RESILIENCE IN TRANSITION: THE JOURNEY OF SYRIAN REFUGEES
REBUILDING LIVES IN İSTANBUL

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RESILIENCE IN TRANSITION: THE JOURNEY OF SYRIAN REFUGEES REBUILDING LIVES IN İSTANBUL

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how Syrian refugees in Türkiye navigate everyday life and build meaningful forms of belonging and resilience under conditions of legal and social precarity. Drawing on a dual theoretical framework—social capital theory (Bourdieu, Putnam, Coleman) and the theory of everyday life (Lefebvre, de Certeau)—the study examines the situated, affective, and strategic ways in which displaced individuals reconstruct coherence amid instability. Based on fifteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in Syrian Arabic with participants living in İstanbul, the research employs narrative inquiry and reflexive thematic analysis.

The findings reveal that refugee agency is not fixed or oppositional but tactically enacted through micro-level practices such as linguistic adjustment, digital navigation, ritual continuity, and selective identity performance. Far from being passive recipients of state hospitality, participants emerge as situated actors who recalibrate visibility, trust, and rhythm to navigate shifting constraints. Social capital, in this context, is mobilized relationally and ethically, blending practical support with moral labor, especially in the absence of extended family networks. Narrative itself functions as a tactic of voice and resistance, allowing participants to reframe suffering and assert presence in a context that often renders them invisible.

This research contributes to Türkiye-based migration literature by foregrounding the micropolitics of daily adaptation and bringing empirical data into conversation with core theoretical concepts. It affirms that life in exile is not merely endured, it is tactically remade.

Keywords: Refugee Agency; Social Capital; Everyday Practices; Syrian Refugees; Precarity

ÖZ

Bu tez, Suriyeli mültecilerin Türkiye'de gündelik yaşamı nasıl sürdürdüklerini ve hukuki-toplumsal kırılganlık koşullarında nasıl anlamlı aidiyet ve direnç biçimleri geliştirdiklerini incelemektedir. Sosyal sermaye kuramı (Bourdieu, Putnam, Coleman) ile gündelik hayat kuramı (Lefebvre, de Certeau) çerçevesinde şekillenen çalışmada, İstanbul'da yaşayan katılımcılarla Suriyeli Arapçasında gerçekleştirilen 15 derinlemesine yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeden yararlanılmış; anlatı temelli bir yaklaşım ve yansıtmalı tematik analiz yöntemi uygulanmıştır.

Bulgular, mültecilerin yalnızca pasif alıcılar değil; dilsel uyum, dijital araç kullanımı, ritüel devamlılık ve kimlik performansı gibi mikro düzeydeki taktiklerle değişen koşullara aktif biçimde yanıt veren öznel aktörler olduğunu göstermektedir. Sosyal sermaye, geniş aile desteğinin eksikliğinde pratik yardım ile ahlaki emeğin iç içe geçtiği ilişkisel bir kaynak olarak devreye girmektedir. Anlatı ise hem bir direniş hem de görünürlük taktiği olarak katılımcılara acıyı yeniden anlamlandırma ve varlıklarını ifade etme imkânı sunmaktadır.

Bu çalışma, Türkiye merkezli göç literatürüne gündelik yaşamın mikropolitikalarını öne çıkararak katkı sağlamakta; sürgün yaşamının yalnızca katlanılan değil, aynı zamanda taktiksel biçimde yeniden kurulan bir süreç olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mülteci Failliği; Sosyal Sermaye; Gündelik Pratikler; Suriyeli Mülteciler; Güvencesizlik

To all the Syrian refugees who have chosen life and kept searching for home within and beyond borders.

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My heartfelt thanks go to the Syrian participants who generously opened their lives to me. They shared not only their stories but also their silences, vulnerabilities, and moments of precarity. Their stories reminded me that home is not always a place, but something people carry, rebuild, and imagine anew. I hold profound respect for each of them.

To my family, thank you for standing by me in every chapter of my life, with love and faith. To Reham Alboshi, whose life story has always inspired me, thank you for your constant support, your listening ear, and your generosity during this process.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFAD: Directorate of Disaster and Emergency Situations

AIDA: Association of International Development Agencies

DGMM: Directorate General of Migration Management

IOM: International Organization for Migration

LFIP: Law on Foreigners and International Protection

SUYE: Social Cohesion and Life Education

TEPAV: The Economic Policy Reaearch Foundation of Türkiye

TP: Temporary Protection

UNHCR: United Nations High Comissioner for Refugees

UNICEF: United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

WFP: World Food Programme

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of the Syrian uprising and the Assad regime's violent repression, Türkiye has become home to the world's largest population of displaced Syrians, transforming urban life, policy frameworks, and everyday social dynamics. Over a decade since the outbreak of war, Syrians in Türkiye continue to live in legal limbo, often facing overlapping forms of precariousness, discrimination, and exclusion. While the policy discourse has largely framed this population as "guests" under temporary protection, the lived realities of Syrians reflect a much more complex negotiation of belonging, survival, and everyday adaptation. Against this backdrop, this thesis explores how Syrian refugees in Türkiye tactically navigate the uncertainties of everyday life and reassemble meaning through micro-level practices of adjustment, resistance, and relation.

Despite the growing body of literature on Syrian displacement in Türkiye, much of the academic and policy-oriented research has focused on macro-level indicators: legal status, labor market integration, or institutional access. Far fewer studies have centered the emotional, relational, and improvisational dimensions of refugee life—how individuals survive, adapt, and assert presence through embodied and context-specific acts. Drawing on this gap, the present study seeks to illuminate the everyday strategies through which Syrian refugees reconstitute social ties, manage visibility, and reinhabit disrupted time.

Moreover, while much of the existing literature on Syrians in Türkiye has centered on experiences of those with limited formal education or precarious labor conditions, this study focuses on a relatively underexplored demographic: educated, professionally active individuals who continue to navigate displacement from a position of social and cultural capital. By engaging participants with university degrees, skilled employment, or active community roles, the research expands the lens through which Syrian displacement is typically understood. This focus offers a complementary perspective on refugee

adaptation, shedding light on forms of resilience, negotiation, and belonging among individuals who often remain overlooked in policy and academic narratives alike.

The research is guided by the following question: How do Syrian refugees in Türkiye tactically navigate everyday life and build meaningful forms of belonging and resilience within conditions of legal and social precarity?

To address this question, the study adopts a dual theoretical lens. The first is social capital theory, drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) concept of capital conversion, Coleman's (1988) emphasis on trust and reciprocity, and Putnam's (2000) distinction between bonding and bridging capital. The second is the theory of everyday life, informed by Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis and de Certeau's (1984) notion of tactics as context-bound practices embedded in constraint. Together, these frameworks allow for an analysis of agency not as resistance or assimilation, but as lived negotiation—relational, adaptive, and emotionally charged.

The research employs a qualitative design, based on fifteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in Syrian Arabic with participants residing in İstanbul. Participants were selected for their educational or professional experience in both Syria and Türkiye, allowing for rich narrative accounts of adaptation, continuity, and transformation. The interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) reflexive thematic analysis, combining semantic and latent coding. Particular attention was paid to how participants described their daily routines, identity negotiations, social relations, and emotional coping strategies.

Importantly, this research was conducted during a moment of political rupture. While the thesis was initially conceptualized and developed under the long-standing regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, the interviews were carried out shortly after the regime's collapse and the beginning of a new transitional government. As such, the legal definitions and policy frameworks discussed in this thesis—particularly regarding protection status—reflect the realities of the pre-transition period. Despite the shifting political landscape, participants continued to live under conditions that, in practical terms, aligned with refugeehood: legal uncertainty, restricted mobility, and social

marginalization. For this reason, the term "refugee" is used throughout the thesis not as a legal category but as a reflection of lived experience and practical vulnerability. The post-Assad era may yet transform the geopolitical terrain of Syrian displacement, but at the time of this study, the everyday realities of being a refugee in Türkiye remained intact.

By foregrounding lived experience and everyday practices, this thesis contributes to Türkiye-based migration scholarship in two key ways. First, it brings attention to the micropolitics of adaptation, offering an empirically grounded account of how refugees live through—and not merely in—precarity. Second, it deepens theoretical conversations by applying established concepts of social capital, rhythm, and tactics to the emotional and relational labor of exile. In doing so, the study moves beyond binary framings of resilience or vulnerability and instead proposes a more nuanced understanding of refugee agency as improvised, situated, and affectively embedded.

This research is also shaped by my own long-standing personal and social engagement with the Syrian community in İstanbul. Since my undergraduate years, I have been involved in activism in solidarity with Syrians and their rights, which has led to lasting friendships with individuals from a range of social and cultural backgrounds. Later, I married a Syrian partner, an experience that brought me even closer to the community in intimate and everyday ways. I found myself dancing at their weddings and mourning at their funerals, gradually integrating many of their everyday rituals into my own life. I began drinking cardamom coffee in the mornings, shopping at Syrian markets, and preparing the same Eid dishes described by participants in this study. Throughout these experiences, I was continually struck by the resilience and optimism of my Syrian friends and relatives. I became deeply curious about how, after enduring such hardship and loss, they managed to rebuild their lives from the ground up in a new country. This thesis was born out of that curiosity—as well as the advantage of speaking Arabic, which enabled me to build trust and communicate with participants directly, without the need for intermediaries. Once the idea for this research began to take shape, the process unfolded naturally and swiftly. I began reaching out to my immediate social circle, gradually expanding the network through referrals and word of mouth. All participants expressed that they found the topic meaningful and were quick to agree to take part. In addition to

contributing to the study, many also saw it as an opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and to be heard. For me, the process offered a rare chance to see people I had known for years in a new and deeper light. While we had shared memories together, the interviews allowed for a different kind of intimacy, as participants entrusted me with vulnerable, emotionally charged moments from their lives.

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 outlines the contextual and legal framework of Syrian displacement in Türkiye and reviews key literature. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical underpinnings of the study. Chapter 4 details the methodological approach, including data collection and analysis. Chapter 5 presents the thematic findings across five key areas. Chapter 6 offers a theoretical discussion of the findings, and Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of contributions, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

CONTEXTUALIZING MIGRATION AND SYRIAN REFUGEES

2.1.   Migration and Forced Migration

Many discussions about migration begin by highlighting humanity's long history as a nomadic species, and while this observation holds some truth, the last few decades have seen migration movements of unprecedented scale. Ongoing crises, wars, and instability compel millions to seek secure lives in neighboring countries and beyond (IOM, 2024). Adding climate change and political upheaval to these factors, the number of people seeking asylum is growing rapidly. By 2023, an estimated 117.3 million individuals had been forcibly displaced, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency (2024), with at least 43 million classified as refugees. This equates to 1 in every 69 people on Earth being forcibly displaced.

Migration involves the permanent or semi-permanent relocation of individuals across administrative boundaries, categorized based on cause, form, and purpose. A key distinction is between voluntary migration, driven by individual choice, and forced migration, driven by circumstances beyond personal control (Jansen, 2016, p. 62).

Voluntary migration refers to the movement of individuals who actively choose to relocate to another administrative region, often in pursuit of improved opportunities, better living conditions, or a preferred lifestyle. Such migration is typically motivated by personal aspirations and generally involves smaller groups of people.

In contrast, forced migration occurs when individuals are driven from their homes due to compelling factors such as political oppression, legal constraints, or religious persecution. These migrations are not a matter of choice but rather a necessity for survival or safety (Castles, 2017, p. 8). Forced migration often takes place on a large scale, prompted by wars, civil unrest, ethnic cleansing, or natural disasters. In such cases, individual agency is significantly diminished, as broader social and environmental crises dictate the movement.

The outcomes of voluntary and forced migration vary greatly due to the fundamental difference in the degree of choice and agency involved. Voluntary migration often enables individuals to plan their move meticulously. Migrants can research their destination, secure employment or housing, and establish connections beforehand, leading to a smoother transition.

In contrast, forced migration is typically sudden and unplanned, driven by crises that leave migrants with little to no time to prepare. As a result, forced migrants face severe challenges, including limited destination options and inadequate resources to rebuild their lives. Unlike voluntary migrants, who may have the possibility to return to their previous way of life, this option is often unavailable to forced migrants. The abruptness and lack of choice in their movement expose them to heightened vulnerability, increasing the likelihood of persistent poverty and social marginalization (Cernea, 2000, p. 12).

Individuals affected by forced migration can be classified into various categories, including refugees and asylum seekers. The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as someone residing outside their country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The responsibility for overseeing this Convention lies with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Nevertheless, a significant number of forced migrants globally do not meet the Convention's criteria. This exclusion is often because they have not crossed an international border or because their displacement is a result of war or widespread human rights violations rather than specific, individualized persecution. This limitation highlights the gaps in existing international frameworks in addressing the realities faced by many forced migrants, leaving them without the legal protections afforded to those classified as refugees under the 1951 Convention.

The 1969 Refugee Convention of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) broadened the definition of a refugee to include individuals fleeing war, reflecting the specific realities of displacement on the African continent. Many African states adopted this

expanded definition, ensuring protection for those escaping armed conflict. However, this approach has not been widely embraced by most Northern states, which continue to adhere to more restrictive interpretations of refugee status under the 1951 Convention.

In the 1990s, in response to the mass displacement caused by violence in the former Yugoslavia, the concept of temporary protection emerged as a pragmatic solution. Temporary protection provides refuge for a defined period, such as three years, or for the duration of the conflict. Once the conflict is deemed to have ended, repatriation is expected and, in some cases, enforced. This framework highlights the differing approaches to refugee protection, with temporary measures often prioritizing short-term relief over long-term solutions.

The 1951 Refugee Convention initially applied only to Europe and to individuals who became refugees before January 1, 1951, reflecting the post-World War II context in which it was drafted. The adoption of the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees removed these geographical and temporal limitations, thereby expanding the scope of international refugee protection. Despite these advancements, some individuals on the move continue to face significant barriers in obtaining refugee status due to restrictions imposed by governments under the Geneva Convention.

For instance, Syrians in Türkiye encounter a unique challenge arising from the country's geographical limitation in its ratification of the 1951 Convention. Türkiye recognizes only individuals displaced by events in Europe as refugees, relegating others, such as Syrians, to a separate legal framework. This issue will be further examined in the following chapter. Currently, 149 states are parties to the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol, which collectively define the term "refugee" and establish the legal rights of refugees as well as the obligations of states to protect them.

Asylum seekers are individuals who have crossed international borders in search of protection but are still awaiting a decision on their refugee status. During this period, asylum seekers often face prolonged uncertainty, as the determination process, including appeals, can extend over several years. Countries provide various forms of protection based on the individual's circumstances, such as granting full refugee status for those who

meet the criteria outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, offering temporary protection for those fleeing armed conflict, or providing humanitarian protection for those who do not qualify as refugees but face serious risks if returned to their home country.

In some countries, asylum seekers face restrictions on their ability to work, leaving them dependent on welfare benefits, which may be lower than those provided to other welfare recipients. In Europe, a significant number of asylum applications are rejected, but many rejected applicants remain in the country. This often occurs because certain countries refuse to accept the return of these individuals, either due to unwillingness or because of the lack of essential documentation such as passports. As a result, some rejected asylum seekers are forced to live in an informal, often precarious, economic situation (Castles, 2017, p. 10).

2.2. The Story of Syrian Refugees in Türkiye

Following the violent response of the regime under Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to the civil unrest in 2011, over 12 million Syrians have been displaced. While 6.8 million have become internally displaced refugees, mostly in northern Syria, 5.2 million fled to another country, primarily neighboring countries including Türkiye (AIDA, 2022). Syrian refugees have dispersed worldwide, seeking safety and stability, from Sweden to Egypt. Due to the proximity between Syria and Türkiye, with the two countries sharing a 911-kilometer-long land border, the majority of Syrian refugees end up in Türkiye. Whether it's a temporary stop or a lifelong home, Türkiye has become the country hosting the largest population of refugees globally (Castles, 2017).

Syrian immigrants in Türkiye either hold temporary protection status or a residence permit. According to the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Türkiye (T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı, 2025), the number of Syrian citizens under temporary protection peaked at 3,737,369 in 2021, decreasing to 2,744,696 by May 2025. There are also a relatively small number of Syrians with a residence permit in Türkiye, as per the Law (Yabancılar Ve Uluslararası Koruma Kanunu, 2013), a residence permit requires a valid passport and a legal entry via border gates to Türkiye. Only 79,662 Syrians have entered Türkiye legally

and are counted as immigrants rather than refugees. Regardless of the legality of their entry, they are immigrants forced to leave their country due to war and threats to their lives. To maintain this connection, I will refer to all Syrian immigrants in Türkiye as refugees or immigrants, irrespective of their legal status.

Türkiye ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention for the Status of Refugees with a geographical limitation due to its distinctive location. Under this provision, Türkiye specified that it would not grant refugee status to individuals arriving from outside of Europe. This made it impossible for Syrians to obtain refugee status in Türkiye (Kır, 2017). Initially regarded as "guests," Syrians were expected to return to their homeland soon in the early stages of the crisis. Responding to the sudden influx of Syrians crossing the border, as the war in Syria escalated and human rights violations peaked, Türkiye established various mechanisms in 2013. These include establishment of the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) within the Ministry of Interior, the main political body for governing Syrian refugees. Additionally, Türkiye relies on longstanding institutions like the Directorate of Disaster and Emergency Situations (Başbakanlık Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı- AFAD), the Turkish Red Crescent (Türk Kızılayı), and new humanitarian organizations, often with ties to religious groups, some linked to the government (Pérouse, 2013: 86). These measures aimed to ensure comprehensive oversight of registered individuals.

Subsequently, the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), No. 6458, was enacted and came into effect in April 2014. Article 91 of the LFIP established the framework for 'Temporary Protection (TP)' to address situations of mass influx. To operationalize Article 91, the government introduced the 'Temporary Protection Regulation' in September 2014. This regulation stipulated that TP would be granted exclusively to Syrian nationals, stateless individuals, and refugees from Syria who had been displaced as a result of events occurring after April 2011. Moreover, the regulation explicitly stated that the granting of TP does not entail providing residency permits or any pathway to permanent status in the country (Kutlu, 2015).

The provision of TP to Syrian refugees, as opposed to conditional refugee status, significantly reduces their opportunities for resettlement to third countries by restricting their legal existence not only to Türkiye but also to the provincial administrative area where they are registered. Under the TP framework, legal recognition is limited to the registered province, further complicating the mobility and integration of these individuals (Yılmaz Eren, 2019).

The TP system for Syrians grants limited access to social services such as healthcare, education, and the possibility of applying for work permits. However, these benefits are inherently temporary and subject to revocation at the government's discretion (Ineli-Ciger, 2017). This framework leaves the well-being and fundamental rights of Syrian refugees to access essential needs under the ongoing negotiation of the government in power, without the oversight of any superior authority.

Furthermore, because TP is geographically bound to the province in which a refugee is registered, even temporary departures from this area render individuals "de facto undocumented refugees" (Karadağ & Üstübici, 2023). This situation exposes them to significant risks, including the loss of TP status, restricted access to basic services, and the possibility of detention. Such restrictions amplify the precariousness of refugees' legal and social standing, fostering a climate of uncertainty and vulnerability (Tunaboylu, 2024).

Bailey et al. (2002) characterize prolonged temporary status as "permanent temporariness," a condition mirrored in Türkiye's TP system. Despite its definition lacking a fixed time limit, there is considerable ambiguity about its eventual conclusion and the post-TP future for beneficiaries. This lack of clarity has also rendered TP a contentious political issue. During the 2023 Presidential elections, several political parties and candidates—including the İYİ Party (2023), the DEVA Democracy and Progress Party (2023), and Presidential Candidate Sinan Oğan (2023)—leveraged the issue by centering their campaigns on promises to abolish the temporary protection status for Syrians.

Many Syrians consequently feel unsettled and insecure about their future. Researchers interviewing urban Syrian refugees have observed that most view their temporary status as too precarious to envision a stable or long-term future (Santana de Andrade, 2020).

As of April 2014, approximately 24% of Syrian refugees in Türkiye resided in 22 shelter centers across 10 cities, while the majority lived independently in urban areas (Başbakanlık Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı (AFAD), 2014). By February 8, 2024, this number had sharply declined, with only 1.94% of Syrian refugees residing in 9 shelter centers across 7 cities. Nearly all Syrian refugees now live in urban areas, actively integrating into local life and seeking ways to sustain themselves.

