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Öz

Bu makalenin amacı, Konya kent merkezine ve çevre ilçelerine iskân edilen Bulgaristan muhacirlerini analiz etmektir. Makalede, Konya kentinde yaşamakta olan muhacirlerin şehre ve yerli halka yönelik göç deneyimlerine odaklanılmıştır. Muhacirlerin göç sonrasında yaşadıkları toplumsal tecrübeleri, kimlik algıları, aidiyet hisleri ve öznel pratikleri irdelenmiştir. Araştırma kapsamında, nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Toplam 21 katılımcı ile derinlemesine görüşme yapılmıştır. Ayrıca, 4'er kişiden oluşan iki odak grup görüşmesi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Katılımcılarla yapılan görüşmeler sonucunda, muhacirlerin göç deneyimi, muhacirlik algısına ilişkin veriler, geçmişe ilişkin veriler ve Konya halkı ile birlikte yaşama kültürüne ilişkin veriler olmak üzere üç tema üzerinden temellendirilmiştir. Muhacirlik algısına yönelik bulgulardan oluşan birinci temada, göç etmiş bireylerin kendilerini hâlâ muhacir olarak gördükleri ön plana çıkmaktadır. Geçmişe yönelik bulguların ele alındığı ikinci temada, Bulgaristan'ın muhacirlerin hatıralarında hâlâ canlı bir an olarak yer etmeye devam ettiği baskın şekilde görülmektedir. Konya halkı ile yaşama kültürüne dair bulgulardan oluşan üçüncü temada, muhacirler ile yerli halk arasında önemli bir duygusal mesafenin varlığı dikkat çekmektedir. Her üç tema da, yaşanan göç hareketinin, muhacirler açısından yalnızca bir mekân değişimi olmadığını gösteren açık örneklerden oluşmaktadır. Bu çerçevede makalede, muhacirlerin aidiyet hisleriyle ilişkili olarak geçirdikleri sosyal bütünleşme süreci çözümlenmeye çalışılmıştır.

Abstract

The objective of this article is to examine Bulgarian immigrants residing in the city center of Konya and its surrounding districts. The study concentrates on the migration experiences of these immigrants in relation to the city and its local inhabitants. It investigates the social experiences of the immigrants post-migration, their identity perceptions, sense of belonging, and subjective practices. A qualitative research methodology was employed for this study. In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 21 participants, supplemented by two focus group interviews comprising four individuals each. The interviews revealed three primary themes concerning the immigration experience: perceptions of being an immigrant, reflections on the past, and the culture of coexistence with the people of Konya. The first theme highlights that the individuals who migrated continue to perceive themselves as immigrants. The second theme indicates that memories of Bulgaria remain vivid among the immigrants. The third theme reveals a notable emotional distance between the immigrants and the local population of Konya. These themes collectively illustrate that the migration experience extends beyond mere relocation for the immigrants. In this context, the article seeks to analyze the social integration process experienced by the immigrants in relation to their sense of belonging.

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1. Introduction

Throughout history, individual and mass migration movements have been pivotal in shaping societies, serving as critical determinants in political, economic, cultural, and demographic contexts. These migrations have often led to significant transformations in political and social structures. A prominent example of such dynamics is observed in the migration flows between the Anatolian and Rumelian regions. As noted by Kemal Karpat, numerous historians contend that the Ottoman Empire was established in the Balkans and, by drawing strength from this region, subsequently completed the conquest of Anatolia. This assertion is largely accurate. The foundation and consolidation of the Ottoman Empire occurred between 1299 and 1448, culminating in the Battle of Varna, and spanned approximately 150 years, with the majority of its development transpiring in the Balkans (Karpat, 2015, p. 7). The strategic significance of the region underwent a transformation with the increased interest of major powers in the Balkans throughout the 19th century (Sander, 1969, p. 3). Concurrently, the 19th-century acceleration of nation-building processes led the Balkan region to aspire towards the establishment of nation-states (Yerasimos, 2015, p. 35). Prior to this period, the Ottoman Empire was perceived as a unified entity encompassing its territories in both Europe and Asia (Todorova, 2015, p. 135). However, the complex and ambiguous Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 marked the onset of a period characterized by nationalism and conflict in European history (Hall, 2003, p. ix). Consequently, the contemporary political landscape of the Balkans was shaped during what historians refer to as the 'long 19th century', extending from the French Revolution to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (Mazower, 2017, p. 124). Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, numerous migrants who had resided in the Balkans for five centuries relocated to Anatolia, with the largest influx originating from Bulgaria. Bulgarian migrants were resettled across various Anatolian cities as part of state-orchestrated settlement policies, with Konya being one of the cities that hosted these migrant communities. This article seeks to examine the cultural positioning, formation of belonging, and integration experiences of the Balkan migrants who settled in Konya, while exploring how the migration experience has influenced their identity perceptions. Accordingly, the migration process from Bulgaria to Konya is analyzed through the lens of individual and collective memory. The article is structured into three sections: a chronological review of the migration flows from the Balkans to Anatolia; an explanation of the methodological framework; and the presentation of findings, categorized under three themes: perceptions of migration, perceptions of the past, and the culture of coexistence.

