Turkish Immigrants: Rebuilding Their Life in Germany

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Abstract
This study focuses on the Turkish immigrants’ experiences abroad, analyzing the experiences and perceptions of individuals migrating to Germany from Turkey. Particular attention has been paid to immigrants’ reasons for leaving Turkey, the entire migration process, including the decision making, travelling and arrival process, the resources they used to adapt to their new environment, and their regrets, if any, on having adapted to life abroad. This study was conducted by selecting ten episodes thought to best represent these experiences from the Turkish documentary, “Homesick Immigrants,” broadcast on Turkey’s official media outlet, TRT. The study sample includes ten individuals interviewed in the ten documentaries selected. The data were analyzed using Giorgi’s “Descriptive phenomenological research model,” which is one of the phenomenological approach models. According to the results, while immigrants wished to return to their home country, they also desired to rebuild their life abroad as a result of the positive circumstances in their host country.

Keywords
Migration • Immigrant • Psycho-social process • Rebuilding life • Giorgi Style Phenomenological Research
Migration is when an individual, or group of individuals, relocate from one from one residential area (country, city, village etc.) to another in order to continue the rest or a portion of his future life due to financial, religious, social, cultural, educational, and/or political reasons (Akdoğan, 1979; Gönüllü, 1996; Karagöz, 2007; Kızılçelik & Erdem, 1994). In light of this definition, if a general distinction is to be made, migration may be divided into two types: domestic and external migration. The scope of this study is on external migration with a focus on the experiences of Turkish immigrants abroad.

It is not an easy process for an individual to migrate to another country, especially when all of the experiences and difficulties that one faces from the beginning to the end of the migration process are taken into consideration. The stress resulting from migration, adapting to the new country, and most importantly, the grief due to having left many things behind may result in anxiety, depression, and/or other psychological problems among immigrants. The first sign of stress observed during the migration process appears while an individual is making his decision and preparations to migrate. Once abroad, feelings of worthlessness, having no relatives or friends, and being separated from one’s previous home not only cause an intensive level of stress on an individual as he attempts to build a new life in a new country, but may also lead to feelings of regret (Tuzcu & Bademli, 2014).

Migration is also defined as a process of change in one’s perspectives and relations, such as socio-psychological and intercultural relations (Berry, 1990; Kuo, 1976). A stressful life caused by cultural change as a result of having migrated affects immigrants’ personalities in a negative way. This situation may result in such negative feelings as loneliness, alienation, depression, anxiety, low self-respect, and self-deprecation, which may then lead to adaptation problems (Aroian & Norris, 2002; Balçın & Samuk, 2002; Esentürk-Ercan, 1998; Kou, 1976; Pernice, Trlin, Henderson, & North, 2000; Steel, Silove, Chey, Bauman, & Phan, 2004; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001; Warfa et al., 2005). Generally theories and observations on migration assert that the process of settling in a new social environment produces a great deal of stress, emphasizing that adaptation related tension begins when immigrants start to become involved in a foreign society and lasting for many years (Şahin, 2001). In this sense, when it is considered that migration causes individuals to lose their feeling of belonging to a group and to abandoning their accustomed socio-cultural life, the psychological effects of migration become predictable (Cicourel, 1982). Studies conducted on social and cultural change, modernization, acculturization, urbanization, assimilation, adaptation, and life stress exhibit a strong relation between migration experiences and psychological disorders (Doğan, 1988). Although it may occur for a variety of reasons, migration brings with it the desocialization of immigrations, their inclusion into another social structure, and a
process of adaptation (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 1999). Learning to cope with anxiety and difficulties mostly resulting from settling in a new environment may be a challenging process (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1999) possibly leading to a number of psychological issues like demoralization and acculturative stress in recent immigrants (Flaherty, Kohn, & Golbin, 1986; Kohn, Flaherty, & Levav, 1989; Ritsner et al., 1996).

In addition, there are a number of factors that may help to ease the integration process. The possibility of gaining citizenship in one’s new host country becomes an important source of motivational for immigrants to integrate into their new setting. Moreover, the positive attitude of host a country toward differences can facilitate immigrants’ integration process (Öztürk, 2012).

Consequently, immigrants, both as individuals and as groups, face a myriad of stressors during each phase of the migration process that may affect one’s psychological, and even physical heath in a very negative way. In all phases of the process, individuals experiencing such situations as unemployment, loss of social status, loneliness, alienation, language problems, and cultural problems may face certain physical and psychological based problems whose level depends not only on how negatively these stress-producing factors effect one’s total health, but also on one’s ability to cope with stress (Farley, Galves, Dickinson, & Perez, 2005; Hyman, 2004; Tuzcu & Bademli, 2014). In this situation, problems like finding a place to stay, language obstacles, challenging employment conditions, and cultural differences may act to increase one’s level of stress, thereby not only leading to feelings of anxiety and decreased levels of self-respect, but also affecting one’s psychological and social adaptation process. It is thought that among all of these difficulties, language obstacles and cultural differences in particular have a dramatic effect on individual immigrants’ integration process, causing them to experience confusion. As a result of migration, groups of immigrants living in a completely different culture find themselves interacting with a pre-existing social structure different from their former one while also trying to preserve their own identity (Castles & Miller, 1998).