While the shift toward urban self-settlement may indicate greater autonomy, it has also exposed Syrian refugees to new forms of vulnerability, particularly in relation to access to housing and essential services. As Sunata and Güngördü (2024) emphasize, urban areas in Türkiye have become key sites of internal bordering, where non-state actors such as landlords, realtors, mukhtars, and ethnic solidarity networks informally regulate access to shelter. Their study of the Basmane neighborhood in İzmir identifies practices like selective overpricing, ethnic filtering, and arbitrary interrogations that systematically limit Syrian refugees' housing options. These mechanisms are driven by a perceived hierarchy of cultural proximity and deservingness, reproducing exclusion through everyday decisions rather than formal legal barriers. In this context, urban self-settlement emerges not only as a spatial strategy but also as a site of struggle, where inclusion is constantly negotiated and often denied through subtle, yet powerful, social practices.

The largest concentration of Syrian refugees, numbering 478,610 individuals, is in İstanbul (T.C. İçişleri Bakanlığı, 2025), where they constitute 3.04% of the city's population (Adrese Dayalı Nüfus Kayıt Sistemi Sonuçları, 2024, 2025). A study conducted by the Municipality of İstanbul identified employment opportunities, existing social networks, and a sense of safety as key factors influencing Syrian refugees' decisions to settle in the city (Doğan et al., 2021).

A comprehensive study conducted by UNHCR, the Syrian Barometer 2021 (Erdoğan, 2022), revealed that most Syrians have not received financial assistance from the

government or NGOs, which underscores their reliance on employment in various sectors for their livelihood. Until 2015, individuals under TP in Türkiye were unable to access work permits, forcing them to integrate into the informal labor market (İneli-Ciger, 2017). Even after the introduction of the "Work Permits for Foreigners under Temporary Protection" regulation in 2016, only a relatively small number of TP holders were able to obtain work permits.

As of 2023, official data indicates that approximately 108,000 Syrians with work permits have entered the formal economy in Türkiye (Çalışma İzin İstatistikleri, 2023). However, a significant number remain active in the informal economy, a pattern consistent with practices observed in many other host countries (Zetter & Raudel, 2018). Several factors contribute to this limited access, including registration challenges faced by TP holders in urban centers where job opportunities are concentrated, the requirement that work permit applications be submitted by employers, and employer reluctance due to a lack of incentives or the restrictions imposed by the 10% foreign employee quota (Tunaboylu, 2024). Consequently, many Syrian refugees are compelled to participate in the informal economy as their only viable option.

Quantifying the number of Syrian workers in the informal sector remains difficult due to its ambiguous nature. Nonetheless, a study by the International Labor Organization (ILO) Türkiye office, Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labor Market, estimated that in 2017, there were 940,921 Syrian workers in Türkiye, with approximately 91.6% employed informally. Most of these workers occupied low-skilled and low-paid positions (Caro, 2020).

The poor working conditions and meager wages associated with informal employment have had dire consequences. A field study (Esin et al., 2024), conducted in İstanbul between 2021 and 2022, found that 64.1% of Syrian families interviewed were severely food insecure.

2.3. Turkish Side of the Story: Hospitality and Discursive Governance

Following the escalating human rights violations and violence in Syria, Türkiye became one of the most popular and practical destinations for Syrian asylum seekers, particularly considering the proximity of the two countries' long shared border. The Turkish government adopted an open-door policy, allowing those fleeing war, torture, and unbearable living conditions to enter. Along with the open-door policy, and in contrast to the dominant populist rhetoric observed in many other countries, the Turkish government adopted a positive and unifying political discourse. This approach was closely intertwined with specific moral and religious frameworks, emphasizing themes of solidarity, hospitality, and shared humanity. (Göksel et al., 2022). As descendants of the Ottoman Empire, which ruled much of the modern-day Middle East, including Syria, Türkiye, under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, assumed the role of protector for Syrians. Türkiye's leadership, symbolized by Erdoğan, in accepting refugees and offering them a safe haven reinforced the country's self-constructed image as the *Baba* (father) of the oppressed (Carpi & Pınar Şenoğuz, 2018). This discourse was also rooted in Türkiye's identity as the guardian of its Muslim brothers in distress.

The country's hospitality was often praised by the international media (McClelland, 2014), exemplified by the city municipality and governorate of Gaziantep, a Turkish city on the Syrian border, nominating themselves for the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of what the mayor described as the "great examination of humanity in relation to *ensar* and *muhacir*" (T24, 2016). The mayor's use of the terms ensar and *muhacir* was not a personal choice, but part of a larger discourse of Islamic hospitality stemming from the *hijra* between Mecca and Madinah during the time of Prophet Mohammad, promoted by President Erdoğan and echoed by various NGOs, government entities, and local authorities.

Another key term used for Syrian refugees was *misafir* (guest), a phrase employed by President Erdoğan to emphasize the temporary nature of their migration and to draw a clear distinction between the hosts and the guests. By framing Syrian refugees as guests, the government conveyed both an intent to provide immediate aid and an implicit

expectation of eventual return, aligning with the broader temporary protection framework adopted by Türkiye. This discourse shaped not only public perception but also the policies and practices surrounding the management of Syrian refugees in Türkiye.

The "hospitality" discourse did not solely emphasize acts of generosity, such as accepting Syrians into the country; it also highlighted the economic dimensions of Türkiye's *Baba* (father) role. During his speech at the 1st Global Refugee Forum at the United Nations Office in Geneva in 2019, President Erdoğan stated, "The money we spent on refugees has exceeded USD 40 billion" (Birgün, 2019). While he later clarified that this figure included cumulative spending by all NGOs and international aid, and other government officials have asserted that the funds came primarily from international institutions with no allocation of resources meant for Turkish citizens redirected toward refugees (Cumhuriyet, 2020), this and similar statements by Erdoğan framed humanitarian aid, the construction of refugee shelters, and refugees' access to basic human rights (e.g., education, healthcare) as acts of charity extended by a powerful *Baba* figure to the vulnerable.

On the other hand, aside from the discursive aspects, Türkiye's policy lacked well-structured integration measures and a robust long-term plan addressing employment, housing, and legal rights for Syrians, which contributed to growing challenges in terms of stability and coexistence. Korkut (2016, p. 2) defines Türkiye's policy toward Syrians as "discursive governance". In the absence of formalized and institutionalized protection and integration policies, the open-border policy, based on temporary protection, gradually transformed into a "refugee crisis." In this context, the Turkish government's approach was more "charitable" than "rights-based," a framework that later fueled public resentment toward Syrian refugees.

Initially, the welcoming stance towards Syrian refugees—referred to as the "neighboring guests"—resonated positively with the Turkish public, aligning with religious and moral imperatives. This, especially in the first years of migration, created a climate of solidarity and brotherhood. Many Turkish citizens provided Syrian refugees financial or in-kind aid, some through NGOs, local authorities (Bursa Büyükşehir Belediyesi, 2022; Ege

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Postası, 2013; Esenler Belediyesi, 2013; UNHCR Türkiye, 2013) or by themselves to such instances where Turkish citizens opened their houses to Syrian people fled from war for extended periods (Milliyet, 2015). During my research I also have had the opportunity to meet Turkish families, especially from border cities, who have hosted refugee families in their houses.

The strategy of hospitality, initially rooted in empathy and moral values, gradually weakened over time as daily challenges emerged, overshadowing the early narrative of generosity. In the early years of migration, the discourse of hospitality was strong enough to obscure the state's shortcomings in planning and managing the migration process. However, over time, this narrative reversed. As the country's economic conditions deteriorated, the situation for Syrian refugees in Türkiye also worsened. Field research by Saraçoğlu and Bélanger (2019) in İzmir revealed that economic, urban, and social cohesion problems significantly contributed to the rise of anti-Syrian sentiment and hostility toward refugees. The government's emotionally driven approach, rather than a legally structured framework, created exclusionary mechanisms for Syrians, preventing them from settling, planning for their futures, or achieving stability. Simultaneously, the inability of Syrians to integrate into society eroded the "guest" perspective and cultural affinity among Turkish citizens (Erdoğan, 2022).

Beyond daily disputes between Syrian refugees and Turkish citizens, a significant turning point occurred in 2014 in Gaziantep. A Syrian tenant allegedly killed his landlord over eviction issues, though the tenant's family later claimed the incident stemmed from harassment by the landlord toward his wife (Yeni Şafak, 2014; Durgun, 2014). Following the murder, local residents attacked Syrian properties in the neighborhood. Such violence was interpreted as an attempt by Turkish youths to "re-territorialize their neighborhood as a home space" (Carpi & Pınar Şenoğuz, 2018). This incident also led to a broader shift in the media and online discourse: Syrians, initially portrayed as "desperate victims" (Efe, 2015), began to be stigmatized as "traitors", "invaders", and "immoral individuals" (Şimdi, 2023).

According to the WFP Social Cohesion in Türkiye Report (2020), discontent among Turkish citizens towards Syrian refugees intensified notably during the period of 2016–2018. This escalation followed political turbulence, including the attempted coup d'état in 2016, which contributed to a broader climate of social and economic instability. During this time, xenophobia and anti-Syrian sentiment became increasingly pronounced, particularly in the lead-up to key political events such as the 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections and the 2019 local elections.

Nationalist rhetoric gained prominence, exemplified by the opposition İYİ Party's campaign slogan for İstanbul's Fatih Municipality, *"Fatih'i Suriyelilere Teslim Etmeyeceğim"* ("I will not surrender Fatih to Syrians") (Sözcü, 2019). Such statements fueled broader hostility about the perceived economic and social costs of hosting Syrian refugees. Opposition parties and media outlets frequently propagated narratives portraying Syrians as beneficiaries of state support at the expense of Turkish taxpayers, exacerbating public frustration.

Following the opposition candidate's victory in the İstanbul mayoral election, expectations surged among segments of the population for measures aimed at reducing the presence of Syrians in the city. These sentiments further amplified hate speech on social media platforms, with hashtags like *#SuriyelilerDefoluyor* (#SyriansGetOut) and *#ÜlkemdeSuriyeliİstemiyorum* (#IDontWantSyriansinMyCountry) becoming alarmingly widespread (Aldamen, 2023). This digital hostility reflected the deepening societal divisions and challenges to social cohesion, highlighting the role of political rhetoric and media framing in shaping public attitudes toward Syrian refugees.

Following the elections, in which Syrian refugees were prominently politicized, security measures targeting them intensified significantly. The İstanbul Governorate issued a directive requiring Syrians residing in the city without proper registration to return to their registered provinces (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023). This announcement was followed by heightened police surveillance and mass detentions, particularly in central areas of İstanbul. Many detained Syrians were forcibly relocated internally to their designated provinces of registration (Pekşen, 2023).

Despite the Turkish government's denials of deportations beyond national borders, several international organizations, including Amnesty International (2019), Human Rights Watch (2019), and AIDA (2022), reported cases of Syrian refugees being forcibly deported to Syria. These accounts highlighted serious violations of international non-refoulement principles, which prohibit returning individuals to places where they face threats to their life or freedom.

Amid this climate of fear, many Syrians were reluctant to leave their homes, even for work or essential errands, fearing detention or deportation (Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023). This growing sense of insecurity not only exacerbated their vulnerability but also underscored the precarious and often perilous nature of their temporary protection status in Türkiye.

The cycle of violence against Syrian refugees has tragically repeated itself in subsequent years, with notable incidents in Ankara's Altındağ district in 2021 and Kayseri in 2024. In Altındağ, tensions flared after rumors of Syrians insulting locals. The situation escalated dramatically on August 10, 2021, following a street fight between Turkish and Syrian youth, resulting in the death of a Turkish teenager. Enraged residents vandalized Syrian homes and businesses for hours and even stormed a mosque where Syrian families, including women and children, sought refuge (Karagöz, 2024).

Similarly, violence erupted in Kayseri on July 1, 2024, after allegations surfaced of a Syrian man harassing a Syrian girl. Local residents targeted Syrian-owned shops and homes in retaliation, with moderate estimates indicating that nearly 400 homes, workplaces, and vehicles were attacked in the Melikgazi district alone (Önder & Doğan, 2024).

The unrest quickly spread to other cities such as Hatay, Gaziantep, Antalya, Bursa, and İstanbul (BBC News Türkçe, 2024). During these clashes, a 17-year-old Syrian boy, Ahmet Handan El Naif, was killed by a nationalist group in Antalya (Erkan, 2024). Videos from these incidents revealed limited police intervention, further aggravating tensions.

Although over 1,000 individuals were detained, only 28 were formally arrested. The Interior Minister visited Kayseri four days after the events, sharing images of himself cutting pastırma, Kayseri's renowned charcuterie, with a large knife. During his visit, he did not meet with Syrian families who had been victims of the violence but instead visited Turkish shops and distributed pastırma and fruits to residents (Kayseri Gündem, 2024).

Following the violent events in Kayseri, approximately 3,000 Syrian refugees left the city. Many relocated to neighboring cities, while others either returned to Syria or embarked on new migration routes to Europe. The aftermath also saw the closure of 24 workplaces, most of them textile workshops operating in the Kayseri Organized Industrial Zone (Yaşar, 2024).

The 2023 presidential elections marked another peak in anti-Syrian rhetoric. During the runoff, the main opposition party, CHP, launched the slogan *"Suriyeliler Gi-de-cek!"* ("Syrians will l-e-a-v-e!"), which was widely displayed across the country (Euronews, 2023). I have witnessed that in Sultanbeyli, a district with a dense Syrian population, a giant poster with this slogan was hung in front of an NGO providing support to Syrian refugees, creating an atmosphere of intimidation for those seeking basic services such as healthcare and education.

Reports of a Turkish man murdering his neighbor's 10-year-old son with a pump-rifle for "making noise" under the assumption that the child was Syrian further highlighted the normalization of violence against refugees. The man testified in court that he believed "Turks could not be that insolent" (İzmir Time 35, 2024). Such incidents underscore a dangerous social climate where crimes against Syrians are perceived as justifiable by certain segments of the population.

Even though the Turkish government initially adopted a positive and unifying discourse, emphasizing themes of solidarity, hospitality, and shared humanity, Türkiye's policy lacked coherent integration measures and a comprehensive plan addressing critical areas such as employment and legal rights in the long run (Rottmann, 2020). This ineffectiveness, coupled with rising violence and dissent among Turkish people towards

Syrians, has adversely affected integration efforts and mutual understanding between the host community and immigrants.

Erdoğan's (2022) UNHCR study revealed that 81% of Turkish citizens view Syrians as culturally distant, with 84.4% lacking any Syrian acquaintances. Only 27.4% of respondents stated they would not be disturbed by sharing an apartment building with Syrians. Similarly Erdoğan and Uyan Semerci's (2018) nationwide survey revealed that a significant majority of Turkish citizens perceived Syrians as an economic and cultural threat. Over 70% believed that Syrians were taking jobs from locals, while 87% expressed disapproval of intermarriage, and 74% opposed having a Syrian neighbor. Field research studies conducted by Banu Hülür et al. (2021) and Kurfalı & Özçürümez (2023) reveal that many Syrian refugees in Türkiye face significant social isolation from their Turkish neighbors, largely due to pervasive negative discourses surrounding Syrians. One of the primary challenges highlighted by the participants is the difficulty in securing rental housing. Many landlords refuse to rent to Syrians, and even when a landlord does accept a Syrian tenant, neighbors often exert pressure to prevent such arrangements. This dynamic exacerbates the social divide, undermining efforts toward social harmony and coexistence.

As a result, Syrians are left with limited opportunities for integration into Turkish society. The growing resentment among Turkish citizens, who increasingly scapegoat Syrians for various societal issues, further intensifies this divide and contributes to unprecedented levels of violence against them. This situation not only isolates Syrian refugees but also severely threatens the social harmony and long-term relations between the two communities.

In response to the growing climate of discrimination against Syrian refugees, the Turkish government took steps to foster social cohesion and integration through the introduction of the National Harmonization Strategy and Action Plan (2018–2023). Issued by the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) in 2018, with support from international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM),

this strategy marked Türkiye's first comprehensive approach to refugee inclusion after seven years of forced migration.

The five-year strategy (2018) aims to leverage Türkiye's "historical legacy of hospitality" and its evolving role as a destination country for a variety of migrant groups. Central to the strategy is a rights-based, inclusive approach that seeks to manage migration in a manner that promotes mutual understanding and respect between refugees and Turkish citizens. It focuses on improving refugees' access to essential services such as education, healthcare, employment, and social support, with the goal of enhancing their integration into Turkish society.

Moreover, the plan underscores the importance of strengthening both local and national institutions to coordinate these efforts and highlights the role of public awareness, cultural understanding, and active engagement of stakeholders, including government bodies, NGOs, international organizations, and migrant communities themselves.

During the implementation of the five-year framework, the DGMM introduced the Social Cohesion and Life Education (SUYE) Project for migrants residing in Türkiye. This training, which began on October 27, 2019, provided 8-hour courses aimed at facilitating the adaptation of migrants to the social, economic, and cultural life in the country (Çalışkan Sarı et al., 2021). In 2022, a total of 1,549,680 individuals participated in the program, which was voluntary. The project included lectures on Türkiye's history and culture, moral values, societal norms, the rights of foreigners, and practical daily activities such as using credit cards, withdrawing money from ATMs, traffic rules, and public transportation.

A 2024 study (Ünlü & Yıldız), based on interviews with trainers involved in the SUYE program, revealed criticisms regarding the timing of the project, which was introduced several years after the initial migrant influx. The trainers reported that the curriculum, which focused on basic daily activities such as using credit cards, was often monotonous and boring for the participants. Furthermore, they observed that many participants attended the training sessions out of fear of deportation rather than a genuine interest in integration.

A study conducted by Çayır and Hancı Kaya (2022) revealed that during the years of the National Harmonization Strategy and Action Plan (2018–2023), school books depicted migrant children—primarily from Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Georgia—as "guests." The representation of migrants in the state's official schoolbooks predominantly portrays them as "oppressed" and "dependent". Although the schoolbooks include questions such as "If you were a migrant, what would you do?" aimed at fostering social cohesion, these prompts often evoke a sense of pity rather than empathy or mutual understanding. Moreover, the examples of social cohesion mainly focus on the integration of migrant children into the Turkish school system, with virtually no examples illustrating how Turkish students might learn from the cultures of the migrant students. These portrayals raise significant concerns regarding the implementation and effectiveness of the five-year strategy.

Even after these efforts, 74.1% of Turkish society believes that Syrian refugees have not integrated into Turkish society at all or have only integrated to a limited extent. Remarkably, Turkish society increasingly perceives the Syrians' social cohesion process as less successful each year. In 2019, 64.4% of respondents stated that Syrians had not integrated into Turkish society, and by 2020, this figure had risen to 69.92%. In other words, despite the lengthening duration of coexistence and the government's efforts to implement harmonization programs, the perception within Turkish society that "Syrians are not integrating" continues to strengthen (Erdoğan, 2022).

2.4. Resilience Against Precarity: Syrian Refugees' Stories of Survival

After leaving their home country and witnessing war, escalating hostilities, and the policies centered around the concept of temporariness in Türkiye, Syrians have experienced profound psychological impacts. Grief and loss are central themes in the most common psychological experiences of distress among refugee populations. In the context of Syrians, these feelings can result from the loss of home, cultural identity, relationships, and support structures as they resettle in a new country (Hassan et al., 2016). Following forced migration, living in uncertain conditions, a lack of social security for

the future, and the constant state of waiting may give rise to various issues concerning well-being and life satisfaction.

However, research (Arnetz et al., 2013; Nam et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2011) indicates that many refugees exhibit resilience and continue to function effectively, even after experiencing trauma before, during, and after displacement. Resilience in the face of adversity focuses on strengths (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005), explores how individuals overcome adverse life experiences, and highlights significant factors that contribute to the resilience process (Windle, 2010). In this context, finding employment is a critical aspect of refugees' journeys to rebuild their lives and demonstrate resilience in the face of the risks associated with forced migration (Zetter & Ruaudel, 2018).

