while. I-6 was also not an active member of any immigrant community, and his international friends were also leaving Türkiye.

4.3. Queer Experience in Türkiye

When it comes to interviewees’ experience of being queer in Türkiye, they mostly agreed that the life of queer people was better than they had expected. Their perception on queer movement and rights changed positively when they first arrived. For instance, coming out just before moving to Türkiye from Germany, I-6 was also expecting a much challenging environment for queer community. At the same time, he was also aware that being gay is not a crime in Türkiye. However, he was shocked to see that people were intimate with each other out in public, only to find out later that it was because of the high-contact nature of Turkish culture, not because they were queer.

Originally from Pakistan, both interviewees I-1 and I-2 were not expecting any difference in the case of queer activism when they first arrived in Türkiye, yet, they were a bit shocked yet pleasantly surprised to see openly queer individuals and pride marches, as I-1 stated and added, “I was pleasantly surprised because it was a lot better than I expected.”

This experience encouraged I-1 and made him feel braver. In his experience, people in Ankara are not bothered by his sexual and gender expression in public, as he was never harassed in Türkiye. I-2 agreed with I-1 and added that he felt transformed since he started his life in Türkiye. For instance, he could shave his legs and wear makeup in public. I-1 added that one of the reasons for him to pursue a university education abroad was the lack of freedom of expression he felt in Pakistan.

Similarly, I-4 talked about the challenges of being a queer individual in Somalia compared to Türkiye. He stressed the hardships the trans and queer community in Somalia faced in everyday life and spoke about the risk of murder. He stated that queer movement in Türkiye is one of the most impressive and resilient one compared to other countries. For instance, I-8 had a positive perception about queer rights in Türkiye as gender-affirming surgery is legal. She knew that she would be able to express her gender identity freely, as the fact that she ran away from Russia because of Russia's oppressive laws against the LGBTQ+ community, which got worse throughout the years. I-5 ideas were also consistent with the previous interviewees, as he shared that Türkiye is a safest place for queer community in the Middle East, even though he could not recall the situation of queer movement in Syria before the war. Another comparison was made by I-7, as she talked about the difficulties queer people faced in Morocco where any same-sex activity is punished by imprisonment. She described how she could hold hands with her girlfriend and even kiss in public when she first arrived in Türkiye.

According to I-4, even if the government and society have a negative perception towards queer movement in Türkiye, the public discourse about queerness is an achievement for queer rights and visibility. I-5 was also sharing that "after witnessing the Turkish queer life, I wanted to be back in Syria and have the same experience. I wish there were a safe queer circle in Syria, and I was able to live like this there." I-3's grandmother even

noticed the queer movement in Türkiye. Before moving to Türkiye, I-3's grandmother opposed this decision because of a post she saw on social media captioned as "infidel homosexuals in Türkiye" that showed a pride parade in Türkiye. I-3 was also told that after adjusting to the country after several obstacles, they felt the need to question their sexual and gender identities after they saw two friends, one trans and the other queer, walking in the Taksim Square. It was an event that changed their perspective on their life in Türkiye.

Similarly, I-6 also stated that being queer is easier in Istanbul as it is a vibrant city where everyone could find a place for themselves. According to him, the trans community especially has an undeniable impact in the city as they are visible even if society has negative opinions about them. Nevertheless, there was a common judgment on the fact that queer identities can be expressed predominantly in safe spaces in Türkiye.

4.4. Conditionally Feeling Safe

I-6 emphasized the importance of having someone who would show the safe spaces when moving to a new country. It was his boyfriend that introduced him to the queer spaces in Istanbul. Even though he apprehended Istanbul a city where being openly queer is considerably acceptable, one of the reasons he felt safe was his straight-passing look according to him along with being white. I-8 also expressed similar points and stated that because of her white ethnicity, she faced fewer problems in Türkiye, compared to Arab immigrants. She also stated that she created a life where she could feel safer because she found her community in Istanbul. I-2 also felt more comfortable in Istanbul in terms of expressing his sexual orientation in public.

On the other hand, I-6 observed that the lives of queer people in Türkiye get more difficult each year as he stated that queer people are made the black sheep and blamed for every

problem. The hate that is targeted towards queer community in Türkiye creates a problem for them in every aspect of daily life. For instance, this situation affects the employment and the work environment of them. I-4 said that he was paying attention not to let anyone know his sexual orientation at school but parents noticed a rainbow flag badge on his bag and assaulted him by claiming that he ‘turned’ their children gay. I-6 also said that he had to hide his sexual orientation when he was working as a tutor in a university. Indeed, he hid it several times in order to find a proper job. Unlike others, I-8 had to be a sex worker as her trans identity created an issue before she could find a convenient job for herself.

Another observation I-6 shared was the lack of queer spaces in Istanbul, which was narrowed compared to 2016, when he first moved to Türkiye. The narrowing down of safe spaces in Ankara was also observed by I-7. She mentioned that queer spaces are decreasing throughout the years and added that there were more queer parties and queer pubs in the city before. This situation was also noticeable with other interviewees who live in Ankara. For instance, I-4 preferred to take off his rainbow pin in Keçiören while he felt more comfortable in Çankaya. This district is known as the stronghold of the main opposition party, the Republican People’s Party (CHP). In I-2’s experience, he decided not to wear nail polish while using public transportation as he felt other people’s eyes on him. I-7 also explained that queer romantic partners cannot be visible even in more open-minded districts of Ankara, such as Çankaya. However, interviewees who were still university students mentioned that campuses are the safest places for them. In fact, I-2 noted that he decided to wear makeup and nail polish only on campus.

Another similar comment was made by I-3. For them, it was not easy to adapt and socialize in their first years in Istanbul, Türkiye. Once a social and friendly person, they became introverted and reserved. Their only high school friend also ended their relationship after he posted a rainbow flag on their social media. The community their

family were engaged with also did not help them feel comfortable because they were quite religious, as I-3 stated. With the eye-opening experience at Taksim Square, they studied harder and were accepted to a university in Ankara, where they could express their queer identity openly. They especially feel safe about expressing their sexual identity on the university campus and in some of the neighborhoods of Çankaya. They stated that the campus is very pro-immigrant and queer-friendly. Even so, interviewees faced discrimination from the international community both on and off campus.