Emigration from Turkey to foreign countries began as a result of the economic and social changes emerging after the 1960s. Although in their earlier stages, emigrants consisted mostly of labor migrations, they turned into entire families migrating in the following years. Today, a considerable amount of Turkish immigrants continue to lead their lives in almost every European country (Özkan, 2008). When the decision making processes of individuals from Turkey who migrated to Germany are evaluated, it is observed that their main motives consist of (1) economic challenges at home, such as unemployment and inadequate job opportunities stemming from a development gap between regions, (2) a perceived higher level of social rights and
of better living conditions existing in Europe, and (3) the desire to live a luxurious, consumerist life-style when visiting or returning to Turkey (Kalaycıoğlu, Çelik, & Beşpınar, 2010). Furthermore, when an individual’s choice to migrate is voluntary, his act of migrating is mostly realized in accordance with his personal aims arising from personal desires. Such reasons include improving his financial situation, securing his family’s future, and a desire for higher living standards (Doğan, 2014).

Since migration from Turkey to Europe began, third and even fourth generation Turkish Diasporas have learned to speak the language of their host countries and have also attended education institutions in these countries. Despite the fact that they have been, and continue to be viewed as an ethnically minority group within the current social structure in their host countries, immigrants from Turkey have inevitably begun to integrate at the cultural level (Özkan, 2008). Moreover, a number of social service institutions conscious of Turkish immigrants’ language and cultural values have been opened. The help of these institutions has helped immigrants both to integrate and to accept being abroad without losing the opportunities they have (Doğan, 2014).

This study aims to determine how Turkish immigrants living in a foreign land perceive their situation and experiences abroad. In line with this aim, this study will analyze the experiences of those individuals who have migrated from Turkey as well as how they perceive (1) their reasons for leaving Turkey, (2) the entire migration process, including the decision making, travelling and arrival process, (3) the resources they used to adapt to their new environment and (4) their regrets, if any, on having adapted to life abroad.

**Method**

**Design**

Being quantitative in nature whose goal is to investigate and analyze real-life examples of psychological meanings arising from phenomena experienced without one’s being completely aware in daily life (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008), this study is of a phenomenological design. Phenomenological research which its philosophical roots originated from Edmund Husserl’s works aims to understand the real nature of the familiar but not fully understood experiences and objects (Van Manen, 1990; Willig, 2013).

Data sources of phenomenological research are comprised of individuals or groups of individuals whose experiences are of interest to a researcher. Analyses conducted within this context aim to describe and define the very essence of individual experiences related to a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology is a method soliciting answers to the question “What is truth?” based on individuals’
personal experiences. In this approach, the researcher is interested in participants’ individual experiences, analyzing how individuals perceive certain events as well as the meanings they attribute to these events. Phenomenology is a type of descriptive study. As such, the goal of such research is not to make a generalization, but to describe the phenomenon in question (Baş & Akturan, 2008). In this study, the researchers chose to use Giorgi’s Descriptive Phenomenological Research Model from among the phenomenological research models available. Based on Husserl’s phenomenology, the Descriptive Phenomenological Research Model attempts to reach the essence of phenomenon using a series of psychological reduction (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). Description comes first, followed by interpretation which focuses on how an individual experiences the phenomenon in question by bracketing previous information on it (Langdridge, 2007). Accordingly, the phenomena focused on in this study are the experiences abroad had by Turkish immigrants living in a foreign country.

**Data Collection Tools**

Data are generally collected in a phenomenological type study through interviews with participants. However, when it is not possible to collect data through interviews, poems, observations, and document reviews may be used to collect data (Creswell, 2013). Since it is impossible to collect data through interviews or observations in this study, data have been collected and analyzed by reviewing relevant documents. Data were collected from [http://www.trtturk.com/program/detay/gurbette-kalanlar_3.html#arsiv910](http://www.trtturk.com/program/detay/gurbette-kalanlar_3.html#arsiv910), the official web page for Turkey’s state media (TRT), which focuses on Turkish immigrants living abroad in a documentary named “Homesick Immigrants.”

**Study Group**

In phenomenological studies, data sources consist of individuals or groups whose real-life experiences are being studied by a researcher (Creswell, 2013). The population of the current study is the individuals included in the documentary “Homesick Immigrants” broadcasted on Turkey’s state media channel, TRT, from 2013 to 2014 and which focuses on Turkish immigrants living abroad. This documentary film consists of twenty-six episodes. This study has made use of the convenience sampling method by selecting ten episodes for analysis thought to provide substantial data in terms of content. The basic idea in convenience sampling is to choose a phenomenon easy for the researcher to find information on (Patton, 2002). Concordantly, since episodes in which individuals shared detailed information and intense emotions served the purpose of the study by enabling multiple coding and analysis, such episodes were selected to be included in the analysis. At the same time priority was given to episodes depicting nuclear and multi-generational families who
came from different social-cultural backgrounds and who had unique experiences while living abroad. Permission to use the documentary was not sought since it was freely available on TRT’s official webpage.

Participants’ time spent in Germany, gender, age, and hometown are given in the table below.