In addition to the previously discussed challenges concerning working conditions, the informal economy, and the difficulties of obtaining work permits, there are also many Syrian-owned businesses, most of which are small or micro-sized, across various sectors, particularly in services. According to a TEPAV report (2018), the number of businesses either owned or partnered by Syrians is 9,978. With an average of 7.3 employees per company, approximately 44,000 people are currently employed in these Syrian-owned or partnered enterprises. Among the business owners, 24.6% are new entrepreneurs, meaning they established their first business in Türkiye. In terms of exports, 55.4% of Syrian businesses are involved in export activities, a notable figure when compared to the 30.9% of Turkish businesses that engage in exports. Entrepreneurial activities have contributed to the social cohesion process of Syrian refugees and serve as an important indicator of their resilience.

Self-efficacy, on the other hand, is defined as the belief in one's ability to cope with a stressful or traumatic situation. In the face of such difficulties, a lack of belief in one's ability to overcome them can prevent a person from taking action or utilizing existing skills to navigate the challenge (Bandura, 2001). Field research conducted by Demir & Aliyev (2019) with Syrian university students in Türkiye found that determination, a desire for learning, self-confidence, spirituality, career goals, patience, a desire for social contribution, and hope were identified as the most important protective factors for Syrian

refugees facing the hardships of their lives. Many refugees reported feeling strong, expressing gratitude, and finding happiness despite the challenges they face. Another study (Karaman et al., 2022) revealed that many Syrian refugees in Türkiye exhibit self-recovery, stating that they try not to dwell on past problems but instead focus on the present and the future.

Living under precarity, Syrian refugees try to adapt different tactics in the place of local residents, and within the confines of locals' strategies, in order to enact their own strategies. Living under precarious conditions, Syrian refugees adopt various tactics to navigate life in their host communities, adapting within the confines of local residents' strategies to enact their own. Their resilience is reflected in behaviors characterized as "playing tricks" or "playing games," where they exploit the gaps left by dominant strategies. For example, some Syrian women began wearing Turkish-style veils instead of traditional Syrian ones to avoid recognition and potential harassment (Rottmann & Nimer, 2021), particularly following the mass violence incidents of 2014 (Banu Hülür et al., 2021). Similarly, Syrian men shifted from wearing local *jellabiyas* to more standard clothing, such as pants and t-shirts. These adaptations can be interpreted as protective tactics developed by Syrian refugees in response to heightened anti-Syrian sentiment. A comparable tactic was employed by Syrian small-business owners in Gaziantep. To safeguard themselves during periods of public unrest, when protestors targeted Syrian shops, barbershop and restaurant owners serving primarily Syrian customers hung Turkish flags on their storefronts (Banu Hülür et al., 2021). Studies in other migration contexts, such as Albanians in Greece, have similarly observed that migrants often adopt socio-cultural patterns of the host society as a strategy to navigate and counteract stigmatization. (Andrikopoulos, 2017).

On the other hand, Syrians employ tactics to assert their cultural identity, maintain autonomy, and navigate the challenges of displacement. In a research by Rottmann and Kanal (2023), some Syrian refugees shared that they prepare certain traditional dishes more frequently in Türkiye than they did in Syria. For instance, *mlukhiyye*, typically reserved for special occasions in Syrian culture, has become a common meal despite the

difficulty of sourcing its key herb in Türkiye. According to the researchers, cooking *mlukhiyye* serves as a tactic for Syrians to establish a sense of place within Turkish society.

Luthar (2015) argued that resilience fundamentally relies on relationships. Social support—encompassing connections with family, friends, and significant others—is primarily rooted in the accessibility and availability of psychological, physical, or financial assistance during times of need. For many Syrian refugees in Türkiye, their families constitute the primary support mechanism. In most cases, family support provides refugees with the strength to persevere, sustains them, and plays a critical role in maintaining their mental health (Karaman et al., 2022; Orakci & Aktan, 2021).

In addition to family support, community support plays a vital role in fostering wellbeing and resilience, particularly through its manifestation in everyday rituals. Émile Durkheim regarded rituals as fundamental social practices that reinforce collective consciousness and social cohesion. In his seminal work The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912/2001), Durkheim argued that rituals are symbolic acts through which individuals affirm their membership in a community, sustaining the moral and emotional bonds essential to societal solidarity. For Durkheim, rituals not only express collective beliefs but also actively create and renew a shared sense of belonging, transforming individual actions into collective experiences.

This perspective is particularly relevant in migration contexts, where rituals provide a framework for establishing new social ties and reaffirming identity within a shared cultural or social structure. Rituals offer a lens through which to understand how belonging and relatedness are constructed in such contexts (Pedersen & Rytter, 2017).

In migration studies, rituals can be examined through two primary categories. The first includes critical life events such as weddings, funerals, or religious practices. The second, as explored in Nadje Al-Ali's (2002) study of Bosnian Muslim refugees, shifts focus from major events to everyday routinized activities and practices, which also serve as significant sources of community building and belonging.

Critical life events are pivotal instances where the collective emotional atmosphere intensifies, transforming individual feelings into a unified group emotion (Kišjuhas, 2023). For Syrian refugees in Türkiye, events such as engagement ceremonies, weddings, and childbirth carry deep cultural and emotional significance. Many express a profound longing for traditional Syrian weddings, lamenting the absence of loved ones and the inability to organize ceremonies fully aligned with their customs. The absence of these culturally significant gatherings may impose an emotional toll, as such rituals traditionally foster solidarity and generate positive emotions among participants (Kišjuhas, 2023). One interviewee, in research on the social exclusion experiences of elderly Syrian refugees in Türkiye (Elmalı, 2023), recounted her emotional struggle during her son's wedding, expressing sorrow over being unable to arrange a traditional celebration. Additionally, elderly Syrians voiced fears about passing away in Türkiye, burdened by the anxiety of having funerals without the presence of close family and friends.

Rituals can also play a pivotal role in shaping transitions and transformations (Pedersen and Rytter, 2017: 5). In the context of migration, where significant transformations and transitions occur, rituals offer valuable insights into how lives are evolving. Everyday activities, while seemingly repetitive and mundane, form a crucial part of these rituals. Though these routine actions may appear to lack deeper meaning at first glance, they are essential in reproducing and sustaining social life (Scott, 2009).

In 2018, Narli conducted research revealing that most Syrian refugees, including those living in poverty, owned smartphones and actively used them regardless of gender or age. Interviews with Syrian refugees in İstanbul's Zeytinburnu district highlighted the significance of smartphones in the context of diaspora and migration. Before their forced migration, Syrians used smartphones to stay updated on war developments and civil unrest. During their migration journeys, many documented their experiences under harsh conditions. After settling in Türkiye, smartphones primarily served as tools to maintain contact with relatives in Syria and other parts of the world, with Facebook Messenger and

WhatsApp being the most commonly used applications for communication and photo sharing (Miconi, 2020).

As tools of connectivity (Karim, 2004), smartphones became integral to Syrian refugees' lives, with many describing them as "life" and as vital as "hands and feet" (Narli, 2018). Beyond communication, smartphones facilitated socialization and access to job and housing opportunities within local communities. Facebook groups, in particular, emerged as popular platforms for Syrians in the diaspora. For instance, Syrian women in Gaziantep used Facebook groups to sell homemade Syrian food (Miconi, 2020). Similar groups, often comprising 3,000 to 4,000 members, are prevalent in cities with significant Syrian populations. These groups serve as spaces for sharing experiences about legal processes, providing restaurant or hotel recommendations, and selling second-hand products.

Food practices and hospitality hold significant importance in daily life rituals, symbolizing belonging and integration within a community (Rottmann & Kanal, 2023). Syrian women emphasize the preservation of food-related traditions, such as maintaining the Friday breakfast ritual, which brings the entire family together to enjoy dishes like *foul*, *hummus*, *fatteh*, and *tes'eyya*. A Syrian woman expresses that continuing this tradition helps create "a normal childhood for my children, with memories like the ones we had in Syria" (Rottmann & Kanal, 2023). Additionally, some NGOs have utilized food preparation workshops as a means to promote social harmony between Turkish and Syrian women. For instance, Yuva Association's "I Am the Voice of My Neighborhood" project, conducted in 2017 in İstanbul's Ümraniye district, provided a platform for Syrian and Turkish women to learn and prepare dishes from each other's cultures. Through this initiative, participants not only exchanged culinary traditions but also fostered meaningful connections and friendships. (Sokağıma Ses, Mahalleme El Veriyorum, n.d.) Myerhoff (1984) highlights that rituals play a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage, as their repetition fosters a sense of continuity and connection to tradition.

Another important ritual Syrian women strive to maintain is hosting neighbors, a practice deeply rooted in Syrian culture and regarded as a vital family duty, particularly for women (Salamandra, 2004) . A study on the role of hospitality among Syrian refugee women in

İstanbul (Rottmann & Nimer, 2021) revealed that Syrian women are accustomed to frequent visits from relatives and neighbors, fostering strong kin ties and supportive relationships. In Türkiye, many reported missing the daily visits they were used to in Syria. To bridge this gap, they often invite Turkish neighbors to their homes, despite frequent rejections. When Turkish neighbors do accept, Syrian women showcase their hospitality rituals by continuously serving tea, coffee, and an assortment of biscuits and desserts from Syrian cuisine.

2.5. Literature Review

Migration—particularly when it occurs between countries—has always been a topic of international significance, as it concerns more than one nation. Consequently, migrants or refugees in a specific country are not solely that country's issue. Syrian refugees in Türkiye, for instance, have become a globally significant topic and have been extensively studied by researchers and international institutions.

UNHCR has consistently highlighted Türkiye in its annual UNHCR Global Reports since 2011. These reports primarily focus on the demographic profiles of Syrian refugees, as well as strategic plans devised by the Turkish government and UNHCR, often incorporating NGO activities in the field (see reports for each year at The Global Report, n.d.). Additionally, UNHCR publications include the Syrians Barometers, a field research initiative led by M. Murat Erdoğan since 2019, which provides critical statistics based on interviews with both Turkish and Syrian communities. Similarly, organizations like Amnesty International, UNICEF, and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, n.d.) publish periodic reports addressing various aspects of the issue.

The literature on Syrian refugees in Türkiye predominantly addresses the socio-political, cultural, and economic dimensions of their migration and integration. Key themes include security, integration, and human rights (Akdemir, 2019). In the security domain, studies have highlighted border security during the Syrian conflict, Türkiye's transborder military strategies, and the Turkish state's open-door policy (Donelli, 2018; Kızılkaya et al.,

2021), as well as the security predicament of Syrian refugees in relation to international political changes (Das & Sharma, 2023).

Scholars have examined Türkiye's evolving policies (Baban et al., 2016), emphasizing the state's initial openness to Syrian refugees and the subsequent challenges in sustainable management. Research has also explored how "crisis" narratives shape integration policies and contribute to xenophobic sentiments (Bélanger & Saraçoğlu, 2019). Other studies have critiqued the Turkish government's guest discourse toward Syrian refugees, arguing that it has hindered the development of long-term solutions and policymaking by focusing primarily on short-term responses at the discursive level (Şimdi, 2023; Carpi & Pınar Şenoğuz, 2018; Toğral Koca, 2016; Polat, 2018).

Further studies have analyzed how Türkiye's policies and legislation in various areas, such as healthcare (Ekmekci, 2017) and Temporary Protection (TP) status, have impacted refugees' lives, highlighting the temporariness (Yılmaz Eren, 2019) and the precarity it creates (Tunaboylu, 2024; Terzioğlu, 2022). Research has emphasized the shortcomings of TP status, including its vulnerability to government discretion (İneli-Ciger, 2017) and geographical limitations (Yılmaz Eren, 2019).

Scholars have also explored the evolution of xenophobia and anti-Syrian sentiments (Deniz et al., 2016), which contribute to a discriminatory climate for Syrians in Türkiye. This includes acts of mass violence, such as the 2021 Altındağ incidents (Çapcıoğlu & Çınar, 2024; Karagöz, 2024), as well as hate speech and lynch campaigns on social media (Aldamen, 2023; Şimdi, 2023; Kavaklı, 2018; Ökten Sipahioğlu, 2023; Parlak & Çakın, 2023). Some studies have examined the relationship between nationalism and discrimination on social media (Bozdağ, 2019).

Research focusing on specific time periods has investigated hate speech toward Syrian refugees on social media. For instance, Erbaysal Filibeli and Ertuna (2021) analyzed over a thousand user comments during the 2018–2019 elections, while Özduzen et al. (2020) examined over 100,000 tweets from hashtags promoting hate against Syrians. Additionally, studies by Efe (2015) and Çoban Keneş (2016) have examined the

representation of Syrian refugees in Turkish press outlets, including newspapers and online news websites.

There is a broad range of studies on the social cohesion and integration of Syrian refugees in Türkiye (İçduygu & Şimşek, 2016; Ünlü & Yıldız, 2024; Çalışkan Sarı et al., 2021; Seyidov, 2021). Şimşek and Çorabatır (2016) analyzed the challenges and opportunities of refugee integration in Türkiye, drawing comparisons with countries experienced in migration and integration policies, such as Germany, France, and Canada.

This literature is complemented by studies focusing on Syrian refugees' participation in entrepreneurship and education (Arık et al., 2024; Aydın & Kaya, 2019; Doğutaş, 2016). Other research (Ecer, 2022; Yetim, 2022; Pak et al., 2022; Yalım, 2020) has examined key themes like resilience, emotion regulation strategies, and flourishing among Syrian refugees in Türkiye. For instance, Karaman et al. (2022) and Demir & Aliyev (2019) analyzed resilience and life satisfaction among Syrian refugee university students in Türkiye through in-depth interviews. Similarly, El-Khani et al. (2017) explored the coping strategies of Syrian mothers living in refugee camps in both Türkiye and Syria.

Studies focusing on the labor market and entrepreneurship of Syrian refugees occupy a significant place in the literature. Research (Demirci & Kırdar, 2023; Uludağ Güler & Bükey, 2024) highlights the challenges of labor market integration for Syrian refugees in Türkiye, emphasizing issues such as participation in the informal economy, limited access to work permits, and poor working conditions. Dayıoğlu et al. (2021) specifically address the prevalence of child labor within the Syrian refugee population in Türkiye.

TEPAV's report (2018) provides key statistics on Syrian entrepreneurship and refugee startups in the country. Chang (2023) examines how Syrian refugee businesspeople in Türkiye sustain and grow their enterprises by leveraging pre-emigration nonsocial capital, including economic, cultural, and symbolic assets, based on 36 semi-structured and in-depth interviews with Syrian businesspeople in İstanbul and Gaziantep. Badran and Smets (2021) offer sector-specific insights into the journalism field, focusing on Syrian refugee journalists in İstanbul, using a three-month period of participant observations.

Some studies incorporate a broader literature on refugees and social capital (Tuominen et al., 2023; Erlandsen & Haase Svendsen, 2023; Olliff et al., 2022; El-Bialy et al., 2023; Easton-Calabria & Wood, 2020; Lamba & Krahn, 2003) into the context of Türkiye. Sizer (2019) explored how Syrian refugees build social capital after resettlement in Ankara by conducting interviews with the staff and beneficiaries of two NGOs working with Syrian refugees. Zihnioğlu and Dalkıran (2022) analyzed the role of NGOs as intermediaries in fostering the social capital of Syrians in İstanbul.

Studies in Türkiye linking social capital and refugees predominantly focus on NGOs. A few, however, apply the concept of social capital to other aspects, such as examining the daily lives of Syrian refugees (Santana de Andrade, 2020) or their business practices (Chang, 2023). Despite these contributions, research in this area remains limited. This study aims to enrich the existing literature by adopting a different perspective and employing social capital to examine the daily lives and the process of rebuilding the lives of Syrian refugees in Türkiye.

Another shortcoming of the literature is the lack of comprehensive studies focusing on the daily lives of refugees in general, beyond their connectivity with social capital. Small daily habits and rituals are often overlooked in favor of broader topics such as policies and politics. Studies addressing daily life tend to focus on challenges faced by refugees (Vesek & Suğur, 2021). However, some research does shed light on various aspects of Syrians' daily lives in Türkiye. For instance, Narli (2018) examined the role of smartphones in the daily lives of Syrian refugees in İstanbul, while Miconi (2020) investigated the impact of social media on the daily lives of Syrian refugees in Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan through 44 in-depth interviews. Rottmann and Nimer (2021) conducted interviews with Syrian refugee women living in İstanbul to explore how the concept of hospitality shapes their interactions with Turkish women. Similarly, Rottmann and Kanal (2023) examined food practices of belonging, offering insights into how refugees connect with their heritage and collective memories, providing valuable perspectives for migration research.

Although limited, the literature on resilience and daily lives has prompted researchers to explore the tactics Syrian refugees employ to navigate challenges in their everyday lives. Kurfalı and Özçürümez (2023) studied the strategies used by Syrian refugees in Türkiye during the house-hunting process. Similarly, Hülür et al. (2021) analyzed various tactics in refugees' daily lives, such as displaying Turkish flags in shops or adapting their clothing style to blend into Turkish society more easily. Since such tactics can be observed in many facets of daily life, this area of study holds significant potential for further research. This study aims to contribute to the literature by examining the daily lives of Syrian refugees in Türkiye, focusing on the tactics they employ in response to the strategies of the dominant group. By prioritizing the human aspect over political narratives, the research seeks to deepen understanding of Syrian refugees in Türkiye and their lived experiences.

Recent literature has seen an increasing focus on the so-called voluntary return and deportation of Syrian refugees in Türkiye (Kayaoglu et al., 2021; Yazıcı Başar, 2024; İçduygu & Nimer, 2019; Sevdaboylu, 2024). Through semi-structured interviews with Syrian refugee men facing deportation or those already deported to Syria, Sevdaboylu (2024) examines whether the voluntary return of Syrian refugees is genuinely voluntary and highlights violations of the non-refoulement principle in deportation processes, which expose refugees to life-threatening risks, including torture and executions. Yazıcı Başar (2024), in contrast, analyzed Türkiye's project of "safe and dignified" voluntary repatriation of Syrian refugees to Northern Syria.

The research has predominantly focused on the perspectives, reactions, and feelings of dominant groups, often falling short in amplifying the voices and experiences of the vulnerable group. While many studies (Güney, 2021; Seyidov, 2021; Çayır & Hancı Kaya, 2022; Parlak & Çakın, 2023) have explored Turkish people's perspectives on Syrian refugees through interviews with Turkish individuals, some research focuses on how Syrians themselves perceive issues related to their legal status, living conditions, and experiences as refugees in Türkiye (Karaman et al., 2022; Demir & Aliyev, 2019; Pak et al., 2022). However, considering the complex and multifaceted nature of the issue, there

is a pressing need for further research to deepen understanding of Syrian refugees in Türkiye. This study aims to contribute to the field by amplifying Syrian voices and shedding light on their lived experiences.

Many studies involving interviews with Syrian refugees in Türkiye have primarily been conducted in either English or Turkish (Tunaboylu, 2024; Arık et al., 2024), often with the assistance of an Arabic interpreter (Santana de Andrade, 2020; Esin et al., 2024; Kiriscioglu & Ustubici, 2023). Research indicates that using a second language can diminish the emotional vividness and intensity of autobiographical memories, potentially affecting the authenticity of emotional recounting during interviews (Jansson et al., 2021). Additionally, emotional expression in second-language qualitative interviews often demands greater cognitive and linguistic effort, making it more challenging for participants to articulate nuanced feelings and experiences (Prior, 2016). Similarly, bilingual participants may experience reduced emotional resonance when discussing personal topics in a second language compared to their native language, potentially resulting in a less authentic portrayal of their emotions.

The involvement of interpreters in interviews introduces a complex layer to the dynamics between researchers and interviewees, often resulting in the loss of nuanced emotional and experiential details. While interpreters facilitate communication, they also mediate emotional resonance, which can alter the authenticity of expressed experiences. Studies suggest that interpreters' choices in rendering speech—including omissions or modifications—can shape the interpretation of emotions and narratives, thereby influencing the depth of empathic communication and the connection between the interviewer and interviewee (Theys et al., 2023). Moreover, qualitative research underscores the challenges of maintaining rapport and understanding during interpreter-mediated interviews, as variations in interpretation styles and instances of miscommunication may hinder the accurate conveyance of vulnerable memories (Kosny et al., 2014).