I-1 and I-2 both faced discrimination from cis-heterosexual Pakistani students in the university. For instance, I-1's roommate misgendered him and used his deadname on purpose. Pakistani students also gossiped about I-2's sexual orientation at a party. These people actively attend the university's international students' club, so I-1 and I-2 prefer not to be part of the club. They also isolate themselves from the Pakistani community on campus. Similarly, the experiences of I-3 were quite similar to those of I-1 and I-2, even though they were in different universities. According to I-3, people in the international students' club are highly homophobic. In fact, Islamic fundamentalist international students assaulted I-3 while hanging queer pride march posters. Some students even outed I-3 to their family, which caused I-3's family to cut all ties with them, which I-3 sees as a common practice among immigrant communities. All three of the interviewees stated that they prefer to participate in activities of queer student clubs. When it comes to the events organized by NGOs, I-5 shared that he prefers to hide his sexual orientation in these events and act accordingly to the ideologies of the NGOs. Nevertheless, he likes to advocate for queer rights in the discussion sessions.

4.5. Queer and Immigrant Experience

Some of the incidents that interviewees experienced were intersecting with both being queer and immigrant. As they also answered that their queer and immigrant identities had

an impact on each other, it was impossible to look through these events from one aspect. The indicator of such issues was visible when they discriminated against because of their queer identity in the immigrant community and vice versa.

I-3 stated that it is almost impossible for a queer immigrant individual to find a place within the immigrant community. In their experiences, the anti-LGBTQ+ attitude in the community alienates the queer immigrants and complicates their experiences. Considering the international students' clubs at universities, the fact that interviewees do not feel welcomed at their events and their decision not to participate in their activities creates evidence for the point made by I-3. There were similar examples from other interviewees as well. The decision of I-1 and I-2 to isolate themselves from the Pakistani community in the university, the assault of Islamic fundamentalist students, the forcefully coming out queer immigrant individuals to their parents in immigrant community, denying I-4's service because of his sexual orientation, or the fact that I-5 feel the need of hiding his sexual orientation when he is around other immigrants are examples of the problems of queer immigrant intersection identity from one perspective.

On the other hand, interviewees were dealing with discrimination within the queer community as well. They give mixed answers to the question I asked about whether they feel more comfortable in queer community. For instance, while I-7 and I-8 stated that they are grateful for queer and trans community to support them, they also believe that queer community in Türkiye is also racist and anti-immigrant. Almost all the interviews stated that queer community is still a part of Turkish society, thus they contain racist sentiments. In another example, I-4 stated that he does not feel belonged to queer community as he faced and witnessed racism and anti-immigration comments within the community. In one of his examples, someone tried to touch his hair and skin. When he confronted them by saying it was racism, they claimed that they could not be racist because they were queer.

In another case, a person in queer community asked him if those who are *zenci* could be queer. His nationality and ethnicity was also constantly questioned in the queer community. This was indeed a problem for all participants. According to them, these kinds of questions are rude and have racist connotations most of the time. Interviewees mostly encounter intersecting discrimination on dating apps, considering that those platforms help them to interact with more people.

4.5.1. Dating Apps Trouble

While dating apps help them to socialize and create new connections for the interviewees, they also have to deal with racism and discrimination on digital platforms. The racism they faced was sometimes direct and took place as an exclusionary behaviour. For instance, I-5 explained that when people learn that he is from Syria, they respond to him by saying that they wish to know that before they start talking. He said that those people are fascists. I-1 shared that people were shocked when they met with a Pakistani gay person and told him that they did not know that Pakistani people could be gay. They initially stop talking after learning about the country's origin. He said, "I am from Pakistan, but don't hold it against me. I also escaped there to express myself freely." I-2 and I-5 prefer not to answer questions about their origin. I-3 also stated that changing their name to Turkish helped them match with many people.

However, sometimes, this racism took place as fetishizing. I-4 stated that people comment a lot about his skin color. For instance, people tell him that they admire his chocolate-like skin color, which is another way of racism. I-4 explained that people made these comments to flirt with him, which is disturbing for him. I-5 also said that there is always someone who will fetishize his immigrant identity if there are no fascists left on these apps. I-3 stated that their Western friends are more popular than other immigrant groups. I-6's statement on how his European identity helps him meet with many people on dating

apps strengthens this point. I-8 also noticed that people are fetishizing her white skin color. As they face different types of racism on dating apps, they develop tactics accordingly. For instance, they deliberately stress their race and ethnicity even if they could easily pass as Turkish. They do this to get to know the person they are dating and decide on their political views and opinions on immigrants. This is eventually narrowing down their dating pool, which is already narrow enough for immigrants, as I-7 said.

There was also common discomfort among some of the interviewees about the attitude of the Turkish people toward dating apps. I-6 stated that gay people treat everyone like a piece of trash. He complained about the rudeness that is cliché in the gay dating culture. He also felt like prey in the eyes of these people. Likewise, I-7 and I-8 stated that they feel like they are hunted by men on these platforms. I-8 said that hormone therapy was an eye-opening experience in that terms as this prey-hunt dynamic was undeniable when she started to socialize as a woman, while dating as a trans individual brings its own problems.

Finally, language knowledge emerged as another theme in dating. For all interviewees, communicating in English becomes problematic for the other person. I-8 stated that being incapable of expressing herself in a language she feels comfortable with restrains her expression of her sexual identity. People usually ask them if they can speak Turkish. This is why I-6 prefers to speak Turkish on dating apps now. He said it also helped him feel less like prey since then. This way, he maintains open and transparent communication with the Turkish people. On the other hand, in I-8's experience, people are shocked by the fact that he is fluent in Turkish and end the conversation to look for someone they can practice their English with, even though he is also fluent in English.

4.6. Turkish as a Tool of Survival

There was a consensus among interviewees that grasp of the Turkish language and conversational fluency is an essential need for living in Türkiye. It is even seen as an essential survival tool for most of them. I-3 stated that it is almost impossible for immigrants to live a proper life unless they learn to speak Turkish. Both I-3 and I-4 stated that this will ease every immigrant's living conditions. Indeed, I-6 stated that he learned Turkish as he wanted a proper life in Türkiye. According to him, it enables him to create healthy boundaries with people. Similarly, I-4 said he could understand easily if someone is being racist or not in public. Most importantly, he stated that being able to speak Turkish helps make friends and find romantic partners. The statement made by I-5 supports this point as he explained that he thoroughly comprehends the environment and society he lives in and expresses himself clearly thanks to his Turkish skills. Sharing a similar opinion, I-3 additionally said that it increases their sense of belonging. I-3, I-5, and I-7 shared that the language barrier they faced in their first years affected their mental state.

