



**UNIVERSITY OF SARAJEVO**

**FACULTY OF POLITICAL SCIENCES**

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY**

**CHALLENGING NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE IMPACT OF SYRIAN  
IMMIGRATION ON CONCEPTIONS OF TURKISHNESS IN  
CONTEMPORARY TURKIYE**

**- Master thesis -**

**Candidate**

**Almedina Mehić**

**Index number: 1164/II-PIR**

**Mentor**

**prof. dr. Amer Osmić**

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## Table of Contents

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	5
INTRODUCTION .....	1
METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK.....	4
<b>1.1</b> RESEARCH TOPIC .....	4
2.1    RESEARCH QUESTION.....	5
3.1    RESEARCH OBJECTIVES .....	5
4.1    HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION .....	6
5.1    RESEARCH METHODS AND TECHNIQUES .....	7
CHAPTER 1 .....	8
THEORETICAL APPROACH.....	8
1.1    National Identity .....	8
1.2    The Impact of Immigration on National Identity.....	14
1.3    Perception of Threat.....	17
CHAPTER 2 .....	22
TURKISHNESS .....	22
<b>2.1</b> <b>Islamists and Secularists Ideologies</b> .....	24
2.2    Kemalist ideology .....	25
2.3    Turks in Germany .....	29
2.4    Social Cohesion with Syrians .....	30
CHAPTER 3 .....	33
HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS .....	33
ARAB-TURKISH RELATIONS: HISTORICAL NARRATIVES .....	33
3.1    “The Terrible Turk” Narrative .....	34
3.2    “Back-stabbed” Narrative .....	35
CHAPTER 4 .....	36
HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS .....	36
CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS SIMILARITIES .....	36

4.1	Religion.....	36
4.2	Culture.....	37
CHAPTER 5 .....		41
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYRIANS IN TURKIYE .....		41
5.1	Legal Status and Protection .....	44
5.2	Border Barriers.....	46
5.3	Education .....	47
5.4	Process of Return .....	50
5.5	Economic Challenges.....	52
CHAPTER 6 .....		53
TURKISH INFLUENCE AND NARRATIVES .....		53
6.1	Foreign Policy in the Neighborhood.....	53
6.2	Impact on Languages .....	54
6.3	Attitudes towards Syrian Immigrants and Implications for National Identity.....	56
6.4	Anti-Refugee Discourses on Twitter and Political Campaigns .....	58
CONCLUSION.....		62
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....		65

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**AKP** - (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi / The Justice and Development Party)

**CHP** – (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi / Republican People's Party)

**EU** – (European Union)

**G20** – (The Group of Twenty)

**GSM** – (Global System for Mobile Communications)

**HDP** – (Halkların Demokratik Partisi / Peoples' Democratic Party)

**HLP** – (Housing, land and property)

**IDPs** – (Internally displaced persons)

**ILO** – (The International Labour Organization)

**IOM** – (International Organization for Migration)

**IP** – (Good Party / İYİ Parti)

**ISIS** – (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria)

**NAVR** – (National Assisted Voluntary Return)

**NGO** – (Non-governmental organization)

**PKK** – (Partîya Karkerên Kurdîstan / Kurdistan Workers' Party)

**PMM** – (The Presidency of Migration Management)

**PYD** – (Democratic Union Party)

**SAC** – (Special Area of Conservation)

**UNHCR** – (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)

**YPG** – (People's Protection Units)

## Summary

This research examines the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on Turkish national identity by analyzing government policies, public perceptions, and challenges to established notions of Turkishness. Qualitative methods and secondary data are used to explore disrupted group cohesion, challenges faced by Syrian immigrants, and anti-refugee sentiments on social media. It also examines the changing challenges of foreign policy, linguistic discrimination, and the integration efforts of the Turkish diaspora. Despite ideological divides, shared values create kinship between Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens. It highlights how secularism and Islamization have interacted to shape Turkey's political identity, while Atatürk's legacy remains powerful. Legal frameworks are used to manage the complexities of the refugee crisis while balancing the rights of citizens and refugees. Emphasizing dynamic nature of migrant identities, this research argues for inclusive policies and stresses importance of addressing root causes through diplomatic solutions and conflict settlement.

*Key words: immigration, Turkish national identity, anti-immigrant sentiment, Syrian refugees.*

## Sažetak

Ovo istraživanje ispituje uticaj sirijske izbjegličke krize na turski nacionalni identitet analizirajući vladine politike, javna mišljenja i izazove etabliranim pojmovima turčijata. Korištene su kvalitativne metode i sekundarni podaci kako bi se istražila narušena grupna kohezija, izazovi s kojima se suočavaju sirijski imigranti i anti-izbjeglički sentiment na društvenim medijima. Također se istražuju promjenljivi izazovi spoljne politike, jezičke diskriminacije i naponi integracije turske dijaspe. Uprkos ideološkim razlikama, zajedničke vrijednosti stvaraju srodstvo između sirijskih izbjeglica i turskih građana. Ističe se kako su sekularizam i islamizacija interagirali u oblikovanju političkog identiteta Turske, dok Atatürkovo naslijeđe ostaje na snazi. Pravni okviri koriste se za upravljanje kompleksnostima izbjegličke krize, istovremeno održavajući ravnotežu prava građana i izbjeglica. Naglašava se dinamična priroda migrantskih identiteta, a ovo istraživanje zagovara inkluzivne politike i naglašava važnost suočavanja s uzrocima diplomatskim putem i rješavanjem sukoba.

*Ključne riječi: imigracija, turski nacionalni identitet, antiimigrantski stav, sirijske izbjeglice.*

## INTRODUCTION

In an era of seamless connection, travel, and information sharing, the notion of migration has become prevalent. While globalization has made it simpler to travel across borders, it has also brought about its own set of challenges and problems that people and nations need to be ready to deal with. In the case of migration, the internationally integrated world we live in presents both benefits and problems. Amidst the ongoing global trends, the World Migration Report, international migration is expected to reach 281 million by 2021, a 27 per cent increase on the 221 million in 2010 (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021). At this time, we are witnessing how governments are putting more effort into the formulation of strategies in their immigration policies that can effectively address the challenges posed by immigration by promoting integration and managing diversity in society. As the number of migrations increases worldwide, political campaigns have begun to include it as part of their agenda, resulting in a significant increase in the number of supporters and a re-engagement of previously politically inactive individuals who are now concerned about the issue.

The idea of 'free mobility', which has deep roots in liberal ideology, is widely recognized. However, putting this into practice presents complex challenges. What is the real cost of this concept, and does its practical implementation match its theoretical principles? In these situations, some people may exhibit strong empathy for those who are suffering, whilst others may adopt a strongly negative stance, and still others may stand to benefit personally. These many answers show how complicated perceptions and outcomes in these situations can be. Immigrants must overcome the difficulty of blending their unique identities with the local culture when they go through borders. To blend into the host culture while keeping their own background, this requires a complicated balance of mental health, sociopolitical dynamics, and identity. For navigation to be effective, approaches that balance diversity with the defense of personal identity rights are required, but hardly

maintained. It is obvious that stereotypes that are created over time influence first approach to immigrants. Especially when the narrative regarding the immigrants' country of origin is deeply entrenched in a host nation's history, it gives rise to heightened tensions and unfavorable sentiments towards that particular group, thereby complicating their integration process.

Since 2011, Syria's civil war has escalated from peaceful protests to a violent conflict between the Assad regime and the Free Syrian Army. The uprising was fueled by corruption, political restrictions, and unemployment under President Bashar al-Assad. The opposition grew in response to the regime's crackdown, attracting extremist and foreign involvement. The death toll increased, forcing many to flee for safety, with neighboring countries and Europe receiving a significant number of refugees. The ongoing conflict and instability in Syria have driven many Syrians to seek refuge in Türkiye. Additionally, due to its involvement in conflicts in Syria and Iraq, Türkiye has faced challenges with a large influx of refugees and migrants into the country, predominantly from Middle Eastern nations, with Syrians constituting the largest group. The motivations for immigration to Türkiye, include safety, socio-economic conditions, and ease of access to asylum procedures.

How historical factors shape attitudes toward immigrants is illustrated by the Syrian refugee crisis in Türkiye. Empathy and welcoming attitudes are fostered by Türkiye's past as a refuge for migrants. But there are concerns and threats as well, which reflect the distinction of deserving and potentially challenging. Turkish national identity is founded upon the notion of "Turkishness," encompassing shared cultural and linguistic attributes, as well as a sense of allegiance to the Turkish nation. The establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 following the decline of the Ottoman Empire played a significant role in shaping and reinforcing this concept of Turkishness, which can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire. During this period, the Turkish government implemented policies that aimed to foster a unified national identity by promoting Turkish language and culture, while simultaneously suppressing regional and ethnic identities.

The perception of threats to national identity arises from the fear of dilution or erosion of the established Turkish identity narrative. Furthermore, the historical narrative of Turkish exceptionalism, which emphasizes Türkiye's unique position as a bridge between Europe and Asia, has also influenced the perception of threats. In this historical context, the arrival of a large number of Syrian refugees challenges the preconceived notions of what constitutes a "genuine" Turk, as it introduces cultural and linguistic diversity into the Turkish social fabric. The influx of Syrian refugees is seen by some as a potential disruption to Türkiye's distinctiveness and its ability to maintain a Westernized and secular identity. This creates concerns about a potential shift towards a more Eastern-oriented or Islamic identity, which may be perceived as a threat to the existing national narrative. Rising anti-immigrant sentiment has become a critical public policy issue that requires careful attention from policymakers, and it also underscores the need for global cooperation to address immigration issues.

## **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***1.1 RESEARCH TOPIC***

The research topic is related to analysis of the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on Turkish national identity in contemporary Türkiye, which has undergone a significant transformation in recent years. Türkiye has indeed experienced various refugee crises throughout its history, but for the purpose of this research, the focus will be on the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis that began in 2011 and its impact on the country from 2011 to 2021. Hence, the theoretical approach of national identity is significant when examining the issue that may alter over time and is impacted by a variety of circumstances, including political, economic, cultural, and historical events. The correlation between national identity and migration is highlighted in the context of the Syrian refugee crisis in Türkiye, as it poses a potential threat to the country's sense of national identity by challenging established notions of what it means to be a "genuine" Turk. According to the research, the inflow of people from other nations and cultures has put old ideas of Turkish national identity to the test and promoted diversity and multiculturalism in the nation. The aim was to provide a balanced view of the issue, highlighting both the challenges and the opportunities faced by Syrian refugees in their pursuit of new life, which affected both the host country's national identity and the lives of the refugees themselves. Moreover, this phenomenon highlights the way in which diversity disrupts established constructs of national identity by introducing novel perspectives and cultural elements that may diverge from the prevailing cultural narrative. In this context, adopting an historical approach becomes essential to uncover the complex dynamics, challenges, and transformations while recognizing the influential role of narratives on the understanding of issue.

## 2.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

Within the methodological framework, this research question delves into the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on the Turkish national identity narrative, specifically examining how the influx of Syrian refugees challenges the established notions of Turkishness. The aim is also to understand how government policies and public perceptions towards Syrian refugees influence the national identity narrative. The shared cultural, historical, and linguistic similarities between Türkiye and Syria have the potential to influence and shape conceptions of Turkishness, possibly challenging the notion of a strictly exclusive and uniquely Turkish identity. Turkish exceptionalism is the belief deeply rooted in the idea that Türkiye stands out from other countries due to its particular characteristics or circumstances. However, this question argues that national identity is not static and can evolve over time, influenced by various factors such as political, economic, cultural, and historical events. That is why investigating these aspects is the ultimate goal—to provide insights into the ways in which the Syrian refugee influx shapes and challenges the Turkish national identity in contemporary Türkiye.

Thus, the subsequent formulation of the research question can be stated as:

*In what way does the Syrian refugee influx challenge the Turkish national identity narrative that is rooted in the concept of Turkishness in contemporary Türkiye?*

## 3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary scientific objectives of this research involve examining cause and effect relationships by contributing to the existing scholarly understanding of national identity theories and provide empirical insights into the specific dynamics and consequences in the Turkish context. As a result, the case study of Türkiye provides a useful example of some possible recommendations. Furthermore, by combining the case of Syrian immigration with national identity analysis literature, it might encourage other researchers and state actors to explore and engage with the complexities of migration and national identity in their respective contexts. This interdisciplinary approach can contribute to a deeper

understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to the intersection of migration, national identity, and foreign affairs, enabling them to make informed decisions and develop effective strategies in response to similar situations, regardless of their position as great powers. The main goal of this study is to get a thorough knowledge of how this "new" political discourse emerged in a particular setting. The results acquired will act as the starting point for additional conversations and analysis. Furthermore, Turkiye's experiences in managing this situation can serve as a valuable example for other countries, highlighting the interplay between immigration, national identity, and the potential outcomes and connections that arise from it.

#### *4.1 HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION*

Based on the previous explanation, the general hypothesis can be formulated as follows:  
*As world's largest refugee nation, the influx of Syrian immigration is perceived as a threat to the national identity of contemporary Turkiye, as it raises questions about the nature of Turkishness itself.*

Auxiliary hypotheses

AH1: The Syrian refugee crisis has exposed existing social inequalities and prejudices within Turkish society, resulting in a fragmentation of national identity along ethnic, religious, or socio-economic lines.