Table 1  
Participants’ Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Time spent in Germany</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Hometown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P.1</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bolu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.2</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Burdur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.3</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Çankırı</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.4</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Kars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.5</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Ordu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.6</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Trabzon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.7</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sivas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.8</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Artvin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.9</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Yozgat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.10</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ankara</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

After collecting data, different steps are used by different schools to analyze and interpret data. This study uses Giorgi’s Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis method from among the various classical descriptive methods. Giorgi and Giorgi (2008) summaries the Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis as follows:

1. To read all transcripts/texts with a phenomenological attitude and to obtain an impression about the whole phenomenon.

2. To distinguish the units of meaning that make up different aspects of the whole.

3. To reveal the psychological meaningfulness of every unit of meaning.

4. To express the essential structure of the phenomenon experienced.

As this type of research methodology is new in Turkey, it is considered necessary to present concrete samples of these steps. Therefore it is specified below what to do in each step:

1. In the first step, all transcripts/texts are read in detail multiple times in order to obtain an impression about the whole phenomenon. In this process, the researcher attempts to disclose himself to participants’ experiences by suspending his own judgments, opinions, and values on the subject. In the current study, researchers
strictly followed these steps so as to gain a general impression about the phenomenon by reading all transcripts multiple times while suspending any previous knowledge about the subject.

2. In this step, the text is divided into smaller elements so as to determine different units of meaning that make up different aspects of the whole. In line with the study’s scope, researchers focus on such concepts as emotion, thoughts, and behaviors of importance, marking them in the text. Essentiality in this marking are the transitions of meaning that felt in the text (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). During this process, attention is paid to lingering, pauses, and the like as they all contain implicit meanings. In this step of the research, units of meaning are inferred by reading the transcripts all together. The focus is on transitions in meaning within the text, and the sign ‘/’ is put to the end of each sentence ending a specific unit of meaning.

Below is a sample related to the second step in which different units of meaning are defined (Participant P.8):

On December 2, 1969, I registered to work abroad in the employment agency. Within 3 months, my papers were ready and I came to Istanbul. After staying in a place in Istanbul for 15 days, we were given exams and had a medical checkup. Then, we came to the Sirkedji train station. The scene in the Sirkedji train station was awesome because we would be travelling to Germany on a special train. Everything was so chaotic because everybody was there. Mothers, fathers, children all came in order to send off their fellow citizens and relatives to Germany. My school friend, Nihat, was with me. We got on the train and were looking at all the waving hands and sad eyes and accepted those all those waving hands as wishing us farewell, too.

3. In the third step, psychologically more meaningful units are determined from among the units of meaning. The texts are again read multiple times in an attempt to discover and interpret the essential elements that constitute phenomenon as a result of the changes made using the phenomenological reduction method. However in this interpretation stage, abstraction should be limited by strictly adhering to psychology theories and by not drifting away from the actual data.

This step contains three steps (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008). The first step is to display implicit meanings by looking at the face material in individuals’ statement. The second step is to concentrate on the general situation being discussed, thinking that the event being mentioned is a sample of a more general phenomenon. The third step is if the content is suitable, to display aspects of event related to psychology. With this being said however, it is necessary to avoid using theoretic jargon while doing so.

The data collected as a result of these steps were collected and organized in a table. In the table, individuals’ statements appear in the rightmost column whereas the middle
columns and leftmost columns show phenomenological notations summarizing the main idea of the statement made by the researcher. Accordingly, statements of the person in the leftmost column were summarized so as to express information in the third person singular while also including words used by the original speaker. Then, this summarized statement is transformed and placed in the right column. Although there is no limit to the number of transformations to be made, studies following Giorgi’s method generally make only one or two transformations (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008; Langdridge, 2007).

A sample transcript and phenomenological analysis for P-8 is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenological Analysis Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I registered to work abroad in the employment agency. Within three months, my papers were ready and I came to Istanbul. After staying in a place in Istanbul for 15 days, we were given exams and had a medical checkup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Then, we came to the Sirkedji train station. The scene in the Sirkedji train station was awesome because we would be travelling to Germany on a special train. Everything was so chaotic because everybody was there. Mothers, fathers, children all came in order to send off their fellow citizens and relatives to Germany. My school friend, Nihat, was with me. We got on the train and were looking at all the waving hands and those sad eyes and accepted them as wishing us farewell, too.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 After the train set off, we entered Greece at around evening. That’s when I started feeling sad. It was such an emotional moment because it was the last time we saw our flag and our soldiers. They were even saluting us because we are leaving.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2.3. People whose application process for Germany resulted in a short period of time, focused on people scenes in train station rather than noticing that they were leaving. Although the speaker and his companion had no one to see them off, they compensated by accepting others’ biddings of farewell.
The speaker’s original sentences underwent modification in Table 2. For example, the expressions “coming to the train station” and “getting on the train” have been transformed into “leaving the country” whereas the words “soldier” and “flag” have been transformed into “his country’s symbols” as they are more general and abstract forms of the same idea. Moreover, since implicit meanings have been inferred from speakers’ statements, more than one unit of meaning was used when necessary. In P-8’s statement, for instance, three units of meaning were combined into (1.2.3.) and then transformed into the following: “The entire process of moving to another country went ahead fast and the speaker became emotionally aware of his situation just as he was leaving the country.”