This research, however, provides a distinct contribution to the existing literature by conducting all aspects of the study—such as contacting interviewees, engaging in

informal conversations, and sharing details about the research—entirely in Arabic. Research shows that interviews conducted in participants' native language often yield more precise and nuanced insights. Furthermore, my fluency in the Syrian dialect as a researcher is likely to foster trust and rapport with interviewees, enabling them to feel more relaxed and authentic during the research process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Migration is not only a geographical movement or a legal transition but also a deeply social, spatial, and everyday experience. To fully grasp the complexity of migrants' lives in urban contexts, it is essential to engage with theoretical frameworks that illuminate both the structural conditions shaping migration and the everyday practices through which migrants navigate, negotiate, and contest these conditions. This chapter brings together two complementary perspectives, social capital theory and the theory of everyday life, to explore how migrants mobilize networks, resist exclusion, and assert agency within host societies.

Social capital theory provides a foundational understanding of how interpersonal relationships, institutional affiliations, and shared norms shape access to resources, opportunities, and power. Through the works of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam, this framework sheds light on how networks function as both assets and boundaries in migrant integration. However, while social capital theory captures structural constraints and patterns of distribution, it often overlooks the subtle, everyday tactics through which migrants reconfigure their social worlds.

To address this limitation, the chapter also draws on the theory of everyday life, particularly as developed by Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, which foregrounds lived experience, spatial contestation, and mundane acts of resistance. This perspective reveals how migrants engage in spatial, temporal, and discursive practices that reshape their environments and challenge dominant social orders.

By placing these frameworks in dialogue, this chapter offers a multidimensional lens for analyzing migration, one that attends to both macro-structural forces and micro-level strategies. The sections that follow first unpack key conceptualizations of social capital, then examine theories of everyday life, and finally synthesize these approaches to provide a more comprehensive account of migrant agency and urban belonging.

3.1. Social Capital

Throughout human history, humankind has been inherently social; bound together by shared lives, mutual dependence, and collective purpose. As the well-known proverb reminds us, no man is an island. The human condition is fundamentally shaped by participation in networks of social relations through which individuals not only pursue collective goals but also reproduce cultural norms, values, and trust. These networks, when mobilized for instrumental or symbolic gain, give rise to what scholars have termed "social capital", a concept that encapsulates the value generated through social connections. Rooted in both classical sociological theory and contemporary interdisciplinary research, social capital has emerged as a critical analytical tool for understanding the relational dimensions of power, resource distribution, and social cohesion.

With roots in economics, sociology, anthropology, and political science, the idea of "social capital" has been around for more than 200 years (Field, 2003). According to Rostila (2010) and Ihlen (2013; 2005); James Samuel Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu, and Robert Putnam's work has reintroduced the notion of social capital and sparked a heightened interest across a variety of academic fields.

The term social capital takes the assumption that social networks are valuable assets (Field, 2003). And social capital in its core can be achieved and employed through social networks to "Improve efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions' through shared trust, norms, and networks" (Putnam et al., 1994). Social capital is mostly about whom one person knows and can be used and exchanged during daily life activities. To possess social capital, an individual must be connected to others, as it is these connections—rather than the individual alone—that serve as the true source of advantage. (Portes, 1998).

Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam represent three "relatively distinct tributaries" in the literature on social capital, as noted by Foley and Edwards (1999). Bourdieu introduced the concept of social capital in the 1970s and 1980s, though it initially received less

attention than other aspects of his social theory. The subsequent academic debate largely took place in the United States, where James Coleman's integration of sociology and economics under rational action theory significantly influenced both scholars and policymakers. However, the concept's widespread recognition today is largely attributed to Robert Putnam, whose work has gained broader public attention.

In essence, the key distinctions between the three scholars lie in their theoretical approaches: Bourdieu, drawing from Marxist traditions, focuses on unequal access to resources and the reproduction of power structures; Coleman rooted in rational choice theory, sees social capital as a resource embedded in social structures that facilitates purposive action; and Putnam builds on the idea of civic engagement and voluntary associations as foundations for social cohesion and well-being. Despite these differences, all three perspectives converge on the notion that social capital is rooted in personal connections, interpersonal interactions, and the shared values that emerge from these networks.

3.1.1. Pierre Bourdieu and Social Capital

Pierre Bourdieu plays a pivotal role in the development of the concept of social capital, as he is widely regarded as the first social scientist to systematically theorize it (Portes, 1998). However, before formulating his theory of social capital, Bourdieu was engaged in a comprehensive analysis of French social life, with a specific focus on the social hierarchy. For Bourdieu, inequality was to be explained by the production and reproduction of capital. He had the idea that 'economic capital is at the root of all other types of capital' (Bourdieu 1986, p. 252). But the Marxist understanding of seeing capital solely in economic terms was insufficient. So Bourdieu was interested in the ways that economic capital could be combined with other forms of capital to create and reproduce inequality. So he set his primary aim as to develop a new methodological and theoretical framework to explain the reproduction of social inequality, particularly in areas where he believed Marxist sociology had limitations.

At the core of Bourdieu's sociology is the idea that the social world is the product of accumulated history. That is, present-day social structures reflect the cumulative impact of past social relations and hierarchies, and the existing structures and dynamics of social life cannot be fully understood through the narrow, economic conception of capital alone. For Bourdieu (1986), capital is accumulated labor, and it manifests in three distinct forms:

> …capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility. (p. 243)

Bourdieu's definitions of these three forms of capital varied significantly in depth, with the most extensive focus placed on cultural capital. In his seminal study on taste and distinction among the French middle class, which utilized a wide range of empirical indicators of cultural capital, he provided only one specific example of social capital, membership in golf clubs, which he argued facilitated business interactions (Bourdieu, 1984). He initially outlined his thoughts on social capital in a brief and modestly described set of "provisional jottings" (Bourdieu, 1980). Later, he sought to operationalize the concept in his research on social reproduction, including his extensive empirical study of French high culture (Bourdieu, 1984) and his critique of the conformity and mediocrity within the French university system (Bourdieu, 1988).

Bourdieu's first systematic analysis of social capital was published in 1980 in the Actes de la Récherche en Sciences Sociales. However, due to language barriers, it did not gain widespread recognition in the English-speaking world until later translations. Later, Bourdieu conceptualized social capital in his seminal article The Forms of Capital (Bourdieu, 1986). He defined social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential

resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition" (Bourdieu 1986).

According to Bourdieu (1986, p. 21), social capital comprises the sum of actual or potential resources linked to an individual's membership in a durable network of institutionalized relationships based on mutual recognition and acquaintance. This network provides its members with collectively owned capital, functioning as a form of "credential" that grants them credit in various senses of the term. These relationships may exist in a purely practical form, sustained through material and symbolic exchanges, or they may be socially institutionalized and reinforced through shared identities, such as family names, social classes, educational institutions, or political affiliations. In this case, they are actively maintained and reinforced through exchanges that shape and define those within them.

Since social capital is built on both material and symbolic exchanges that necessitate mutual acknowledgment, it cannot be entirely reduced to mere geographic, economic, or social proximity. Even though having a family name or raising in a certain social class may help the individual to produce and operate relationships and gain credits among the society, social capital is not something that is naturally given by birth or can be inherited by one's family. No relations are stable and taken for granted forever. Individuals must put effort to keep them strong, reproducing the relations everyday by mutual acts such as spending time together, helping each other, and following traditions. So, all relations, including kinship relations, are the product of an "endless effort" and "investment strategies" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). Those relations such as "those of neighborhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights)" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 250).

A key aspect of Bourdieu's analysis is the interrelation of different forms of capital. He posits that all forms of capital—economic, cultural, and social—are ultimately reducible to economic capital, which he defines as accumulated human labor (Portes, 1998). Through social capital, individuals can gain direct access to economic benefits such as

subsidized loans or investment opportunities, enhance their cultural capital by engaging with experts or acquiring refined tastes (embodied cultural capital), or affiliate with institutions that provide valued credentials (institutionalized cultural capital) (Bourdieu, 1979; 1980).

However, acquiring social capital requires deliberate investment of both economic and cultural resources. Unlike economic transactions, which are generally transparent, social capital transactions are characterized by ambiguous obligations, uncertain timeframes, and potential breaches of reciprocity expectations. This lack of transparency enables social capital to obscure what might otherwise be straightforward market exchanges (Bourdieu, 1979; 1980). As Bourdieu notes, social capital is inherently relational, its benefits stem not from individual ownership but from the advantages conferred by others within the network.

Bourdieu's later work also draws attention to linguistic capital—a particularly relevant dimension when analyzing power and legitimacy in multilingual or stratified social settings. In *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), Bourdieu conceptualizes linguistic capital as the value attributed to particular language practices within structured social fields. Language, he argues, is far from a neutral means of communication; it operates as a form of symbolic power, wherein speakers equipped with the dominant linguistic style—the "legitimate language"—can accrue authority, credibility, and recognition. This "legitimacy" is institutionally sanctioned, often aligning with state, educational, or elite linguistic norms, thereby reinforcing existing social hierarchies. Linguistic capital is unequally distributed, typically acquired through family upbringing and formal education, and becomes embodied within one's habitus—the system of durable dispositions that shapes perception and practice (Bourdieu, 1986). As a form of embodied cultural capital, linguistic capital is convertible into other forms of capital, particularly social capital, since mastery of a prestigious linguistic code can facilitate access to influential networks, institutions, and opportunities. Thus, linguistic exchanges serve not merely communicative but also classificatory functions, subtly reproducing structures of domination. Bourdieu's framework reveals how language proficiency functions as a

mechanism of symbolic inclusion or exclusion, rendering linguistic capital a critical component in the broader economy of power relations that structure everyday social life.

Bourdieu's theory of social capital has been regarded by some social scientists as one of the most coherent and persuasive sociological approaches to the concept (Fine 2000: 53–64; Warde and Tampubolon 2002: 157). However, his framework is not without criticism, particularly in relation to its similarities with the Marxist tradition he sought to move beyond. Bourdieu conceptualizes social capital as an exclusive resource of elites, utilized to maintain their privileged position. His analysis of social relationships largely focuses on their function in sustaining social hierarchies, with limited recognition of affective bonds beyond their role in reinforcing exchanges. Additionally, his emphasis on kinship as a foundation for social capital may be overstated, and despite acknowledging individual agency, his model remains relatively static in its depiction of social structures.

Bourdieu recognizes the decline of traditional social structures in Western societies, noting that as families lose control over exchanges such as marriage arrangements, new institutions emerge to regulate these interactions (Bourdieu 1980: 3). However, his examples, such as elite social events, highlight the limitations of his theory in addressing the increasingly fluid and decentralized social relations of late modernity. Moreover, his work was shaped by the intellectual debates of his time, particularly in opposition to Marxism and social Catholicism, both of which influenced discussions on social inequality in mid-20th century France. By introducing the concept of multiple capitals, Bourdieu positioned his approach against structuralist Marxism, as represented by thinkers like Althusser (Althusser 1977), and against the humanistic perspectives of existentialist scholars. He sought to reconcile structuralist accounts of inequality with constructivist perspectives on human agency, placing his work at the intersection of two major European sociological traditions (Bourdieu 1986: 241; Robbins 2000: 45–49; Ritzer 1996: 537).

Despite his significant contributions, Bourdieu's theory of social capital is not without its limitations. While he acknowledges the potential for social capital to be misused — for instance, when it is delegated to representatives such as patriarchal figures or aristocrats

(Bourdieu 1986: 251) — his treatment of its negative dimensions remains limited. In particular, Bourdieu tends to emphasize the strategic function of social relationships in reproducing advantage, but pays less attention to how social capital can reinforce exclusionary practices or undermine democratic participation.

Nonetheless, Bourdieu's theoretical contributions remain foundational in shaping the concept of social capital, particularly in his analysis of its accumulation and interaction with other forms of capital. Despite the limitations of his empirical examples, his work continues to offer valuable insights into the mechanisms through which social capital operates and warrants further scholarly engagement.

3.1.2. James Coleman and Social Capital

James Coleman's work on social capital has been pivotal in shaping contemporary discussions on the intersection of sociology and economics. According to Field (2003), Coleman's impact on the concept's development has been far-reaching, particularly in the English-speaking world. His conceptualization of social capital, rooted in rational choice theory, has influenced research on educational attainment, community cohesion, and social structures. By framing social capital as both an individual resource and a collective asset, Coleman provided a nuanced understanding of how social structures facilitate human action.

In his broader theoretical framework, Coleman delineates three forms of capital: physical, human, and social. Physical capital consists of tangible assets such as tools and machinery, while human capital pertains to the skills and knowledge acquired by individuals. Social capital, in contrast, is the least tangible, as it is embedded within social relationships and networks. Despite its intangibility, social capital is crucial for fostering cooperation and enabling individuals to achieve collective goals (Coleman, 1994, p. 304).

Coleman (1994) defines social capital as "the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or a young person" (p. 300). This definition underscores

the role of social structures in shaping individual opportunities, particularly in the context of education and youth development. Social capital, according to Coleman, is not a single entity but a collection of social structural elements that facilitate action within a given system. This variety of different entities includes two common things: "they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure" (Coleman 1994, p. 302).

Coleman's theoretical framework placed significant emphasis on the family, which he regarded as the most fundamental form of what he termed "primordial" social organization. This type of organization, rooted in relationships formed through childbirth, was contrasted with "constructed" social structures, which emerged for specific, often temporary, purposes and exerted weaker forms of social control (Coleman 1991). He argued that the decline of the family and other primordial institutions had shifted the responsibility for primary socialization to constructed organizations such as schools, ultimately leading to a long-term depletion of the social capital necessary for societal stability (Coleman 1991). For Coleman, kinship, especially the family, was the cornerstone of social cohesion, and he remained skeptical about the effectiveness of artificial structures in sustaining meaningful social control.

Nevertheless, his framework acknowledged that certain constructed organizations were more effective than others in fostering social capital. Among these, he identified religious institutions, particularly churches, as exemplary due to their role in reinforcing network closure. Reflecting on his earlier empirical studies of adolescents, Coleman (1990) highlighted the intergenerational dimension of religious ties: "Religious organizations are among the few remaining organizations in society, beyond the family, that cross generations. Thus they are among the few in which the social capital of an adult community is available to children and youth" (p. 336). This reveals Coleman's recognition that, although he placed primary emphasis on the family as a vehicle for social capital, certain constructed organizations, when capable of sustaining intergenerational continuity, could partially replicate the functions of primordial structures. Religious institutions, in this context, serve as rare examples of constructed organizations that

possess the social depth and temporal reach necessary to support the transmission of social capital across generations.

One of Coleman's most significant contributions is his analyses on social capital in the field of education. He attempted to explain relationships between social inequality and academic achievements in schools (Field, 2003). His research demonstrated that social capital is not confined to the powerful; rather, it can provide tangible benefits to marginalized communities. In his studies of educational attainment in American ghettos, Coleman found that social capital within families and communities could counterbalance economic disadvantage by fostering trust, shared values, and reciprocal expectations (Coleman et al. 1966).

oleman developed an interdisciplinary social science field that is in the crossroads between economics and sociology (Field, 2003). His magnum opus, *Foundations of Social Theory* (1994), represents his attempt to integrate sociology with economic theory to develop a comprehensive model of social order. In this book, Coleman extended the analysis of economic principles to social structures, arguing that social capital, like human capital, plays a fundamental role in shaping individual outcomes.

Ritzer (1996) claimed that Coleman's work was influential for the rise of rational choice theory in contemporary sociology. Indeed, Coleman's work is situated within the broader context of rational choice theory and it led to create an interdisciplinary field that is named rational choice sociology. Rational choice sociology assumes that individuals act based on self-interest and strategic calculation and it posits that social interactions function as exchanges where individuals seek to maximize their benefits. Within this framework, social capital serves as a mechanism that explains how individuals cooperate despite their self-interested motives. In Coleman's framework, social capital functioned in a manner similar to the 'invisible hand' of the market in classical economic theory, aligning with its underlying principles (Heinze and Strünck 2000, p. 179).

Coleman (1988) emphasizes that social capital is embedded in social structures and facilitates actions within those structures. He distinguishes social capital from other forms of capital by stating that it inheres in the relationships between actors rather than being

an individual possession. While he acknowledges collective aspects, his approach is largely functionalist and considers how social capital enables individual or corporate actors to achieve certain outcomes.

Coleman (1994) further suggests that there are three types of useful resources embedded in social relations. The first, called "obligations, expectations and trustworthiness", refers to credit slips that arise when an individual does something for another and trusts the other person to reciprocate this in future. A second form of social capital is the potential for information that inheres in social relations. Finally, norms are a third form of social capital and do not only facilitate certain actions but also constrain others. However, Coleman also emphasizes the dark sides of the concept as he suggests that a given form of social capital that is valuable in facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others.

Coleman's theory of social capital has been widely debated in academic circles, particularly in comparison to Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization. One of the primary criticisms revolves around Coleman's tendency to present social capital in a functionalist and largely quantitative manner, often detaching it from its broader socio-historical context (Schuller et al., 2000). Critics (Coradini, 2010; Portes, 1998) argue that Coleman's definition lacks contextual depth and fails to account for the power dynamics and inequalities embedded in social structures. Unlike Bourdieu, who situated social capital within broader structures of power, Coleman largely ignores the ways in which social networks can be exclusionary. Some scholars emphasize that social capital can be used to maintain elite dominance rather than to foster social mobility (Fine, 2001).

3.1.3. Robert Putnam and Social Capital

Robert Putnam's work on social capital has had a transformative impact on social sciences, offering a framework to understand how social networks, trust, and norms shape collective action and societal well-being. Since the publication of his seminal works, *Making Democracy Work* (1993) and *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam has become the most

widely recognized proponent of social capital, bridging academic disciplines and influencing public policy. His definition of social capital as "features of the social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, 1993, p. 167) has provided a lens for examining the role of social relationships in fostering cooperation, civic engagement, and integration. He argues that social capital is generated through the active involvement of individuals in organizations and community groups. He notes in his essay "Tuning in, tuning out: The strange disappearance of social capital in America" (Putnam, 1995) that "Social capital refers to our relations with one another" and "Bowling in a league or having coffee with a friend embodies and creates social capital" (p. 665) Central to his concept of social capital is the role of trust; he posits that groups characterized by mutual trustworthiness and a shared sense of trust among members are far more capable of achieving collective goals than groups where such trust is absent. Putnam later elaborated on this by distinguishing between thick trust, which forms in dense, close-knit networks such as families or tight communities, and thin trust, which enables interaction and cooperation with more distant, unfamiliar individuals (Putnam, 2000, p. 466).

More specifically, social capital facilitates collective action by increasing the potential costs associated with defection, reinforcing robust norms of reciprocity, enhancing the flow of information, particularly regarding actors' reputations, building on the successes of past collaborative initiatives, and providing a framework for future cooperation (Field, 2003).

Social capital also influences individuals' well-being through psychological and biological mechanisms. Research (Thoits, 2011; Southwick et al., 2016) indicates that those with strong social connections are better equipped to cope with trauma and recover from illness. In *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam highlights this by suggesting that social capital can serve as a complement, if not a substitute, for medications like Prozac, sleeping aids, antacids, and vitamin C. He even notes that, "'Call me [or indeed almost anyone] in the morning' might actually be better medical advice than 'Take two aspirin' as a cure for what ails us" (2000, p. 313).

Putnam's exploration of social capital began with his study of regional governments in Italy, *Making Democracy Work* (1993). By comparing the prosperous, civic-minded regions of Northern Italy with the less developed, less participatory South, Putnam demonstrated that the density of social networks, norms of reciprocity, and levels of trust were critical to effective governance and economic development. He argued that social capital, embodied in horizontal networks of civic engagement, enabled communities to solve collective action problems and foster democratic institutions. This study laid the groundwork for his later work, which expanded the concept to address broader societal trends, particularly in the United States.

In *Bowling Alone* (2000), Putnam documented the decline of social capital in America, attributing it to factors such as urbanization, suburbanization, generational change, and the rise of television. He illustrated this decline with the metaphor of bowling leagues. While more people were bowling, fewer were participating in organized leagues, symbolizing a shift from collective to individual activities. Putnam's Social Capital Index, which combined measures of trust, civic engagement, and associational membership, revealed a correlation between declining social capital and lower levels of education, health, and democratic participation (Putnam, 2000).