AH2: The presence of a large number of Syrian refugees in Turkiye prompts a reassessment of the concept of Turkish exceptionalism, as it raises questions about Turkiye's role as a bridge between Europe and Asia and its relationship with the Western world.

AH3: Shared similarities between Turkiye and Syria may expand the notion of Turkish identity by transcending traditional limits.

AH4: People with a strong sense of national identification are more prone than those with a poor sense of national identity to feel a threat to their security, economy, or culture.

### *5.1 RESEARCH METHODS AND TECHNIQUES*

According to this qualitative study based on secondary data, national identity is mutable and inextricably linked to its environment. The sources to be analyzed include books, written articles, audio materials, and online media, encompassing reports on the Syrian refugee crisis authored by different individuals, journalists, and human rights activists. Additionally, data from the Turkish government will be examined, including statistics on life tables, citizenships, trends, asylum applications and border control measures. Moreover, official documents and reports from government bodies, non-governmental organizations, and international institutions will be reviewed as part of the analysis process.

# CHAPTER 1

## THEORETICAL APPROACH

### *1.1 National Identity*

Before delving into the analysis of national identity, it is essential to comprehend the concept of identity itself. From an academic perspective, identity can be understood as the idea and recognition of individual as a member of particular social categories or groups, which includes social comparison, where individuals categorize themselves in relation to other social categories. According to Stets and Burke, identity encompasses personal and social aspects of an individual's self-perception. Balancing normative social identities and personal identities is crucial to avoid conflicts. Identity integrates group, role, and personal dimensions, providing insight into how individuals navigate constraints and choices. It explores the interplay between structural expectations and personal agency (Stets & Burke, 2000).

In the following analysis, we will closely examine the process of nation formation and explore the factors that exert significant influence upon it. By analyzing these factors, we aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics that shape the emergence and development of a nation and national identity. In the light of the overwhelming number of definitions of nation, the simplest definition would be that it forms when individuals with a shared identity and culture come together in a specific geographical region. This gathering gives rise to a system of government, institutions, and a collective historical consciousness. Additionally, recognition by other countries also plays a significant role. For several centuries, nation state is the primary goal of contemporary politics. In line with previous research, a nation-state is defined as a country where people have their own independent government and territory. Moreover, an independent government, a defined area, sovereignty, government institutions, a legal

framework, international ties, and national symbols are additional traits that a nation-state possess, unlike a nation.

Political participation is about more than being a citizen, it is about being an active citizen and taking part in social life. Hence, it goes beyond citizens to include all those capable of making political claims in the public domain, whose political agency is determined by social recognition and not by personal characteristics (Howarth, Andreouli, & Kessi, 2014). But what defines citizenship as national identity? Citizenship as national identity is grounded not in ethnic similarities but in group membership with shared surroundings, embracing tolerance for diverse ethnicities residing in the same country, with the identity of the latter being a personal choice. Greenfeld suggests that membership of a nation is ultimately a matter of will, and that, like religion, it can be acquired and forfeited (Tkachenko, 2016). Education plays a crucial role in shaping youth's national identity and creating future leaders. A study conducted by (Idris, Hassan, Ya'acob, Gill, & Awal, 2012) revealed that students from religious and national schools tend to have higher levels of identity compared to those from vernacular schools. They will be able to understand the history, values and cultural heritage of their countries, develop pride and solidarity, make informed decisions and participate in the development of their societies, and uphold democratic values and human rights.

As authors defined, political narratives strategically construct and shape national identity, evolving over time to define a nation's principles, endurance through hardships, and representation in various forms, including public celebrations, memorials, and history lessons, crucial for group identity claims. In case of national narratives, closely linked to politics, depict stories about power, its distribution, and manifestations within the nation, while national identity, cultivated from an early age, encompasses feelings of belonging or alienation and evaluations of how the nation operates, who holds control, and how that control is wielded (Howarth, Andreouli, & Kessi, 2014).

When Arabs emphasize their Arab identification over their national identity, it is referred to as having a pan-Arab identity. This fosters a shared Arab identity based on history,

culture, and language. However, in recent years, Pan-Arabism has lost some of its sway as individual Arab governments have become more self-centered and less concerned with the interests of the Arab community as a whole. Pan-Arabism promoted the concept of a unified Arab nation or community, referred to as the "Umma Arabiyya Wahida Dhat Risala Khalida," which translates to "the one Arab nation with an immortal mission" (Ajami, 1978). The data indicates that declining pan-Arabism and Saudi oil wealth led to repressive regimes consolidating power through strong national security institutions and tight control over politics, media, and the economy. While in the Ottoman Empire, similar to the Roman Empire, fostered identities that transcended narrow ties of religion or ethnicity, Rome's decline saw the erosion of political unity and a collective sense of mission.

The aspect that connects identity theory with national identity involves the examination of the beginnings of the identity processes and the importance of its understanding. Based on that, individuals construct their identities, emphasizing certain aspects in relation to their sense of national belonging. In accordance with the findings of Barrett, during childhood and adolescence, national identity develops and consists of both cognitive (knowledge and ideas) and emotional (feelings and assessments) components which is strongly integrated in daily life and is expressed in the language, cuisine, attire, and architecture (Barrett, 2000). National achievements evoke pride and unity, while geographical boundaries and national anthems symbolize national identity. Indeed, beliefs about others' perspectives on national identity influence individuals' self-concept alignment, nationalist views, and self-esteem. Author argues that children naturally favor their own national group, with national identity strengthening throughout childhood. Differences between national groups become more prominent in adolescence, as group preferences deepen. But it is worth mentioning that development of national identity varies among children.

In view of Korostelina (2007), there are three notions of national identity: the exclusive ethnic idea rooted in cultural and theological presumptions, the inclusive multicultural idea recognizing diversity within a country, and the civic notion centered around shared ideals, rights, and obligations within civic culture (Windari, 2021). However, critics argue that by

reducing national identity to only three categories, it neglects the numerous other factors that contribute to the formation of national identity, such as historical narratives, political ideologies, and socioeconomic realities.

An alternative viewpoint is that Indelicato and Martín identified four main national identity types: pure post nationalists, pure civic-oriented nationalists, pure ethnic-oriented nationalists, and pure credentialists, while indicating country, political orientation, and age as key factors which shape individuals' identification with specific national identity types. The majority of citizens fell into the credentialist category, indicating that they considered national identity to be influenced by both ethnic and civic dimensions. The analysis of indicators related to ethnicity, civic orientation, and credentials identified significant national identity types, including post nationalists and credentialists, affirming and expanding upon previous research in the field (Indelicato & Martín, 2022). In case of Germany, the findings of a research reveal that German students with immigrant origins had lower levels of agreement with concerns on ethnic national identity than with concerns regarding civic national identity. Additionally, over 90% of students with immigration backgrounds felt a sense of belonging to both Germany and their parents' country (Matafora, Hahn-Laudenberg, & Abs, 2021). The analysis also determined that building collective identities requires putting together components, gathering data, and thinking about dimensions, much as forming views by drawing on latent memory-based components. Additionally, a stronger sense of shared identity fosters emotional connection, cognitive affinity, and a decline in the belief in ulterior motives, all of which eventually boost collaboration because there is less likelihood of exploitation being seen. These outcomes lessen perceptions of negative goals and boost views of collaboration (Rousseau & Garcia-Retamero, 2007).

Golob, Makarovič and Suklan stated that national identities are subjective reflections of individuals and groups within a social context, influenced by modernity's emphasis on inclusion, freedom, and equality. By time, national belonging evolves with social complexity and individuals' engagement in multiple subsystems, resulting in semantic

shifts at individual and societal levels, influenced by mutual interactions and communication between individuals and social systems. Reduced meanings in the self-description of social systems drive transformations in national belongings, leading individuals to express diverse forms of national identity in response to structural changes. Authors consider three types of national identity are distinguished: ascribed national identities based on birth, territoriality, and religion; voluntarist national identities based on choices and achievements; and instrumental trans- and supranational identifications. Taking into account, underdeveloped countries often exhibit strong ascribed national identities, influenced by factors like lack of modernism, inclusivity, openness, and meritocracy, and rooted in elements such as birth, location, and religion, even after considering individual characteristics like gender, age, education, and immigrant backgrounds. Hence, voluntarist national identities, shaped by factors like political institutions, national identity, and language, do not directly reflect overall levels of development; although they may align more with firm national belonging in less modern societies, their civic inclusiveness also makes them compatible with developed modern features (Golob, Makarovič, & Suklan, 2016).

Another important aspect worth mentioning is cultural and creative tourism, which shapes national identity by fostering a deep sense of connection and belonging through immersion in cultural expressions, exploration of heritage sites, and active participation in local traditions. It has been argued that embracing and promoting cultural heritage and creative industries in tourism preserves unique cultural assets and enriches the visitor experience, thereby playing a significant role in shaping national identity formation. This contributes to better understanding how individuals and communities develop a sense of belonging and connection to their country of origin or residence. According to that, policymakers and tourism stakeholders should prioritize comprehensive strategies for cultural and creative tourism, integrating cultural elements, promoting local community participation, and ensuring sustainable management of heritage sites to strengthen national identity, increase

tourism revenues, and foster appreciation of cultural heritage (Zhang, Ruan, & Yang, 2021).

Undoubtedly, globalization and diversity contribute to the impact on national identity, but ineffective self-governance is also a significant factor, while national identity itself fosters empathy, solidarity, and a sense of belonging (Windari, 2021). Thusly, social categorization shapes the formation of national identity, influencing attitudes, policy preferences, and its continued significance in a changing world, making national identity an ongoing and adaptable process that responds to global complexities. In 2021, Eurobarometer data revealed that 73% of EU (European Union) respondents strongly identified with their nationality, with variations across Member States, while 56% did not perceive their national identity as under threat. Notably, respondents expressed identification with family, being European, political orientation, and religion (Eurobarometer, 2021). Drawing upon previous research, national identity can have positive aspects such as contribution to social cohesion, cultural preservation, and potential negative consequences such as xenophobia, exclusion of minority groups, and potential conflicts arising from excessive nationalism. As a result, broader identities could be overshadowed e.g being a member of the European Union or a global citizen, by limiting to way to a more diverse world.

This concept is closely linked to mass media, playing a significant role in shaping individuals' attitudes, behaviors, and national identity, acting as a window to understand reality, even in the absence of direct contact. It also influences the perceptions and attitudes of international students, impacting their sense of national identity, and aligns with political affiliations, shaping individuals' political behavior. Indeed, media shapes national identity through framing and accessibility, while states use media to disseminate desired identity (Windari, 2021).

By discussing these aspects, Ayishat Akanbi's statement "the fixation with your identity limits your identity" suggests that being overly preoccupied with one's identity can actually restrict and narrow one's understanding and expression of it (Akanbi, 2020). While

applying this, identity fixation can be problematic as it forces individuals to conform to stereotypes, inhibiting their authenticity. This rigid self-concept prevents growth and hinders embracing new experiences. It also creates conflict between different identity groups, overlooking shared values and hindering collaboration. Empathy for those with different experiences becomes difficult. Focusing on a singular identity aspect obscures overlapping identities, leading to inappropriate policy responses and exclusionary measures. This excessive emphasis on identity can divert attention from pressing societal issues affecting everyone, hindering empowerment and positive change while limiting creativity and innovation.

### *1.2 The Impact of Immigration on National Identity*

At the simplest level, identity is not only about an individual's self-perception, but also about the perception of others, and it is a bridge between the public and private spheres. In the realm of immigration studies, group identification (social identity) entails the cognitive assimilation and emotional incorporation of shared characteristics and social experiences among individuals belonging to a specific cultural group, whereas cultural identity involves the progressive internalization and assimilation of cultural meanings, symbols, and values over time (Verkuyten, Wiley, Deaux, & Fleischmann, 2019).

It has been widely quoted "If you don't want refugees, don't create them," emphasizing the need to address root causes such as conflict, poverty, and human rights violations through diplomatic solutions, poverty reduction, and conflict resolution efforts to effectively mitigate the impact of refugee crises. This proactive approach benefits both host countries and displaced populations by promoting a more compassionate and sustainable response to displacement. Approximately most of the refugees worldwide were children under the age of 18, and unaccompanied or separated from their families. They are people with a well-founded fear of being persecuted and who are unable or unwilling to return to their home countries, as set out in the 1951 Geneva Convention and the 1967 Protocol (The 1951 Refugee Convention, 2010). The number of migrants has been growing over the years, representing a never-ending movement, where the world still struggles with understanding

social identities and immigration in contemporary life. In the global context of international migration, some states are major contributors to trans-boundary migration flows, whilst others are major recipients of those flows in search of new opportunities and better lives. For instance, India, Mexico, the Russian Federation, and China are major emigrating countries, while the United States and Germany are considered as significant destinations for immigrants (Verkuyten, Wiley, Deaux, & Fleischmann, 2019). Each country brings own unique cultural practices, traditions, and artistic expressions to new homes. The cultural scenes of host countries are enriched and diversified by the culinary heritage and artistic expressions of migrants. As languages from these countries spread through migration, multilingualism and cultural exchange flourish, enriching host countries' cultural fabric in a globalised, diverse environment. By exposing individuals to various cultures, migration helps them develop a more diversified and stronger identity since being in a foreign environment makes them be more resilient and self-adaptive. Pathway of migration facilitates identity exploration, cultural understanding, empathy, and self-reflection, leading to a more inclusive and consolidated sense of identity. Individuals with immigrant backgrounds often have multiple national identities and navigate between their home and host societies. This indicates their identities are multifaceted and flexible, which undermines the notion of a single national identity.