4. In the fourth step, an individual’s experience is synthesized both with itself and with others’ experiences. In a specific individual’s experience, significant psychological units of meaning are synthesized and transformed into a short chronological explanation, called the “individual structural description.” After this, the individualistic and structural descriptions for every participant are compared in an attempt to find unchanging features. As a result, shared basic features representing the core of the phenomenon, called the “general structural description,” are found. Such general information may not always be reached, and in this case, more than one general structural explanation is provided. A conclusion is formulated and expressed by comparing with similar examples in the literature and with other individualistic explanations.

Presented below is a sample an individual structural description detailing how each participant experienced the phenomenon. To do this, the basic elements of the phenomenon appearing as a result of transforming the units of meaning were gathered together.

An individual structural description prepared for Participant P-8 is given below:

When P-8. could not reach his aim, he decided to go to Germany for economic reasons, encouraged by his role-models and his own self-confidence. It took little time for him to leave the country, and he became emotionally aware of leaving his own country upon realization that he might not see his country’s symbols again. Upon arrival to Germany, he faced an confusing environment over which he had no control and initially experienced feelings of regret. When he came face-to-face with the real circumstances under which he would live, he felt disappointment, regret, longing, and sadness for days. Accepting his situation, he decided that he needed to adapt to his new reality and therefore regarded learning the language as his primary goal. He found mutual trust, understanding, and support in his marriage, which had the effect of eliminating loneliness and of accomplishing a rite of passage for him.
P-8 continues to maintain his relations with his home country, feeling happiness within a certain social network there. Expresses the belongingness via the place where she adapted, built a mutual relationship, experienced her loss and success and now feel herself belong to Germany. Despite great grief of losing his child, he was able to cope with this grief due to his religious beliefs, relation with his wife, and social circle.

Subsequently, common experiences among speakers were found by comparing it with other individual structural descriptions and then combining the result into a “general structural description.”

Findings

As it is not possible to show the findings attained from every speaker, a general structural description of the phenomenon has been provided in this section and the elements constituting it have been presented with transcript samples. While speakers’ direct quotations are shown within quotation marks (“…”), psychological quotes appear within brackets ([…]).

General Structural Description of the Phenomenon

A general structural description was formulated by using phenomenological reduction to examine all speakers’ statements. Common elements of this description consist of such structural identifiers as (1) motivation to go abroad, (2) the decision making process, (3) the travel process, (4) initial experiences upon arrival abroad, (5) adaptation sources, and (6) accepting/regretting one’s situation abroad. Each structural identifier has been explained using samples from the descriptions.

Motivation to Go Abroad

Upon careful study of the findings, it is observed that the actual starting point of one’s experience abroad occurs when he begins to contemplate the advantages and disadvantages of traveling abroad. In this vein, the most compelling factor during the decision-making process is one’s desire to attain better economic, social, and psychological conditions, in respective order.

During the decision-making process, that potential immigrants give priority to the socio-economic conditions in his home country and the opportunities gained by migrating to another country, which are themselves macro variables and defined as attraction and repulsion factors in the literature (Doerschler & College, 1999; Hare, 1999). Speakers’ statements showed that during the 1960s and 70s when migration abroad was near its peak, the notion that Germany had reached such high levels of prosperity that Turkey would never be able to provide was dominant among Turks.
From a historical and socio-political perspective, the fact that Europe was idealized in Turkey contributed to the very foundations of this notion, influencing immigrants’ decision to leave Turkey and travel abroad. Moreover, the clothing, possessions, attitudes, and behaviors of people returning from Germany on their holiday provided concrete examples supporting this notion which facilitated the perceived veracity to be continuously circulated throughout Turkish society. Consequently, Germany was perceived as the ideal country in terms of material opportunities and welfare.

Such rumors started about people are going to Germany. They found jobs, bought houses, and became property owners. I mean, we started to see people going abroad and coming back with money and possessions, having achieved such a standard that they could help their family, friends, and children. [P.10]

…I had developed a certain love for Germany. Everyone who went to Germany would come back with cars, radios, and tape-recorders when they returned to Turkey. I wanted the same things. [P.4]

Another subject of remark is that none of them had the intention to settle permanently in Germany when they first made the decision to immigrate. They saw Germany as a temporary place to go in order to improve their economic and social welfare rather than a place to stay permanently.

We said we would come here and would work. We didn’t say we would stay here permanently. Turkey is our homeland. [P.6]

Those who still live here now planned to come for just 5 year., Everyone had a job. Some of them would enlarge his business, and some would buy a tractor in the village. [P.4]

The Decision-Making and Traveling Process

It is assumed that viewing Germany as only a place to go to for a temporary period of time has a direct effect on one’s decision-making process about whether to migrate. Based on the speakers’ statements, it is understood that they considered migrating to Germany as a temporary situation and that they did not consider remaining in Germany for the rest of their lives to be a real possibility while making their decision to leave. From a cognitive and emotional perspective, speakers did not use good reasoning skills when making their decision to immigrate to Germany.