Language also plays an important part in employment. For instance, I-3 and I-4 could find side jobs because they are multilingual. As I-4 is fluent in Turkish, he gave Turkish lessons to immigrants. He also helped those who needed translation within the immigrant community. He once flew to Istanbul to be a translator for a Palestinian patient. I-3 also participated as a translator in the Istanbul Pride committee. These participants use their language knowledge to help others, create solidarity among (queer) immigrant communities and earn a living. The lack of Turkish knowledge also causes isolation for those who cannot speak the language. I-8 shared her issue in the work environment due to a language barrier. She stated that she feels isolated and outcast when other models speak Turkish among themselves. Her Turkish skills are not enough to carry out long and

complex conversations. However, she stated that she speaks Turkish in daily interactions to protect herself from the negative attitudes of Turkish society towards immigrants.

I also found it beneficial to uncover the similarities and differences of participants from the same country. For instance, I-3 and I-5 had different experiences with the officials in the migration center. I-3 stated they had difficulty communicating with the officials as no one speaks Arabic. They were signing papers they did not understand. According to I-3, the attitude of the officials was disturbing. I-3 also stated that immigrants were helping each other with translation. On the contrary, I-5 faced no challenge with the officials as they were emphatic and could speak Arabic. There were also translators in the center to help them. This difference was the result of the way of entering the country. As I-5 and his family were under temporary protection in Türkiye, there were different procedures for them. On the other hand, I-3 got residency permits because of their father's Turkish ID. I-5 also stated that the government was offering Turkish classes through NGOs for those who were under temporary protection. I-3 also mentioned this opportunity and added that they could not benefit from it because of their citizenship status. They had to learn Turkish by themselves, which was challenging considering they also had problems at school.

I-3 talked about how their self-confidence was destroyed as the language barrier disrupted their school success. Their teachers let them write the exam answers in Arabic and then translate them for grading. As I mentioned before, they had trouble making new friends because of the language barrier and racism. I-5 was also having trouble due to similar reasons in the work environment. The first years of I-5 were very challenging, considering that he worked several hours as a child laborer. He even talked about the physical abuse he faced in the work environment. According to him, one of the reasons he could not

protect himself was that he did not speak Turkish, as he did not know what to say to oppose the abuse and oppression.

Another similarity was about discovering their sexual orientations. They questioned their sexual orientations after they felt secure enough in Türkiye. As I explained before, I-3 could reflect on their sexuality when they started learning Turkish and were able to explore Istanbul on their own. Meanwhile, I-5 did not speak Turkish when he first questioned his sexuality and demanded psychological support from an EU-funded NGO. They helped him to understand himself and discover this new self-identity, as he had originally and traditionally thought it was a sickness or perversion. He explained that because of homophobic environment in the immigrant community and racism in the queer community, it was challenging to accept himself. He stated that he could speak Turkish when he accepted himself, which positively impacted this process.

Nonetheless, the necessity of learning Turkish differs significantly for the interviewees who arrived in Türkiye as international students. I-1 and I-2 spent most of their time on campus, and they plan to move to Europe or the USA after graduation. They mostly use English to socialize. The only language barrier they had to deal with was when they attended the events of the students' clubs. They complain that the language used for events that are held on campus is Turkish most of the time. When they announced the event would be in English, everyone eventually returned to speaking Turkish. I-7 was also critical of the lack of events held in English on the university campus. The only English events are organized by the English Speaking club of the university, which she found meaningless to attend as she is already fluent in English. She also stated that even the courses that should be given in English were taught in Turkish, even after she shared her discomfort with the instructors. However, as she plans to move back to Morocco after

graduation, she does not feel the need to learn Turkish. She also mentioned that the phonology and morphology of Turkish complexes affected the learning process for her.

While all the participants acknowledge that immigrants need to be able to speak Turkish, they were also disturbed by the fact that it is almost an obligation. This obligation is seen as assimilation for some of them. I-7 stated that the lack of English in everyday life (such as in government-level information forms, movie theatres, billboards, banners, and social events) forces immigrants to learn Turkish. According to I-3, for queer immigrants, the situation is inevitable. As I-3 stated, queer immigrants have to learn Turkish because of the discrimination within the immigrant community. The only place they can be is the queer community in Türkiye. The other participants did not directly state that it was an assimilation, but they implied that. For instance, I-6 said that (queer) immigrants have to ‘adapt’ to society by learning Turkish, which will be beneficial for them. I-8 was saying that she tried to get through by not learning advanced Turkish, which is impossible for (queer) immigrants if they cannot find a stable source of income. Meanwhile, international students I-1 and I-2, the only two participants with no relatives in Türkiye, no intention to stay there, and no prior knowledge about Türkiye, did not comment about it. They find it adequate to state their problems due to the language barrier.

These comments show different stances of the participants towards the nationalistic language ideology of Türkiye. As I-3 and I-7 see the language learning process as an assimilation, they also acknowledged that this is the only way of establishing yourself and having a life in Türkiye. I-7’s stance on this issue reflects her decision to learn the language. Similarly, I-8 took a stance by deliberately refusing to speak Turkish or advance the language skills in I-8’s case.

Finally, some of the participants were using Lubunca during the interviews. When I asked about their knowledge of the style, I-8 stated that her trans friends taught her a few words

and sentences with the background of the style. She said that she enjoys exchanging with them in their interactions, as she explained. I-4 said that he is not able to speak fluently, however he said that it is ‘güllüm’ to use Lubunca with other queer people especially with those he met in queer parties. He said that it was inevitable for him to learn about Lubunca as a queer person in Türkiye. I-6 was also aware of Lubunca but said he cannot use it frequently, unlike his friends. He said he hardly understands if someone speaks Lubunca as his knowledge is limited to popular words and sentence structures. I-3 was the only one who could use the style frequently in their everyday life. They said that Lubunca is practical and fun at the same time and gives the sense that they are part of a community.