An essential consideration is individual identification with their country of living, might being influenced by perceived prejudice and unfavorable sentiments, which can make it harder for them to choose only one identity. Since people can embrace both their home and host communities, complex identities undermine the "us" against "them" viewpoint. Mostly, individuals maintain ties to their origin while incorporating elements of the host culture, resulting in diverse cultural fusions, but stereotypes and physical characteristics can hinder recognition in the country of residence, while multiple identification is linked to satisfaction with positive attitudes toward politics, economy, or society (Matafora, Hahn-Laudenberg, & Abs, 2021). The available evidence indicates that regression models show that being an immigrant, with parents who are not citizens of the country, leads to

less intense national identities, both voluntarist and ascribed. This suggests that immigrants may tend to develop instrumental transnational identifications rather than classical national identities (Golob, Makarovič, & Suklan, 2016).

Regarding the influence of national identity on the long-term integration of the second generation of immigrants, Monscheuer argues that immigrant children's integration is negatively impacted when their parents have a strong attachment to the origin country, leading to the development of a stronger ethnic identity, limited contact with natives, and lower English proficiency, ultimately hindering the integration process. They tend to perform worse in school compared to their peers, and adult male second-generation immigrants who have a stronger origin identity face disadvantages in the labor market, highlighting the importance of inclusive policies that encourage immigrants' participation and provide better opportunities for promoting long-term integration (Monscheuer, 2023). Compulsory integration courses and citizenship requirements can contribute to addressing immigrant identity directly and supporting integration efforts.

A nuanced understanding of migrants' multiple identities is provided by the different dimensions of their dual identification with the host country and their heritage group. Does having a dual identity encourage personal growth and cross-cultural understanding, or does it lead to internal conflict and a sense that one is divided? From (Verkuyten, Wiley, Deaux, & Fleischmann, 2019)'s perspective, in individuals with merged identities, there is a sophisticated recognition of both differentiation and integration of multiple identity facets, fostering a more nuanced understanding of their group memberships, while those with intersecting identities exhibit a simpler perception, lacking differentiation between group memberships and leading to a stronger ingroup versus outgroup distinction, which may result in higher ingroup bias. Across countries with diverse immigration histories, varying levels of identification and association between national and ethnic identities can lead to stress and psychological conflict for immigrants who perceive these dual objectives as incompatible or in opposition to each other. One possible explanation is that discriminatory and exclusionary practices may have a negative impact on the integration of dual identities,

while multicultural policy is generally associated with stronger national identification on the part of migrants. Neurological research (Hirsh & Kang, 2016) supports the idea that such stress and conflict often result from conflicting group belongings and commitments, as well as contrasting moral world views and normative expectations. On the other hand, (Eskelinen & Verkuyten, 2020) point out that the compatibility of multiple group identifications can be challenging, particularly when conflicting beliefs and values arise in relation to the host society's norms, such as traditional and patriarchal views conflicting with liberal values promoting gender equality and minority rights; nevertheless, immigrants have the capacity to creatively interpret and reinvent cultural meanings as a means to negotiate and establish a sense of societal belonging.

### *1.3 Perception of Threat*

Distinct from other variables in the field, the relative capacity of parties to pursue their objectives using a variety of strategies, including as overt confrontation, covert manipulation, and the swaying of preferences, is known as power in international relations. The balance of power is determined by population, territory, economics, military strength, political stability and expertise. The underlying cause of intercultural conflict is power (or resource) inequality, which collective problem-solving can help to reduce prejudice and discrimination, although competition for resources has the potential to quickly turn into open conflict (Rousseau & Garcia-Retamero, 2007). It is possible to take an outwardly pro-immigrant stance toward some categories of immigrants while simultaneously holding opposition toward others thanks to the synergy between the rhetoric that "illegality is wrong" and the restrictionist interpretation of the "NoI" (Nation of Immigrants) discourse (Bikmen, 2015). Highlighting the importance of legal immigration channels and acknowledging the nation's history of assisting refugees, this approach serves to further solidify negative sentiments, particularly directed towards undocumented immigrants.

In order to maintain national harmony and prevent the collapse of the government, a strong national identity is essential. National identity can be divided into ethno-cultural and civic national identities, with ethno-cultural identities often having more negative attitudes

towards immigration than civic identities (Sandelind, 2015). Scholars propose that national identity can be strengthened as a form of defence in the face of threats to a nation, whether territorial or cultural. People protect their social group identity, including their national identity, from a perceived threat. This may lead to inter-ethnic or inter-national prejudice and discrimination. Perceived threats, combined with individuals' beliefs in their efficacy to cope with existing social demands, can promote assertive feelings of group membership and foster ethnocentric attitudes and behaviours (Baydhowi, et al., 2023). The concept of "status quo," which relates to the existing societal standards and the present, established way of life, is crucial to take into account. Changes brought about by migration, such as new languages, traditions, and ways of life, can be seen as potential challenges to this existing order, leading to concerns or reactions from those who are accustomed to the way things were before the arrival of migrants. Thus, (Davis, 2000)'s research supports the notion that threat is characterized by the presence of an actor or a group with the capacity or intention to cause adverse repercussions for another actor or group. Threats against individuals can affect their physical security, personal wealth and income, or personal values and beliefs. Drawing upon previous research, authors suggest that emotions contribute to the shaping of threat perceptions and identity if identity manipulation not only increases perceived similarity but also evokes positive feelings towards the foreign country (Rousseau & Garcia-Retamero, 2007). The issue of perceiving migrants or displaced persons as a threat in host societies is not a modern problem but rather a challenge that has been trending for several centuries. Historically, movements of people have often caused concern and anxiety among the host communities, reflecting the complex interaction between identity, culture and social and economic factors. To further understanding, (Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher)'s finding adds weight to the argument that the host society's choice to integrate immigrants is influenced by their perceived value and similarity. If immigrants conform to host society attitudes, values, and ethnicities, they will be seen as valued, leading to more support for their integration. However, devalued groups may be the target of demands for either integration or segregation. If a cultural minority is perceived to be a threat, ethnocentric identity preservation strategies may be employed.

This paradox of the stranger is clearly captured by (Camus, 1942) in his book "L'étranger": "The stranger is the one who is different, the one who does not share our values or our culture. He can be a threat, but he can also be a source of enrichment. We must learn to accept and integrate him, because he is a member of our society." These words by Camus shed light on the complex and multifaceted nature of immigration, where newcomers may bring both challenges and opportunities to the host society.

When a less dominant group moves into the territory of a more dominant group, as in the case of immigration, significant cultural conflicts can arise. The influx may be perceived as a cultural challenge or invasion if the native, dominant group has negative feelings about the cultural preferences and values of the incoming immigrant group. The bias embedded in the opinions of those with privileged identities, including whiteness and legal status, is highlighted by the findings of (Mukherjee, Molina, & Adams, 2012). It becomes evident that when a substantial influx of immigrants from a specific country leads to the formation of a sizable community, it is often construed as a threat and competitive presence, as their proliferation of beliefs and values is seen to potentially undermine the native identity of the host nation. The shared attributes of a common mother tongue, culture, or religion have the potential to foster tightly-knit communities, effectively involving newcomers from the same origin country and aiding them in integrating into society, much like their predecessors. In order to establish a feeling of community, these communities are intended to gather in a common area to meet shared needs, socialize and engage in shared pursuits. However, due to these barriers, forming close relationships with locals may not always be always attainable, and the intentions of these bonded communities may often remain unfamiliar to the local population.

Building upon the insights of (Tsukamoto & Fiske, 2018) the dynamics become clear: warm and competent stereotypes are capable of inducing a spectrum of active and passive behaviors. Nevertheless, the perception of rivalry can lead to the formulation of cold stereotypes, thereby potentially reshaping or jeopardizing in-group convictions. Moreover, the recognition that warmth plays a prominent role in intergroup interactions highlights its

importance in in-group interactions with immigrant populations. It is imperative to consider that concerns related to resource competition and bias promotion are inherent to the functional approach to intergroup conflict.

It is expected that individuals will be driven towards a more exclusive definition of the national in-group by the perception of threats from immigration, encompassing economic, cultural and social dimensions. This perception is positively associated with stronger "ethnic" national identities that are nationalistic and exclusive, and negatively associated or unassociated with "civic" identities that are more inclusive. Furthermore, the expectation is that these threat perceptions will be negatively related to national pride. While civic identity is not necessarily associated with negative attitudes, previous studies have shown that individuals with a strong sense of ethnic identity have negative attitudes towards immigrants (Ha & Jang, 2015). A common patriotism, based on common political and social institutions and not on exclusive cultural features, can strengthen unity in a diverse society and reduce perceptions of immigrant menace (Sandelind, 2015).

Scholars have long debated six types of threat that majority group members experience in response to refugee migration, including concerns about cultural differences (symbolic threat), financial strain (realistic threat), criminal acts (safety threat), conflicts within society (cohesion threat), increasing xenophobia (prejudice threat) and refugee care (altruistic threat). These threats evoked negative feelings among the majority group, contributing towards a negative stance towards refugees and support for restrictive measures. The study found that concern about caring for refugees (altruistic threat) predicted support for restrictive migration policies, potentially due to a lack of emotional response to this specific threat. Considering emotional reactions to threat beyond fear, including anger, contempt, and disgust, may provide better insights into attitudes towards refugees and migration compared to solely considering general negative affect or stable emotional tendencies (Landmann, Gaschler, & Rohmann, 2019). Immigration has become a divisive issue among political parties and voters, where the effect of immigrant threat on presidential vote choice is more pronounced for individuals with weaker national

identification, though somewhat attenuated for this group (Garand, Qi, & Magaña, 2020). Yet, economic factors, which are fundamental to daily life, might appear as hostility toward foreign immigrants due to perceived rivalry in the economy, especially in the labor market, where local populations may view immigrants as competitors for jobs, raising worries about job availability and wage stagnation. As a relatively less recognized source of xenophobic attitudes, (Schaller, Park, & Faulkner, 2003) propose that xenophobia stems from our evolutionary tendency to avoid unfamiliar groups due to disease vulnerability. In addition, experimental evidence suggests that fear of sickness reduces support for new immigrants, and that ideology and dehumanization are both related.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **TURKISHNESS**

Turkishness is a social construct that was created in the Republic of Türkiye after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire as a basis for the creation of social cohesion within the nation-state. Despite their long-standing presence in Türkiye, both Kurds and Alevi have endured a history of being systematically categorized as "others," subjected to social and legal marginalization, and often unfairly perceived as culturally backward within the overarching Turkish identity, underscoring the complexities of their integration within the nation-state. Education, which allowed everyone to become a Turk or assimilate into Turkishness, was seen as a force for nation-building (Aunina, 2018).

Turkish Republic was officially founded in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. In order to modernize the nation, Atatürk carried out a number of political and economic changes, including the establishment of a new legal system, an alphabet, and policies to support women's rights and secularism. It also included encouraging private enterprise, promoting foreign investment, and nationalizing specific industries. Furthermore, these reforms demonstrated that Atatürk's government exhibited cultural progressiveness while maintaining political authoritarianism. Historically, Türkiye's citizens have been more inclined towards authoritarianism, which has led to a stronger affinity for centralized leadership in the country. As a successor state of the Ottoman Empire, history of the modern Turkish republic is marked by Atatürk (Karaveli, 2018). Atatürk's secular, nationalist reforms have undeniably shaped the trajectory of modern Türkiye, laying the foundation for its identity as a secular state. His vision emphasized modernization and Westernization, fundamentally altering Turkish society and institutions. In Türkiye, a complex interplay of factors, including freedom of expression, nationalism, European integration, and the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, divides the nation. We observe that Türkiye is progressively moving further away from its initially founded fundamental

principles of secularism, democracy, and the rule of law. In contrast, Erdoğan's leadership has seen a pronounced shift towards conservatism, with a notable emphasis on Islamic values.

When delving further into the theoretical framework pertaining to the notion of being Turkish, it becomes evident that this identity is underpinned by several shared characteristics. These characteristics predominantly revolve around homogeneity in terms of ethnicity, primarily manifested through the utilization of the Turkish language, and a common adherence to the Islamic faith. Additionally, Turkish society places a significant emphasis on the upholding of conservative values and the preservation of traditional family structures, both of which are highly regarded within this cultural context. Central to the construct of being Turkish is the expectation that individuals within this identity will wholeheartedly embrace conservative values. These values, characterized by a commitment to heritage, customs, language, religion, conservatism, and a strong sense of community, serve as integral components of Turkish identity.

Additionally, the Turkish military plays a significant symbolic role, being perceived as a representative symbol of the nation itself and embodying the ideals and aspirations of the Turkish people. Historically, the military has served as the guardian of secularism in the political structure of the Turkish Republic. Secularism has thus remained a central pillar of the state, ensuring its independence from religious interference and adherence to a secular legal framework. The military has intervened in politics on several occasions throughout history to safeguard secular order. These interventions, occurring in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997, were justified as necessary measures to preserve the integrity of the secular state against perceived threats from religious influences. Despite changes, the Turkish military remains a significant force in international conflicts, especially in Kurdish-related issues and border operations due to regional instability (Lust, 2020).