In 1972 after I completed my military service, I thought that it would be a good idea to go to Germany. There were announcements then. I told myself to apply to go. [P.2]

My older brother went to Germany in 1969. He wrote a letter asking me to come, and I accepted his request. [P.4]

Kemal was joking at first, then he got serious. Our passports were prepared in a week and we filed our applications to the Employment Agency. [P.1]
The fact that the application and evaluation processes were completed in such haste contributed to the immigrants’ low level of emotional awareness while leaving Turkey. Some of them did, however, experienced anxiety stemming from uncertainty and grief felt from leaving the country in which they were born and raised upon the start of their journey. Others, however, experienced such feelings while traveling and even others when they crossed the Turkish border. Such experiences crowds bidding farewell at the railway station as well as actually crossing the Turkish border enabled speakers to face reality. It is observed that most individuals felt the same feelings (e.g. sadness, excitement, curiosity, anxiety) at the same time during the traveling process.

There was a group of people on the train bidding farewell with loud cheers. I remember some of them were worried. Some shed tears of happiness, and that’s when I felt it. Because leaving is not an easy process. [P.7]

After the train set off, we entered Greece at around evening. That’s when I started feeling sad. It was such an emotional moment because it was the last time we saw our flag and our soldiers. They were even saluting us because we are leaving. [P.8].

The Arrival Process in the Host Country

After experiencing multiple contrasting feelings while traveling, another milestone was crossed upon arrival in one’s host country. As soon as they arrived, they stepped out of their cars and were transported to where they would be working. At this point, speakers began to understand that their fantasies and dreams were just that, realizing that they were far from their homeland and loved ones in a country whose culture and language was unfamiliar to them. Moreover, the anxiety felt by the speakers led them not only to question their decision to migrate, but also to feelings of sadness, longing, regret, and frustration.

Additionally, when the cultural shock experienced by the speakers is taken into consideration, the magnitude and results of this shock and adaptation process are closely related to intercultural intimacy, motivation to move, and speakers’ expectations (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dosen, 2002). In this specific case, it can only be imagined how great a shock most Turkish immigrants from rural areas in the 1960s and 70s experienced when they migrated to Germany based on idealized realities (that were not always true) and with the intention to migrate only temporarily.

It is understood that speakers experienced lower levels of anxiety when they were either accompanied by a relative during or welcomed by one upon their arrival to their host country. As Grinberg and Grinberg (1999) point out, this situation overlaps with the regression that appears when one is faced with the unknown and is searching for somebody to help him cope with these feelings.
We arrived in Munich and spent the night there. In the morning, they gave us some food and rations for breakfast. These were things I wasn’t accustomed to. I arrived in a totally unfamiliar place. The night I arrived, I stayed up until morning writing pages upon pages to my wife in a letter telling her that I didn’t belong here, that we couldn’t live here, and that I was coming back. [P.1]

Thousands of people were getting off the train. Everybody had a suitcase in his hand, and they took us to an underground shelter. I asked myself ‘Why did we come here?’ Of course, I came to work but, I always felt a deep feeling of remorse. [P.8]

I was lucky because my brother brought me. The situation of those who came by train was worse. [P.3]

**Sources used to Adapt to One’s New Environment**

Upon arrival to the host country, the first step immigrants took to adapt to their new country was to learn the country’s language. Abandoning old skills and previous identity in their new country, speakers felt that learning their host country’s language was critical for them to adapt to their new environment, to be promoted, and to gain a new identity. Speakers described how they had to struggle to survive under intense working conditions.

…I held a dictionary in my hand, I was learning ten to fifteen words every night so that I could explain my problems and stand on my own two feet. [P.1]

My goal was to continue my training by learning the language and to find myself in a better career. I would teach myself for three hours after I came home from work. [P.8]

These places were very dirty when I first came. My job was quite challenging. We faced huge problems. We were wearing shoes made of wood and we were working in fire. [P.4]

Another source immigrants used to ease the adaptation process was their relations with relatives or fellow Turkish citizens who had settled there earlier. Marriage in particular is viewed by these people and their families as a necessary step to fend off loneliness and alienation. In general, a wife would most likely be somebody living in Turkey, chosen after consulting one’s family. Those who stated that they received support from their wives and families had an easier time adapting and coping with challenges. As such, it can be inferred that personal and family relations were important resources not only in the adaptation process, but also to help them cope with everyday events.

While walking around, I came across some Turks and asked them, “Are you Turkish, brother?” We would hug each other there. In the good old days when a Turk saw a Turk, they would give each other a big hug. They would ask each other which city they lived in in Turkey. They would ask, ‘Where are you from? How are you? What are you doing? Where are you working? [P.8]
There is an expression used by [Turkish] people, “Having a large family means having insurance.” In other words, they are my right arm, left arm, my insurance, my safety net. They are point of support for me. [P.2]

My late mother told me that they had found a girl for me. They went and asked for the girl’s hand in marriage, telling me that I would marry her. They didn’t do the things which I had gotten used to now. I accepted her. [P.6]

I am proud of my wife. She never left me alone in any society, social group, or meeting. [P.8]

This situation overlaps with concept of “migrants’ social networks” to which Massey et al. (1993) refer. According to this concept first immigrants create a platform which connects the immigrant-receiving and emigrant countries and this connection enables other individuals in emigrant country to migrate. New migration movements prompt this created relations network and then later migrants make use of pioneers’ experiences (Wilpert, 1992). Consequently, migrant workers actively use their social networks as a resource to solve problems related to the migration process (Güllüpmar, 2012).