4.7. Scrollback Interviews and Activism

When I asked the interviewees if they consider themselves activists, they were all reluctant to attribute themselves this title, except I-3, who was a member of a left-wing party for a while. They prefer to continue their activities under university clubs now. The first protest they attended was against the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. Since then, they have been active in a university’s LGBTQ+ committee. Most of their activities are related to their queer identity. As they stated, “The burden left to immigrants is heavier when you are also queer.” This is why they do not consider themselves within any immigrant-related activism and also makes them sentimental towards other queer immigrant people who are afraid of being part of any protests. The other interviewees were also stating the fact that it is almost impossible for queer immigrants to be part of any social/political movement as there is a risk of being deported.

However, I-3 claimed that their existence could be considered as queer immigrant activism as they share stories about the Levant region (it is a historical term that refers to the area that covers eastern Mediterranean coasts) and explain the Syrian war to raise awareness among queer community. They said “I don’t want anyone to go through what

I've gone through [...] I walked on the front row on marches and was beaten by police officers," which is something they could engage in without the risk of deportation unlike most of the queer immigrants. They showed their first press statement in Turkish on behalf of the Pride Parade in Ankara as a part of their activism, which they were proud of. Their Instagram archive was full of posts about violation of queer rights in Türkiye. They had posted about Palestine and Syria as well. They have posted calls for solidarity for other queer individuals as they were looking for rentals, roommates, jobs, financial aid for gender affirmation surgeries and any other issues that queer community could support.

It was common among the interviewees to post the calls for solidarity on social media. I asked them if they consider these posts as a way of activism. They were unsure about it, but they said it could be considered so. What they were sure with no doubt is that the posts they shared to raise awareness for Palestine and queer and immigrant rights are part of activism. The interviewees also posted the global and local news about violation of queer and immigrant rights which they consider as a way of raising awareness. Nonetheless, posting on social media will hardly make anyone an activist, as the interviewees suggested.

While they were cynical about the effectiveness of social media activism, I-8 said that she took it seriously. She stated, "In my country, people are sentenced to prison because of their social media posts. So, I believe being vocal on social media is also important." She was terrified that some of her trans women friends were arrested because of their social media posts in Türkiye. This is why she tries to be subtle while posting anything on social media, as her biggest fear is being deported. She said that she prefers to help other trans-women and reach out to them in every way possible. Supporting and raising awareness in their social circle is also favorable among other interviewees. They all agreed that if they want to transform society, they should first focus on their circle. Still, the risk of being

deported was a high concern among them. As I-3 suggested, queer immigrants should not be participating in any political events until having citizenship. They were waiting for support and solidarity from Turkish society to push the government to act on pro-immigrant rights, while they expect more from NGOs.

At the end of the scroll back interview, I asked if I could add some of their posts to my thesis anonymously, and they told me they would send some of the posts after they go through their archive. However, none of them sent any of the posts. Considering that they were already hesitant to go through their archive during the interview, it was unsurprising and quite expected. I did not follow through as I did not want to come off as disrespectful of their privacy or too pushy.

4.8. Expectations from NGOs

The last section of the interview focused on their relationship and expectations of NGOs. I asked the interviewees if they had ever attended an NGO event or if they had taken part in the organization. I-1, I-2, and I-8 had limited knowledge of the operations of NGOs in Türkiye. I-3 did not work or participate in the events of NGOs, but they had witnessed their missions indirectly. On the other hand, I-5 and I-7 have contacted several NGOs since they arrived here. I-4 voluntarily worked in some of the operations of NGOs. I-6, on the other hand, has a work history in several NGOs.

I-7 stated that she had great experience with NGOs in Türkiye. However, as the government shut some of them down, her connection with them was eventually weakened. She stated that well-known NGOs are not paying to queer immigrants in her experience. As NGOs are faced with government obstacles, I-5 prefers to contact the ones that the UN funds because of their trustworthiness. Even though he hides his sexual orientation in events of these NGOs, he would choose to get in touch with someone from an NGO rather

than calling the police in case of an emergency. I-3 and I-7 also suggested that as the government oppresses queer-led NGOs, other NGOs should focus on the well-being of the queer population.

I-3 stressed the need for secular NGOs that will contact immigrants. They were uncomfortable with the fact that only the religious NGOs were helping the immigrants when they first arrived. They even stated that their family became more religious and conservative throughout the years as the family mainly socialized with the network of the NGO. I-7 also shared her experience with religious NGOs and said that she had to take off her nose piercing before their meeting. She said that they asked her to dye her hair to its original color or else they would not provide support. She said, “They are not helping you if you are not aligning with their ideologies.” Likewise, I-3 also told of their friend’s incident with a religious NGO and stated that they withdrew support because of the sexual orientation of the friend. They shared their disappointment with NGOs working with immigrants and said they should work efficiently. As someone who has worked in NGOs, I-6 believes NGOs are not doing proper work in Türkiye. He says the lack of cooperation with NGOs is a critical issue.

Another issue that I-6 discussed was the lack of connection of NGOs with queer community. He said that they are reluctant to work with them or tend to dismiss them, even if they organize workshops and programs specifically for the community. The most critical issue for queer community, creating and expanding safe spaces, still stays as an overlooked topic on the agenda of NGOs as I-6 claimed. He stated that NGOs give way to oppression of the government towards queer people but he said there are many queer individuals which cannot be ignored ultimately. He believes that society could be more accepting towards queer individuals contrary to the general judgment. He explained that the attitude of the government creates a complex relationship between NGOs and the

queer community. He suggests that finding a Turkish way to operate will benefit NGOs and Turkish society in the long run.

I-3 made another suggestion for queer-led NGOs. They explained that it is almost impossible for queer immigrants to make their voices heard within their immigrant communities and also within immigrant-related-NGOs. I-3 recommended queer-led NGOs to create safe spaces for queer immigrants where they can organize and discuss their problems. They made a point by stating that immigrants' need for secular and queer-led NGOs, especially when they first arrived in the country, as the first few months are the most challenging times in their experience. Demand for safe spaces to socialize and exchange experiences was also discussed during the interview with I-8. She additionally demanded workshops and projects that would be held during the day to help them adapt to everyday life.