2. Literature

Migration is a phenomenon with a history as extensive as that of humanity itself (Abadan-Unat, 2017, p. 1). It typically arises when the environmental conditions in which individuals sustain their lives become increasingly challenging to inhabit (Yüceşahin & Özgür, 2006, p. 16). The spatial mobility experienced during migration, along with the numerous variables that emerge from this movement, renders the migration process highly dynamic (Bağlı & Binici, 2005, p. 88). Consequently, migration has evolved beyond being merely a population movement; it has become a socio-cultural transformation, an economic shift, and a politically fluid concept (Kaygalak, 2009, p. 10). Therefore, migration should be defined as a multidimensional process with a highly complex structure. Various social scientists who have studied migration have attempted to elucidate the process through different definitions. According to Karpat (2003, p. 71), migration, in its simplest sense, is the act of moving from one's place of origin to a desired destination. Chambers (2014, p. 17) defines migration as a movement in which neither the point of departure nor arrival is fixed, emphasizing that being a migrant entails residing within constantly shifting languages, histories, and identities. Marshall (1999, p. 685), on the other hand, describes migration as a permanent movement of individuals or groups beyond symbolic or political boundaries into new societies and settlement areas. Undoubtedly, more definitions of migration can be provided; however, the perspectives presented by these scholars sufficiently illuminate the general meaning of migration. It is important to highlight that migration involves not only spatial relocation but also deeply affects the cognitive world of migrants. In this context, one of the essential topics to be addressed alongside migration is the issue of settlement.

The phenomenon of settlement is a crucial practice employed by states for various reasons, including the distribution of population and land, the efficient utilization of national resources, the allocation of ethnic groups and religious belief systems across the country, and the resolution of local problems (Babuş, 2006, p. 13). Based on these considerations, it is possible to speak of a new identity formation for the migrants resettled in the Anatolian region. While attempting to achieve social integration, migrants have simultaneously sought to preserve certain aspects of their cultural identity (Karpat, 2010, p. 27). This dual process has enabled the emergence of interpersonal relationships characterized by shared origins and bonds of friendship among migrants who arrived during different periods (Abadan-Unat, 2017, p. 18). As can be seen, both migration and settlement are essential concepts that must be examined in order to analyze the migration experience of the migrants. Accordingly, understanding the historical development of the migration flows from the Balkans to Anatolia is vital for comprehensively analyzing the situations faced by the migrants who, through the settlement process, established a new way of life in Anatolia.

Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, a sustained migration from the Balkans to Anatolia ensued (Halaçoğlu, 2014, p. 43). The migrants who arrived subsequent to the 1878 Ottoman-Russian War were resettled in areas such as Macedonia, Western Thrace, Edirne, and Western Anatolia as part of a political resettlement initiative (Ağanoğlu, 2012, p. 72). At the dawn of the 20th century, the scale of migration escalated significantly with the onset of the Balkan Wars. The oppression and atrocities perpetrated by Bulgarians, Greeks, Serbs, and Montenegrins against the Muslim-Turkish population of Macedonia and Rumelia precipitated mass migrations towards Anatolia (Halaçoğlu, 2014, p. 46). This situation persisted even after the cessation of hostilities. Between the Balkan Wars and the commencement of World

War I, approximately 300,000 to 400,000 migrants resettled in various regions of Anatolia (Ağanoğlu, 2012, pp. 112-113). Consequently, the Balkan Wars are recorded in history as one of the most tragic events for the Turks, as they were compelled to abandon their ancestral lands in Rumelia. This resulted in the forced migration and resettlement of the Turkish population, which had constituted the overwhelming majority in Rumelia for 550 years, to Anatolia (Toğrol, 1989, pp. 17-18). By the conclusion of World War I, nearly five million migrants had vacated their lands and relocated to Anatolia. These developments underscore that migration has been a persistent phenomenon throughout Ottoman history (McCarthy, 2014, p. 360). In addition to the Ottoman period, the migration flows from the Balkans to Anatolia following the establishment of the Republic of Turkey also warrant examination.

In the context of both immigration and settlement, the Balkan migration occupies a distinct place in Turkey's history. The recognition of Balkan migrants as one of the founding elements during the early years of the Republic exemplifies this significance, as considerable attention was devoted to both their migration and resettlement processes (Erder, 2018, p. 143). Furthermore, as İlhan Tekeli emphasizes, migration from the Balkans to Anatolia should be regarded not only as international migration but also, in a sense, as internal migration (Tekeli, 2010, pp. 55-60). According to official records from the Republican period, approximately 1.5 million migrants relocated to Turkey from the Balkan region. The largest portion of this migration originated from Bulgaria, followed by Greece, Yugoslavia, and Romania, respectively (Erder, 2018, pp. 154-165). Thus, Anatolia has historically remained a highly dynamic region shaped by successive waves of migration. Although these migration flows commenced prior to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, they continued throughout the Republican period and persist to this day. Within this broader Balkan migration context, Bulgaria holds particular significance as the most prominent source country.