In addition to social resources, the efforts made by a migrant to establish and/or maintain one’s identity are another issue worth attention. Marriage is an effort to combat loneliness and disorder. The idea of “marrying someone from Turkey” includes an identity related dimension. It is believed that marrying a wife from Turkey and spending time with other Turkish citizens is an attempt to protect one’s own identity against the danger of assimilation and degeneration while living in a foreign environment. It is understood that this identity may be protected and transferred to the next generation by placing an emphasis on conventional child-raising codes. Also related to identity is one’s emphasis on an orthodox application of Islamic principles and rituals as well as the belief the one’s suffering is a result of not applying these religious rituals.

I vaccinate my own culture into my children. I raised them in a decent way. [P.8]

We tried to instill certain beliefs and behaviors in our children. At home, we have our children do the same things. We made it an effort to raise them as well as we could. [P.7]

Happiness is neither about money nor possessions; it is about humanity, belief, and attachment to God in all aspects of one’s life. As the Prophet Muhammad (SAWS) says, we must build a population in which individuals wish for others what they themselves desire. People shouldn’t go to bed on a full stomach knowing that their neighbor is hungry. We must be just like that. [P.10]

Here, it is appropriate to discuss the concept of acculturation, which is one of the most debated concepts in the literature on immigrants. Hovey and King (1996) define this concept as changing of individual at a certain extent and being affected by the culture he gets in touch with in a new country. This concept is also addressed by the American Psychiatry Association, in APA (1994), in which it is state that “being
affected by new culture” under heading of additional codes which may be clinic focus of interest,” and in APA (2013) in the section “Other Problems Related to the Social Environment” entitled “Acculturation Difficulty.” While individual migrants wish to be like other people, they are worried about being eliminated by the new culture as a result of assimilation. While this inner conflict leads to alienation and internal chaos in the individual, it also increases and intensifies depressive tendencies of loneliness and isolation (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1999). This situation can be interpreted as a form of the fear of engulfment (Laing, 1960) that an individual experiences existentially on both the cultural and communal level.

Regret of Having Adapted to Life Abroad

When the speakers’ statements are examined, it is observed that while some of their ideas, attitudes, and abilities facilitate their adaptation process to life abroad, others make adaptation difficult and cause conflicting feelings.

Facilitating features can be summarized as having good family relations, feeling supported, having good relations with relatives and fellow expatriates in one’s host country, holding a certain belief system, maintaining one’s connections with Turkey, accepting Germany as one’s home, and establishing a socio-economic balance abroad.

Since family and social relations are heavily mentioned in the previous sections, they will not be mentioned again here. In this section, the first subject to be discussed is religious beliefs and value systems effective in helping one to move on after having experienced loss and trauma. Although some speakers had such traumatic experiences as losing a child, they were able to use their religious beliefs to overcome their grief.

…but in life these are events that should be experienced. As Allah created us, He wrote a specific destiny for all of us…” “… I praise and thank Allah. I learned how to praise, and give thanks to Allah for all the blessings that He has given or has not given and also how to be patient for the sad events that Allah ordains. I learned that life will be good if one has patience. Patience brings reward. I got the reward for my patience. [P.1] I experienced an extremely sad event. I mean my wife and I lost our 22 year old daughter. Of course, there is no bigger grief that losing one’s child, but Allah gave her life and again Allah reclaimed it, which is His will. May Allah grant her rest. I hope she’s resting in peace. But life is going on. In any case, we were not discontent with what happened., We said that it was our destiny. [P.2]

People who use religion to give meaning to life events and who feel supported by their partner accept troubles as necessary, ordained events in life, expressing that they can more easily cope with traumatic events. It is known that one of the most important factors affecting the high resilience of these people is their ability to give meaning to the difficulties they have experienced. In this study, it is seen that strong family relations, patience, and gratitude have an effect on individuals’ high resilience.
A positive relationship is observed between participants’ understanding of patience and gratitude and their psychological resilience. This situation confirms Walsh’s (2006) ideas that belief systems and spirituality are basic factors in individuals’ psychological resilience and are determinant in helping one face difficulties more easily.

Moreover, having good relations in Turkey and having the opportunity to occasionally visit Turkey are two other factors that facilitate adaptation. Individuals’ attachment to Germany and their having a good relationship with Turkey are not mutually exclusive. While there is a cultural and sociological side to this issue, attachment patterns have an impact on the individual level. In the literature, Van Oudenhoven and Hofstra (2006) confirm in their study on immigrants’ attachment patterns, acculturation attitudes, and how individuals react to new situations that immigrants who felt more securely attached had a more positive integration experience compared to those who did not. In the same study, a positive relationship was found between fearful-avoidant attachment and disintegration and assimilation. Polek, Van Quudenhoven, and Ten Berge (2011) identified that feeling attached is an important determiner of psychological well-being. Considering all of these, maintaining one’s connection with Turkey, viewing it as one’s homeland and a place to return when he wants to or feels stuck reminds an immigrant that he is attached to a secure base. Individuals who developed such an attachment with Turkey feel secure both in German and other countries. As a result, they begin to explore new relations and establish a daily order.