A cornerstone of Türkiye's socio-political dynamics is the concept of Turkishness, which encompasses the shared cultural, historical, and national identity of the Turkish people. Understanding its significance is essential when considering its impact on free expression

and democratic principles, as it criminalizes the public denigration of Turkishness, the Republic, and state institutions, resulting in the prosecution of individuals like writers, journalists, and human rights activists who voice critical opinions about these subjects. One notable instance is the case of Orhan Pamuk, a prominent Turkish novelist. Pamuk faced Article 301 charges over comments in a Swiss newspaper interview, but the case was dropped due to a legal technicality (Amnesty International, 2006). Türkiye's push for EU membership is calling for a redefinition of "Turkishness" and an amendment to Article 301 to bring it in line with EU standards, while ultra-nationalists are resisting, fearing it could weaken Turkish identity. Hrant Dink, an Armenian journalist and advocate for free speech in Türkiye, was targeted by ultra-nationalists who viewed him as an opponent of Turkish nationalism. His death sparked discussions about the necessity of legal reforms and the protection of free speech in Türkiye. In 2008, the Turkish parliament has decided to amend several parts of Article 301, a law which has been criticized for limiting freedom of speech (Cook, 2010). This allowed space for discussions on sensitive topics, fostering democratization and evolving Turkish identity.

## **2.1 Islamists and Secularists Ideologies**

Türkiye is a nation where the struggle for the role of religion in public affairs continues to shape its political identity and societal norms, reflecting a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and political forces. During the years of the formation of the Turkish nation-state, a deep cultural divide emerged, characterized by a struggle between secularist elites, who embraced Turkishness as a foundational ethic, and religious conservatives, who sought to protect and preserve the nation's Islamic identity. This ideological divide has contributed significantly to the multifaceted evolution of Turkish nationalism. Conservatives resisted republican reforms aiming to reduce Islam's role in public life and were historically marginalized due to their religious and provincial backgrounds. The rise of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) triggered debates about the relationship between Islam, democracy, and modernity. In contrast, secularists, comprising the educated elite, business community, media, judiciary, and military, advocated for secularism as essential for

democracy. They emphasized equal rights for all citizens regardless of religious identity, striving to maintain a separation between religion and the state. This ideological divide continues to shape Turkish politics and societal norms (Lust, 2020).

In this dynamic context, different varieties of nationalism struggled for dominance, representing the complex interplay of socio-cultural forces. The Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), for instance, prominently promoted an ethnic conception of Turkishness, emphasizing the primacy of Turkish ethnicity as a fundamental principle of national identity. Conversely, AKP pursued an alternative path, placing paramount importance on the promotion and preservation of a Muslim identity, advocating conservative values, and appealing to an envisioned resurgence of an Islamic civilization in the Turkish context. Of particular note is the recent evolution of the AKP's agenda to include efforts to grant cultural rights to Türkiye's Kurdish population. This strategic move reflects an evolving approach within the AKP, signaling that it recognizes Türkiye's diverse cultural tapestry and seeks to foster a more inclusive national identity, transcending religious considerations (Seufert, 2018).

## *2.2 Kemalist ideology*

The ideology of Kemalism is based on the principles of Atatürk and aims at the creation of a modernized and secularized Turkish state that emphasizes "revolutionism" and "nationalism" as its basic principles. Atatürk was driven by a strong desire to distance Türkiye from Arab influences, the Arabic alphabet, and its Ottoman cultural legacy. As part of his comprehensive modernization agenda, he implemented religious reforms to establish a secular state, and one of his most symbolic changes was adopting the Latin script, replacing the Arabic alphabet. These reforms were pivotal in shaping modern Türkiye, emphasizing a break from its Ottoman past and aligning it with Western values and progress. Atatürk sought to create a single Turkish national identity through the promotion of a single national language, Turkish, which led to the repression of ethnic diversity and minority languages. The authoritarian characteristics of Atatürk's government, such as the repression of racial and religious minorities, the absence of

political freedom, and the limitations on civil freedoms, are widely recognized, also the Kemalist one-party system and the regime's authoritarianism. Additionally, even though the Kemalist state was definitely totalitarian and autocratic, the idea of having a supreme leader was not elevated to the status of a guiding political principle with independent legitimacy. Atatürk abhorred the label of a dictator vehemently (Zürcher E. J., 2017).

The Treaty of Lausanne, signed in 1923, marked a crucial moment in history by resolving hostilities between Türkiye and the Allied Powers after World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire. This treaty not only recognized the sovereignty of the Republic of Türkiye and defined its borders but also orchestrated a significant population exchange between Greece and Türkiye. Greek Orthodox Christians were moved from Türkiye, while Muslim Turks were relocated from Greece, aiming to create more ethnically homogeneous nation-states. Additionally, the treaty placed the strategically important Straits of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus under international supervision, guaranteeing freedom of navigation for all parties involved. The Treaty recognized non-Muslim minorities (Armenians, Greeks, Jews), guaranteeing their rights to religious freedom, education, and cultural autonomy (Lust, 2020).

As soon as tourists set foot in Türkiye, they are immediately struck by the prominent and widespread presence of the nation's inaugural president, along with the enduring reverence for his legacy. This phenomenon is epitomized by the ubiquity of both the Turkish national flag and depictions of the inaugural leader. These two symbolically potent elements collectively underscore the profound attachment of the Turkish populace to their homeland and its founder. Notably, the visage of the first president graces a multitude of public spaces, ranging from government offices to commercial establishments and eateries. Furthermore, his aphorisms find expression in various forms, while monuments, busts, and even his signature serve as enduring reminders of his monumental role in Turkish history.

In the contemporary era, with the advent of digitalization and modernization, the presence of the first president has transcended conventional modes of representation. His image is not confined solely to the walls of official institutions but has proliferated across an array

of consumer products. These manifestations include, but are not limited to, buttons, bumper stickers, T-shirts, and even footwear, constituting a testament to the enduring resonance of his influence within Turkish society. The ultimate manifestation of this veneration can be witnessed in the form of tattoos, which further exemplify the depth of his impact and the extent to which his legacy remains an indelible part of the Turkish collective consciousness.

Atatürk frequently addressed the youth in his speeches, emphasizing that their primary duty is to protect and preserve Turkish independence and the Turkish republic. He stressed that this responsibility is vital for the nation's present and future, and they should be prepared to defend it, even in the face of formidable challenges from both within and outside the country. Atatürk also highlighted that the strength to carry out this duty lies within the noble spirit and heritage of Turkish youth.

Atatürk's famous motto and principle for the Turkish Republic is “*Ne mutlu Türk'üm diyene*,” which translates to "How happy is the one who says, “I am a Turk,” emphasizing national identity and unity rather than ownership of the country. Atatürk's statement, “Nations which don't find their national identities will be preyed upon by other nations,” (*Milli benliğini bulamayan milletler başka milletlerin avı olacaklardır*) succinctly emphasizes that nations must be cognizant of their history, culture, and achievements to protect their identity. Neglecting these essential aspects can leave a nation vulnerable to external influences and the corrosive effects of cultural erosion. At the core of this concept lies a profound love for one's homeland and a strong connection to the state. Atatürk firmly believed that individuals who lacked this connection might become detached from their nation's core values and interests. This, he argued, would fortify the nation against external influences and bolster its resilience. His message serves as a warning against any attempts to undermine or divide the Turkish people and highlights the significance of national unity and pride in Turkish heritage (Korkmaz, 2014).

Foreigners who express admiration for Atatürk are often seen as individuals who identify with Turkish national identity and the principles championed by the founder of the Turkish

Republic, and they may be automatically considered as part of this group. Individuals who align themselves with Kemalism are often more inclined toward liberal principles, embrace a lifestyle closely associated with Western values, and may not strictly adhere to specific religious or moral convictions. Consequently, they are frequently perceived as tending to identify with European identity. Yet, it is important to adopt a realistic outlook that acknowledges that such perceptions may hold little significance without a corresponding shift in their actual lifestyle.

The Turkish legal landscape is supported by the provisions of Turkish Law No. 5816, enacted in 1951, which deals with crimes related to insulting Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the revered founder of the Turkish Republic. This law covers various transgressions, including insults to Atatürk's memory, damage to representations of Atatürk, and derogatory language or actions directed at him. Convictions can lead to imprisonment ranging from one to five years. This law allows for increased sentences based on aggravating factors like multiple offenders, public incidents, media involvement, and physical force. Courts can defer sentences and impose fines alongside imprisonment. Sentences under one year can become fines, and for sentences up to two years, imprisonment can be suspended. Prosecution doesn't require a formal complaint and can be initiated by the public prosecutor. There's an eight-year statute of limitations, and the Criminal Courts of First Instance handle these cases. Reconciliation is not possible, as it involves an agreement between the offender and the victim, but here, the victim is deceased (Durak, 2022).

The immigration of Syrians in Türkiye presents challenges to the country's national identity and security, like the concerns raised by Mexican immigration in the United States. Similar to how Mexican immigrants sometimes express exclusion or alienation from mainstream American identity or politics, particularly felt by immigrants or marginalized communities, reflecting broader issues of identity, belonging, and power dynamics with the phrase “Uncle Sam no es mi tío,” meaning “Uncle Sam is not my uncle,” Syrians in Türkiye may also experience a sense of detachment. This is evident in statements such as “Atatürk is not my father,” where the surname “Atatürk” signifies “Father of the Turks”, reflecting a sense

of disassociation or lack of connection with the Turkish national identity or the legacy of Atatürk. Following Atatürk's passing, the use of the Atatürk surname was prohibited.

### *2.3 Turks in Germany*

There is a prevalent and inaccurate narrative circulating in many European countries, suggesting that refugees migrate to specific nations solely to exploit "their" economy. Contrary to this misconception, many individuals who have been forced to flee their home countries primarily seek peace, security, and the basic rights that should be afforded to them within their home countries.

In the 1960s, West Germany faced a labor shortage and signed a Recruitment Agreement with Türkiye, bringing around 867,000 Turkish "guest workers" between 1961 and 1973. Many stayed, leading to about four million people with Turkish roots in Germany. Later migrations, influenced by factors like political unrest, expanded the Turkish diaspora in Europe to approximately six million. Germany hosts the largest population of Turkish immigrants, mainly descendants of the original "guest workers." Regular trips are made by over 1.5 million Turks residing in Europe to Türkiye each summer (Turkish diaspora returns home to post-pandemic Turkey, 2022).

"I am a German if we win, but an immigrant if we lose." is very famous statement made by Mesut Özil, a third-generation Turkish German and soccer star, who faced criticism for appearing in a photo with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan before the 2018 FIFA World Cup. He, feeling torn between his Turkish and German identities and denouncing discrimination in Germany, resonated with many Turkish Germans who shared their experiences on Twitter using "#MeTwo," highlighting the challenge of choosing between their dual identities, ultimately leading to Özil's withdrawal from the German national team (Alkousaa, 2018).

A study of German attitudes toward Turkish immigrants found that support for integration decreases when they are perceived as a threat. Exclusion is the strongest factor associated

with this trend, followed by segregation (Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher). Survey results indicate that German and Turkish respondents supporting integration are lower when perceiving Turkish migrants as a threat to German values. In experiments, individuals exposed to alarmist articles about Turkish immigrants developed more negative attitudes and favored assimilation. These articles discussed topics like Islamic fundamentalism, negative portrayals of Germany in Turkish media, and gender inequality in Turkish culture. Reading such articles increased negativity toward Turkish immigrants, fostering support for assimilation, indicating a belief that Turkish citizens in Germany should adopt German culture. Individuals who exhibit a preference for reduced foreign presence within their native land often experience a sense of nationalistic pride upon encountering Turkish signage within the borders of Germany.

In Germany, there are many streets with names associated with Turkish people and places. In Berlin, for example, there are streets such as Bosphorusstrasse (Bosporus Street) and Dardanellesweg (Dardanelles Path). In Regensburg, there is Fröhliche-Türken-Straße (Happy Turks Street). Recently, Dortmund created a prize and named a street after Turkish pioneer Safiye Ali (Daily News, 2023). Just a few examples of Turkish inspired street names in Germany, but indicative of a larger trend nationwide.

#### *2.4 Social Cohesion with Syrians*

The current sentiment among some segments of the Turkish population towards refugees, particularly Arabs, has manifested in a form of intolerance, with a notable number of individuals expressing frustration and an inability to distinguish between expatriate Arabs and refugees. In their eyes, all individuals from Arab backgrounds are collectively labeled as "Arabs", irrespective of their specific country of origin, socio-economic status, or legal entitlement to reside in Türkiye. This blanket categorization reflects a tendency to pass judgment without due consideration of the nuanced circumstances, motivations, or backgrounds of these individuals. While there are positive interactions with some Arab individuals, negative encounters with others appear to be more prevalent. It is worth noting

that some critics argue that this negative attitude towards refugees, especially Arabs, is partially motivated by a desire for approval from Western countries.

A commonly cited argument among Turks who hold these views is rooted in patriotism and nationalism, with concerns raised about the potential threat posed to their country's security by newcomers. There is a fear that these newcomers may not share the same commitment to defending the nation and preserving centuries-old traditions, thereby potentially contributing to the erosion of the conceptualization of Turkish identity over time. Furthermore, some believe that refugees in Türkiye struggle to integrate fully into Turkish society, as they often adhere to their distinct values and freedoms, even when willing to adopt the local customs and language.