Putnam defined social capital in analogy with physical and human capital, noting that while the latter pertain to tangible objects and individual attributes. Social capital is fundamentally about the connections between individuals. He linked social capital to civic virtue but emphasized that civic virtue alone is insufficient; it becomes truly powerful only when embedded within a dense network of reciprocal social relationships. In other words, civic virtue does not generate social capital on its own but rather functions as an essential component when reinforced by strong social networks and interactions. (Putnam, 2000, p. 16)

However, Putnam also identifies potential solutions for rebuilding social capital. He emphasizes the importance of fostering bridging and linking social capital through initiatives that promote intergroup dialogue, civic education, and community-building

activities. For example, he highlights the role of sports teams, religious organizations, and online communities in creating spaces for diverse individuals to connect and collaborate.

3.1.3.1. Dimensions of Social Capital: Bonding, Bridging, and Linking

Putnam's most significant contribution to social capital theory is his distinction between bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. These dimensions describe the different types of social connections and their roles in fostering cooperation and integration.

Bonding social capital refers to the strong ties within homogeneous groups, such as family, close friends, or ethnic communities. Bonding social capital provides emotional support, solidarity, and a sense of belonging. For example, Putnam highlights how ethnic enclaves offer psychological and material support to their members, reinforcing in-group loyalty (Putnam, 2000). However, bonding social capital can also create out-group antagonism, as it reinforces exclusionary identities (Putnam, 2000, pp. 22–23).

Bridging social capital encompasses weaker ties that connect diverse groups, fostering inclusivity and broader networks. It is particularly valuable for accessing external resources and information. Putnam likens bridging social capital to "sociological WD-40," facilitating connections across social cleavages and generating broader identities (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). For instance, inter-ethnic relationships between migrants and host communities exemplify bridging social capital, promoting social integration (Nannestad et al., 2008). Bridging social capital is also crucial for economic mobility, as weak ties often provide access to job opportunities and new information (Granovetter, 1973).

While Putnam's work (2000) does not explicitly focus on linking capital, later scholars (Woolcock, 2001; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004) expanded his framework to include it. Linking social capital refers to vertical connections between individuals or groups and formal institutions or authorities. Linking social capital enables access to resources and opportunities beyond immediate networks, such as government services or advocacy organizations (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). For migrants especially, linking social capital is crucial for navigating bureaucratic systems and overcoming structural barriers. For

example, interactions with NGOs or municipal services can facilitate access to housing, healthcare, and legal support.

Putnam further argued that many groups simultaneously exhibit both bonding and bridging social capital across different dimensions. For instance, the Black church unites individuals of the same race and religion while bridging class divisions. Similarly, the Knights of Columbus was established to connect different ethnic communities while reinforcing bonds based on religion and gender. Online chat groups, on the other hand, may bridge geographical, gender, age, and religious differences while remaining homogeneous in terms of education and ideology. Ultimately, bonding and bridging should not be seen as mutually exclusive categories but rather as varying dimensions along which different forms of social capital can be compared (Putnam, 2000, p. 21).

In *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society* (2002), Putnam acknowledges that tightly knit, homogeneous groups—when lacking the moderating influence of crosscutting allegiances and diverse perspectives—can easily unite for harmful purposes. He cites Bosnia as an illustrative case of bonding social capital without corresponding bridging ties (Putnam, 2002, p. 12). In this context, Putnam highlights how strong intra-group solidarity among Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs — manifested through dense, trust-based networks within each ethnic community — did not translate into inter-group cooperation or trust. While bonding social capital reinforced cohesion within each group, the absence of bridging capital between groups contributed to polarization, mutual distrust, and ultimately, social fragmentation. Additionally, he references Varshney's (2001) research, which demonstrates that Hindu-Muslim violence in India is significantly lower in communities where civic associations foster connections across religious divides.

Despite its influence, Putnam's work has faced significant criticism. Scholars have questioned the circularity of his definition, arguing that he conflates causes and effects by treating social capital as both a cause and a consequence of civic engagement (Misztal, 2000). Others contend that he overlooks power dynamics and inequalities, focusing primarily on the positive aspects of social capital (Portes, 1998). Cohen (1999) argued

that Putnam's work carries the risk of unintentionally supporting those who seek to weaken the welfare state. She even goes so far as to describe him as a "neo republican" (pp. 211, 228). Thus, Misztal (2000) contends that Putnam has advanced a "romanticized image of community," overlooking the fact that social networks can cultivate both trust and distrust (p. 121).

Additionally, Putnam's focus on Western democracies has been criticized for neglecting the role of social capital in non-Western contexts, where informal networks and kinship ties play a central role in economic and political life (DeFilippis, 2001).

3.1.4. Social Capital and Migration

Social capital plays a multidimensional role in migration, shaping both the decision to migrate and migrants' subsequent social and economic trajectories. Migration often disrupts pre-existing social networks, forcing migrants to rebuild social capital in new environments (Zhang et al., 2024). Social capital is both an asset and a challenge in this process; bonding capital provides immediate assistance and a sense of belonging, while bridging capital determines long-term integration prospects (Lőrincz & Németh, 2022). Studies have shown that migrants with stronger bridging capital experience faster economic integration, gaining access to diverse employment opportunities beyond ethnically concentrated labor markets (Ortiz Cobo et al., 2023).

Furthermore, social capital influences migrants' access to legal resources and public services. In many host countries, migrants rely on social networks for guidance in navigating complex bureaucratic systems, securing housing, and finding employment (Luo et al., 2024). In contrast, the absence of social capital can lead to social exclusion, reinforcing economic disparities between migrant and native populations (Ryan et al., 2008). Policies that enhance social capital, such as community engagement programs and language training, have been found to significantly improve integration outcomes (UNHCR, 2023).

Additionally, digital platforms and communication technologies, such as Facebook groups and WhatsApp communities, have emerged as critical tools in expanding migrants' bridging capital by connecting them to broader support networks, employers, and local institutions (Ortiz Cobo et al., 2023). However, research indicates that while digital engagement broadens social networks, it is not a substitute for face-to-face interactions that foster deeper trust and integration (Zhang et al., 2024). Therefore, successful migration policies should incorporate strategies that cultivate both virtual and physical forms of social capital to enhance integration and social cohesion (Luo et al., 2024).

Pierre Bourdieu's social capital theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing migration by emphasizing the role of networks, power, and resources in shaping migration experiences. Bourdieu defines social capital as the sum of actual or potential resources available to individuals through durable networks of institutionalized relationships (Bourdieu, 1986). In the migration context, social capital determines migrants' ability to mobilize support for migration decisions, access employment, and integrate into new societies. Migrants often rely on pre-existing social networks to facilitate movement, secure housing, and find jobs (Kim, 2018). However, access to social capital is not equally distributed; its effectiveness depends on the structure of power and hierarchy within both the sending and receiving societies. Migrants from privileged backgrounds often have access to more influential networks, allowing for smoother integration and upward mobility, while marginalized groups face structural barriers that limit the benefits of social capital (Yang, 2023).

Bourdieu's theory also highlights how migration disrupts existing social capital and requires migrants to reconstitute their social networks in unfamiliar environments. The process of rebuilding social capital is influenced by factors such as class, education, and host-country policies. For instance, studies on peri-urban migration indicate that migrants strategically accumulate and activate social capital through kinship ties and community participation, but this process is constrained by social hierarchies and exclusionary practices (Hernández Flores & Rappo, 2016). Additionally, Bourdieu's concept of habitus—internalized cultural norms and dispositions—plays a role in shaping how

migrants navigate new social fields, often reinforcing inequalities when their cultural capital is devalued in the host society (Joy et al., 2018). Understanding migration through Bourdieu's social capital theory thus provides insight into the intersection of power, networks, and integration, offering a critical perspective on the structural barriers faced by migrants.

James Coleman's theory of social capital provides a structured framework for understanding how migrant communities build and utilize social networks to facilitate adaptation and economic mobility. Coleman (1988) defines social capital as the function of relationships that enable individuals to act collectively, emphasizing its role in providing access to information, trust, and mutual support. Building on Coleman's (1988) concept of social capital, migration scholars have shown that close-knit communities, such as ethnic enclaves, provide migrants with essential resources like housing, employment, and emotional support, which are crucial for successful resettlement (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Waldinger, 1995; Keles, 2015).

James Coleman's concept of social capital has several limitations that affect its applicability, particularly in migration studies. One key limitation is network closure, which Coleman (1988) argues strengthens trust and mutual obligations within a group but can also restrict access to broader economic and educational opportunities. Migrant communities that rely heavily on close-knit networks may benefit from immediate support, such as housing and employment referrals, but risk becoming socially and economically isolated from the wider society. Another limitation is the unequal distribution of social capital, as Coleman assumes that all individuals can benefit from strong social networks, yet in reality, access to influential networks is shaped by pre-existing inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986). Unlike Bourdieu, who emphasizes power structures, Coleman does not fully address how social capital reinforces socioeconomic disparities. Furthermore, social capital is not easily transferable—it depends on maintaining relationships, meaning that migration or displacement can weaken an individual's access to critical resources (Coleman, 1990). Additionally, Coleman's theory focuses primarily on micro-level interactions within families and communities but does

not adequately account for institutional influences or bridging and linking capital, which later scholars such as Putnam (2000) emphasized as crucial for integration into broader society. This narrow scope means that Coleman's framework, while valuable for understanding localized networks, does not fully explain how migrants navigate structural barriers or access institutional resources. Later scholars, including Portes (1998), expanded on these limitations by incorporating power dynamics and transnational networks into social capital theory, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how migrants leverage social ties for mobility and adaptation.

Putnam's framework has been widely applied to migration studies, particularly in understanding how social capital facilitates integration. Bonding social capital helps migrants maintain cultural identity and emotional resilience, while bridging social capital enables connections with host communities, fostering mutual understanding and access to resources (Putnam, 2000). For example, Putnam's study of Italian immigrants in the U.S. demonstrates how informal networks, such as rotating credit associations, provide financial support and strengthen community ties (Putnam, 1993).

However, Putnam also notes that ethnic diversity can initially reduce social capital at some instances. In his study *E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century*, Putnam (2007) examines the impact of ethnic diversity and immigration on social capital. He observes that since the 1960s, both America and Western Europe have become increasingly diverse, a shift that has influenced social capital and social cohesion. While acknowledging the cultural and economic benefits of diversity, Putnam argues that in the short term, it tends to weaken social capital. This is because increased diversity often leads individuals to withdraw from civic engagement and reduces interpersonal interaction. However, he ultimately concludes that, over the long term, successful immigrant societies are those that overcome initial fragmentation by fostering inclusive identities and new forms of solidarity that transcend group divisions (Putnam 2007, p. 137).

3.2. The Theory of Everyday Life

The theory of everyday life offers a valuable counterpoint to the structuralist limitations of Bourdieu's social capital framework, particularly his limited attention to individual agency. This theoretical approach examines how individuals navigate, resist, and subtly reshape dominant social structures through mundane, everyday practices. Two of the most influential thinkers in this domain, Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre, provide complementary yet distinct perspectives. Lefebvre critiques the alienating, repetitive nature of daily life under capitalism, emphasizing how everyday rhythms are shaped by systemic forces. In contrast, De Certeau foregrounds the creative and tactical ways individuals subvert imposed structures in their daily routines (Lefebvre, 2014; De Certeau, 1984).

3.2.1. Henri Lefebvre: Everyday Life as a Site of Alienation and Possibility

Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947/1991) introduces everyday life as a realm shaped by the forces of capitalism, bureaucracy, and spatial organization. Lefebvre argues that modernity has fragmented daily life into routinized and alienating structures, stripping it of spontaneity and creativity (Lefebvre, 1947/1991). He describes everyday life as a dialectical space where individuals both experience oppression and enact resistance.

Lefebvre's spatial triad—perceived space (spatial practice), conceived space (representations of space), and lived space (spaces of representation)—helps explain how everyday life is experienced differently based on social, economic, and political contexts (Masemann, 2024). Perceived space refers to the ways people engage with physical environments through movement and daily routines. Conceived space is the way space is planned and structured by institutions, while lived space represents personal and collective experiences that challenge dominant spatial orders.

Lefebvre contends that capitalism creates an illusion of normalcy through habitual consumption, labor, and spatial constraints, making everyday life seem natural rather than

socially constructed. He critiques how urban environments are designed to promote efficiency and control, reinforcing capitalist structures (Lefebvre, 2004). Yet, he also believes in the potential for resistance through rhythmanalysis, or the study of how time structures daily experiences. By examining the rhythms of urban life, Lefebvre reveals opportunities for reclaiming space from capitalist control. His influence extends to urban studies, political geography, and cultural theory, emphasizing that everyday life is not passive but a contested field where ideology and resistance intersect.

Henri Lefebvre's work on the production of space provides a foundational framework for understanding how migration shapes and is shaped by urban environments. While Lefebvre did not explicitly address migration, his spatial triad has been applied to migration studies to analyze how migrants navigate and transform urban landscapes. Scholars have used Lefebvre's theory to show how migrant communities reshape city spaces through informal settlements, labor markets, and cultural practices, often contesting dominant spatial orders that seek to regulate their presence (Schmid, 2008).

Lefebvre's concept of the right to the city (1968) has been particularly influential in migration research. He argues that all urban inhabitants, regardless of status, should have access to the city's resources and decision-making processes. Contemporary scholars have extended this concept to advocate for migrant rights, emphasizing how restrictive immigration policies and urban planning often exclude migrants from full participation in city life (Purcell, 2002). Research on migrant struggles for housing, labor inclusion, and public space access demonstrates how Lefebvre's call for spatial justice applies to modern migration debates. Migrants often exercise their right to the city by occupying public spaces, forming community networks, and engaging in political activism to claim urban belonging (Hall, 2015; Tsavdaroglou & Kaika, 2021).

Additionally, Lefebvre's work on rhythmanalysis (2004) has been adapted to study migrant temporalities, particularly how migrants experience urban time differently from native-born populations. Scholars have used this framework to examine how migration policies, labor conditions, and precarious housing shape the daily rhythms of migrant life, often enforcing instability and exclusion (Simone, 2010). Taken together, Lefebvre's

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spatial triad, right to the city, and rhythmanalysis offer a valuable framework for understanding how migrants navigate and reshape urban space. These concepts illuminate how everyday practices become sites of resistance, allowing migrants to contest spatial exclusion and assert agency within structures shaped by capitalism.

3.2.2. Michel de Certeau: Everyday Practices as Tactics of Resistance

While Lefebvre focuses on macro-structural critiques of everyday life, Michel de Certeau shifts attention to micro-level strategies of agency and resistance. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), De Certeau explores how individuals navigate and subtly subvert dominant structures through what he calls "tactics"—small, everyday acts that challenge established systems of power. Unlike "strategies", which are used by institutions to enforce order, tactics are improvised and temporary, allowing individuals to carve out autonomy within structured environments (De Certeau, 1984).

One of De Certeau's most famous examples is walking in the city—an act through which individuals reappropriate urban space in ways that defy planned, institutional uses. He argues that even mundane actions, such as storytelling, shopping, or using technology, can function as everyday resistances against dominant ideologies (Masemann, 2024). De Certeau's framework is particularly influential in cultural studies and media theory, where scholars analyze how people reinterpret and repurpose mass-produced culture. His approach highlights the agency of ordinary people, showing that even in seemingly controlled environments, everyday life remains a site of creative adaptation and defiance.

De Certeau also discusses reading as an act of resistance, where individuals interpret texts in unintended ways, similar to how people use urban space creatively. His work has been applied to digital culture, where users engage with online platforms in ways that subvert corporate control. His theories influence studies on hacking, social media activism, and consumer culture, showing how everyday tactics persist in new technological landscapes (Highmore, 2017).

Michel de Certeau's theory of everyday life, particularly his concept of tactics and strategies, has been applied to migration studies to understand how migrants navigate and resist dominant power structures in urban and social spaces. Scholars have extended De Certeau's framework to examine how migrants engage in tactical practices to resist exclusion and claim space in host societies (Bocken, 2016). These everyday tactics include informal economies, linguistic adaptation, and the use of digital communication to maintain transnational connections. Migrants often operate within institutionalized strategies of migration control, such as border enforcement, asylum restrictions, and surveillance, yet they tactically resist these controls through informal networks, legal loopholes, and community solidarity (Gill et al., 2013). For instance, irregular migrants and asylum seekers develop counter-tactics by exploiting inconsistencies in immigration policies, seeking refuge in religious or activist spaces, and using digital platforms to evade deportation.

Another key area where De Certeau's ideas intersect with migration studies is in the use of language and cultural adaptation as tactics. De Certeau (1984) argues that reading and storytelling are not passive acts but tactics through which individuals reinterpret dominant discourses. Migrants engage in similar practices by navigating multilingual environments, developing hybrid linguistic codes that allow them to function in new societies while maintaining connections to their origins, and subverting restrictive language policies (Gill et al., 2013; Bocken, 2016).

De Certeau's concept of space as a site of contestation has also been crucial for analyzing migrant urban practices. His idea that walking in the city reclaims urban space from institutional control has been applied to how migrants appropriate and redefine public spaces (De Certeau, 1984). Research on Chinese immigrants in Johannesburg demonstrates how they tactically create diasporic spaces through clustering, dispersal, and visibility, often in response to xenophobic policies and economic marginalization (Harrison et al., 2012). Similarly, field research on migrants in Greece (Triandafyllidou, 2018) and Italy and Germany (Fontanari & Ambrosini, 2018), reveal that migrants and asylum seekers employ tactics such as crossing borders with fake documentation,

inhabiting the grey zones, informal employment, and self-organized housing to circumvent restrictive migration laws. These examples highlight how migration is not just a legal or economic process but a spatial struggle, where migrants contest exclusion through everyday acts of adaptation and survival.

3.3. Theoretical Synthesis: Social Capital and Everyday Life in Dialogue

Bringing the theory of social capital into conversation with the theory of everyday life reveals both conceptual tensions and complementary insights. While social capital theory—particularly in the works of Bourdieu, Coleman, and Putnam—provides a robust framework for understanding how social networks function as resources that shape integration, access to power, and collective action, it often underplays the everyday strategies through which individuals negotiate these structures. Bourdieu's structural emphasis, for instance, explains how migrants' access to social capital is shaped by class, habitus, and institutionalized hierarchies, yet offers limited space for recognizing how migrants actively contest and reshape their social worlds.

In contrast, the theory of everyday life, as articulated by Lefebvre and De Certeau, shifts focus from structural reproduction to individual agency, creativity, and resistance. Lefebvre's spatial triad and his concept of rhythmanalysis foreground how migrants experience and reconfigure urban space through embodied, temporal, and spatial practices. De Certeau's notion of tactics illuminates how migrants resist dominant institutional logics through everyday acts—occupying space, navigating language regimes, or improvising legal and social pathways.

Recent scholarship supports the value of integrating these frameworks. For instance, Aihwa Ong's (1999) work on flexible citizenship explores how migrants strategically accumulate and mobilize different forms of capital within shifting regimes of control. Katharyne Mitchell (1997) combines social capital theory with spatial analysis to show how migrant youth in urban schools build networks that both reproduce and challenge exclusionary systems. Similarly, Jenny Phillimore (2011) applies Putnam's bonding and

bridging distinctions to migrant integration, while also emphasizing the need to account for lived experiences and institutional constraints.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that while social capital theories help explain the distribution of resources and opportunities, the theory of everyday life sheds light on how those resources are navigated, challenged, and reinvented through daily practices. A combined framework thus enables a more comprehensive analysis of migration, one that accounts not only for structural conditions and network-based advantages but also for the spatial and temporal tactics migrants use to assert agency, claim rights, and transform their environments.

METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in narrative inquiry and thematic analysis. The aim was to explore the everyday experiences, coping strategies, and meaning-making processes of Syrian refugees living in Türkiye through their own words and reflections. Narrative inquiry was chosen to capture the richness and complexity of participants' life stories, while thematic analysis allowed for the systematic identification of recurring patterns across interviews.