Another point related to adaptation is viewing one’s host country as his home by establishing a financial and social balance. Individuals’ level of satisfaction is remarkably higher if they have accepted their current situation and feel a part of both their new country and Turkey.

[He mentions that he views both Turkey and Germany as his homeland. Although his heart is in Turkey, this new country has lots of things he would never see in his country of birth. He can’t leave and go back to Turkey. He says he made a large circle of friends, learned many things, and made cultural contributions to this country.] [P.4]

[He doesn’t feel as if he were abroad because he has adopted his new country and has established intimate relations with people here without isolating himself.] [P.10]

In addition to all of these socio-economic, psychological, and culture adaptation factors and facilitators, there exist a range of factors leading to conflicting feelings about living abroad. The primary factor is the feeling that one is “stuck,” which is caused by immigrants’ original intention of migrating temporarily that is then rendered impractical due to their concern of losing the order and the possessions that they have gained in their host country.
Individuals who have spent the greater part of their life in Germany, who have started a family there, and who have provided their children with a good education feel themselves to be economically, socially, and emotionally attached to Germany. Returning to Turkey means leaving behind not only all the material possessions that one has gained, but also the order that they spent their life to build. However, although they mention a lack of opportunities in Turkey when they compare Germany to Turkey, they experience difficulties in becoming attached to Germany. This predicament can be described as feeling oneself to be “stuck.”

Leaving is hard, and so is staying. I’m 70 years old now. I want to leave, but everything I own is here. We have to wait and watch over it here. [P.3]

...we became permanent residents here. Some of our intimate friends bought their entire family here and set up businesses. Although we’ve stayed in Germany since we got here, we have maintained our ties of affection in Turkey. When we die, we’ll finally go to Turkey. [P.4]

Massey et al. (1993) also discuss this point, stating that while immigrants set off with the specific purpose of earning money, in time, they begin to desire moving up the social ladder, becoming increasingly interested in their host country’s life style and its consumer goods. However, as Anik (2011) points out, the fact that first-generation immigrants who have spent an important part of their life in Turkey in particular continue to maintain a subconscious belief that they will return to Turkey permanently. Some may even have abstained from learning their host country’s language and prevented them from fully integrating into their host country’s culture and society.

At the same time, speakers frequently expressed the difficulties of living abroad and being away from Turkey on important religious and cultural days like, including funerals, and the challenges one faces in fulfilling his religious duties in the correct way. As previously discussed, this may be related to emotions accompanying the loss of a loved one and/or not living a lifestyle in accordance with one’s assumed identity.

[He mentions that they could not celebrate the two ‘eid (Islamic) holidays in Germany, but that they could only exchange ‘eid greetings with their relatives over the phone.] [P.4]

It is also seen that immigrants perception to face racism and discrimination from Germans. Such perceptions, be they real or not, strengthen an individual and community’s sense of not belonging.

They despised us because we were foreigners calling us “kümbültürk.” Of course, these were offensive things for us. We were aware that there was something wrong and that we were experiencing the very blunt end of it. [P.7]

[When he first came to Germany, he felt that Germany was a good place and that he was loved and valued by Germans. Later however, his situation changed and he began to feel rejected.] [P.5]
Lastly, it is obvious that attitude differences between the thought which attributes the losses and grief in life to being in foreign lands and the acceptance of these troubles as natural realities of life are closely related to individuals’ ultimate adaptation. The fact that immigrants idealized Germany at such an extreme level and viewed it only as a temporary home contributes to this belief.

As a result of idealizing Germany at extreme level, immigrants hold the implicit belief that they are protected from loss and pain while in Germany. Not accepting troubles as natural realities of life and attributing them to a foreign land negatively affects one’s ability to integrate and feel satisfied with one’s situation.

From an existentialist point of view, it is thought that the case is not facing the death, loneliness, senselessness and freedom—accordingly responsibility (Yalom, 1980) which are the realities of existing. Such individuals are unable to make sense of the problems they face and blame their host country as being the reason for them to have experienced such problems, thinking that they would not have experienced these same problems in Turkey. It is seen that ambivalent toward the country in which they live is a result of this negative attribution. Since immigrants often compare Germany to Turkey, they often experience negative emotional effects, leading to unhappiness and their feelings of alienation.

In a way, we ran away from our problems. We came here for one or two years in order to forget the pain of my mother, father, and brother’s death. Unfortunately, destiny did not leave us in peace. We couldn’t return to our homeland.” “This foreign land gave me nothing but pain. [P.1]

Germany took so many things away from me. My youth went down the drain. I wish I had stayed in my homeland after having worked and suffered here for so long. At least, I’d have a homeland. I regret staying abroad. This foreign land took all of these things away from me. This foreign land owes me. It owes me the things that can’t be bought with any currency, dollar, mark, or gold. [P.7]

As in every qualitative study, the findings of this study depend on how clear and comprehensive participants expressed their personal experiences. This specific research topic is in need of further study. It is of vital importance to reveal which factors facilitate and which factors complicate integration without compromising one’s own identity and to produce suitable projects to aid Turkish citizens living abroad.