The contention is that if refugees fully embrace Turkish culture and learn the language and traditions, their origins may become inconspicuous to the local population over time. The rejection of refugees, especially Arabs, appears to be influenced by a complex number of factors, including tendencies related to perceived European identity due to the most specific geographical and geostrategic position in the world, issues such as intolerance, exaggerated national pride, a struggling economy, and instances of hypocrisy in various aspects of society. These factors have contributed to a growing frustration with refugees, particularly those traumatized by war and poverty, who have come to Turkish soil and, in some cases, have altered the perceptions of many through their behavior.

Tourism is a major worldwide activity that plays a crucial role in the economy of many countries and cities. It generates substantial income and offers numerous opportunities for businesses and workers, contributing significantly to their overall economic well-being and development. By saying this, intolerant views are not only harming this vital economic sector but also undermining the nation's global image and its appeal as a welcoming and inclusive destination for international travelers.

In recent years, there have been multiple instances of violence against refugees, including attacks on their properties, businesses, and even fatal assaults. These incidents highlight a

concerning trend of hostility and aggression towards refugees worldwide. In the case of Türkiye in 2017, a violent incident in İzmir, involved an attack on refugees by about 300 individuals, leading to the displacement of 500 refugees. In July 2019, unverified reports of sexual violence involving Syrian refugees triggered violence in Istanbul, resulting in attacks on refugee-owned properties. In August 2021, masked individuals vandalized refugee-owned businesses in Ankara, citing tax-related allegations. In January 2022, masked assailants fatally stabbed a Syrian refugee in his home. In June 2022, security forces fired on a group of 35 refugees trying to escape temporary shelter, followed by a civilian mob attempting to lynch them (Tahiroğlu, 2022). The absence of strategies to foster social integration, reduce tensions, and ensure refugee safety has led to concerning and escalating attacks. This rising hostility and resentment pose a significant threat to the future, highlighting the urgent need for effective policies and actions to promote harmony and safeguard refugee rights and security. These adjustments can be emotionally, socially, and economically challenging, and without adequate support, they may lead to adverse outcomes, including social isolation and mental health issues.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS**

#### **ARAB-TURKISH RELATIONS: HISTORICAL NARRATIVES**

The relationship between Turks and Arabs has undergone significant transformations throughout centuries, which have been shaped by various factors such as trade, religion, and politics. It is a frequently made assertion that Turks and Arabs are interconnected due to their shared religion and geographical proximity. However, this assumption is often made without a comprehensive understanding of the broader implications it entails.

Arabs who lived during the Ottoman Empire's rule before the mid-1800s cannot be equated with the Arabs residing in modern Arab nations who associate themselves with the principles of Arab nationalism (Alioğlu Çakmak, 2013). The political aspirations of Arabs under Ottoman rule were not oriented towards self-governance and national independence in the same way as the modern Arab nationalist movement. The Ottoman Empire, being a multi-ethnic and multi-religious entity, subordinated Arab identity to the broader Ottoman identity. Arab aspirations for autonomy were limited, as the empire's focus was on its larger framework rather than the formation of separate Arab states (Bakri, 2018). In contrast, the rise of Arab nationalism as a reaction to European colonialism, which resulted in the establishment of autonomous Arab states with an expanded focus on Arab heritage and identity, is widely recognized. The hostility between Syria and Türkiye has deep roots dating back to conflicts in 1918-1921 known as the Turkish Güney Cephesi or "southern front." Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's 1936 demand for the transfer of Iskenderun, historically known as Alexandretta, and its surrounding region from Syria to Türkiye, was based on the presence of a majority Turkish population. Despite Syria's territorial claim, Türkiye

annexed Alexandretta in 1938, but Syria still displays it as part of its territory on maps, while Türkiye refers to it as Hatay, resulting in Syrian officials avoiding the issue for tourism and diplomatic reasons, and the Syrian public remains unaware due to official silence. Due to historical resentment, Türkiye, under secular and nationalist governments, maintained a distance from Arab states, including Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel, which were seen as emerging from the ruins of the empire. Under Erdoğan, Türkiye and Arab countries increased cooperation based on shared religious affiliations, despite Arab distrust from the memories of Ottoman oppression endured for centuries.

Authors also emphasize the Turkish-Syrian flourishing cooperation due to trade routes and mutual opposition to Kurds, but tensions arose during the Syrian civil war as Erdoğan supported the Muslim majority against the Alawi-led regime. Erdoğan retaliates against the Assad regime by attacking the Syrian army, occupying border areas, and promoting the return of Sunni Muslim refugees, while Assad aims to replace them with Shiite migrants from Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. The situation of Syrian Kurds is a significant factor in Turkish-Arab relations. Türkiye has concerns about Kurdish groups in Syria, viewing them as linked to the PKK. This issue is not limited to just Türkiye and Syria, to other Arab leaders as well.

### *3.1 "The Terrible Turk" Narrative*

While Iran, not considered as Arab nation, treated Türkiye with interest and respect, while Arab academia ignored Turkish language, literature, history, and society whereas Turkish attempts to mediate between Arab states and the US or EU were met with contempt. The negative stereotype of the "terrible Turk" persists in Arab discourse due to Ottoman-Turkish rule being viewed as foreign domination (Jung, 2005), even though Turkish and Arab nationalism shared Ottomans roots. Turkification and centralization policies contributed to the decline, but the negative stereotype existed due to the perception of Ottoman rule as foreign domination causing economic exploitation, social and political oppression, cultural suppression, religious differences, and the emergence of Arab nationalism and independence movements. Ideologies in Türkiye and the Arab world were

influenced by European great powers, resulting in the development of separate narratives that still shape the political perspectives of Arab and Turkish political elites.

### *3.2 “Back-stabbed” Narrative*

The famous phrase used by Turks “Arabs stabbed the Turks in the back” describing the Arab Revolt during World War I as a betrayal by Arabs, has been used by some Turkish nationalists (Cagaptay, 2019). The Arab Revolt was an uprising initiated by Arab nationalists against the Ottoman Empire, which was primarily composed of Turks. According to some Turkish sources, the Ottoman Empire had treated the Arabs fairly and provided them with opportunities for political and social advancement. While the empire was declining, the Young Turk Movement shifted towards Turkish nationalism, with Anatolia becoming its core. After World War I and territorial changes, Republic of Türkiye emerged as antithesis to Arab world after World War I. Initially, Islam was used to defend the state, but once recognized internationally, secularism became central to Kemalist nationalism. Kemalist principles replaced previous ideologies and shaped Türkiye's foreign policy. The approach to the Middle East was cautious and non-interventionist, viewing the region as a backward zone of conflict. The Kemalist elite saw the Middle East as an unattractive and uneasy neighborhood, only engaging with it when Turkish security concerns necessitated it (Jung, 2005). The Kemalist reforms faced challenges, particularly in the question of identity, given the diverse ethnic and religious groups in the country, and the suppression of Kurdish identity has led to tension and resistance. Despite renewed efforts to recognize and accommodate Kurdish identity within the framework of Turkish nationalism, progress has been slow and fraught with difficulties. Undoubtedly, Turkish perceptions and policies towards the Middle East are still influenced by the history of the Ottoman Empire and Atatürk's domestic reforms.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUNDS**

#### **CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS SIMILARITIES**

There are various factors that, when compared to the circumstances in European nations, make the integration process in Türkiye somehow simpler. The cultural and religious connections between Syrians and Turks are a major factor in Türkiye's easier integration. The majority of the population in both nations is Muslim, therefore there are several cultural practices that are similar. Additionally, the close proximity between Syria and Türkiye allows for easier movement and interactions, promoting social and economic integration. Lastly, 400 years of Ottoman rule creates a level of understanding and common ground between Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees, facilitating integration. Despite these advantages, integrating a large number of refugees still presents challenges, where mostly language barriers, legal complexities, and social prejudices hinder integration.

##### *4.1 Religion*

The religious similarity between the Syrian and Turkish communities plays a significant role in their shared cultural aspects. Both populations primarily follow Islam, practicing common religious traditions, and adhering to Islamic teachings on morality and ethics. It encompasses various aspects of life, including dietary choices, business practices, financial dealings, and personal behavior, while promoting mutual respect, aids in integration efforts, and fosters harmonious coexistence.

Turks are not Arabs but have their own modernized Turkish school of Islam, which differs from Syrian approaches to religion. In accordance with the findings of Santoro, these differences are reflected in food and drink preferences. A small percentage of Syrians in Türkiye consume alcohol, while a significantly higher percentage of Turks have tasted alcohol, even among religious individuals. The observation of Turks drinking alcohol often

surprises Syrian arrivals, highlighting the cultural disparity between the two groups (Santoro, 2019). Besides that, the ability of Syrian refugees and Turkish people to connect socially and find common ground depends on their shared religious beliefs (Biçer, 2017).

#### *4.2 Culture*

Another common aspect is the importance of family, mutual support, respect, and loyalty contributing to a sense of kinship and social cohesion between Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens. Both cultures emphasize commitment in marriage and relationships, creating a stable environment for children. Child marriages, especially among Syrian refugees, are common, although the Directorate of Religious Affairs retracted its support for such marriages after public outcry in 2018 (Freedom on the net, 2022). Shared values regarding respect for the elderly, support for the needy, and a sense of charity and communal responsibility promote family bonds, social cohesion, and empathy between them. This culture of kindness and generosity fosters a strong sense of obligation to assist those facing hardships, further strengthening integration efforts.

According to Bicer (2017), Syrian immigrants in Kilis have adapted to different facets of Turkish society, such as attire, food, and behavior since they perceive connections between Turkish and their own culture.

While Arabic and Turkish are distinct languages, there is indeed a linguistic connection between these two communities. The Turkish language has been influenced by Arabic throughout history, particularly in domains such as religion, science, and administration. Many Arabic-derived words have been adopted into the Turkish vocabulary, enriching the language, and creating a linguistic bridge between the two communities. In addition to Arabic influence on Turkish, there is also Turkish influence on Arabic, including in Syrian colloquial and vernacular languages. Turkish-derived words have been incorporated into everyday speech and expressions, becoming part of the local linguistic fabric, especially in the border areas. Moreover, there are shared proverbs and expressions between the Syrian and Turkish communities. These common linguistic elements often reflect shared cultural

values, experiences, and wisdom. They contribute to a sense of shared understanding and familiarity, further strengthening the linguistic connection between the two communities. Absolutely, the presence of Turkish-derived words in Arabic and vice versa indicates a historical and cultural exchange between the Syrian and Turkish communities. While the extent of these linguistic similarities may vary depending on regional dialects, they do reflect the interaction and influence between the two cultures over time. Such linguistic connections can play a significant role in facilitating communication and fostering cultural understanding, especially in areas where the Syrian and Turkish communities have had historical ties or frequent interaction, such as border regions. They contribute to a shared linguistic heritage that can bridge gaps and promote mutual comprehension.

Another similar thing are their traditional wedding customs, such as elaborate celebrations, lively music and dancing, and the gathering of loved ones, are cherished in both cultures, holding significant cultural value. The Eid holidays involve communal prayers, family gatherings, exchanging greetings and gifts, and enjoying festive meals. In terms of cuisine, there are shared elements in traditional food types. Both Syrian and Turkish cuisines feature dishes like kebabs, falafel, baklava, and various stews. While there may be regional variations, the commonalities in ingredients, cooking methods, and certain dishes create a sense of connection and facilitate cultural exchange through food. Musically, both cultures share similarities in melodies, scales, and musical instruments. There are overlapping influences in classical, folk, and traditional music styles. Elements such as maqamat (musical modes), rhythmic patterns, and instrumental compositions showcase a shared musical heritage between the two cultures. In terms of traditional dances, there are notable similarities. The dabke, a popular line dance characterized by synchronized footwork and hand-holding, is performed in both Syrian and Turkish cultural contexts.

Folk dances like the halay in Turkiye and traditional dances of the Levant region also exhibit common movements and energetic rhythms. The art of calligraphy, in particular, demonstrates an interconnectedness between Arabic and Turkish calligraphic styles. Both cultures utilize intricate illumination techniques in religious manuscripts and decorative

arts. Moreover, decorative patterns and motifs in architecture, ceramics, and textiles reflect common influences and designs. These shared artistic elements illustrate the historical and cultural interactions that have shaped the artistic heritage of the region. They contribute to a sense of shared artistic identity and heritage between the Syrian and Turkish communities (Shaherhawasli & Güvençer, 2021). According to the survey conducted by UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), 77 percent of Turks believe Syrians do not have cultural similarities with Turks, while Syrians consider themselves socially close to Turks (Tokyay, 2022).

While there are shared ethnic groups like Arabs, Turkmen, and Kurds, the distribution and prominence of these groups differ between the two countries. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the specific ethnic makeup, traditions, and customs can vary across different regions within each country. In Türkiye, the Kurdish population is more significant, particularly in the southeastern region, where they form a significant portion of the population. In Syria, Arab and Kurdish populations have a substantial presence, alongside other minority groups. By recognizing and appreciating the regional differences, we gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of both Turkish and Syrian cultures and its heritage.