The migration movement from Bulgaria necessitates not only meticulous academic investigation but also national reflection. To fully comprehend its significance, it is essential to analyze the historical stages through which this migration evolved between the two countries (Toğrol, 1989, p. 2). Between 1923 and 1933, a total of 101,507 individuals migrated from Bulgaria to Turkey. In this context, the Residence Agreement signed between Turkey and Bulgaria holds particular importance for the Muslim-Turkish minority residing in Bulgaria, as it regulated their migration to Turkey for the first time (Kâmil, 1989, p. 28). Consequently, between 1934 and 1939, a total of 26,942 families migrated to Turkey from Bulgaria, both through resettlement programs and voluntary migration (Şimşir, 1986, p. 211). However, following the 1944 military coup in Bulgaria, the newly established regime adopted a negative stance, resulting in the suspension of the agreement (Kâmil, 1989, p. 28). Consequently, migration from Bulgaria to Turkey diminished during and after World War II until 1950 (Geray, 1962, p. 33). During this period, Turkey's decision to close its border forced Bulgaria to reconsider its position. Bulgaria eventually accepted Turkey's conditions, leading to the reopening of the borders and the resumption of migration flows (Kemaloğlu, 2012, p. 36). As a result, approximately 155,000 migrants relocated to Turkey within a one-and-a-half-year period up to September 1951. These migrants were resettled in a systematic and organized manner by the state and were integrated into productive economic activities. In this regard, the migration agreement signed on December 2, 1950, stands out as the most comprehensive arrangement, facilitating both the settlement of migrants in Turkey and the reunification of fragmented families (Toğrol, 1989, p. 73).

By the 1960s, the Bulgarian government adopted a new political approach within the framework of its Bulgarization policy. Religious oppression against the Turkish minority intensified, initiating a process of forced Christianization (Kemaloğlu, 2012, p. 39). In the following years, approximately 130,000 Bulgarian Turks migrated to Turkey during a nine-year period of close relative reunification between 1969 and 1978 (Kâmil, 1989, p. 61). Although the primary aim of this migration was to reunite fragmented families, the intended goals were not fully achieved. The agreement stipulated that only relatives of those who had migrated before 1952 were eligible for migration permits, leaving many Bulgarian Turks in a difficult position. While the Turkish government provided support to those who migrated in 1950-1951, the newcomers were generally classified as voluntary migrants. Despite these developments, tensions between the two governments persisted. In the 1980s, a new wave of migration to Turkey began as a result of escalating religious and political pressures on the Turkish population living within Bulgaria's borders (Kemaloğlu, 2012, p. 43).

The Turkish-Muslim population, numbering approximately 1.5 million and whose existence and rights were guaranteed by various agreements, was subjected to policies aimed at eradicating their cultural and religious identity. From this period onward, Bulgaria's assimilation policies against the Turkish minority intensified, culminating in forced name changes (Toğrol, 1989, p. 78). Turkish-Muslims residing within the country's borders were compelled to abandon their names and adopt Slavic-Christian ones. Over 1,000 individuals who refused to comply were killed (Karpas, 2003, pp. 411-412). The hunger strikes that erupted across the country, particularly in the Belene labor camp and various prisons, served as the initial catalyst for mass migration, as people protested these events and sought to migrate to Anatolia between 1984 and 1985 (Çağlayan, 2006, p. 33). Many Turkish-Muslims who rejected assimilation and resisted the policies were arrested, tortured during interrogations, and punished through exile, imprisonment, or execution (Zafer, 2010, p. 30). As these events unfolded, the Bulgarian government gradually adopted a more favorable stance toward emigration and permitted migration in hopes of resolving the escalating tensions (Dayıoğlu, 2005, pp. 302-305). Consequently, in 1989, a total of 330,000 migrants relocated from Bulgaria to Turkey (Kemaloğlu, 2012, p. 172). These developments reveal a continuously recurring pattern of migration between Bulgaria and Anatolia. At this juncture, it becomes necessary to analyze the specific role played by the city of Konya within the context of these migration flows, particularly examining the periods during which Konya hosted these migrant populations.