**Results and Suggestions**

Migration may be either mandatory or willful, one’s intention to migrate may be to seek work or a new home by using either legal or illegal means.

In this study, migrants were found to travel with the intention to increase their economical, social, and/or psychological welfare. Although their original plan was to
migrate temporarily, they found themselves permanently settling in their host country as a result of becoming an integrated part of the country’s system..

Such issues as language problems, a lack of a social environment, and being in a low social-economic class are part of the orientation process in which one learns to adapt to new life conditions and to living abroad. Considering that migrants desire to work and for their culture to be accepted in their host country, they are in search of better life conditions, be they social, economically, or psychological. As a result of this desire, a number of migrants tend to adapt to the cultural and social life of their host country. Others, however, tend to maintain close relationships with their own ethnic community so as to preserve their culture. Leading one to over-identify with his own culture are a lack of sense of belonging, not earning a sufficient income, and being subject to heavy working conditions, social exclusion, culture shock, loneliness, and alienation as a result of not having a well-connected social interaction network and sharp cultural differences.

Moreover, the main coping strategies used by such individuals consist of family support, relationships with fellow expatriates, and maintaining cultural and religious values. This results in a dilemma for the individual in that while he desires to return to his country of birth, the positive conditions provided by living and working in a developed country push him to make a new life in his host country.

In the 1960s as a result of labor migration to Western Europe, and especially to Germany, Turkish-born migrants gained a sense of permanency when their family members joined them in their host country. Since such immigrants eventually decided not to return to Turkey, civilian charters began to call for the religious and cultural institutionalization of migrant populations. The existence and importance of these organizations in aiding immigrants in adapting to their host country and culture cannot be ignored as they provide many services in a variety of areas, ranging from native language and religious education to sports activities, from Hajj and Umrah organizations to funeral services (Yaman, 2015). It is also believed that establishing psychological support units will positively contribute to the adaptation and integration process by providing mental health support.

As per the findings of this study, individuals who migrated abroad seeking work, healthcare services, education, and the like should be assisted during three specific periods; these being before departing, while on the road, and after arriving. Providing consultancy in the decision phase would be better for individuals who experience migration before starting the immigration process. By providing consultancy services before departing one’s home country, potential emigrants may be informed about the feelings of loss that they may experience while they are away, the existence of the possibility of permanently settling in the host country, the stress resulting from the
acculturation process so that they may make proper preparations. Potential emigrants could be provided with written and visual materials that include the experiences and recommendations of people who have previously traveled abroad.

In the host country, organizing an orientation program in which official representatives of both Turkey and the host country take part would help expatriates overcome the initial shock in a more healthy way. With the cooperation of non-governmental organizations established by Turkish citizens in the host country, there could be a figure that expatriates could trust in their new home who might either meet with them or be determined as a contact person.

In order to reduce the stress resulting from the acculturation process, people could be given seminars, personal, and group consultancy support about how to protect one’s identity in a multicultural environment and how to prosper culturally without losing one’s own identity. Despite the feeling that one’s cultural identity is under threat, ‘eid prayers, religious activities, funeral ceremonies, and some other religious/cultural activities could be carried out as broadly as possible. Teaching religion and spirituality as a part of one’s identity may play a role both in protecting and developing oneself culturally and in enhancing one’s resilience during crisis situations.

Outgoing individuals seem to adapt more easily in new countries since they also tend to frequently return to their own countries and have ongoing relationships with their relatives. Traveling to Turkey at certain intervals and using technological facilities, such as video conversation, may also be helpful in helping people overcome the difficulties of living abroad.

In this study, the decision-making process of Turkish-born emigrants was further than they expected. As a result, it was observed that the speakers in this study made decisions without subjecting much critical-thinking. Therefore, family life education thematic endeavors for the individuals who are expected to migrate will lead to stakeholders involve in decision making process and consolidation of family bounds. Individuals whose secure attachment state is enhanced as a result of the psychological services will experience a change in attitude and behavior towards the country they migrated, thus a sense of belonging will emerge.

Strengthening immigrant relations will work to clear up much of the psychological confusion experienced by individuals during the arrival process, which will lead to reduced feelings of loneliness. For all of these reasons, increasing the effectiveness of non-governmental organizations, be they associations, federations, or foundations, will increase immigrants’ well-being abroad. In such studies, acculturation should ensure the protection of national religious values and the underlying dynamics of identity.
As a result of such extreme changes in environment, migrants’ cognitive awareness level is weakened, as is evident from the cognitive distortions in speakers’ statements. Counseling activities aiming to increase immigrants’ awareness levels will lead to more balanced responses against the suffering that life brings. Immigrants who experience crises in their life tend not to be aware that such situations are a result of homesickness. While this is an example of cognitive distortion, it is also a denial of one’s existential realities. In such a crisis, receiving professional help from a mental health adviser intimate with that specific individual’s culture, mentality, and feelings appears to play a crucial role in helping the individual overcome the crisis and in preventing him from developing negative attitudes toward that country. In addition, since mutual spousal support is thought to be important in helping families to adapt to and in enduring resulting stress. Consequently, including spouses in all consultancy services would help to increase the effect of counseling.

Kaynakça/References