One of the most recurring demands among interviewees was workshops on legal rights of (queer) immigrants. Most interviewees feared being deported, affecting their participation in political/social movements and raising their voices for their issues. For instance, I-8 stated that she felt like being held in a cage because of her lack of knowledge of legal rights. In another example, I-5 stated that his limited knowledge of the judicial system in Türkiye reduces his trust in law and enforcement. Participants gave examples from deported immigrants, whether they are acquainted with or heard about, and explained that some of them were deported without giving any reason. Interviewees are afraid that if they are organized and demand legal rights, they will be at risk of being deported.

Along with legal rights, they also feel the need of workshops on rights to health, finding pro-immigrant and queer friendly doctors, guidance for job search and house hunting. They have also claimed that NGOs should lean on the accessibility of education for underage immigrants. I-8 hoped that NGOs would also focus on preventing trans

individuals from being pushed into sex work. These demands they have mentioned during the interview are mostly related to the language barriers in Türkiye.

Language barrier is one of the most predominant problems for interviewees, and they have reflected on the obligation of learning Turkish and its advantage for (queer) immigrants as I have pointed out previously,. While discussing their expectations of NGOs, they also include their need for language classes. They expect NGOs, as well as the government, to promote language classes that are accessible to every immigrant regardless of their situation. Beside the Turkish classes, they also hope to access media that is provided with English, and as well as centers that provide vital information for (queer) immigrants in English. They mentioned that even those working in NGOs have limited English skills, which creates a problem getting in touch with them. I-6 also stated that NGOs rarely created content in English, which troubled the process of reaching out to the immigrants.

As I conducted interviews with students and those in university circles, they were concerned about the financial needs of international students. Interviewees stated that in Türkiye, there is an assumption that international students are wealthy enough to live here. They shared their concerns about the students who escaped from their country or were not supported by their families, which creates a problem when we consider that there is a registration fee for international students. They expect NGOs to help them adjust to society, assist them with legal issues, and create accessible scholarships. Finally, besides the support of NGOs, they declared their need for Turkish society to move towards pro-immigrant policies and demand equal rights for them.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

5.1. Queer Immigrant Identity in Türkiye

Before arriving in Türkiye, interviewees had either a positive perception of Türkiye or had experienced positive experiences in their first years. Over time, this positive outcome declined as the welcoming attitude towards immigrants deteriorated. While interviewees had to deal with racism, they were also discriminated against because of their sexual and gender identities simultaneously, which creates stress, considering that they had problems during the integration process due to language barriers and cultural differences.

Interviewees stated that these circumstances led them to mental problems on top of that. Depression and stress they had in the migration process show parallelism with the literature as it suggests that negative attitude of the host society leads to mental health problems as well as makes them lose their self-identity (Burke et al., 2014; Wehrl et al., 2018; Podgornik et al., 2020). For instance, the fact that I-5 discovered his Kurdish identity because of war and led him to question his identity supports these findings. The confusion I-2 and I-7 were having about how to express their sexual identity after

escaping from an oppressed environment, or whether I-3's questioning their sexual identity after arriving in Türkiye can be a further example for these findings in the literature.

Similar to the studies in the literature on intersecting identity practices of immigrants (Wehrl et al., 2018; Prins et al., 2013; Cicognani et al., 2018), interviewees find different ways to navigate the challenges that arise from conservative and nationalist groups. Most of the time, they prefer to hide their sexual identity if they feel unsafe. Some of the interviewees, such as I-8 and I-5, hide their immigrant identity to blend into society or isolate themselves from the immigrant community. However, their intersecting identities lead to different ways of discrimination in Türkiye. For instance, interviewees shared that they face xenophobia in queer community which reduces their sense of belonging to the community. As Boland's (2020) study suggested, intersecting identities lead to problems with integrating into the host society, even if they are sometimes useful tools for connecting with the citizens. The negative impact of discrimination on belonging was also observed among interviewees regardless of the community they are part of, as the literature suggested. As none of the interviewees feel accepted in their home country because of their sexual and gender identities, the anti-LGBTQ+ attitude in Türkiye increases their feeling of isolation as well. However, they also agreed that queer community gives them a sense of belonging and makes them feel included even if they face racism from Turkish queer people. As immigrants feel at home if they are discriminated less and they consider themselves as citizens of the host country (Bolan, 2020; Karlsen & Nazroo, 2013), the findings are aligned with the literature on the correlation between discrimination and belonging, and even some of them consider themselves from Türkiye. For instance, I-3 and I-5 stated they feel comfortable

considering themselves from Türkiye ('Türkiyeli,' in I-3's case). However, no significant findings were found based on other interviews.

As the survival aspect of learning the dominant language for immigrants was suggested (Kalocsányiová, 2018), the findings were aligned with the literature and revealed that interviewees agreed on the necessity of learning the Turkish language as it will help them to socialize or find proper jobs. Even so, some of the interviewees (such as I-1, I-2, I-7, and I-8) did not consider improving their Turkish skills. This is because of a reaction to the host society's approach to immigrants and the country's language ideology, as they prefer to speak English, which they see as a global language. Their attitude was similar to that of the participants in Jansen's (2023) study, as they were also reacting to monolingualism in Germany and were disturbed by low English proficiency in society. The interviewees in this research were also upset that it is challenging to communicate in English in Türkiye. Interviewees who plan to build a life in Türkiye can already communicate in Turkish and suggest that other immigrants do so if they want to continue to live here. The interviewees were positioning themselves by these language choices. Considering the Snell's (2018) definition of stance, which suggests that a speaker's use of language and other semiotic resources to position themselves and others, establish social boundaries, and assert particular knowledge, the decision of not learning Turkish but using English in daily interactions to show their discomfort with monolingualism in the country show their stances. This is also true for interviewees who improved their Turkish proficiency to increase their chances of survival in society. Besides their choices on which language they will choose, some of the interviewees use Lubunca to create solidarity and feel a sense of belonging to a community and distinguish themselves from the cis-heterosexual (immigrant) community, which is also another stancetaking practice.