The number of migrants who settled in Konya prior to World War I was lower compared to those who arrived in the 1920s. Initially, due to the impact of the Balkan Wars, many migrants first settled in cities such as Istanbul, Ordu, Adana, Izmir, and Mersin. Over time, however, they relocated to Konya, which they perceived as a more secure place for settlement (Kurtulgan, 2010, p. 68). Between 1950 and 1960, the number of migrants resettled in Konya was recorded as 1,523 (Geray, 1962, pp. 54-55). During the major wave of migration from Bulgaria to Turkey in 1989, 2,704 migrants were resettled in Konya (Kemaloğlu, 2012, p. 172). Consequently, Konya has periodically served as a destination for migrants throughout different migration waves. This situation necessitates an analysis of Konya's particular appeal for these migrant populations. Such an inquiry requires a multidimensional examination of the migration experiences of those who settled in Konya across various periods. It is essential to investigate the socio-cultural challenges faced by the migrants and how these experiences influenced their sense of belonging. In this context, the social lives of the migrants who relocated to Konya, their experiences throughout the migration process, and their relationships with the local population have been analyzed in depth.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Objective and Methodology

This article seeks to examine the Bulgarian migrants who were resettled in both the central and peripheral districts of Konya as part of the broader migratory movements to Anatolia. The study concentrates on the processes of belonging and integration into the local population experienced by these migrants, who continue to reside in Konya. The primary focus of investigation is the migration experiences of individuals who relocated from the Balkans to Konya and their subsequent adaptation to the city. These migration experiences are analyzed within the context of the migrants' own realities. The post-migration circumstances have been scrutinized through three key themes: data related to the phenomenon of migration, data concerning the past, and data regarding the culture of coexistence. Based on the findings obtained from participants, the article evaluates these themes to present a comprehensive assessment of the current conditions of the migrant population.

3.2. Research Problem

Every research endeavor fundamentally originates from a problem that encapsulates its core objective. The reality that embodies this objective emerges as the research problem itself. Identifying the research problem constitutes the initial stage of any scientific investigation. In this context, three primary elements are considered when defining the research problem: first, the analysis of existing theories and previous research related to the field of study; second, the experiences of the researcher; and third, the societal issues encountered within the study area (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016, p. 82). In this article, which focuses on migrants who have settled in Konya, a literature review has been conducted to analyze their social integration through the lens of belonging. Although an increase in studies addressing this research problem can be observed, there remains a notable scarcity of research specifically focusing on Konya. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the challenges experienced by migrants in their interactions with the local population and how these experiences have influenced their perceptions of migration. Accordingly, the primary problem addressed in this research revolves around the adaptation difficulties and integration challenges faced by Balkan migrants who have settled in Konya and its surrounding rural areas.

3.3. Research Method

The objective of scientific research is to generate knowledge that facilitates a deeper comprehension of the universe under investigation. Consequently, scientific studies are conducted to acquire data that adhere to a systematic framework and are analytically interconnected, ultimately culminating in scientifically valid knowledge (Güven, 2017, p. 8). Within this framework, the qualitative research method, employed in this study, emphasizes understanding social phenomena through individuals' personal narratives and experiences. Qualitative research should be regarded as a reconstructed and interpreted representation of individual behaviors, group dynamics, and social processes as perceived by the participants themselves (Kümbetoğlu, 2017, pp. 37-38). Accordingly, this article utilizes a qualitative research approach to examine the post-migration social experiences, identity perceptions, and senses of belonging among migrants who have settled in the central districts and surrounding villages of Konya. This method was chosen due to the necessity for subjective accounts, personal memories, reflections on the past, and insights into the integration challenges faced by migrants in their interactions with the local population. In alignment with this approach, the study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the migrants' social lives, their migration experiences, and their relationships with the host community in Konya.

3.4. Research Design

In qualitative research, methodologies such as observation, interviews, and document analysis are utilized to effectively fulfill research objectives. Consequently, it is imperative that the research problem is articulated in a detailed and explicit manner in qualitative studies. The employment of multiple methods enhances both the validity and reliability of the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, p. 52). Among these methodologies, phenomenology -commonly employed by qualitative researchers- concentrates on phenomena that are acknowledged but not thoroughly understood, with the

aim of acquiring comprehensive knowledge derived from individuals' past experiences (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013, pp. 80-81). Accordingly, this article adopts the phenomenological design within the qualitative research framework to obtain in-depth information about the experiences of migrants.

3.5. Data Collection Techniques

Qualitative research employs various methodologies, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, for data collection. In-depth interviews facilitate participants' engagement with open-ended questions, allowing them to articulate their responses and explore the subject matter comprehensively through follow-up inquiries (Kümbetoğlu, 2017, p. 71). Among these methods, focus group interviews are particularly distinguished for yielding detailed information. They serve as a valuable data collection technique by enabling participants to express their emotions, thoughts, experiences, and inclinations (Çokluk, Yılmaz, & Oğuz, 2011, p. 105). In this study, both in-depth interviews and focus group interviews were employed concurrently in the data collection process. A total of 21 participants were engaged in one-on-one, in-depth sessions. Additionally, two separate focus group interviews were conducted, each comprising four participants. The spatial distribution of the in-depth interviews was as follows: 7 participants from Konya city center, 5 participants from Karatepe village in Sarayönü district, 4 participants from Orhaniye village in Ilgın district, 3 participants from Pazarkaya village in Akşehir district, and 2 participants from Erdoğan village, another village in Akşehir district. The first focus group interview was held in Kapaklı village of Ilgın district, while the second was conducted in Konya city center. The individual in-depth interviews lasted approximately 50-60 minutes, whereas the focus group interviews lasted around 90-120 minutes. A semi-structured interview form, composed of open-ended questions designed in accordance with the research problem, was employed during the interviews. The interview form consisted of two main sections: the first part included demographic questions such as age, gender, and place of origin; the second part contained questions related to culture, belonging, and identity. In this context, participants were asked questions concerning the timing of migration, differences between migration waves, reasons for migration, experiences during the migration process to Konya, self-identification of their identities, socio-economic conditions, whether the migration fostered a sense of belonging, and the nature of their connections with other migrants.