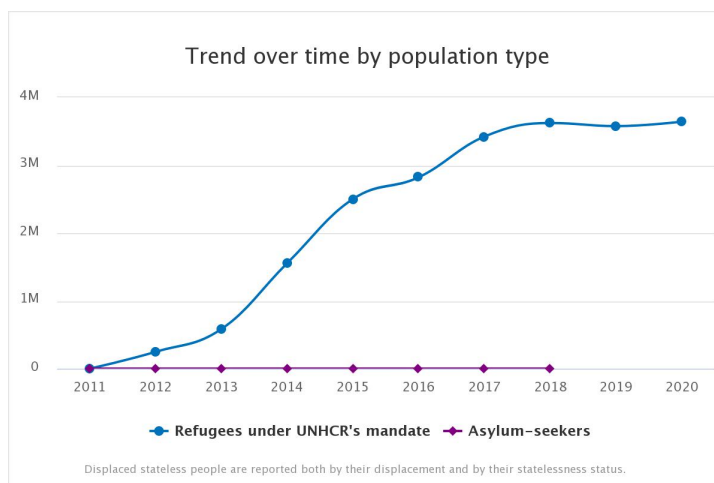
Changes in political and economic conditions in Türkiye, as well as the ongoing conflict in Syria, can indeed impact the relationship between the Syrian refugees and the host population. Shifts in political narratives, economic challenges, and changing social circumstances can influence perceptions and attitudes towards integration. While cultural proximity initially provided an advantage for integration efforts, the influence of other daily developments, such as the challenges of hosting a large refugee population, can overshadow the initial positive atmosphere. As time passes and circumstances change, the cultural similarity may lose some of its potential to promote integration, as other factors come into play. It has been argued that when one group has more access to political, economic, or social resources and utilizes those resources to impose control or privilege over others, dominance may result.

However, a crucial question arises regarding these similarities: „Does similarity of identity threaten equality or dominance of the stronger?“ In response to that, we will take two situations as possible scenarios. Firstly, if the Syrian refugee community in Türkiye strengthens their collective identity and preserves their cultural heritage, it could lead to a vibrant multicultural society. However, an overly exclusive Syrian identity could hinder integration and create social divisions with the Turkish host community. Secondly, if the Turkish host community emphasizes and reinforces their cultural identity, it can foster unity and pride. However, it is important to be mindful of the risk of excluding other cultural groups, including Syrian refugees. Striking a balance is crucial, promoting Turkish identity while ensuring inclusivity, respect, and equal rights for all individuals. In contrast to that, what could happen if Russian immigrants strengthen own national identity which is the opposite of Turks, Afghans, Syrians? Then, we can consider a possible scenario of strengthening a national identity that differentiate from other immigrant groups, resulting in heightened ethnic tensions, social polarization, political instability, discrimination and exclusion, and the loss of social cohesion.

## CHAPTER 5

### CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SYRIANS IN TURKIYE

The movement for democracy and freedom, known as Arab Spring, began in Tunisia in 2011 and spread to Syria, leading to a violent war and mass displacement of Syrians. The Syrian Civil War, caused millions to become refugees. In 2012, over 500,000 fled to neighboring countries like Türkiye, Jordan, and Lebanon (Refugee Data Finder). Türkiye hosts a significant population of Syrian refugees, making it one of the countries with the highest number of Syrian refugees in the region (Refugees and internally displaced persons, 2023). As a home to over 3.6 million Syrians under temporary protection, the Turkish government has spent over USD 37 billion to support these refugees, providing them with free access to healthcare services.



*Picture 1: Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)*

Source: [UNHCR - Refugee Statistics](#)

The provided table shows the number of refugees or displaced persons originating from Syria and seeking asylum in other countries for the years 2011 to 2020. Over the years, the number of Syrian refugees seeking asylum in Türkiye has increased significantly. In 2011,

there were 19 refugees, but by 2016, the number had risen to 2,823,987. The trend continued, reaching 3,737,369 Syrian refugees in Türkiye by 2021.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute's data from 2020, the average life expectancy at birth in Türkiye increased to 78.6 years, with males living an average of 75.9 years and females living an average of 81.3 years, which may influence the needs and demands of migrant populations in terms of healthcare, social services, and overall well-being. At age 50, the average remaining life expectancy in Türkiye was 30.9 years (28.6 years for males and 33.1 years for females), presenting the potential long-term impact of migration on the aging population, as migrants who arrive in Türkiye at age 50 can expect to have an average of 30.9 years of remaining life (Hayat Tabloları, 2017-2019, 2020). The provided data excluded foreign citizens living in Türkiye and was based on population and mortality data from 2017-2019.

When analyzing the age distribution, the largest age group among immigrants in 2019 and 2020 was the 25-29 age group, making up 13.3% and 12.5% of the immigrant population, indicating that there is significant migration activity within this specific age range. Similarly, among emigrants in 2019 and 2020, the largest age group was 25-29, comprising 15.2% and 15.2% of the emigrant population.

When it comes to the immigration by province, Istanbul is the the highest concentrated province, following Ankara, Antalya, Bursa, and Izmir, indicating that these may have specific characteristics, opportunities, or attractions that draw migrants (International Migration Statistics, 2023). Based on the previous studies, immigrant children in areas with strong industries and accessible public schools have increased chances of upward mobility and achieving the middle-class status in future generations. Furthermore, immigrants often underestimate their earning potential, but children quickly catch up and outperform their peers due to the principles and abilities instilled by their parents.

In 2016, the Turkish government issued a significant number of permits to Syrians, including residence permits, student residence permits, and work permits. The exact

number of permits granted to Syrians is not specified, but they were part of the total permits issued for citizens from Iraq, Syria, and Azerbaijan, which amounted to 244,034. Syrians also received student residence permits (61,116) and work permits (56,591) alongside individuals from other countries (Turkey Immigration Report Shows Increase of Permits in Turkey, 2023).

Syrians find Türkiye appealing due to factors such as relaxed employment regulations, established communities, shared religion and culture, and the possibility of returning to Syria. Rural regions in Türkiye are seen as a more viable migration option compared to Europe for those who find urban life challenging and expensive. Language barriers, unemployment, and limited housing pose challenges for Syrian migrants, similar to other countries. The EU-Türkiye deal in 2016 aimed to reduce refugee flows to Europe and offered visa-free travel and aid to Türkiye. While the deal has led to a decrease in refugees crossing from Türkiye to Greece, many refugees choose to stay in Türkiye due to the belief in the possibility of a better life there (Simpson, Balcioglu, & Almutabagani, 2017).

On the other hand, migrants and refugees in Türkiye have lower labor market integration and participation rates compared to the native-born population, especially for those with lower education levels. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been working in Türkiye since 2015 to find decent work opportunities for Syrian refugees through their Refugee Response Programme. The program includes five projects aimed at enhancing skills, creating job and entrepreneurship opportunities, and strengthening governance systems. Although progress has been made, more support is needed to ensure access to education and employment for Syrian refugees in Türkiye, especially considering Türkiye's aging population (2019 International Migration and Displacement Trends and Policies Report to the G20, 2020).

According to the latest survey conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the majority of Syrian migrants and refugees have chosen Türkiye as their final destination. Additionally, 86% of the Syrian respondents who participated in the survey said that Türkiye was their final destination. Research indicates that Syrians chose Türkiye

mostly for reasons related to safety, socioeconomic conditions, and ease of access to the refugee. It is evident that Syrians made up the largest percentage of adult females among the migrants and refugees that entered Türkiye, at 52% (Migrants and Refugees Increasingly Choosing Turkey as Final Destination, 2018).

### *5.1 Legal Status and Protection*

Türkiye is a party to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees, but has a geographical limitation reservation. This means that Türkiye grants refugee status to individuals from Europe and provides temporary protection to non-European refugees until they can be resettled in a safe third country. Initially, Türkiye implemented an open-door policy, providing temporary protection to these refugees with the expectation that they would eventually return home. In April 2009, first group reached the Cilvegözü Border Gate in Hatay, marking the beginning of Syrian mobility into Türkiye (Temporary Protection in Turkey, n.d.). To address the Syrian refugee crisis, Türkiye passed the Law on Foreigners and International Protection in 2013, which includes a geographical limitation clause, by granting refugee status to those coming from Europe and provides conditional refugee status to individuals fleeing events outside Europe. Additionally, a new status called "temporary protection" was introduced for individuals who do not qualify as refugees but face serious threats in their home countries.

The legal status of "guest" or "misafir" granted to Syrians under temporary protection in Türkiye is distinct and does not have an equivalent in national and international legal literature, setting it apart from the terms "Syrian refugees" and carrying unique legal implications (Bidinger, et al., 2014). Law No. 6458 introduced the concepts of "refugee, conditional refugee, and temporary protection" for individuals seeking asylum through individual migration. However, the war in Syria led to a mass influx of Syrian refugees, resulting in the establishment of "temporary protection status" under the same law. This status allows the displaced population to be temporarily granted international protection until a safe environment is restored in their home country. It was introduced because it

became impractical to grant individual statuses to the large number of people seeking refuge in Türkiye. According to Article 91 of Law No. 6458:

- 1) “Temporary protection may be provided for foreigners who have been forced to leave their country, cannot return to the country that they have left, and have arrived at or crossed the borders of Turkey in a mass influx situation seeking immediate and temporary protection.”
- 2) “The actions to be carried out for the reception of such foreigners into Turkey; their stay in Turkey and rights and obligations; their exit from Turkey; measures to be taken to prevent mass influxes; cooperation and coordination among national and international institutions and organisations; determination of the duties and mandate of the central and provincial institutions and organisations shall be stipulated in a Directive to be issued by the Council of Ministers.”

The article indicates that, temporary protection status is a temporary solution for handling a large number of individuals seeking asylum through mass migration. Syrians under temporary protection status in Türkiye do not receive individual statuses like "refugee" or "temporary protection status," which leads to different procedures and rights in areas such as residence, work permits, domestic travel, and citizenship. The Temporary Protection Regulation, issued in 2014, aims to address urgent protection needs in mass asylum situations, uphold the non-refoulement principle to prevent return to places of persecution, and ensure basic human rights standards. Under the Temporary Protection Regulation, initial services provided include entry into the country, disarmament, referral to reception centers, health checks, registration, issuance of temporary protection identity documents, accommodation in centers, and the right to reside outside these centers. It is worth noting that Article 26 of the regulation grants access to healthcare, education, job market, social services, assistance, and translation services to individuals covered by the regulation (Turkey: Law No. 6458 of 2013 on Foreigners and International Protection, 2013). There is a sense of injustice and frustration among certain segments of the population, as many Turks feel discriminated against for paying into the healthcare system, while some refugees

receive free healthcare. It remains a challenge for policymakers to balance the needs of citizens and refugees when promoting a more inclusive health system.

### *5.2 Border Barriers*

Turkiye, an upper-middle-income country, leads the G20(The Group of Twenty) nations in hosting the highest number of refugees and is experiencing a notable transformation from being perceived as a transit country to becoming an increasingly prominent final destination for displaced individuals. The large number of refugees has strained Türkiye's resources and infrastructure, creating challenges in managing the crisis. Syrians have been significantly affected by migration factors in Türkiye and the Eastern Mediterranean. The EU-Türkiye statement, aimed at managing migration flows, has also impacted Syrian migrants, particularly those arriving on the Aegean islands. Overcrowding in reception facilities has prompted transfers to the mainland.

In 2020, Syrians were among the main nationalities involved in document fraud during intra-EU/Schengen movements. They applied for asylum in significant numbers and were frequently detected as document fraudsters upon entry at EU/SAC (Special Area of Conservation) airports. But some of applicants withdrew their asylum applications before completion (Frontex E. B., 2020). However, critics argue that patriotism and nationalism also significantly predicted support for apprehending and punishing undocumented immigrants (Mukherjee, Molina, & Adams, 2012).

While some refugees have obtained citizenship, the public strongly opposes granting citizenship, and refugees face restrictions on their freedom of movement and lack political rights. The large refugee population is also vulnerable to workplace exploitation. During the review period, Syrian refugees in Türkiye were deported for their online activities. In October 2021, racist comments made by a Turkish citizen led to a backlash from Syrians who posted videos and photos of themselves eating bananas.

The Turkish Ministry of Interior deported seven refugees and investigated 31 others, while an additional 45 asylum seekers were deported in November 2021. Lawmakers attempted

to legalize virtual GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) numbers for foreigners and refugees in July 2020. In May, the far-right Victory Party shared hateful tweets about refugee women. These incidents, combined with the government's crackdown on refugee rights organizations, have caused NGOs to limit their online activities and avoid attracting negative attention from authorities (Freedom on the net, 2022).

When it comes to smuggling, these networks in Türkiye are still using boats for migrant crossings, while firearms smuggling is a concern at land borders. There's a rising risk of heroin trafficking from Africa to Europe, potentially leading to increased smuggling at maritime borders and the Black Sea region (Frontex, 2021). Migrant smugglers in Türkiye successfully met the growing demand from Syrian migrants by coordinating simultaneous departures. Syrian migrants have played a significant role in migration flows addressed through agreements such as the EU-Türkiye Statement and other bilateral agreements between EU Member States and Western Balkan countries (Frontex E. B., 2020). In 2020-21, the COVID-19 pandemic and challenges related to Syrians, such as temporary protection, asylum, irregular migration, and return, dominated migration policy. In February 2020, Türkiye opened its borders, allowing irregular migrants, including Syrians, to try to cross into Greece and Bulgaria. However, both countries closed their borders, leaving many migrants, including Syrians, stranded at the border (International Migration Outlook, 2022).

### *5.3 Education*

Refugees, including many educated Syrians, often flee to Europe seeking a better quality of life due to conflict and war in their home countries. Before the war, Syria had a well-regarded education system. However, upon reaching their destination, refugees face challenges accessing healthcare, social rights, and having their diplomas recognized, hindering their integration and pursuit of professional opportunities (Why many refugees fleeing to Europe are highly educated, 2015).