To sum up, the first research question (RQ1) tried to find an answer to how migration impacts queer immigrants' identity in current socio-cultural context and the findings suggest that the migration had an impact on the identity construction, as interviewees define this process as transformative. Aligning with Kiesling's (2013) understanding of identity construction, which is a dynamic and intersubjective process, interviewees from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds showed that migration triggers an ongoing negotiation of one's identity in relation to others, whether through resistance, adaptation, or withdrawal. According to the interviewees, their queer and immigrant identities are intersecting and creating new experiences in the sociopolitical context of Türkiye. The interactional problems they faced (such as racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and legal issues) lead back to Eckert's (2008) indexical field term, as it suggests that a single variable can have multiple meanings at multiple levels. Similarly, the multiple identity categories are linked to each other contextually and ideologically. For instance, the queer migrant identity is more than being a demographic status as it also indexes certain behaviours, language use, and in some ways visible in the public. The different strategies of reflecting identities (e.g., hiding sexual orientation according to neighborhood) lead to Du Bois' (2007) stance definition as interviewees position themselves according to social norms and evaluate their surroundings to align or disalign accordingly. This also shows that the identities are intersubjective as they are interaction-bounded. For instance, interviewees explained the different ways of discrimination they have faced in queer and immigrant community, and how they create strategies according to the context. Moreover, the linguistic practices (such as learning and using Lubunca even during the interview) of the interviewees also shows the importance of linguistic style in identity construction. With Lubunca, they can practice solidarity and resistance in anti-LGBTQ+ society. Finally, The interviewees' experiences indicate that identity construction is beyond self-expression and has to be navigated through ideologies and cultural contexts.

5.2. Navigating Queer Immigrant Identity Online

Even though literature suggests that online spaces are where queer immigrants can empower themselves and socialize with their community along with host society (Bayramoğlu & Lünenborg, 2018; Aziz, 2022; Yin, 2015; Gonzales, 2017), there was lack of evidence on this research to support these suggestions. The interviewees used social media to share solidarity, support, or information about human rights violations. While these social media posts show their stancetaking strategies, the fact that they were afraid to post anything that would lead to deportation was a high concern among them. Aziz (2022) stated that immigrants can resist violence and discrimination with social media activism. However, the interviewees were even reluctant to claim the activist label. When it is discussed with the interviewees, they consider some of their posts as a part of social media activism, but this did not change their idea of defining themselves as one. However, as Yin (2015) suggested, homeland media creates collective togetherness among immigrants, which can be supported by the findings that interviewees continue to share socio-political news and recent developments in their home country.

While Bayramoğlu and Lünenborg (2018) stated that social media platforms and dating apps help queer migrants to integrate into society, the interviewees in this research mostly shared their bad experiences with them. Some shared that these apps help them socialize and find romantic partners. There was a common experience of being exposed to racism. They shared their discomfort for being fetishized by the host society, which they show as a part of racism. They also found new strategies to communicate better with the host society, such as code switching to Turkish to make them feel comfortable. They also use linguistic practices to protect themselves from uncomfortable and disturbing situations on dating apps. They use the indexicality of certain words or phrases to understand the political stance on migration and migration issues. However, because of the negative

experiences they prefer to share, such as feeling like prey, this research partially contradicts the literature that indicates a positive impact of dating apps.

In conclusion, as the second research question (RQ2) focuses on the role of social media in reflecting and negotiating queer and immigrant identities, the findings showed that interviewees prefer selective visibility on social media. They tend to hide their immigrant identities depending on the context. On the other hand, the social media posts they shared on sociopolitical issues (e.g., queer rights in Türkiye) shows that they are taking stances, as they position themselves ideologically in social context. These posts are indexing their political, social, and cultural identities. It can be stated that a single post on social media could index queer solidarity, political position, and migrant status depending on the context, which is related to Eckert's (2008) indexical field. It shows that participants are aware of the context, and they share depending on the topic they want to cover on their social media account or the audience they want to reach out to. They decide on the language and content depending on these contexts. The social media practices are then part of their identity construction. However, participants were reluctant to define themselves as activist or accept activism as a stance-taking mechanism. Additionally, the self-censorship of the interviewees on social media because of the fear of deportation also emphasizes one of the most important aspects of identity construction in Kiesling's (2013) definition, indexicality. This shows that interviewees are aware of the social norms and ideologies of the host country.

5.3. The Role of NGOs in Identity Construction Process

The findings revealed that the stance on the role of NGOs is mixed. Some participants stated that they offer financial and social support and community building. Others found them inadequate in supporting intersectional needs and creating safe spaces. In terms of NGOs that are working with immigrants, they are uncomfortable expressing their sexual

and gender identities in their circles. On the other hand, the visibility of queer-led NGOs was low among the interviewees. The need for queer immigrant NGOs became prominent during the interviews. Interviewees agreed with the fact that the oppression of the government on queer NGOs. However, they expect more from them to support the safe space that queer immigrants need in order to discuss and find solutions for the problems for themselves. As Held (2023) suggested, there is low trust in NGOs because of the intersecting discrimination they face.

In summary, the case of Türkiye shows that unlike most of the Western contexts in the literature, Türkiye's nationalist, authoritarian, conservative yet secular stance creates visibility for queerness but also make queer immigrants easy target in the current socio-political atmosphere. The experiences of queer immigrants in Türkiye indicates that identity is negotiated through belonging, exclusion, and survival. The ambivalent environment of Türkiye is also part of the identity-construction process.

Most of the participants were distant from the NGOs. There was a reaction specifically towards FBOs as they demand religious alignment to share their resources with the immigrants. The findings show a resistance to associating with such NGOs, which can be considered stancetaking. The participants' stance on NGOs mostly depends on how willing they are to support the intersecting identities of the interviewees. The need for secular and queer-led NGOs to create safe spaces to discuss their issues shows that their identity construction is relational with structures and institutions, while indicating that it is also dialogical. Failure of creating these environments for queer immigrants also disrupting the identity construction's relationality aspect. Considering that people need other individuals, institutions or in larger context to create their identity, this failure of NGOs' recognition of queer migrants as it is not recognized by so called others and their identities are interrupted. As NGOs do not take a step to deal with this issue, queer

immigrants turn to social media and peer networks to create alternative spaces to express themselves.