4. Findings

4.1. Findings Related to the Perception of Migration

The data presented in this section elucidate the perceptions of migration among individuals who relocated from the Balkans to the province of Konya. The qualitative findings derived from the interviews indicate that migration transcends mere geographical relocation, emerging as a phenomenon of belonging transmitted across generations. For the majority of participants, migration represents a prolonged traumatic experience that they have internalized. However, the critical issue is that the perception of migration simultaneously functions as both a source of pride and a socially devalued identity for the participants.

An analysis of the participants' statements reveals that migration is not perceived merely as a historical phenomenon but rather as an ongoing issue of belonging. One participant's remark, "*you came as a migrant and you will remain a migrant*," exemplifies the sense of exclusion experienced by Balkan migrants within society, a sentiment frequently emphasized by many participants. The assertions made by participants in this context suggest that the perception of migration has induced a traumatic effect in their minds. For some, migration has become a form of othering, while others express pride in embracing this assigned identity. Consequently, for Balkan migrants, the migrant status is perceived both as an exclusionary label and as an identity to be embraced. These narratives suggest that participants regard the concept of migration as extending beyond a mere historical event. One participant's statement, "*we are living as migrants on the lands of our ancestors*," reflects the contradictory situation they experience, illustrating a certain ambiguity in how participants perceive their migrant identity and define their connection to the land they inhabit. Ultimately, participants emphasize the reality that they feel like foreigners on the very lands where their ancestors once lived.

Another significant finding from the interviews is that participants perceive migration not merely as a personal issue but as intrinsically linked to the Ottoman Empire. Participants frequently contextualized their migration experiences within a shared historical narrative rooted in their Ottoman heritage. Statements commonly emphasized during the interviews, such as "*we are the true children of the Ottoman Empire*" or "*our ancestors raised that flag over there*," exemplify this perspective. The historical connection established in the minds of the migrants reflects not only their attachment to the lands they currently inhabit but also a mental bond with the lands from which they once migrated.

One participant's recounting of the migration experience as a memory shared with his grandchild demonstrates that the perception of migration has been transmitted across generations as a historical phenomenon. This intergenerational transmission indicates that the migrant identity remains vivid and fresh in collective memory. Notably, the narratives passed down from grandparents to grandchildren are not merely stories but embody a reality directly tied to their sense of identity. Thus, the essential issue to be examined is how Balkan migrants assign meaning to the perception of migration embedded in their collective memory. One participant's statement, "*migration is carried like a flag*," reflects how this perception has been embraced with pride. These words illustrate that migration has transformed into a form

of ownership. In other words, Bulgarian migrants, who often perceive themselves as excluded, have developed a form of resistance in response to this marginalization. This suggests that migrants do not reject their migrant identity; rather, they view it as a reality to be internalized and embraced. The core question that emerges here is how migrants assign meaning to this phenomenon, which has become a source of pride. Considering participants' expressions, it is evident that the migrant identity is regarded with a sense of sanctity. In other words, the hardships endured during migration and resettlement have led to the attribution of a mystical meaning to both the lands they left and the lands they settled. For some participants, migration represents a historical legacy inherited from their ancestors. These narratives indicate that carrying the migrant identity is regarded as a responsibility. The sanctity attributed to migration by the migrants has evolved into a collective mindset characterized by shared resistance. Thus, migration is not perceived as a source of shame but rather as an identity that should be made more visible and recognized.

Numerous participants articulated that their migrant identity, which they regard as possessing a sacred significance, is insufficiently comprehended by the local populace. Additionally, some participants asserted that certain residents of Konya exhibit a dismissive or condescending attitude towards migration. This circumstance has engendered a profound sense of resentment among the migrants. These experiences indicate that the initial respect accorded to migrants has progressively waned over time, ultimately evolving into a form of discrimination. A participant's remark, "*they called our grandfathers bandits, and made us migrants,*" poignantly encapsulates the depth of exclusion experienced by the migrants.