Refugees' education plays a role in their likelihood of reaching distant destinations. Syrian and Afghan refugees in Germany, as well as Syrians in Jordan, tend to have higher levels of education and positive selection. However, Syrians in Lebanon and internally displaced Iraqis show slight negative selection in terms of education (Welker, 2022). Despite the large number of Syrian refugees in Turkish public schools, there has not been a significant education-related backlash from the Turkish public. This could be due to the desire for Syrians to learn Turkish and reduce reliance on Arabic, as well as concerns that without education, Syrians may become a permanent underclass.

According to a 2017 poll, 33% of Turks believe Syrians should only be educated in Turkish, while 26% believe they should not receive any education at all, possibly indicating a fear of their long-term presence (Makovsky, 2019). Due to the uncertainty of their stay and the fear of deportation, some parents of Syrian refugees are hesitant to invest in their children's education, including learning the Turkish language required for primary education in Türkiye. However, parents who have long-term plans and potential opportunities, such as the chance to obtain Turkish citizenship, are motivated to encourage their children to learn Turkish and have optimistic expectations for their educational futures (Karaagac, Bilecen, & Veenstra, 2022).

Recent research indicates a prevailing misconception among Turks regarding the income generation of Syrians, with a significant number believing that Syrians solely depend on state assistance. Furthermore, survey data reveals that 71 percent of the Turkish population opposes granting citizenship to Syrians. On the other hand, 46 percent of Syrians express a sense of integration within Turkish society, while expressing a preference for maintaining temporary protection status to avail themselves of associated benefits (Tokyay, 2022).

In contrast to Jordan and Lebanon, which host the largest concentrations of Syrian refugees and benefit from a common Arabic mother tongue that facilitates integration, Syrian refugees in Türkiye face significant language barriers that hinder their integration process, although the presence of common words. Cultural knowledge is a crucial factor in the successful social integration of language learners, as language acquisition is closely linked

to an understanding of the cultural context in which it is spoken. Efforts to teach Turkish to Syrian refugees are crucial for their economic independence, education, and sense of belonging, fostering the growth and importance of the language. By combining language learning with Turkish culture, their integration is facilitated through understanding values and ways of thinking. Recognizing the interdependence of language and culture, education should prioritize cultural understanding in institutions, aiding refugee children's adaptation and harmony with the local community, as exemplified in Kilis, Türkiye. This includes watching Turkish movies, singing Turkish tunes and participating in cultural exchanges (Biçer, 2017).

The Turkish government is preventing some Syrian refugees with university degrees from leaving the country to offer them citizenship. Over 1,000 Syrians have been stopped from traveling to the US and other countries for this reason. Türkiye is considering the economic benefits of integrating refugees versus the potential loss of talent through brain drain. Despite hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees worldwide, Türkiye has not provided them with the same education and employment opportunities as Europe and North America. Integration reforms have been slow, leaving most Syrians unable to access the legal job market and adequate education for their children. The lack of job opportunities in Türkiye and other host countries has led to the mass movement of Syrians to Europe, according to a UN survey (Feldman, 2016).

The EU-Türkiye deal, aimed at curbing illegal migration, has also slowed down the legal emigration of Syrians as Türkiye considers the economic benefits of integration. However, it would be legally questionable and "unacceptable" to force approved travelers to stay in the country without justification or consent. Unfortunately, families affected by this situation are left in limbo, awaiting clarity about their future.

The Law on Foreigners and International Protection in Türkiye grants Syrian refugees access to primary and secondary education. With proper documentation, refugees can obtain an international protection ID, and alternative methods are used to establish their identity if documentation is unavailable. The Temporary Protection Legislation regulates

education in primary and secondary schools based on Ministry of Education guidelines, while higher education follows guidelines from the Turkish Council of Higher Education. Syrian students in Türkiye receive scholarships from the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities, and efforts are being made to increase Syrian enrollment in Turkish universities through a year-long academic Turkish language course (Aras & Yasun, 2016). Despite efforts to provide basic services to refugees, many refugee children lack access to education and few adults find formal employment.

#### *5.4 Process of Return*

Türkiye has opened its borders for Syrian refugees with valid documentation multiple times since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. Those who chose to return were required to do so before the deadline, and anyone returning after that date would be treated as a new arrival and subject to the immigration process. Assad has urged Syrian refugees to return home, but a survey revealed that 75% of those who returned to government-held areas faced harassment, conscription, or arrest. A recent study affirms that individuals associated with opposition groups, media activism, or humanitarian work are particularly vulnerable. Pressure on refugees to return is increasing, with neighboring countries tightening restrictions to encourage their departure. Over the past two years, nearly 2,000 people have been arrested upon returning to Syria, with hundreds more affected in previously rebel-held areas (Loveluck, 2019).

A significant number (41%) of Syrian refugees who returned home did so involuntarily, citing coercion or force. Even among those who claimed their return was voluntary, factors like poor living conditions, security concerns, and limited opportunities influenced their decision. Family reunification, especially among those returning from abroad, played a significant role, indicating that restrictive policies in host countries may have influenced their choices. Approximately half of the returnees expressed confidence in their decision, while the other half had regrets or doubts.

11% of Syrian returnees with Housing, land, and property (HLP) in their area cannot reclaim it due to destruction or armed group takeover. In government-controlled areas, 24% of returnees with HLP face challenges due to laws targeting dissidents. These laws have caused at least 50,000 Syrians to lose their homes. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) face even greater difficulties in reclaiming their property, posing a significant obstacle to their return. About 32% of Syrian returnees encountered difficulties with passports, registering children and marriages. A quarter lacked official documentation, risking statelessness. Many reported a lack of justice and law enforcement, with 27% stating these channels were non-existent (Jordan, Akil, & Karam, 2022).

According to the UNHCR, over 22,000 voluntary return interviews were observed in Türkiye in 2021 and worked with the Turkish authorities to enhance procedural safeguards for these returns in collaboration with PMM (Provincial Migration Management) (UNHCR Turkey - Fact Sheet February 2022, 2022). In 2021, discussions regarding the voluntary return of migrants gained momentum, including talks on establishing safe zones. In September 2020, the Directorate General for Migration Management, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Turkish Red Crescent signed a protocol to enhance operational cooperation for the National Assisted Voluntary Return (NAVR) mechanism (International Migration Outlook, 2022).

Additionally, nationals of Syria saw an increase in the number of return decisions in 2019, while Iraqis showed a decrease compared to the previous year. The majority of these return decisions were issued by EU countries of arrival (Frontex E. B., 2020). According to the latest study, host-country conditions had little effect on return intentions as long as safety concerns in Syria remained unaddressed (Alrababah, Masterson, Casalis, Hangartner, & Weinstein, 2020). On the other side, some refugees are thinking of returning to Syria due to tough living conditions and discrimination in neighboring countries. Economic hardship, lack of secure income, and a desire to be with family are the main reasons for their decision. However, when they return, many struggle to find jobs and meet basic needs (Baas, 2018).

### *5.5 Economic Challenges*

They affect both formal and informal employment. At first, formal employment was boosted by the labour-intensive work of building and managing camps. But as more people moved outside the camps, the impact on formal employment became adverse. Areas where the Syrian refugee crisis is more intense have higher unemployment rates and fewer formal and informal employment opportunities. A crucial role in influencing unemployment rates is played by the educational level of the labour force. More unskilled people in the workforce are associated with more undeclared work. This suggests that economic growth has no impact on formal employment. Including Syrian refugees in the labor market is essential for reducing economic and social strain and improving their welfare. This is because it creates demand for goods and services, channelling public funds into local employment and boosting trade between Türkiye and Syria. Syrian refugee density in a region negatively affects formal employment, with 20 fewer formal jobs for every 100 Syrian refugees (Esen & Binatlı, 2017).

## CHAPTER 6

### TURKISH INFLUENCE AND NARRATIVES

#### *6.1 Foreign Policy in the Neighborhood*

The "Zero Problems with Neighbors" policy was introduced in the early 2000s by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his party to improve relations and stability with Türkiye's neighboring countries, but faced obstacles due to regional conflicts like the Arab Spring and the Syrian civil war and the policy ultimately became "nothing but problems" (Polat, 2016).

During the 1990s, Türkiye adopted a more proactive foreign policy, investing heavily in neighboring countries, having democratic neighbors in Europe and partially democratic neighbors in Asia, such as Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, despite recent criticisms of their democratic systems. Connections with Middle Eastern nations are complex, influenced by political, cultural, economic, and historical factors. Europe and the United States rely on Türkiye's cooperation and coordination to address issues like the refugee crisis, the threat of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), and the Syrian civil war. With its economic strength and status as a democratic Muslim nation, Türkiye has the potential to exert "soft power" and bring about a new era of stability, known as "Pax Ottomanica" (Zürcher E. , 2017).

As a result of its engagement in the Syrian civil war and backing for the Government of National Accord in Libya, Türkiye has reoriented itself toward the East, positioning itself as a natural intermediary between the USA, China, and other major nations. Since the AKP party came to power, Türkiye's foreign policy has shifted towards the East, driven by national interests and economic opportunities. Increasing cooperation with China, Iran, and Russia highlights Türkiye's move away from Western ideals, while Western countries have

diminished influence in promoting democracy and liberal ideals, is strong proof that Türkiye is heading toward the "East" (Rule of Law, 2021).

The close ties to the East, particularly Arab countries, could increase trade, investment, and collaboration, fostering shared economic identity and interdependence. Furthermore, potential relations could lead to a blending of cultural identities, collective political identity, shifts in regional power dynamics, and a reassertion of Arab identity and pan-Arab solidarity. In terms of migration, this shift can have an impact through potential scenarios such as closer refugee cooperation, border security and management measures, regional solutions, and bilateral agreements on migration-related matters. Zakaria emphasized the "rise of the rest," referring to the economic growth and increasing influence of countries like China, India, Brazil, Russia, and others (Zakaria, 2008). The fact that the world is shifting towards the East and that the "American dream" no longer holds the same prominence in achieving goals, has become a reality nowadays. Türkiye may potentially benefit from increased cooperation and aspire to become a regional power while aligning itself with future superpowers.

## *6.2 Impact on Languages*

In Türkiye, discrimination based on language is very common and often has a historical background related to events that have shaped their history. Derogatory expressions, terms, idioms, and proverbs are used as tools of discrimination and racism against minority groups, thereby reinforcing negative stereotypes.

Turkish language has expressions that are commonly used in informal conversations, cultural contexts, and slangs, for instance: "*Arap saçı gibi*" (like Arab's hair) which means a mess from which there is not exit; "*ne Şam'ın şekeri ne Arap'ın yüzü*" (neither the sugar of Damascus nor the face of the Arab) which is said for undesirable people who are not wanted to be met even though it has many benefits; "*bir şey anladıysam Arap olayım*" literally, "Let me be Arab if I understand anything" is used to express frustration or disbelief when something is difficult to comprehend, but it can perpetuate negative

stereotypes about Arabs and may be considered offensive (Cagaptay, 2019). This expression “*Arap kılığına girmek*” (Disguise oneself as an Arab) refers to deceitfully assuming an Arab identity, often associated with manipulation or unethical attempts to conceal one's true self, carrying a negative connotation; “*Kıskananın Arap olsun*” (Let the envious person be an Arab) that suggests allowing the envious person to suffer the consequences of their jealousy or envy.

The Turkish phrase “*Arap eli öpmekle dudak kararmaz*” translates to “A person does not get dirty by coming into touch with anything filthy, ugly, or unclean” (Halis, 2013). It delivers the message that being respectful and polite to someone who comes from a different background has no negative effects and won't reflect poorly on the one who exhibits these behaviors. It encourages diversity, respect, and the idea that deeds of compassion are not limited by cultural boundaries.

The Arabic language was banned in Türkiye after the establishment of the Republic in 1923, but recently, there has been a revival of the language due to the influx of Arab tourists and refugees. Arabic language proficiency is now required by many companies and banks in Türkiye, leading to an increase in Arabic language teaching in institutes and universities.

While in Arabic, when prosecuting someone for stealing, it is common to use the phrase “لا تدع له في البيت وهو الترك” which translates to “Don't take him home, he is a Turk.” (Türkler Alehine Söylenmiş Atasözleri ve Deyimler, n.d.). It is important to note that this phrase has its historical context and may refer in court circumstances to highlight the seriousness of the theft charge and to prevent offering the accused person refuge or protection.

Since Erdoğan came to power, Turkish policy towards Arab nations has positively changed unlike previous presidents. The AKP government reintroduced Arabic language classes in schools and religious classes, resulting in the opening of Arabic language departments in public universities. The revival has been driven by a convergence of religious and economic needs, with older adults being the keenest to learn the language for deeper understanding of Islam and the Quran, or employment opportunities. However, some

young people associate Arabs with the Ottoman defeat in the First World War and blame refugees and Arabs for the economic downturn (Abdul Razzaq, 2023).

### *6.3 Attitudes towards Syrian Immigrants and Implications for National Identity*

As already mentioned, Jetten and Wohl (2012) suggest that disrupting group continuity can result in collective angst, driving individuals to limit outgroup interactions and potentially fostering anti-immigration views tied to apprehensions about the group's future (Bikmen, 2015). Studies confirm that collective fears and cultural threats directly influence immigration attitudes. In addition, it is possible to explain intergroup attitudes' predictive power by distinguishing bourgeois and ethnocentric attitudes that tend to lead to more exclusive views of migrants. But ethnic values tend to be linked to less exclusive views of immigrants (Tsukamoto & Fiske, 2018).