5.4. Study Limitations and Areas for Future Research

One limitation of the study is the sample size. Even though it was challenging to find queer participants who were willing to be part of the research, future research could try to expand the sample size by including more diverse experiences from the migrant population from different part of Türkiye. The research also leaned into university spaces, which narrowed the age range of the participants. Another limitation was the language barrier. Translation of Turkish interviewees also might lead to a loss of nuance in specific ways. As it was a sensitive topic, some participants might withhold certain details, which likely influenced what is shared. Regarding methods, focus groups can help understand how interactive group settings impact the negotiation of identity. The focus on ethnographic work from the field could also reveal interesting findings. The scrollbar interview was conducted to understand the participants' attitude towards activism. Thus, using this method to understand their everyday lives can be beneficial for future studies.

As the two participants were from different backgrounds (they were white Europeans), their experiences need to be studied thoroughly by expanding the number of participants to understand experiences of immigrants who are identified as white Europeans. It can be also useful to engage with queer migrants in the rural areas of Türkiye to understand the contextuality of identity construction thoroughly. It would be also valuable to conduct follow-up studies to understand how queer migrant identities' evolved together with the changing political atmosphere of Türkiye.

Another gap that needs to be focus is trans and sex worker migrants, as their experiences are less represented within the queer research. Lastly, understanding how queer migrants

interact with other institutions as they experience most of the challenges in places such as hospitals, government offices, and business environments.

5.5. Policy Implications

Based on what participants shared in this study, there are a few urgent matters that need attention to enhance the safety, dignity, and freedom of queer migrants in Türkiye. First, the need for secular, queer-led NGOs came up repeatedly in places that do not ask anyone to change who they are to receive help. These organizations should be politically and financially supported so they can do more than exist. Workshops on legal rights, health access, and housing, ideally in multiple languages, would give people tools to navigate a system that often feels stacked against them. It also became clear that most services remain inaccessible to people who do not speak Turkish, so language support should be expanded and not treated as a privilege but as a basic need.

At the same time, we cannot talk about support without talking about actual physical places where people can feel safe to be seen and connect. Whether it is a queer café or a campus group, those spaces matter for queer immigrants, as they are decreasing.

Universities and municipalities need to stop pretending symbolic gestures are enough and start investing in real infrastructure for queer and migrant communities. Online spaces are a lifeline for many, but they are also risky, as some participants fear being deported for what they post. Protecting digital expression and ensuring people know their rights online should also be part of this conversation. Most of all, any policy that claims to support queer migrants has to start by listening to their needs. That means acknowledging how racism, queerness, language, class, and migration all collide in people's lives, often painfully and all at once.

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APPENDICES



Appendix A. Bilkent University Ethics Committee Approval



Bilkent Üniversitesi

Akademik İşler Rektör Yardımcılığı

Tarih : 22 Mayıs 2024
Gönderilen : Mehmet Kızıklı
Danışman : Emel Özдора
Gönderen : H. Altay Güvenir
İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başkanı
Konu : "Identity ..." çalışması etik kurul onayı



Üniversitemiz İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu, 22 Mayıs 2024 tarihli görüşme sonucu, "Identity Construction of Queer Migrants in Their Host Countries and The Role of NGOs" isimli çalışmanız kapsamında yapmayı önerdiğiniz etkinlik için etik onay vermiş bulunmaktadır. Onay, ekte verilmiş olan çalışma önerisi, çalışma yürütücüleri ve bilgilendirme formu için geçerlidir.

Bu onay, yapmayı önerdiğiniz çalışmanın genel bilim etiği açısından bir değerlendirmedir. Çalışmanızda, kurumunuzun değerlendirmesi dışında kalabilen özel etik ve yasal sınırlamalara uymakla ayrıca yükümlüsünüz.

Kovid-19 salgını nedeniyle konulmuş olan kısıtlamaların yürürlükte olduğu süre içinde, tüm komite toplantıları elektronik ortamda yapılmaktadır; aşağıda isimleri bulunan Bilkent Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu Üyeleri adına bu yazıyı imzalama yetkisi kurul başkanındadır.

Etik Kurul Üyeleri:

Ünvan / İsim	Bölüm / Uzmanlık	
Prof.Dr. H. Altay Güvenir	Bilgisayar Mühendisliği	Başkan
Prof.Dr. Haldun Özaktaş	Elektrik ve Elektronik Müh.	Üye
Doç.Dr. Işık Yuluğ	Moleküler Biyoloji ve Genetik	Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Burcu Ayşen Ürgen	Psikoloji	Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi A.Barış Özbilen	Hukuk	Üye
Prof. Dr. Özgür Ulusoy	Bilgisayar Mühendisliği	Yedek Üye
Dr. Öğr. Üyesi A.Barış Özçelik	Hukuk	Yedek Üye

Kurul karar/toplantı No: 2024_05_22_01

Başvuru No: 559

Appendix B. Informed Consent Form

Mehmet Kızıklı
mehmet.kizikli@bilkent.edu.tr
Doç. Dr. Emel Özdora
emel.ozdora@bilkent.edu.tr



Bilkent University

Kuir Göçmenlerin Kendilerine Ev Sahipliği Yapan Ülkelerdeki Kimlik İnşa Süreçleri ve STK'ların Rolü

KATILIMCI BİLGİ VE ONAY FORMU

Değerli katılımcımız, Bilkent Üniversitesi İletişim ve Tasarım Bölümü'nde yürütülen bir araştırma projesi kapsamında Mehmet Kızıklı tarafından yürütülen bir araştırmaya davetlisiniz.

Bu çalışmanın amacı, kuir göçmen bireylerin, LGBTQ+ ve göçmenlere karşı önyargılı olan Türkiye'ye göç etmelerinin kimlik inşa süreçlerini nasıl etkilediğini ve STK'ların bu süreçteki rolünü anlamaktır.

Çalışma boyunca sizden yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme sorularını cevaplamanız beklenmektedir. Bu çalışma için soruları yanıtlamanız yaklaşık 1.5-2 saatinizi alacaktır.

Çalışma size doğrudan bir fayda sağlamayacak, ancak bizim kimlik inşa süreçlerinin işleyişini ve kırılgan grupların kimliklerini Türkiye gibi LGBTQ+ ve göçmen karşıtı toplumlarda nasıl yönlendirdiğini daha iyi anlamamızı sağlayacaktır. Ek olarak STK'ların kuir/göçmen gruplarla olan ilişkisini ortaya koymamıza yardımcı olacaktır.