However, some participants noted that this experience of exclusion is a phenomenon encountered by both parties. A participant's statement, "*in the Balkans we were called Turkish seeds, in Anatolia we are called Greek seeds,*" illustrates that the migrant identity they have endured is characterized by a dual outcome. It is apparent that living as a migrant is perceived not only as a contemporary experience but also as a historically traumatic condition previously endured. Consequently, the issue of belonging should be acknowledged as a historical challenge that migrants have confronted from past to present. A 48-year-old participant recounted that, during his school years, he was labeled as a "*migrant,*" which instilled a strong sense of discrimination in his mind. These narratives demonstrate that despite the considerable passage of time, the migrant identity continues to exert a lasting impact on individuals.

Ultimately, each of the participants' statements underscores the existence of deeply ingrained memories that are difficult to erase. The perception of migration imposed upon them by the people of Konya is regarded by the migrants as a permanent reality. Therefore, for most participants, the phenomenon of migration has been accepted as a shared legacy inherited from the past. Based on the participants' reflections, it becomes evident that migration is not merely a simple movement from one country to another but carries much deeper meanings. In the participants' perceptions, migration is viewed by some as a source of pride to be carried, while for others, it represents a mechanism of marginalization. However, regardless of these varying interpretations, what remains certain is that migration has become a persistent issue with which the migrants are continually confronted.

4.2. Finding Related to the Past

The data presented in this section aim to analyze the perceptions of the past among Balkan migrants who have settled in Konya. The findings derived from the interviews indicate that, for these migrants, the past transcends a mere collection of historical events. Specifically, the past has not remained solely as a personal memory within the migrants' minds; rather, it has evolved into a persistent presence in their consciousness. The interviewees frequently articulated their efforts to keep their sentiments regarding the past alive. Consequently, the majority of participants emphasized that they perceive their past memories as a lens through which they interpret their present circumstances. These accounts illustrate that, for the migrants, the past is not merely a reference to a forsaken geography but has instead become a factor that sustains their sense of belonging.

The interviews reveal a profound connection to the Balkan geography among the majority of participants. Notably, this connection is particularly striking given that most participants have never actually visited the Balkans. Despite never having set foot in these lands, a strong emotional bond has nevertheless been established. The persistence of this connection is largely attributed to narratives passed down through generations within the family structure, as clearly indicated in the interviews. One participant stated, "*my grandfather used to tell us about our house in Bulgaria every night; I feel like I have known that place since my childhood,*" which serves as a significant example summarizing this phenomenon. Another participant illustrated the trauma caused by displacement by stating, "*just as Anatolia is sacred to us, so is Rumelia.*" These remarks demonstrate that the past, for the migrants, is grounded in an emotional relationship with their ancestral homeland. The memories shared by the interviewees serve as compelling evidence of how migration has left a profound imprint on their collective memory. The deep longing that the migrants feel for the past has transformed into a space where their sense of belonging to Rumelia is continually reproduced. Despite never having visited Rumelia, many participants still express a strong desire to become familiar with these lands. One participant remarked, "*Turkey is where I live my faith, but Rumelia is where I would live my longings,*" reflecting a deeply emotional and cultural perspective on migration. Thus, for the migrants, Rumelia is not merely a physical place but a meaningful whole in which geography and history are inseparably intertwined.

In the migrants' profound connection to their past, certain place names emerge as particularly significant. Among these, references such as Bulgaria, Deliorman, and Rumelia have become prominent markers through which migrants seek to concretize their historical experiences. These geographical locations, however, have transcended their physical meanings and have instead evolved into symbols that evoke the memory of the past. One participant's statement, "*even*

though we no longer live on those lands, our culture remains there,” serves as a clear example demonstrating that migration is not simply a concluded process of relocation but rather an enduring experience that continues to shape the migrants’ sense of identity.

Another key issue that emerges here is the meaning attributed by the migrants to the intertwining of post-migration life and longing for the past. One participant’s remark, *“we had difficulty becoming Anatolian, but we never forgot Rumelia,”* illustrates the complex nature of this dual experience. This situation reflects how, on the one hand, the migrants have never forgotten their former homeland, while on the other hand, they have faced challenges adapting to life in their new homeland. In other words, the dilemma experienced by the migrants stems largely from their conscious effort to keep the memory of the past alive. Another participant expressed this dynamic by stating, *“my grandfather spoke more about his travels to Bulgaria than about his pilgrimage to Mecca,”* which serves as an additional example highlighting the vivid presence of the past in the migrants’ narratives. A particularly striking example was shared by an elderly participant who described an emotional breakdown during a visit to Bulgaria after many years: *“Nikola took us around the village... He introduced us as Turkish friends... I wish there had never been separation.”* These accounts demonstrate that the sense of migration is not simply a form of nostalgia but rather a transformation of the past into a living experience. The physical reconnection with the lands of their ancestors reveals the profound significance that Rumelia holds for Balkan migrants. Thus, for the migrants, the past is not merely a collection of memories but has become a cultural identity that keeps their deep ties with their origins alive. The past, therefore, is seen as an essential element that carries not only traumatic experiences but also enduring longings.