Negative public sentiment towards refugees is increasing, and they face legal and practical barriers that limit their movement within Türkiye. Individuals who perceive immigrants as representing a high level of threat are likely to refrain from casting a vote for Recep Tayyip Erdogan during the presidential election, due to his refugee policies, compared to individuals who do not perceive such an immigrant threat. Two opposing political parties with different ideologies exhibit contrasting approaches towards refugees. Regrettably, media news often portrays refugees negatively, emphasizing their nationality, resulting in damage to the reputation of countries and fostering a xenophobic atmosphere among civilians. The subject of significant concern centers around the discrimination and precarious safety conditions experienced by tourists or temporary residents in Türkiye who share visual similarities with individuals of Arab descent. This unfortunate circumstance is predominantly attributable to the continuous act of comparing such individuals with notions of Turkishness, fostering a climate of apprehension and suspicion, and consequently leading to their marginalization and vulnerability.

Public attitudes towards culturally dissimilar immigrants, such as Muslims in Europe, are generally more negative compared to culturally similar immigrants, influenced by

contextual, migrant, and personal characteristics, including education, political ideology, humanitarian concerns for involuntary refugees, and economic anxieties under certain conditions. Understanding the significance of subjective perceptions, framing in public policies, and media influence in shaping attitudes towards immigrants is crucial to prevent divisive consequences of migration, foster successful newcomer integration, and address negative implications of public opposition to immigration, including reduced opportunities, mental health challenges for newcomers, and broader societal consequences, emphasizing the need to promote support for immigration and refugee settlement (Verkuyten, Public attitudes towards migrants: understanding cross-national and individual differences, 2021).

More political and nationalistic than religious identification is associated with anti-Syrian views. For Syrians to integrate into Turkish culture, shared religion is not enough, and racism toward Syrians is still a big issue. Instead of serving Syrians, politicians may utilize religious discourse for political advantage. But there may be ways to build a more hospitable atmosphere for Syrians in Türkiye through individual efforts and the existence of organizations with a religious focus (Nawyn, 2019). According to current findings, a majority of 55 percent among the Turkish population holds a negative stance regarding Syrians opening their own businesses, primarily due to concerns of unfair competition (Tokyay, 2022).

The influx of Syrian immigrants in Türkiye has led to social challenges such as polygamy, increased divorce rates, and concerns about forced early marriages and sexual abuse. Economically, the strain on limited resources to meet the needs of both Turks and Syrians has become a concern. Majority of Turks express frustration over Syrians taking jobs at lower wages, leading to tensions. Unfortunately, landlords also charge higher rent to Syrians, exacerbating economic disparities and generating resentment among Turkish citizens (Yeniçeri, 2021).

The establishment of Syrian-owned food businesses in Türkiye has fostered the emergence of “Little Syrias”, “Little Aleppos” or Arabized neighborhoods, hindering integration and

limiting legal employment opportunities for Syrians, while the proliferation of Syrian restaurants and kebab shops in urban areas like Aksaray, Istanbul, has further contributed to the Arabization of these areas, impeding integration efforts. The culinary divergence between Syrian and Turkish cuisine has contributed significantly to the formation of Syrian ghettos, hampering assimilation and amplifying the perceived identity threat among Turks, while witnessing a remarkable increase in the number of companies with Syrian capital operating in Türkiye, predominantly in the food sector, employing approximately 100,000 workers since 2011 (Santoro, 2019).

The growing number of Arab restaurants, which aim to promote their own culinary heritage, have given rise to a culinary history marked by the opposition of Turkish colleagues, claiming that the already diverse, lively and tasty nature of Turkish cuisine negates the need for such integration. The widespread fear within the nation has obscured the fact that everyday foods like pizza, pasta, sushi, etc., that are part of its dietary habits are also of foreign cultural origin. This phenomenon prompts an examination of the possible extension of analogous cultural dynamics to these gastronomic elements, considering their comparable vulnerability to cultural appropriation.

#### *6.4 Anti-Refugee Discourses on Twitter and Political Campaigns*

In shaping the collective consciousness and paradigms of conversation in society, the media play a central role. However, it is important to recognize that media platforms can also be channels for spreading hate, disinformation and misinformation. When such content infiltrates public discourse, they can greatly promote negative attitudes and opinions towards refugees. It therefore contributes to reinforcing negative perceptions of this excluded population. Some political parties, seeking domestic advantages, have initiated campaigns that aim to provoke or incite conflict among Syrians. This strategy involves emphasizing individual grievances, often exaggerating government policy errors related to Syria, all with the goal of influencing public opinion against the Syrian presence and exerting pressure on the ruling party.

Presently, social media has become a prominent tool for the manipulation and regulation of particular nations, with the primary objective of acquiring power and influence in the realm of addressing critical issues. Social media platforms have led to widespread negative stereotyping of Arabs, with a particular focus on Syrians, through the amplification of individual mistakes and misjudgments made by certain individuals. These incidents have been deliberately framed to exacerbate existing problems and inaccurately portray the situation in order to create an overarching negative perception associated with all Syrians. This manipulation of public discourse serves the ulterior motivations of achieving political gains. This was achieved by consciously exaggerating the perceived shortcomings of the government policy on Syria, thus increasing the sense of disagreement within public opinion. This has been used to pressure the ruling party.

Turkish individuals show a notably high level of activity as users on the social media platform Twitter. Hashtags have been used for the creation of a nationalist agenda and the promotion of group identity. Within the online discourse, particularly among Turkish social media users, discussions have been prominently centered around the hashtag *#suriyelileriistemiyoruz*, meaning "we don't want Syrians." The hashtag discussion has portrayed Syrian refugees negatively, emphasizing their perceived weaknesses and ethnic characteristics, especially after Erdoğan's announcement of offering Turkish citizenship to Syrians. This has fueled division and harmful stereotypes on social media regarding their impact on Turkish nationalism. While the hashtag has gained widespread popularity, there is no evident leader promoting the discourse it represents. Notably, traditional political leaders have not embraced this particular hashtag, highlighting the absence of a central advocate in this anti-refugee narrative (Özerim & Tolay, 2021).

In online discourse, Syrian male refugees are often portrayed as potentially dangerous and colonialist, which perpetuates stereotypes. Objectifying Syrian refugee women by reducing them to their ability to reproduce and ignoring their needs. Discussions polarize and perpetuate negative stereotypes with derogatory terms such as "barbarians," "invaders," and "flagless." This rhetoric is used by radical groups to manipulate discussions of national

identity and to justify discrimination, aggression and hostility, especially towards Syrian refugees (Taşdelen, 2020). Among the most frequent content tokens in the data set, some carried negative associations related to concerns about the homeland. This can be seen in terms such as "*vatan elden gidiyor*" (we are losing our home). Hate discourse on Twitter constructs a nationalist Turkish identity by emphasizing the idea of a homeland and expressing concerns about the presence of refugees. Terms like 'my country,' 'my people,' 'my citizen,' 'our people,' 'Turks,' and expressions like 'we' and 'us' are used to construct an in-group identity. In some cases, the discourse supports the idea that racial discrimination is necessary in order to maintain the Turkish identity. The discourse tends to treat refugees living in Türkiye as a single ethnic group, despite the fact that they come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds (Yılmaz, Elmas, & Eröz, 2023).

A complex socio-political landscape has emerged due to a mix of economic challenges, the Syrian refugee debate, and skepticism regarding EU membership. Inflation and unemployment are rising along with public economic concerns. About 80 percent of Turkish voters support the return of Syrian refugees to Syria, making the Syrian refugee issue a prominent political issue. These refugees are seen as exploitative labor and competition for jobs, which adds to the economic strain. Furthermore, many Turkish citizens oppose joining the European Union, seeing it as a means to turn Türkiye into an "open prison for refugees." These interconnected influences impact public opinion and affect Türkiye's national and global relationships (Yavuz, 2021).

Media outlets like *Sözcü* have worsened the issue by publishing misleading headlines that distort data and fuel negative perceptions of refugees, especially regarding their impact on the job market. The title of the article was "Her 10 Suriyeli mülteci 6 Türk'ü işsiz bıraktı" (Every Ten Syrians Have Put Six Turks Out of a Job) (Kaya, 2021). In the mentioned case, the newspaper may have aimed to attract readers or push a particular narrative about the impact of Syrian refugees on jobs, even if it meant distorting data.

A tweet on Twitter has sparked concerns by highlighting predictions and potential threats from the Mayor of Hatay about the increasing influence of Syrian candidates in local

elections. He is stating that if a Syrian individual declares themselves as a mayoral candidate in Reyhanlı, Yayladağı, and Altınözü, they believe that person could win the election currently. Moreover, he predicts that within five years, this trend could extend to Kırıkhan and within ten years, potentially encompass the entire province of Hatay (Savaş, 2019). The statement reflects a perception of a changing political landscape and growing influence of Syrian candidates in these areas. Political campaigns in Türkiye strategically shape the narrative on repatriation to align with party policies, garner public support, influence opinions on identity and security, adapt positions to changing sentiments, and seize political opportunities for electoral advantage.

Turkish political parties demonstrate diverse stances on the migrant and refugee question. In the dynamic landscape of political discourse, immigration emerged as a focal point in the 2018 election manifestos, overshadowing its prominence in the 2015 counterparts, driven in part by escalating economic challenges and the imminent 2023 elections. While some parties, like the HDP, emphasize support for migrants' rights, others, such as the AKP, focus on a voluntary return to their home countries. The major opposition parties, CHP (Republican People's Party) and İP (İYİ Parti), criticize demographic changes and advocate for repatriation. Significantly, however, opposition parties have also been accused of capitalizing on public fears and using the presence of Syrian refugees to their own advantage. Opposition politicians spread disinformation, alleging President Erdoğan grants citizenship to refugees for electoral gain. Despite exaggerated claims about Syrian voters in the 2019 elections, less than half a percent of refugees were eligible to vote. The issue of migrants and refugees remains a complex and multifaceted aspect of Turkish political discourse (Tahiroğlu, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

A contribution of the present research relates to exploring the interaction between out-group stereotypes and the perception of threat within the backdrop of the Syrian refugee crisis in Türkiye, while also considering the impact on national identity and Turkish exceptionalism. The results suggest that, due to concerns about incompatible national ideologies, majority of Turks hold negative attitudes toward Syrian immigrants. Perceptions of one's own nationality have an impact on people's perceptions of immigrants and can be used to explain negative attitudes towards them.

Identity formation, especially national identity, is a complex process influenced by historical narratives, political ideologies, and socioeconomic realities. Immigration adds another layer of complexity as individuals with immigrant backgrounds navigate between multiple cultural belonging. Factors such as parental attachment to the country of origin and discriminatory practices affect the integration process. Embracing diversity and fostering inclusivity requires an understanding and respect for the complexities of individual and collective identities. This promotes empathy, collaboration, and positive societal change. Identity is shaped by both self-perception and external perceptions influenced by social, cultural, and personal factors. Immigrants go through a process of cultural assimilation over time. Perceived threats from immigration can reinforce exclusive national identities, leading to xenophobia and support for restrictive policies. Responses to these threats vary, with some embracing inclusive civic identities while others adopt exclusive national ones.

The complex interplay of geopolitics, cultural perceptions, and migration experiences underscores the enduring complexity of economic challenges, the Syrian refugee debate, and EU skepticism, which in turn shape Türkiye's global positioning and internal dynamics. Cultural similarities can initially facilitate integration, but changes in political and economic conditions can affect relations, making it crucial to maintain a balance between

identity preservation and inclusiveness to avoid potential challenges and promote a harmonious multicultural society.

Türkiye's intricate political landscape reflects the delicate balance between secularism and Islamic identity. The influence of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk extends beyond history and continues to shape the legal framework and contemporary socio-political dynamics. Amidst complex historical legacies and contemporary challenges, the nation's identity is evolving. Türkiye's situation in addressing the multifaceted issues arising from the Syrian refugee crisis highlights the interplay between legal measures, societal attitudes, and geopolitical dynamics.

The influx of Syrian refugees in contemporary Türkiye challenges the narrative of Turkish national identity rooted in the concept of Turkishness, where this challenge is multifaceted, impacting economic, social, and political domains. Economic strain, competition for jobs, and perceived cultural threats contribute to anti-refugee sentiments among a significant number of the Turkish population. Furthermore, the emergence of "Little Syrians" and Arabized neighborhoods hampers assimilation efforts and amplifies identity tensions. Social media and political campaigns exacerbate divisions, reinforcing negative stereotypes. The complex socio-political landscape underscores the need for inclusive policies, empathetic discourse, and proactive measures to address economic concerns and foster integration, while preserving the pluralistic fabric of Turkish society. The resurgence of Arabic language education signifies both economic motives and a cultural revival, yet discriminatory language persists, posing challenges to fostering inclusivity. As Turkey redefines its global role, addressing these linguistic and cultural sensitivities will be essential for promoting understanding and unity in an evolving global landscape.

Understanding the complex relationship between identity, threat perception, and immigration is crucial for developing comprehensive strategies. A diverse set of identities among migrants requires nuanced approaches that recognize the positive potential of

cultural diversity while addressing concerns about economic competition and cultural differences.

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