Sonuçlar da dahil olmak üzere çalışmanın tüm yönleri gizli olacak ve sadece araştırmacılar katılımcılar hakkındaki bilgilere erişebileceklerdir. Çalışmanın sonuçları tamamen anonim bir şekilde Medya ve Görsel Çalışmalar Yüksek Lisans Programı (Bilkent Üniversitesi) tez projesi kapsamında kullanılacaktır. Tanımlanmayan veriler daha sonra yeni analiz teknikleri veya hipotezleri test etmek için tekrar kullanılabilir. Hiçbir bireysel sonuç bildirilmeyecektir. Bireysel yanıtlar, her katılımcıya benzersiz kimlik numaraları atayarak ve yanıtlarını yalnızca bu numarayla ilişkilendirerek gizli tutulacaktır. Hiçbir kişisel olarak tanımlanabilir bilgi, katılımcı yanıtlarının herhangi biriyle ilişkilendirilmeyecektir.

Araştırmaya katılım tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayalıdır. Katılmak zorunda değilsiniz ve katılmanız halinde herhangi bir sebep sunmadan ve özellikle Bilkent Üniversitesi ile olan ilişkinize karşı herhangi bir sonuçla karşılaşmadan herhangi bir zamanda araştırmadan geri çekilebilirsiniz.

Bu bilgileri okuduktan sonra araştırmacıya dilediğiniz soruları yöneltebilirsiniz. Bu araştırma ile ilgili herhangi bir şikayetiniz veya çekinceniz varsa, araştırmacı Mehmet Kızıklı ile mehmet.kizikli@bilkent.edu.tr mail adresinden veya araştırma sorumlusu Doç. Dr. Emel Özdora ile emel.ozdora@bilkent.edu.tr adresinden e-posta ile iletişime geçebilirsiniz.

Dile getirdiğiniz tüm sorunlar gizlilik içinde ele alınacak, eksiksiz bir şekilde araştırılacak ve sonuçtan size bilgi verilecektir.

Lütfen herhangi bir nedenle, verilerinizin çalışmaya dahil edilmemesini isterseniz, araştırmacılara hemen bildiriniz.

Bu bilgi ve onay formunun bir kopyası, saklamanız için size verilecektir. Bu araştırmanın etik olarak yürütülmesine ilişkin herhangi bir endişeniz varsa etik@bilkent.edu.tr adresinden Bilkent Üniversitesi Etik Kurulu ile iletişime geçebilirsiniz.

~~~~~  
*Kuir Göçmenlerin Kendilerine Ev Sahipliği Yapan Ülkelerdeki Kimlik İnşa Süreçleri ve STK'ların Rolü* isimli çalışmaya katılmamın istenmesi üzerine bu formu imzalayarak rıza gösteriyorum. Şunları kabul ediyorum:

1. Araştırma projesi yukarıda açıklandığı gibi gerçekleştirilecektir. Tarafıma sağlanan bilgileri okudum ve anladım. Projeye bilgi ve katılım sürecimi araştırmacı ile tartışma fırsatım oldu.
2. Katılımım gizlidir ve çalışma sırasında kazanılan bilgiler yayınlanabilir, ancak kimliğimi ortaya çıkaran hiçbir kişisel bilgi kullanılmayacaktır.
3. Katılımım rızam doğrultusunda gerçekleşecektir. Bilkent Üniversitesi ile olan ilişkiyi etkilemeden herhangi bir zamanda çalışmadan çekilebilirim. Rızamın geri çekilmesi için bir sebep sunmak zorunda değilim.
4. 18 yaşın üzerindeyim ve şu anda Doç. Dr. Emel Özdora'dan herhangi bir ders almıyorum.

İmza: .....

İsim: .....

Tarih: .....

## Appendix C. Interview Questions

### Warmup Questions and Basic Information:

1. Age
2. Sexual identity
3. Gender identity
4. Religion
5. Education (highest achieved)
6. Relationship status
7. Country of origin
8. Years lived in Türkiye and cities you have lived in there
9. Why did you prefer to immigrate to Türkiye?
10. Did you live in any other country before you immigrated to Türkiye?
11. How do you perceive LGBTQ+/queer rights and immigrant rights in your homeland?
12. How did you perceive LGBTQ+/queer rights and immigrant rights before you came to Türkiye and after you came to Türkiye? (Both the government's and society's perspective on these issues)

### Open-Ended Questions on Identity:

13. How was the immigration process?
14. How was your experience of living in Türkiye as a queer migrant?
15. Do you feel that you can express your sexual identity freely in Türkiye?
16. How do you identify yourself mainly? ("Who are you?" "what makes you **you**?" )
  - a. Can you elaborate on the impact of your sexual identity and/or migrant identity on your identity construction?
17. When you think about your queer and migrant identity, do you think that they have an impact on each other? If so, how?
18. In what situations do you prefer to stress/express your queerness/migrant identity?  
Can you elaborate on your answer?
19. Do you think that after the immigration, how you identify yourself has changed?
20. Have you ever felt excluded or discriminated against because of your migrant/queer identity?
21. Are you active in a migrant/queer community of Türkiye/Ankara/İstanbul/etc.?

- a. Do you think the attitude of these communities towards sexual minorities and migrants is different from the rest of Türkiye?

22. Does religion have any effect on your identity?

Open-ended Questions on NGOs:

23. Do you consider yourself as an activist? If so;
- a. Can you talk about your activism? (When did you first engage in activism, how often are you involved, what kind of activism it is, what encouraged you to be an activist, etc.)
  - b. Do you think your contribution has an impact? If so, how?
24. Have you ever connected to NGOs (before/during/after the migration) or attended any NGOs' activities/programs in Türkiye?
- a. Do NGOs cooperate with queer migrants in Türkiye?
25. What opportunities and obstacles do you see in queer migrant activism/movement in Türkiye?
26. With regards to everything addressed and didn't in the interview, in your opinion, what (e.g., services, programs, policy) would help queer immigrants transition better into Türkiye after settlement socially? Aside from the legal help regarding the immigration process for queer immigrants, what are some of the needs that should be addressed by services in order to help them adjust socially to Türkiye? (Adapted from Choubak, 2014)