I followed the six-phase reflexive thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022), which includes familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme generation, theme revision, naming and defining themes, and finally, writing up the analysis. This approach allowed for a flexible but rigorous engagement with the data, primarily focusing on semantic meaning while remaining attentive to latent and discursive dimensions when relevant.

4.2. Participant Selection and Sampling

Fifteen Syrian individuals (eight women, seven men) participated in this study. All were above the age of 20 when they arrived in Türkiye and currently reside in İstanbul. All participants were between the ages of 30 and 45 at the time of the interviews. Participants were selected based on their involvement in educational or professional life both in Syria and in Türkiye, ensuring that they had narratives that extended beyond survival and included aspects of adaptation and participation.

While the sample was not statistically representative, it reflected a relatively high educational and professional profile. Most participants were university graduates or held skilled occupations in both Syria and Türkiye. This composition stemmed partly from the recruitment method: as the study began with individuals I personally knew and extended

through their referrals, the participant pool naturally leaned toward those with similar socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Notably, much of the existing literature on Syrian refugees tends to focus on individuals with lower levels of formal education or precarious labor conditions. While these studies remain vital, I observed that the experiences of more educated Syrians—who also navigate significant challenges—are comparatively underexplored. By highlighting their stories, this study aims to contribute a more nuanced perspective to the literature on forced migration and integration in Türkiye, particularly within the urban context of İstanbul, where Syrian communities are diverse and multi-layered.

4.3. Data Collection

The study employed semi-structured, in-depth interviews, conducted between February and March 2025. Most took place online via video call platforms due to logistical constraints and participant preference; one interview was conducted face-to-face. All interviews were conducted in Syrian Arabic and lasted approximately 45 minutes on average. The use of the participants' native dialect created a space of comfort, allowing them to speak more freely and emotionally.

In terms of interview structure, each conversation followed a flexible but thematically guided trajectory. Interviews typically began with introductory questions about participants' demographic background and pre-war life in Syria, including family structures, educational and professional histories, and everyday routines. This was followed by a discussion of their migration journey to Türkiye—how and when they arrived, the challenges faced during displacement, and their initial settlement experiences. The next set of questions focused on adaptation in Türkiye, such as navigating bureaucracy, learning the language, finding employment, and building social networks. I explored both bonding ties within the Syrian community and bridging ties with Turkish society. Participants were also invited to reflect on their coping mechanisms and daily practices—ranging from maintaining traditions, celebrating holidays, and preparing Syrian food, to digital tool use and emotional strategies for managing discrimination or

trauma. Lastly, I asked about their hopes, fears, and imagined futures, allowing for narrative closure. This semi-structured format allowed space for rich storytelling while ensuring thematic consistency across interviews.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed manually. I listened to the recordings multiple times, noting early thematic patterns during the transcription phase. I then translated the transcripts into English and reviewed them twice for accuracy and fidelity to the original meaning.

4.4. Positionality

My positionality in this research is layered and dynamic. On the one hand, I occupy a partial insider position: I have been married to a Syrian for four years, I speak Levantine Arabic fluently, and I share many aspects of daily life with members of the Syrian community in İstanbul. These factors allowed for a degree of relational proximity that facilitated emotional trust during interviews. Participants often referred to shared cultural experiences with phrases like "you know this" or "I'm sure you've heard about it," which encouraged more open and detailed storytelling.

At the same time, I remain an outsider in important ways. I am a Turkish citizen who has never experienced forced displacement, war, or legal precarity. Despite my intimate connection to the community through marriage and language, I was still perceived—and positioned—as Turkish. This shaped the power dynamics of the interviews. In the early stages of some conversations, participants appeared hesitant to criticize Turkish society directly, often avoiding negative comments or framing their experiences cautiously. Sensing this, I made a conscious effort to acknowledge the structural inequalities at play. I sometimes shared my own critiques of anti-refugee sentiment in Turkish society or referenced similar experiences my husband had encountered. These moments of alignment often encouraged participants to speak more freely, though many still emphasized that they did not want to generalize or judge all Turkish people unfairly. This

careful balancing—between honesty and fairness—was a recurring pattern across interviews.

This dual positionality—both embedded and external—offered certain advantages while also requiring constant reflexivity. I was granted access and a degree of intimacy, yet I also remained aware of the asymmetries of power, language, and mobility that shaped our encounters. While I was trusted with vulnerable narratives, I carried the responsibility of translating them into academic analysis. I approached this task with humility, conscious of the ethical stakes of representation, and committed to honoring participants' voices without flattening their complexity or appropriating their pain.

In addition to my dual positionality, the ethnographic dimension of the interviews was also significant. Although most interviews were conducted online, they often unfolded in intimate home settings, particularly with participants who were mothers. Several interviews were marked by interruptions from children, background noises, or shifts in tone as participants tried to balance caregiving and vulnerable self-expression. I witnessed these layered moments of tension and care as an embedded observer, and they became part of my field notes.

These moments offered a glimpse into participants' everyday realities beyond the spoken narrative—revealing the emotional labor, time pressure, and multitasking that shaped their daily lives. Observing how participants navigated household responsibilities while discussing complex and sometimes painful experiences provided valuable contextual insight.

4.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained prior to the data collection process. Participants were informed about the aims of the study and their rights, and both verbal and written consent were obtained. All names used in the study are pseudonyms, either chosen by the participants or assigned by me. Identifying details such as workplace or school names were anonymized or blurred to ensure confidentiality.

Given the emotional nature of the interviews, particularly with participants who discussed trauma, loss, or discrimination, I approached the conversations with great sensitivity. As an interviewer, I recognized the emotional labor involved in recounting personal narratives. When participants showed signs of distress, I slowed down, offered breaks, and gave them full control over how much they wished to share. My shared social and linguistic background with the participants also helped ease emotional strain and create a sense of safety.

4.6. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. After transcribing and translating the interviews, I manually coded the data across several cycles. Initial codes were descriptive, focusing on what was said. In later rounds, I introduced latent and discursive coding where deeper meaning or structure was evident.

Theme generation was iterative: I grouped similar codes, revised overlaps, and refined theme names and boundaries through repeated readings. The final themes reflected both the patterns across participants and the theoretical concepts guiding the study, including tactics, social capital, belonging, and resilience. These themes formed the structure of the analysis chapters.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter presents the key analytical findings of the study, drawing from in-depth interviews with Syrian refugees living in İstanbul. Anchored in a dual theoretical framework—Social Capital Theory (Putnam, Coleman, Bourdieu) and the Theory of Everyday Life (Lefebvre, de Certeau)—the analysis explores how individuals navigate structural constraints, negotiate belonging, and assert agency in displacement. Rather than offering a linear or chronological narrative, the findings are organized thematically across four major axes: (1) Tactics in Everyday Life, (2) Social Capital Building and Mobilizing Social Capital, (3) Navigating Social Inclusion and Exclusion, and (4) Resilience, Narration and Meaning-Making. Each theme comprises multiple sub-dimensions and is supported by rich qualitative data, offering insights into the ways displaced individuals live, adapt, resist, and make meaning in the context of forced migration. Through this thematic structure, the chapter reveals how everyday practices, social ties, and personal narratives intersect to shape the lived experiences of Syrian refugees, and how these experiences, in turn, challenge dominant discourses of passivity, temporariness, and integration.

5.1. Tactics in Everyday Life

In contexts of displacement, survival is rarely a matter of grand decisions; it is built through small, repeated, adaptive gestures. For Syrian refugees in Türkiye, everyday life unfolds within a landscape of uncertainty, legal ambiguity, and shifting social dynamics. While institutions and dominant discourses often portray refugees as passive recipients of aid or subjects of regulation, this chapter instead foregrounds the subtle forms of agency that emerge in daily interactions with power. Drawing on Michel de Certeau's notion of "tactics"—opportunistic, situational maneuvers by those without institutional power—this section explores how Syrian refugees strategically navigate the uneven terrain of life in Türkiye. Through language, identity performance, digital tools, and

interactions with bureaucracy, participants demonstrate a range of adaptive practices that, though often modest in scale, constitute powerful expressions of autonomy, resilience, and resistance.

Each sub-section traces a different thematic axis through which tactics are deployed: from linguistic code-switching and accent modulation to concealment and assertion of identity; from the tactical use of social media and mobile apps to the creative negotiation of opaque institutional systems. These are not acts of open defiance, but calibrated moves within existing constraints. Collectively, they reveal how everyday life becomes a space of tactical ingenuity, where refugees actively shape their social worlds despite the asymmetries of power that surround them.

5.1.1. Language as Capital and Barrier

Language is never a neutral terrain in the lives of Syrian refugees in Türkiye. It structures access to key domains of life—such as education, employment, legal protection, and everyday interaction—while simultaneously exposing individuals to hierarchies of belonging and exclusion. In contexts of forced migration, the ability to speak the host society's language becomes not just a tool for adaptation, but a socially charged marker of legitimacy, visibility, and risk.

This dynamic resonates with Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, which highlights how fluency, accent, vocabulary, and ease of expression are deeply embedded in symbolic hierarchies. Language, in this view, is saturated with value—it shapes how individuals are recognized, trusted, and granted access to institutional resources (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 43–65).

Participants' narratives bring these dynamics into focus, showing how Turkish proficiency can function both as a gateway and a barrier. Through small but strategic choices—such as code-switching or calculated silence—language becomes not only a site where power is experienced, but also one where it is tactically negotiated in everyday life.

While most interviewees expressed a strong determination to learn Turkish, the process was often marked by exhaustion and structural constraints. These limitations were particularly evident in various domains: access to higher education (Nahla, Matar, Razan, Ammar), daily communication (Leena, Nahla, Nadia, Farouk, Matar), missed employment opportunities (Fares, Farouk, Matar, Nahla), and attempts to assert one's rights in the face of racism, discrimination, or bureaucratic exclusion (Matar, Shadi, Ayman, Nadia).

During the interviews, Nahla (30, female), a legal advisor who studied Business Administration at a Turkish university, poignantly asked, "How was I supposed to understand classes in Turkish? It all felt way too hard," as she reflected on her initial exposure to Turkish-language instruction at university. Similarly, Ammar (34, male), now working as a filmmaker, described the cognitive burden of learning through a second language during his studies in the Radio, TV, and Cinema department: "I had to first process everything in a foreign language. Only after that could I start to understand the actual content. It was a two-step struggle." These accounts underscore how unequal access to linguistic capital can become a barrier to educational mobility, where knowledge is insufficient if one lacks the language to unlock it.

Matar (37, female), an education consultant and a master's student at the same time, described the challenge of asserting her rights in a non-native language, highlighting the power asymmetries embedded in linguistic competence: "One of the hardest things for me during this whole process was that I wasn't speaking in my native language. I had to fight for my rights, but in a language I had only learned recently." This highlights how language operates as a mechanism through which access to institutions, justice, and recognition is granted—or denied.

The inability to respond, as Nadia (32, female) painfully recounts when describing a taxi ride during which the driver cursed Arabs, leads not only to silencing but also to the internalization of marginality: "What bothered me the most was that I couldn't respond to him in any way. I understood everything he was saying, but I didn't know enough Turkish to reply." Although Nadia arrived in Türkiye in 2015, she noted that she had not

developed strong Turkish skills because her professional work—as a managing editor—had always been in Arabic-speaking environments, limiting her exposure to the language.

Yet even among those who attain a functional level of Turkish, full integration into communicative norms remains elusive. As Farouk (36, male) notes, "If I were to call about renting a house, even if I speak Turkish, at some point my accent would give me away." In such moments, pronunciation functions as a symbolic boundary, a subtle but powerful marker of otherness that can override linguistic competence. The voice, no matter how grammatically correct, betrays one's origins and potentially triggers discriminatory reactions. Farouk, who has lived in Türkiye for over twelve years and currently works as a Foreign Trade Officer at a Turkish company, is highly proficient in Turkish. Yet, his experience reveals that accent alone can remain a barrier to full social acceptance. Thus, accent becomes a site of surveillance, judgment, and racialization, echoing Bourdieu's insight that language carries the weight of social history and power relations.

This experience aligns with broader research showing how communicative fluency often fails to secure social acceptance in the face of deeper symbolic boundaries. As noted by Hülür et al. (2021), Syrian refugees frequently encounter social isolation even when they share physical space with Turkish neighbors, with linguistic difference—especially accent—serving as a trigger for exclusion.

While Bourdieu's notion of linguistic capital helps us understand how language proficiency shapes access to power, it does not fully capture the everyday improvisations that individuals use to navigate structural constraints. Here, Michel de Certeau's concept of "tactics" offers a valuable lens. In contrast to the strategies of institutions and dominant actors, tactics are the everyday practices of those who lack power, enabling them to maneuver within imposed structures without directly confronting them (De Certeau, 1984). For Syrian refugees in Türkiye, such tactics often emerge in the realm of language—where speaking becomes not only a means of communication, but also a strategic, adaptive, and at times subversive act.

A striking example of this can be found in Nadia's (32, female) account: "There was a pharmacist in the neighborhood who treated me badly until I pretended not to understand Turkish and only spoke English—suddenly, she was polite and kind." Her calculated decision to speak English becomes a tactical maneuver in the Certeauian sense—a form of code-switching that reveals an acute awareness of how linguistic performance intersects with power, class, and race in the Turkish public imagination. As she explains, "Speaking English helped reduce aggressive reactions, so that's what I use. For the past two years, it's been my best method."

Nadia's (32, female) narrative underscores how language choice is about managing visibility and vulnerability. By selectively performing a different linguistic identity, she temporarily accesses a more privileged social perception—someone possibly Western, cosmopolitan, and therefore more "acceptable." This performative shift not only deflects potential hostility but also reveals how hierarchies of language reproduce broader systems of othering.

Roula's (33, female) account demonstrates another form of linguistic tactic. She explains that when public servants see someone who speaks Turkish fluently, they become more helpful and cooperative. For her, speaking Turkish well has become a way to reduce tension, gain respect, and make everyday interactions easier. Roula, who has been living in Türkiye since 2014 and is fluent in Turkish, strategically employs her language skills to manage institutional encounters. Like Nadia (32, female), she uses language not just to communicate, but to navigate institutional expectations and protect her position within a system that often feels unwelcoming. Her approach reflects a clear awareness of how linguistic performance can be calibrated to gain legitimacy and ease daily interactions.

Taken together, these narratives reveal that for many Syrian refugees in Türkiye, language is not simply a medium of communication but a battleground of power, identity, and adaptation. The act of speaking becomes a daily negotiation, both a survival tool and a site of vulnerability. While some participants frame language acquisition as a source of empowerment, mobility, and self-worth, others underscore the emotional and symbolic labor it requires.

Whether through code-switching, accent suppression, or fluent performance, refugees mobilize language tactically to navigate unequal terrains. Nadia's (32, female) switch to English to gain respect in public settings, or Roula's (33, female) deliberate effort to speak proper Turkish in order to ease interactions with state officials, are not grand gestures of resistance. Yet in Michel de Certeau's terms, they exemplify tactics: momentary, adaptive acts of appropriation within systems they do not control. These subtle maneuvers allow refugees to bend linguistic norms just enough to claim space, safety, and dignity in an otherwise precarious landscape.

5.1.2. Identity Negotiation

For Syrian refugees in Türkiye, identity is a constantly negotiated terrain, shaped by context, risk, memory, and belonging. As with language, identity too becomes a tactical domain, where individuals adapt, conceal, assert, or modify elements of their self-presentation in response to the pressures and perceptions of the host society.

A striking form of this negotiation appears in participants' efforts to mask or reveal their Syrian identity in public. Nahla (30, female), reflecting on the 2024 Kayseri incidents and similar hostile episodes, recounts how she and others deliberately suppressed visible signs of their background to avoid potential danger: "We started going out much less... Most of us Syrian women even started changing the way we wore our scarves to avoid looking too obviously Syrian." Leena (31, female), on the other hand, shared that she began to dress more like the local population to avoid drawing attention. A mother of two who has been living in Türkiye since 2016, she described this adaptive shift in dress not merely as stylistic but deeply strategic. Tying one's hijab like Turkish women becomes a kind of spatial camouflage, and a tactic to blur the boundaries of difference, reduce risk, and secure a temporary form of safety.

Yet, not all identity work was about concealment. For some, such as Nadia (32, female), the act of visibly claiming a Syrian identity became a counter-tactic, a way to resist erasure and affirm presence. "Even my hijab... I've never adopted the Turkish style," she

explained. "I like Turkish style hijab but I want people to see me and know I'm Arab or Syrian." For Nadia, who is unable to return to her country and feels the disorienting pull of exile, this deliberate self-presentation is a way to preserve continuity and coherence. As she put it, "I feel like I resist change. I want to preserve something very local, something very 'me.'" Her identity becomes a curated archive, one she performs daily to maintain agency over her own narrative.

This duality, between concealment and expression, illustrates how identity is tactically mobilized depending on context. While in some cases, like Nadia's, visible cultural markers serve to reaffirm dignity and difference, in others, they are consciously minimized to reduce exposure and threat. These are not contradictions but rather layered responses to a social landscape in which visibility itself is politically charged.

Razan (35, female) offers yet another variation of tactical identity negotiation. Rather than hiding or asserting her identity in defiance, she found that certain aspects of it—specifically being from Damascus—granted her unexpected social capital in her neighborhood. Having arrived in Türkiye in 2013, she reflected on how time had allowed her to observe such subtle dynamics. "When they found out we were from Syria, they asked, 'Where exactly?' We said Damascus, and they were really moved. Because to them, Damascus was 'Şam-ı Şerif,' a blessed, sacred place." In this context, her identity functioned not as a stigma but as a bridge, enabling her to build rapport with elderly, religious Turkish neighbors and access a shared symbolic repertoire rooted in religion and tradition. Here, identity is tactically framed to resonate with local values, creating space for inclusion without total assimilation.

These accounts underscore that identity negotiation for Syrian refugees in Türkiye is not a passive adaptation but an active process, shaped by the shifting demands of safety, recognition, and relational proximity. Whether through camouflage, assertion, or selective disclosure, participants mobilize identity as a tactical repertoire—sometimes to minimize harm, other times to assert belonging. In Certeauian terms, these are not strategies of domination but minor acts of survival, ingenuity, and self-determination

within a terrain they do not control. Refugee identity, then, is not just shaped by displacement; it is also reshaped through the everyday art of navigating it.

5.1.3. Digital Tactics

Expanding the scope of earlier discussions on everyday tactics, participants' engagement with digital tools reveals a dynamic space of improvisation and adaptation. In their daily lives, digital technologies are not simply used, but selectively repurposed—to navigate bureaucratic and linguistic barriers, sustain transnational family ties, and circulate practical knowledge amid institutional gaps.

Rather than mere convenience, digital tools like WhatsApp become tactical responses to everyday linguistic barriers. Nadia (32, female), for instance, relies on WhatsApp to mediate linguistic gaps in daily life: "There was a woman who used to help me with the housework—she'd send me voice messages, and I'd ask her to write them out on WhatsApp so I could translate and reply." WhatsApp, in this case, functions as a low-risk environment for controlled interaction, allowing Nadia to communicate on her own terms while avoiding the stress of real-time language struggles.

Similarly, Ayman (43, male), a surgeon, described using Google Translate to prepare his CV for a job application at a private hospital. This account illustrates how digital literacy can substitute for inaccessible professional services, opening doors to formal employment through tactical improvisation.

For many participants, social media became a crucial tool for educational continuity and navigating institutional systems. Matar (37, female), whose university education in Syria had been interrupted by war, described how she overcame systemic barriers in Türkiye through Facebook groups. Lacking both Turkish language skills and familiarity with the higher education system, she joined online forums for Syrian students and discovered a state-run integration program. "It was an incredibly supportive community… all helping each other, answering questions, and sharing experiences," she recalled. These informal

knowledge networks provided access to institutional pathways otherwise obscured by bureaucracy and linguistic exclusion.

Similarly, Yasser (39, male) explained that he relied on WhatsApp groups made up of fellow Syrian migrants to address everyday challenges. While Matar (37, female) used Facebook to access formal educational pathways, Yasser used WhatsApp as a peer-driven support network—underscoring how different digital platforms enable collaborative problem-solving and community-based resilience.