These narratives highlight that the phenomenon of migration is not limited solely to those who directly experienced displacement. The effort to transmit the migration experience as a historical responsibility to subsequent generations exemplifies how migration transcends the personal and acquires a broader significance. One participant, who migrated at a very young age and has limited recollection of that period, described how Rumelia continues to leave deep marks on him by stating: *“How could I forget the Balkans? It’s impossible to forget! For years, I’ve always had the same dream-running across Rumelia.”* The presence of Rumelia in the dreams of migrants serves as a clear indication of the profound intensity of their longing.

The wills bequeathed from older generations to younger ones illuminate the significance ascribed to perceptions of the past. A participant’s assertion, *“it is my will that you visit those lands,”* exemplifies the intergenerational transmission of longing for the past. Notably, some participants, despite never having visited Rumelia themselves, impose upon their families the obligation to visit these lands, underscoring the profound importance attributed to Rumelia by the migrants. Another participant articulated this sense of duty by stating, *“my sons will definitely go there,”* indicating that it is not merely a desire but a clear obligation. Similarly, one participant remarked, *“my son is in Germany, and I always tell him to visit his ancestors’ lands,”* providing another compelling example of the deep significance the past holds for the migrants. Supporting this sentiment, another participant stated, *“one day we will return,”* reflecting the enduring mental and emotional connection to their ancestral homeland.

Ultimately, the memories expressed by the participants who migrated to Konya occupy a significant place in the construction of their migrant identity. These narratives suggest that the past holds a meaning far beyond mere nostalgia. For the migrants, the past has become a domain through which their current sense of belonging is continuously reassessed. The fact that this attachment to the past has evolved into a way of thinking demonstrates the profound influence that the lands of Rumelia have exerted on the migrants. In other words, the data concerning the past reveal the special significance attributed by the migrants to their migrant identity. Thus, the emotional connection with the past has transformed into a central component of their migrant identity. Consequently, these migration experiences have not led to a complete psychological sense of displacement among the participants. Their statements clearly support this reality. This has allowed both the vivid preservation of memories and the acceptance of the migrant identity as a form of resistance. Therefore, based on the participants’ expressions, it may be concluded that the relationship established with the past serves as a reinforcing factor in the formation of their migrant identity.

4.3. Findings Related to the Culture of Coexistence

This section presents data concerning the interactions between Balkan migrants who settled in Konya and the local population, focusing on their adaptation processes, social conflicts, and the resultant divisions. The data derived from the interviews offer significant insights into the foundation upon which the practice of coexistence has been established. The participants’ statements indicate that their living conditions frequently did not reach parity with those of the local population. The recurrently emphasized sense of exclusion suggests the development of a feeling of social otherness among the migrants. The perceptions of exclusion articulated by the migrants should be comprehended within their specific context. The challenges encountered during the adaptation process, as well as the factors contributing to social division, must be analyzed within their own realities. This situation warrants further examination based on the context in which the migrants’ reactions toward the local population have been shaped.

The presence of an emotional distance between the migrants and the residents of Konya is evident in numerous participants’ statements. One participant’s lamentation, *“these people never accepted us,”* exemplifies the emotional gap between the migrants and the local populace. This participant further emphasized that, although Konya accepted hundreds of thousands of refugees from Syria, the same level of tolerance was not extended to them. Additionally, by situating the issue within a historical context, the participant noted that the Ottoman Empire had intentionally settled them in the Balkans. Expressing difficulty in understanding the challenges of integration with the local population, the

participant contended that Konya had failed to grasp the true essence of the migration phenomenon. Another participant's remark, "*first they left us as migrants, then they dismantled our migration identity*," highlights this emotional void that has emerged between the migrants and the local community.

Many participants reported that, during the initial period of their settlement in Konya, they were excluded by the local population and continually marginalized due to their migrant identity. The fact that many participants articulated these experiences in a shared language serves as compelling evidence that the issue is not merely individual but reflects a broader social reality. Consequently, the migrants' reactive stance toward the local population has evolved into a significant form of social division that extends beyond personal experiences and into broader social relations. One participant's remark, "*we are still foreigners here*," illustrates the hardships migrants continue to face in their social lives. For the migrants, the phenomenon of migration has become a reality that serves both as a source of belonging and of conflict. Despite having resided in Konya for nearly a century since their migration, the majority of participants emphasized that they are still regarded as migrants. These frequently repeated statements suggest that full integration with the local population in Konya has not been fully achieved.

The separation between the immigrant community and the residents of Konya has resulted in a notable conflict in their relations. The statement by a participant, "*these people from Konya only understand bulgur pilaf*," suggests a pronounced sense of othering between the two groups. The emphasis on "*bulgur pilaf*" warrants a deeper analysis to ascertain whether it reflects a critique of culinary practices or signifies a broader civilizational awareness. It is essential to investigate whether a cultural divergence has emerged and the context in which this perception is articulated by the immigrants.