Nahla (30, female), Razan (35, female), and Roula (33, female) all reported finding language courses through social media. Even before arriving in Türkiye, Nahla had downloaded Duolingo to begin learning Turkish, while Razan (35, female) and Shadi (33, male) used YouTube to access free lessons. These examples reflect how digital space becomes a preparatory site—one where refugees construct their linguistic capital even before physically arriving.

Employment was another area where digital tools proved indispensable. Matar (37, female), Fares (40, male), and Talia (31, female) all reported finding jobs via Facebook listings, while Ayman (43, male) used the platform to launch his own medical service: "I created a Facebook page called 'Al Sham Clinic – İstanbul and Surroundings.' I started sharing the link and my number in all the Syrian groups… I immediately began getting calls from Syrian patients." Here, digital space acts not only as a job market but as a platform for informal entrepreneurship—where trust, visibility, and initiative translate into livelihood opportunities despite legal precarity.

This pattern echoes findings by Miconi (2020), who highlights how Facebook groups have become informal hubs of economic activity, peer support, and legal information exchange within Syrian diaspora communities. In cities like Gaziantep, for instance, Syrian women use these platforms to sell homemade food, share recommendations, and circulate second-hand goods. Such practices reveal that digital tools are not merely functional—they are deeply embedded in the economic and social fabric of refugee life, enabling both survival and initiative under uncertain conditions.

Several women participants also emphasized the importance of online shopping apps like Getir, Trendyol, Modanisa, and Yemeksepeti. For Nadia (32, female), these tools reduced her need to speak Turkish in public: "I translate the reviews to understand the products, and it helps that I don't need to talk to anyone." Huda (33, female), a social worker and mother of two, explained that using online grocery and clothing apps had become a practical way to manage the demands of both her job and family life in a fast-paced urban environment. Such practices reflect how consumption itself becomes tactical—offering reprieve from linguistic exposure, mobility constraints, and gendered labor burdens.

These findings resonate with Narli's (2018) research on Syrian refugees in İstanbul's Zeytinburnu district, which revealed that for many Syrian refugees, smartphones served not only as tools of communication but also as repositories of memory, means of socialization, and instruments for navigating urban life. Their role extended from documenting displacement to maintaining transnational family ties and seeking resources for daily survival.

Across these narratives, digital platforms are not simply used—they are tactically inhabited. Whether for learning, working, navigating bureaucracy, or maintaining social ties, participants engage digital tools as flexible infrastructures that extend everyday agency. In doing so, they carve out temporary zones of autonomy within the broader architecture of displacement.

5.2. Social Capital Building and Mobilizing Social Capital

In contexts of forced migration, social capital becomes a vital resource for navigating everyday challenges. For Syrian refugees in Türkiye, relationships—whether among fellow Syrians or across communities—serve as tools for accessing housing, work, legal pathways, and a sense of stability.

Building on Putnam's (2000) distinction between bonding and bridging ties, this chapter explores how participants draw on both solidarity-based and cross-group connections. Coleman's emphasis on trust and reciprocity offers further insight into how these ties are

maintained, while Bourdieu's perspective situates social capital within broader structures of power—showing how access to valuable networks can be unequally distributed and strategically mobilized.

The following sections examine three dimensions: the formation of bonding and bridging ties (2.1), the role of social networks as everyday support systems (2.2), and the dynamics of trust and reciprocity (2.3). Together, they show how social capital is not merely inherited or given—it is actively built, tactically used, and constantly negotiated within the constraints of displacement.

5.2.1. Bonding and Bridging Capital

Everyday social life of Syrian refugees in Türkiye reveals how different types of relationships—both with fellow Syrians and with Turkish neighbors or colleagues—are cultivated, activated, and strategically used to meet emotional, material, and bureaucratic needs. Drawing on Putnam's distinction between bonding (inward-facing, solidarity-based ties) and bridging (outward-facing, cross-group ties) social capital, this section explores how participants cultivate and deploy different forms of connection. These social ties are not static resources but context-sensitive networks—sometimes reinforcing closeness within the Syrian community, and other times reaching across differences to access support, recognition, and integration. From a Bourdieusian lens, these ties are not neutral or equally available to all; rather, they are unequally distributed across social positions and function as convertible capital that can yield material or symbolic advantages depending on the field in which they are activated.

5.2.1.1. Bonding Capital: Ties That Travel with Displacement

Across interviews, a strong sense of intra-community solidarity emerges. As Nahla (30, female) succinctly put it, "To me, it seems like Syrians are always helping each other, always standing by each other." These networks of mutual aid often predate migration, rooted in pre-existing relationships from Syria that were then transported and

reconstituted in Türkiye. Omar (35, male), for example, a journalist, recalled that many of his university friends from Syria had also come to Türkiye, easing his sense of alienation: "So, I already had some familiar faces around." He mentioned that he found his first job in Türkiye through one of these friends. Many participants maintained close friendships from their home country, which became instrumental in securing housing, employment, and guidance in the early stages of resettlement.

Several participants emphasized how exile enabled the formation of new and meaningful friendships with other Syrians in Türkiye. Matar (37, female), for instance, described the deep bonds she formed with fellow Syrian students during her first year of university. These friendships, she emphasized, were not incidental but born from shared vulnerability, linguistic isolation, and mutual dependence: "We met when we had no one, when we had just started living in a brand-new country … and we're still connected today." In her narrative, displacement acts as a catalyst for new bonding ties, shaped by shared hardship and collective navigation of uncertainty. Leena (31, female), too, described forming a close-knit circle of ten Syrian women in Türkiye, emphasizing how social rebuilding becomes essential in exile. As she put it, "When you're in exile, you have to build a new social circle for yourself."

Some of these relationships were described as functionally replacing family. As Matar (37, female) put it, many of her Syrian friends felt like kin because they had weathered vulnerable circumstances together. Ayman (43, male) echoed this, noting that his cousins who later migrated to Türkiye became part of his everyday circle: "I feel like our family in Türkiye has grown." When asked who they would turn to in times of crisis, many participants said that in Syria, it would have been a parent or a family member—but in Türkiye, it was now a friend. Here, friendship becomes kinship, absorbing emotional and logistical responsibilities that family members once fulfilled. From a Bourdieusian perspective, this functional transformation of peer networks into kin-like support systems illustrates how social capital adapts to shifting field conditions, responding to the absence of familial capital by consolidating horizontal ties.

Even in more incidental settings, bonding ties surfaced through shared Syrian identity. Nahla (30, female) recounted how a Syrian appliance repairman who sold them a second-hand washing machine later invited them to his wedding—simply because they were Syrians like him and he had no one else. "Even though we didn't know him at all… he still invited us," she said. This moment, while minor, reveals how shared identity itself can act as a social bridge in exile.

5.2.1.2. Bridging Capital: Reaching Across Difference

While bonding capital was more prevalent and emotionally resonant, several participants also described cultivating relationships with Turkish individuals—often through proximity or institutional spaces. The two domains most commonly cited as sites of interaction were workplaces and neighborhoods.

A small number of participants reported having more Turkish friends than Syrian ones. Yasser (39, male), a public school teacher, expressed pride in the friendships he had built with Turkish colleagues. Shadi (33, male), who owned a car repair shop in İstanbul's Esenyurt district, also reported forming close ties with Turkish clients and neighboring mechanics. In both cases, daily interactions with Turkish colleagues or customers slowly evolved into friendships. Omar (35, male), too, described connecting with Turkish peers through his work as a journalist and through university activities, noting that his first Turkish friendships were work-related.

However, participants with weaker or absent bridging ties often cited language barriers and cultural distance as primary obstacles. Nadia (32, female) and Huda (33, female), for instance, linked their lack of Turkish friendships to their limited Turkish skills. Nahla (30, female) mentioned the age gap with her neighbors as a barrier to meaningful connection. Matar (37, female), who initially struggled to connect with classmates, attributed the difficulty to differences in lifestyle and worldview. Yet she also noted that when she encountered Turkish communities aligned with her religious and cultural values,

friendships emerged more easily—suggesting that value proximity can act as a bridge where language alone cannot.

Another recurring theme was the limited depth of these friendships. Huda (33, female) reflected, "I wasn't able to build deep new relationships, except with people I already knew from Syria." Most participants equated deeper relationships with home visits—a standard they felt was rarely met in Turkish friendships. Ayman (43, male), who worked with a Turkish pharmacist for three years, said they had only visited each other once with their families—despite trusting her. Farouk (36, male) also pointed to busy routines as limiting deeper social engagement: "Even with my own brother who lives in the next building, we only run into each other once a week."

Several participants linked the difficulty of forming friendships with Turkish people to structural asymmetries and cultural distance. Ammar (34, male), who expressed the lowest inclination toward bridging, framed the issue as one of social expectation and responsibility: "There's a wall between Syrians and Turks. And for a friendship to even start, that wall needs to come down first. But all the time, I, as the Syrian, am expected to break down that wall… I've always believed that breaking that wall is the responsibility of the host society."

Despite these challenges, some participants experienced moments of interpersonal connection that, while limited in depth, provided everyday support. Fares (40, male), for instance, a car rental company owner, spoke of regularly visiting a Turkish auto mechanic in his neighborhood whom he trusted for car repairs—an example of practical ties formed through routine interaction. While not extending into deeper friendship, such relationships offered reliability and a degree of mutual trust in daily life.

5.2.2. Social Networks and Support Systems

In the context of displacement, social networks become more than sources of belonging—they function as essential infrastructures of care and resilience. Drawing on Putnam's notion of social capital as a substitute for institutional support, this section explores how

participants in exile construct support systems in the absence of extended kin, formal welfare, or predictable institutions. Coleman's (1990) reflections on the decline of primordial institutions and the emerging role of constructed spaces such as religious groups and schools further illuminate how refugees reconfigure their social environments to meet everyday needs. These support systems take multiple forms—peer solidarity, neighborhood-based assistance, bridging ties with Turkish locals, NGO-mediated resources, and religious networks—each shaped by the logic of displacement and the demand for adaptive trust.

One of the most vivid illustrations of such a support system comes from Shadi (33, male), a car electrician working in Esenyurt. He described his Turkish neighbors from Çankırı as indispensable allies: "They always stand by me, honestly… No matter what, whether I'm right or wrong, they always have my back." These were not symbolic words. Shadi recounted a tense incident when some men in the neighborhood insulted him and threatened to have his shop shut down. Shadi waited until his trusted neighbors arrived. He told them what had happened, and in response, his neighbors from Çankırı gathered their relatives and went straight to the offending man's shop. "They didn't hurt him," Shadi recalled, "but they told him, 'Don't you ever go near Shadi. Shadi is our red line.'" One of them added, Shadi is like my son. I have two sons — Shadi is the third.' Since then, no one's harassed me." Similarly, Fares (40, male) recounted his landlord, who is from a large family in Mardin, telling him "If you ever have a problem, we've got your back." multiple times. This account reflects how support can take the form of protection and advocacy—offered not by institutions, but by everyday solidarities in shared spaces.

Universities and student networks emerged as critical spaces for developing new ties. Roula (33, female), who had come from a rural background in Syria, reflected on her participation in a Syrian student club in İstanbul: "This process was, of course, my first real life experience." For Omar (35, male) and Huda (33, female), similar volunteer work and university events facilitated both belonging and access to information, turning education into a social infrastructure of support. In Bourdieu's terms, these student networks enabled the conversion of social capital into both cultural capital (e.g., Turkish

language proficiency, academic adaptation) and symbolic capital (e.g., being seen as a capable student or peer), thus facilitating participants' relative positioning within academic and bureaucratic fields.

Outside of university settings, neighborhood networks played a key role. Participants like Nadia (32, female), Leena (31, female), and Talia (31, female) described relationships with Turkish neighbors who checked on them, brought gifts, or accompanied them to hospitals and official offices. Nadia, for example, recalled that during periods of anti-Syrian violence, her Turkish neighbors actively reassured her: "They would check in on me more often, bring me food or sweets, as if to say, 'We're here for you.'" Leena described her Turkish neighbors as a "second family," and Talia (31, female), a mother of two, recalled how neighbors in Fatih brought gifts for her children and even taught them Turkish through everyday interaction.

Support networks extended beyond Turkish communities, with Arab-speaking neighbors also playing a key role. Omar (35, male) described the trust between his family and their Egyptian neighbors: "The woman had to go out for something, and her husband said, 'Alright then, just leave the kids with the Syrians downstairs.'" Similarly, Yasser (39, male) shared that he has many Arab friends he met through an Arab youth network, and they regularly check in with each other. And Ayman (43, male) observed that his son naturally bonded with Egyptian classmates. Here, inter-Arab bonding becomes an informal care network—one based not only on language and culture, but also on shared experience as migrants.

The presence of facilitator figures—Turkish individuals who provided support, mentorship, or institutional navigation—was also central to participants' accounts. Farouk (36, male) spoke of Ömer Hoca, a Turkish colleague fluent in Arabic who supported his career transition across companies. Leena's (31, female) Arabic-speaking Turkish neighbor Sonya and Razan's (35, female) Arabic-speaking guarantor played similar roles. Matar (37, female) recounted how her Turkish sister-in-law Esma helped her overcome bureaucratic hurdles during university registration by writing petitions and calling officials on her behalf. These relationships, while rooted in bridging capital, also

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served vital support functions, demonstrating that trust-based personal ties often functioned as informal extensions of institutional access.

Although NGOs were not cited as sources of material support, they occasionally facilitated important forms of legal and social assistance. Omar (35, male) mentioned receiving legal help from an NGO, while Razan (35, female) benefited from a local women's organization that offered Turkish courses and job referrals. Particularly noteworthy was a Turkish woman in Razan's neighborhood who organized a free language course for Syrians by collecting signed requests and petitioning the municipality. Razan described her as "very kind and supportive, especially with language learning." These examples illustrate how access to linking capital—connections that bridge horizontal networks to institutional hierarchies—can enable participants to navigate and occasionally reshape bureaucratic constraints.

Religious institutions also surfaced as sources of moral and material support. Ayman (43, male), both a surgeon and a hafiz of the Qur'an, was introduced to a job opportunity through connections in a religious community. Omar (35, male) described his experience living in a religious student dormitory, where he attended religious discussions and built lasting friendships. These accounts echo Coleman's argument that religious institutions foster intergenerational ties and function as some of the last remaining spaces of dense, trust-based social capital in modern life.

5.2.3. Trust and Reciprocity

Trust and reciprocity form the invisible architecture of social life; often taken for granted, yet essential for coordinated action, mutual care, and the sense of safety. Drawing on Putnam's conceptualization, trust is not merely an emotional state but a social resource that "improves the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions." (1993, p. 167) Similarly, Coleman (1994) defines trustworthiness and expectations of reciprocity as key elements of social capital, likening them to "credit slips" embedded in relationships: acts of help or generosity given in the hope that they will be returned when

needed. For Syrian refugees in Türkiye, trust-building is both an emotional endeavor and a tactical practice—necessary for navigating displacement, forming new relationships, and constructing a sense of everyday stability.

Participants' accounts highlight both the formation and fragility of trust. For some, small gestures anchored long-term bonds. Omar (35, male) shared an example involving his elderly Turkish neighbors: "One day, they needed to go to the hospital. My dad placed a chair outside their door for them to sit and wait comfortably. This small gesture meant a lot to them, and I could really feel how much they appreciated it." These interactions, seemingly minor, reflect how trust can emerge not through grand alliances but through everyday care and attentiveness.

Razan (35, female) offered a rich example of mutual trust and reciprocity formed through a local women's support center. Initially introduced by a Turkish neighbor, she became close with the center's staff and described them as "like a second family." Their support was not limited to services; it included home visits, emotional support, and joint celebrations. Razan recalled: "They knew everything about our lives. If we ever needed advice or had questions, they were the first ones we turned to." This form of embedded reciprocity—where intimacy and obligation intersect—is a vivid example of how social trust becomes a substitute for institutional reliability.

As described earlier, Shadi (33, male)'s experience with his neighbors in the industrial area offers one example of how trust can translate into protective solidarity in moments of conflict. This example goes beyond individual kindness, it illustrates how reciprocal protection can evolve into a form of collective moral boundary, drawing a clear line against social exclusion.

Reciprocity also took subtler forms. Nadia (32, female) spoke warmly of a couple who owned a local shop: "They're always sweet to my kids, give them candy." These repeated gestures created an emotional contract of goodwill and belonging. Razan (35, female) remembered that her neighbors often invited her to teach them Arabic or stopped to talk at the market when they heard her speak. These were not one-sided exchanges; they signaled curiosity, openness, and a desire for mutual engagement.

The limits of trust were also deeply felt. Huda (33, female) described the anxious self-monitoring that shaped her daily interactions: "If a Turkish person says hi to me, I get nervous and think, 'Why are they greeting me?' Or if someone offers me food, I sometimes feel unsure." Similarly, Shadi (33, male) contrasted his work experiences in Syria and Türkiye, noting that verbal trust and informal agreements had once sufficed: "In Syria, I could fix a car and replace whatever was needed without asking. Here, I have to ask the customer about the price of a lightbulb before I even touch it."

These reflections point to what Puntam calls "thin trust" versus "thick trust" (Putnam, 2000). While the latter develops slowly and sustains reciprocity over time, the former remains superficial, tentative, and easily broken. In the absence of thick trust, many participants expressed a sense of vigilance—feeling watched, judged, or misunderstood.

Yet despite these difficulties, many refugees found ways to build islands of reciprocal trust in the midst of an uncertain landscape. Leena (31, female), for example, described her neighbor Iman as someone she could rely on "like family," while Razan's (35, female) description of her support organization showed how relational density could replace institutional absence. In these accounts, trust is not passively received; it is actively built, maintained, and, at times, defended—an act of both survival and solidarity.

5.3. Navigating Social Inclusion & Exclusion

For Syrian refugees in Türkiye, social inclusion is not a static outcome but a fragile and contested process. While legal status and institutional frameworks play a role in shaping access to rights and resources, participants' narratives show that inclusion—and its inverse, exclusion—is experienced most viscerally in the textures of everyday life. This chapter examines how inclusion and exclusion are navigated, negotiated, and sometimes resisted in lived spaces, affective relations, and structural contexts.

Drawing on Lefebvre's notion of space as socially produced and Michel de Certeau's attention to everyday practices, the following sections explore how participants experience being "in" or "out" of the social order—not as a legal binary, but as a shifting

continuum of belonging, temporariness, and otherness. Belonging is not simply a question of citizenship or residency status; rather, it unfolds through everyday markers of cultural familiarity, religious proximity, symbolic recognition, and interpersonal warmth. At the same time, the precarious nature of refugees' legal status—particularly under temporary protection—deepens their experience of uncertainty and emotional suspension, echoing Putnam's insight that the absence of stable social ties erodes both individual well-being and societal cohesion.

Exclusion, as expressed by the participants, does not always take the form of explicit rejection. It often emerges through more diffuse mechanisms—spatial segregation, institutional neglect, microaggressions, or misrecognition—all of which reinforce symbolic boundaries. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital helps illuminate how even attempts at integration may be undermined by subtle, yet powerful, signals of devaluation. In contexts where refugees are unable to convert social presence into accepted membership, their identity remains suspended between visibility and marginality.

5.3.1. Belonging & Non-belonging

For the participants, the experience of belonging unfolds as a layered and often contradictory terrain—marked by moments of warmth and identification, but also by episodes of rejection, misrecognition, and emotional distance. While legal categories such as temporary protection or citizenship offer formal recognition, they do not automatically translate into a felt sense of inclusion. Belonging, as experienced by the participants, is not a binary condition but a continuum—negotiated through everyday interactions, cultural proximity, spatial familiarity, and shifting power dynamics.

For many participants, belonging was cultivated through cultural familiarity, religious continuity, and urban symbolism. Rather than emerging solely through formal citizenship or institutional inclusion, feelings of attachment were often grounded in everyday resemblances between Syrian and Turkish life. Farouk (36, male) described the two societies as "very close" in terms of food, customs, and interpersonal relations, while

Roula (33, female) emphasized the clarity of religious life in Türkiye as a source of comfort. Leena (31, female) similarly noted, "The most important thing—it's a Muslim country. So we didn't experience a big cultural shock." These expressions reveal how participants tactically leaned into shared values and familiar rhythms to soften the rupture of exile.