The assertion, "*we brought civilization*," made by another participant, exemplifies the underlying meaning of this situation. It becomes evident that the immigrants perceive the separation from the people of Konya in terms of cultural sophistication. The immigrants regard themselves as more advanced and refined in terms of civilizational culture compared to the Konya residents. This perception not only serves as a source of pride for the immigrants but also contributes significantly to the prevailing tension. It is crucial to examine whether the immigrants' self-perception as a more advanced class arises solely from a discourse developed in response to feelings of exclusion. In other words, the notion that the immigrants consider themselves more civilized than the locals should be evaluated through examples that illustrate the context in which participants have concretized this issue.

The statement by one participant, "*we taught that the toilet and the barn should be in separate places*," should be interpreted as an indication of cultural superiority and pride in transforming the locals. This theme is further reinforced by another participant's remark, "*the locals didn't even know how to use a toilet*." Such statements underscore the immigrants' belief in their significant contributions to enhancing the civilizational awareness of the locals. The findings indicate that while these contributions are a crucial aspect of the integration process, they are also employed to legitimize the immigrants' identity. Consequently, the frequent emphasis by some participants on their more modern lifestyle compared to the local population provides valuable insights into their self-positioning.

Several participants attributed the distinctions between the inhabitants of Konya, particularly those who arrived during the 1989 migrations, to religious factors. One participant highlighted the role of Nüvvab teachers, noting their significant contribution to the proliferation of Islam in Anatolia. Furthermore, this participant ironically remarked that their decision to settle in Konya was predominantly influenced by religious motivations. However, he expressed that the religious contributions made by them and their ancestors were largely overlooked by the local populace of Konya.

Another critical issue impacting the cultural coexistence between the immigrants and the residents of Konya is the economic disparities frequently cited by participants. Some participants indicated the presence of economic inequality between themselves and the local inhabitants. Specifically, it was noted that the first-generation immigrants faced challenges in accessing economic opportunities beyond agriculture and animal husbandry. Conversely, it is perceived that the local population possesses greater advantages in the realms of industry and commerce. One participant referenced the example of Bursa to illustrate his marginalized status within this economic context. He noted that Bursa also accommodated numerous Balkan immigrants, who were more successful in engaging in industrial and commercial activities. He attributed the economic cohesion among immigrants in Bursa to the marginalization they experienced from the local population. In essence, economic disadvantage is perceived as a phenomenon with deeper implications than mere individual circumstances. The statement, "*This city could not produce industrialists from the Balkan immigrants*," should be interpreted as a critique linking the immigrants with the local populace in economic terms.

Consequently, for the Balkan immigrants who relocated to Konya, the notion of cultural coexistence extends beyond merely sharing a geographical space. The findings from the interviews reveal that the immigrants' identity is rooted in a complex, multidimensional reality. It is important to note that the relationship between the immigrants and the local population is characterized by tension within the context of cultural coexistence. Therefore, for the Balkan immigrants who settled in Konya, cultural coexistence predominantly signifies a division within a shared space. Based on the participants' accounts, it is evident that there is a lack of unity between the two groups, with numerous factors contributing to their separation. The strong solidarity observed among the immigrants should be regarded as a clear indication that full integration with the local population has not been achieved.

5. Conclusion

This article examines the migration experiences of individuals who relocated from Bulgaria to Konya at various times. The study explores the immigrants' self-perception, sense of belonging, personal practices, and their perspectives on the city of Konya and its inhabitants. Employing a qualitative research methodology, in-depth interviews were conducted with 21 participants. Additionally, focus group discussions were held with two separate groups, each comprising four individuals. The analysis of the interviews revealed three primary themes: the participants' attitudes towards the phenomenon of immigration, their nostalgia for the past, and their practices related to cohabiting with the residents of Konya.

The initial notable finding from the interviews pertains to the immigrants' perceptions of immigration. For these individuals, immigration transcends a mere historical movement of displacement. It holds a profound significance beyond a mere change of location. The participants' statements indicate a greater interest in the cultural and social dimensions of immigration rather than its physical aspects. The immigrants perceive their identity as a significant determinant in their social interactions, frequently highlighting its pervasive influence on various facets of daily life.

The second prominent finding from the interviews concerns the participants' reflections on the past. While assessing the impact of migration, the participants often expressed a profound longing for the past. Their narratives about the past are primarily sustained through memories passed down across generations. This phenomenon is intricately linked to their immigrant identities, as the deep emotional connection to the past keeps their memories dynamic. Consequently, the persistence of the past as a vivid memory is not merely a longing for bygone times but also underscores the enduring nature of their immigrant identity.

Another significant finding from the interviews pertains to the practice of coexisting with the local population of Konya. The interviews reveal an emotional gap between the immigrants and the local residents. Many participants attribute this situation to their continued perception as immigrants. Some participants, who reported having integrated with the local community, noted that despite this integration, the process is not experienced on equal terms. A further point of contention between the two groups is the immigrants' perception of themselves as more civilized than the local populace. These narratives illustrate the complex and dynamic nature of the emotional distance between the immigrants and the residents of Konya.

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