Religion, in particular, operated as an anchoring frame of cultural belonging. Ayman (43, male) articulated this connection when he said, "We Syrians always seek a society that's closer to ours. When I see a Turkish woman with a headscarf, I feel more at ease." This suggests that religious signifiers provided both psychological ease and a symbolic bridge across difference. Similarly, Shadi (33, male) identified with the city of İstanbul itself, noting, "İstanbul is the city most similar to Damascus. Even before coming to Türkiye, we knew İstanbul was like a bigger Damascus." Such perceptions of spatial and cultural continuity helped refugees settle emotionally into unfamiliar environments.

For some, belonging was expressed not just as a feeling of comfort, but as a sense of moral indebtedness. Ayman (43, male) put this sentiment powerfully: "Türkiye has a debt on my neck, and I hope I've repaid even a little by being here. … Türkiye opened its doors. They told us: 'Welcome. Come in. Work. Live here.'" This articulation of gratitude framed belonging not only in terms of cultural proximity but also in terms of responsibility.

Yet belonging was not always reciprocal. While participants like Farouk (36, male) expressed a strong desire to give back to Turkish society—saying he hoped to contribute more if granted citizenship—others encountered moments that revealed the fragility of this sense of inclusion. One striking example came from Ayman (43, male), who recounted his daughter's experience at school. Though she held Turkish citizenship, when a teacher asked, "Who here is Syrian?" the whole class pointed to her. When she responded, "But I'm Turkish," the teacher replied, "You'll always still be Syrian." This moment crystallized the disjuncture between formal status and social recognition, showing how belonging is not only claimed but contested—especially when visible or symbolic difference persists.

Some participants, like Nadia (32, female) and Matar (37, female), articulated a deeper sense of alienation. Nadia reflected on the cumulative effects of exclusion: "I didn't feel accepted by society. I didn't even want to try to fit in. This prevented me from learning Turkish or integrating into the community." Similarly, Matar (37, female) recalled, "We were living in an environment where no one knew us and no one liked us, and that became a problem. It created a lot of psychological pressure." In these accounts, non-belonging is not abstract—it is felt bodily, daily, and emotionally, shaping one's willingness to engage with the host society.

Nevertheless, many found pockets of belonging in interpersonal relationships, particularly where gestures of recognition or warmth were extended. Yasser (39, male) shared that among his Turkish friends, he never felt like a foreigner. "Sometimes they'll joke about Arabs," he said, "but then they turn to me and say, 'Come on, you're one of us now.'" Such interactions, though sometimes ambivalent, created provisional forms of inclusion.

Children also emerged as subtle mediators of belonging. Nadia (32, female) observed that her children were often warmly greeted by Turkish strangers in public spaces: "They would give them candy and smile at them. So in that sense, I felt comfortable and at ease in cafés or on the streets." Talia (31, female) and Leena (31, female) echoed this dynamic, explaining that their children were welcomed by neighbors and local shopkeepers. Through their children, some participants experienced a softened public gaze.

Finally, belonging was often refracted through the experience of raising a new generation. Roula (33, female), reflecting on her Turkish-born children, said, "They know Türkiye better than Syria … When they grow up, they will practice not only Syrian culture but also Turkish culture." In this statement, belonging becomes intergenerational, hybrid, and forward-looking—not just a question of fitting in, but of evolving identity across space and time.

5.3.2. Precarity and Temporariness

Temporariness was rooted in both legal status and the nature of the participants' positioning in Türkiye. While not all participants held temporary protection status —six were citizens who had held protection status beforehand, five had residence permits, and four remained under temporary protection— most had experienced the instability of the temporary protection regime at some point in their daily life. Here, the feeling of temporariness extended beyond formal categorization; it was a condition generated by structural exclusion, social stigma, and the unpredictability of life as a refugee.

Participants frequently cited moments of intensified vulnerability, particularly during the 2023 elections and the 2024 anti-refugee incidents in Kayseri. In these periods, public hostility escalated and safety became uncertain. Several interviewees reported limiting their movement or avoiding public spaces altogether. Nahla's (30, female) recollection captures the intensity of this fear: "Even the sound of fireworks outside scared us." Talia (31, female) described asking her children to stop speaking Arabic in public during tense times: "Things get very tense sometimes, and we're afraid of people reacting badly—either towards us or our children."

In some cases, participants tried to comply with legal procedures but found themselves pushed into informality due to administrative barriers. Yasser (39, male), a high school teacher, explained how bureaucratic delays in renewing his work permit left him working undocumented for a couple of months despite his best efforts. These institutional failures compounded the feeling of instability and powerlessness.

Precarity also revealed itself in more intimate, emotional registers. Nadia (32, female) expressed a deep sense of instability: "Despite living in the same house for almost nine years, I never felt like I belonged there. I never set up my home the way I imagined. Even now, I hesitate before buying new furniture, decorations, or even small things like a coffee cup." For her, temporariness was not a legal abstraction but a persistent psychological state: "This place doesn't feel like mine … You feel like everyone around you is just temporarily here."

Matar (37, female), who had fled Syria in search of "psychological stability," recounted the frustration of confronting new layers of uncertainty under Türkiye's temporary protection regime. Although she enrolled in university, she faced repeated administrative obstacles in maintaining her student and protection status. When she later attempted to return to Syria, she encountered further institutional opacity and expressed her disappointment starkly: "I'm doing a master's in the field of humanitarian studies. And yet, in real life, I don't see that same humanity in this country."

Ammar (34, male), a filmmaker, offered a similarly bleak assessment. Restricted from traveling due to the limitations of his legal status and denied work permits on multiple occasions, he said, "Socially, I felt that it was killing me. I couldn't find psychological stability." He described staying home for days in fear of unannounced inspections, which prevented him from working and exacerbated his sense of isolation. As he put it, "For Syrians—especially those under temporary protection—the anxiety and hardship kept growing."

Some participants described how this institutionalized insecurity influenced their behavior in daily life. Leena (31, female), for example, recalled staying silent in the face of street-level racism: "If I were in Syria and someone treated me like that, I would never stay silent. Never. But unfortunately here, I can't react the same way. I feel like… like it is their country, not ours." She added, "I feel like we are a burden on them. That's the feeling that overwhelms me—like I'm helpless and can't do anything." Ayman (43, male) put his feelings in words cleverly, telling that "We put salt to our scars, live with the pain and keep going."

Coleman's (1994) theory of social capital helps contextualize these narratives. He describes the erosion of traditional support systems—like family or community—as a shift that places the burden of primary socialization and stability onto constructed institutions. But when those institutions are weak or inaccessible, refugees are left in limbo—deprived of both formal support and the secure relational networks that typically mitigate vulnerability.

Putnam's (2000) reflections on how social capital contributes to psychological well-being are also especially relevant. The absence of stable, trustworthy networks—whether in the form of community, state, or interpersonal ties—creates what Putnam might frame as a deficit in social capital, which undermines both personal resilience and collective integration. In this sense, temporariness is not just a bureaucratic classification; it is a lived state of heightened exposure, managed uncertainty, and suspended belonging.

This legal and psychological ambiguity resonates with what Bailey et al. (2002) define as "permanent temporariness"—a state in which refugees are kept in prolonged legal limbo without access to long-term planning or stable rights. As elaborated in the contextual chapter, Türkiye's Temporary Protection regime was initially framed as an emergency humanitarian measure, yet it has extended indefinitely without offering a clear path to permanent settlement, naturalization, or full civic participation (Ineli-Ciger, 2017; Yılmaz Eren, 2019). The regime's discretionary structure, combined with Türkiye's geographically limited ratification of the 1951 Refugee Convention, creates an environment in which refugees must constantly navigate uncertainty. In this landscape, temporariness is not only a juridical status but also a lived experience—one that restricts agency, delays life decisions, and fosters a persistent sense of impermanence.

5.3.3. Perceptions of Discrimination, Harassment & Otherness

Experiences of discrimination, harassment, and othering were common among participants, cutting across various domains of daily life—from housing and healthcare to education and neighborhood interactions. These experiences were not isolated incidents but part of a broader social climate in which Syrian refugees navigated their existence within an often-hostile host society. Their narratives speak not only to moments of overt racism but also to subtle forms of exclusion and misrecognition that shaped their sense of belonging and self-worth.

Several participants noted a recent intensification in the frequency and severity of discriminatory encounters. Nadia (32, female), for example, offered a personal

chronology of change: "From 2015 to 2022, I never felt any discrimination—I was quite comfortable. But over the past two or three years, I've started to feel racism." This shift reflects a growing precariousness in the social environment, where formerly neutral or welcoming spaces became sites of suspicion and unease.

Spatial and institutional forms of exclusion were among the most cited. Ammar (34, male) described Türkiye's temporary protection status not only as a legal designation but as a mechanism of structural othering: "That status itself is a form of discrimination. Like, the state stamps this label on your back and then expects you to live a normal life in society." He recalled being denied eligibility for Erasmus programs—not due to individual rejection, but because, as he put it, "technically, I'm not a student. I am just someone under temporary protection status." Here, bureaucratic exclusion reinforces social boundaries, barring equal participation in civic life.

Other participants reported spatial othering in the housing market, with landlords refusing to rent to Syrians or the state imposing quotas on foreign residents in specific districts. These exclusions materialized as neighborhood segregation, feeding into a broader experience of societal marginalization.

These accounts resonate with findings by Kurfalı & Özçürümez (2023), who document how even when Syrian refugees manage to secure housing, they often face resistance from neighbors, driven by widespread negative discourses. This resistance not only limits residential mobility but also deepens social fragmentation at the neighborhood level. Moreover, as Sunata and Güngördü (2024) argue, such exclusionary practices are manifestations of internal bordering, whereby non-state actors enforce implicit norms of deservingness through mechanisms like ethnic filtering, selective overpricing, and informal vetting. Access to housing thus becomes contingent not on legal status or economic capacity alone, but also on cultural legibility and perceived social fit.

Everyday interactions also revealed more diffuse yet persistent forms of discrimination. Yasser (39, male) shared a subtle but repeated moment: "When I tell people I'm Syrian, their faces kind of drop." Such reactions mark Syrian identity as a social stigma, quietly reinforcing difference. Matar (37, female) echoed this with a more personal example: her

neighbors, aware she was Syrian, simply refused to return her greetings. "It hurts," she said, "to be ignored in your own apartment building."

Other stories involved direct verbal abuse or physical aggression. Nadia (32, female) recounted a particularly painful memory of being spat at in the street while pushing her children's stroller: "A woman muttered, 'These Arabs,' and spat at me. I was so enraged… but I thought it would only make things worse, so I just walked away." Talia (31, female) similarly recalled a distressing moment in a market when a stranger yanked her daughter's hat off because she was speaking Arabic. "That really upset me," she said, visibly shaken by the memory.

Cultural and religious stereotypes are also fed into public perceptions. Leena (31, female) described being openly harassed by strangers on the street who shouted, "When are you Syrians going back? We're tired of you." In her words, "That kind of stuff really stings. But we don't respond. We don't say anything." The choice to remain silent, repeated across many interviews, was often framed as a survival tactic—participants feared escalation, confrontation, or even deportation. As Leena (31, female) put it, "We're here as guests, after all."

Such silences can be understood through Michel de Certeau's lens of tactical responses to dominant structures. Participants' decisions not to react were not acts of submission but strategies of containment—avoiding risk while maintaining personal dignity in the face of hostility.

Razan (35, female) described how even small gestures of goodwill—like offering a plate of food to a neighbor—could be met with rejection and humiliation. "She dumped the food, shoved the plate back at us, and slammed the door," she said, still stunned by the encounter. These moments, layered with both emotional and symbolic violence, contributed to a persistent sense of otherness.

Similar patterns emerge in Göksel et al.'s (2022) study of Turkish public opinion, which highlights how many Turkish citizens perceive Syrian refugees as culturally distant and morally suspect. Despite government efforts to invoke shared religious identity, the

authors find that such framings often fail to generate empathy; instead, religion can become a dividing line, as Syrians are sometimes viewed as "not Muslim enough" or even "unclean." These perceptions reinforce boundaries of exclusion and further hinder everyday gestures of social connection.

Discrimination extended into the educational system as well. Both Ayman (43, male) and Razan (35, female) described how their children faced verbal bullying and racial slurs in school. Ayman (43, male) recalled how classmates mocked his children, saying things like "Suriyeli bombiş" (Syrian bomb) and "Yalla, go back to your country." He reflected: "These sentences from children are a reflection of their families." Such moments revealed a powerful undercurrent of non-recognition, where even attending the same schools and sharing the same spaces failed to secure equal belonging or protection.

Even in healthcare, a field where ethics are presumed to transcend social divisions, participants encountered differential treatment. Ayman (43, male), a doctor himself, was shocked to witness discriminatory behavior from medical professionals toward Syrian patients. "Even doctors treat patients with racism—which is shocking," he said. These experiences further underlined the limitations of institutional trust and the fragmentation of public services for refugees.

In several cases, participants linked their social exclusion to class-based stigma. Ayman (43, male) recounted being mocked for shopping at budget stores or wearing white socks—"as if I were a gypsy," he said, reflecting on the intersection of ethnic, class, and cultural prejudices.

Taken together, these stories reveal not isolated incidents but an ecosystem of exclusion— what Putnam might frame as the erosion of bridging social capital. In a context where trust, reciprocity, and shared civic space are fragile or absent, discriminatory practices become normalized. They shape not only how Syrians are seen by others but how they come to see themselves.

5.4. Resilience, Narration, and Meaning-Making

In the face of displacement, uncertainty, and rupture, everyday life does not merely continue—it is reassembled, reinhabited, and made meaningful through rhythms, rituals, and storytelling. This chapter explores how Syrian refugees in Türkiye cultivate resilience and coherence through two interrelated domains: embodied practices and narrative expression. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis and the broader theory of everyday life, the analysis reveals how participants create stability amid precarity—not through extraordinary acts, but through the quiet persistence of living, remembering, and telling. From restoring lost temporalities through food, celebration, and sensory cues to transforming pain into self-articulated narratives of survival, these practices constitute vital strategies of coping and sense-making. Far from passive adaptation, such acts reflect agency in motion: the effort to hold life together, to claim meaning where systems have denied it, and to assert presence in a world shaped by absence.

5.4.1. Everyday Rhythms and Coping Practices

In the midst of structural uncertainty and fragmented belonging, everyday life remains a space where Syrian refugees actively negotiate continuity, stability, and meaning. This chapter explores how participants recreate rhythms of life from Syria, adapt to the fast-paced environment of İstanbul, and maintain affective ties through embodied practices.

A common theme across interviews was the transformation of temporal experience after displacement. İstanbul was often described as fast, rushed, and impersonal, especially when compared to the more relaxed rhythms of life in Syria. Omar (35, male) articulated this contrast: "This is İstanbul, a big city, and everyone is always in a rush. But in Damascus, everything was calmer. So, people's perception of time is different in these two places." Nahla (30, female) expressed a similar sense of dislocation through her struggle to navigate public transport using digital maps—something unfamiliar and disorienting: "It was really hard for me to get anywhere using Google Maps. We didn't

have anything like that in Syria… your family just gives you directions, and that's how you get there."

Such everyday disruptions were not limited to spatial orientation; they extended into social practices as well. Participants remarked on the absence or transformation of significant rituals, especially weddings. Yasser (39, male) reflected that celebrations had become smaller due to the absence of extended family: "Here in Türkiye, those celebrations became more intimate—just among close family." Nadia (32, female), more starkly, said: "When I got married here, no one attended. I didn't even have a wedding." These absences, accumulated over time, produced a profound sense of rupture.

Distance from home also meant missing out on pivotal family events. Shadi (33, male), for instance, was unable to attend his father's funeral in Syria, while Nadia could not join her sister's wedding. These disruptions highlight the fragmentation of familial time, a break in the continuity of shared life cycles that are usually central to collective identity.

And yet, participants also spoke of efforts to preserve or reassemble those rhythms of life. Leena (31, female) explained: "We still live our Syrian lifestyle at home. Especially during celebrations—we do everything the Syrian way." Talia (31, female) used the phrase "a lifestyle transfer" to describe how daily customs, food rituals, and family habits had been re-rooted in Turkish soil: "We've basically transferred the way of life we had in Syria to here."

This transfer was especially visible during Ramadan and Eid. Nadia (32, female) recalled: "On Eid, I always buy sweets, even if no one is visiting. I buy clothes for the kids even if we won't go out much or don't have extended family here. In Ramadan, I prepare things, try to keep the rituals." Maintaining such rituals served as both a cultural anchor and a coping mechanism. This embodied engagement with food finds resonance in Rottmann and Kanal's (2023) observation that practices like the Friday breakfast ritual serve as vital anchors of cultural identity and emotional stability for Syrian refugee families in Türkiye.

Food emerged as a central site for sustaining continuity. Many participants described preparing traditional dishes like *shakriyyah*, *safarjaliyyah*, and *kibbe labaniyyah* during

Eid, replicating both flavor and timing as forms of ritual re-enactment. These culinary practices function as embodied memory—tied to collective temporality, seasonal rhythms, and inherited gestures.

The sensory dimensions of these rhythms were vividly articulated by Nadia (32, female), who said she orders a specific laundry detergent online because it reminds her of her childhood home in Aleppo: "That scent is like a piece of home." This example highlights what rhythmanalysis refers to as sensory rhythms—how smell, texture, and atmosphere embed memory and stabilize identity across space.

Participants also restructured social rituals to recreate a sense of community. Leena (31, female) and a group of nine Syrian women, all raising children away from extended families, established a weekly gathering to substitute for the familial visits common in Syria: "Now, we've created a sort of 'friends' family' group here." They even celebrated children's milestones with small parties, echoing practices from back home: "We try to give them the social life they're missing here."

This kind of improvised kinship structure highlights how refugees actively reconstitute social life through relational creativity. As Luthar (2015) emphasizes, resilience is not merely an individual trait but a relational process, fundamentally reliant on the availability of supportive ties. Whether emotional, psychological, or material, such support systems are essential for navigating adversity. In the absence of extended family, participants like Leena and her peers created affective constellations of care, affirming that the ability to cope is often sustained not by formal institutions, but by intimate, self-fashioned networks of belonging.

Beyond participants' accounts, my own immersion in Syrian communal life in Türkiye provided additional insight into how ritual continuity and collective emotion are tactically sustained through everyday practices. As the wife of a Syrian—often referred to in community spaces as *kinne Suriya* (Syrian bride)—I have been invited to and have participated in numerous life-cycle rituals such as weddings, childbirth celebrations, and graduation parties. These experiences, while personal, also offered an observational lens

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through which to understand the patterned and affective dimensions of everyday life in exile.

Drawing on Myerhoff's (1984) view that rituals preserve tradition through repetition and predictability, I observed that many Syrian families in İstanbul—particularly in districts like Avcılar and Fatih—organize weddings in accordance with cultural customs. These events often include gender-segregated spaces, Syrian music, *zalghouta* (ululations), and sweets purchased from Syrian bakeries. The guest lists are predominantly composed of fellow Syrians, with Turkish guests being rare. In fact, I only encountered Turkish attendees at a wedding where the bride worked in a Turkish company.

Similarly, graduation rituals have been reconfigured to meet the affective and cultural needs of Syrian youth. While some graduates attend official university ceremonies, many women I know chose instead to celebrate in female-only graduation parties, often announced via Facebook groups or family networks. These events are held in community cafés or rental halls and tend to attract large numbers of participants. When asked about their preferences, many cited lack of social connection at university, discomfort in mixed-gender spaces, or the absence of a formal ceremony for distance education students. Such alternative gatherings—what Kišjuhas (2023) refers to as sites of ritual solidarity—generate collective emotion and affirm communal belonging in an otherwise fragmented social environment.

Syrian women also frequently organize *haflas*—intimate, female-only celebrations held in homes to mark events such as childbirth or birthdays. These informal gatherings involve music, dancing, and traditional food, creating a space where personal affect is transformed into collective emotional resonance. As Pedersen and Rytter (2017) suggest, rituals play a crucial role in shaping transitions and social transformations, particularly in migratory contexts where life is marked by disruption and uncertainty.

These personal observations closely mirror participants' narratives and reinforce the argument that rituals are not simply nostalgic reenactments but tactical responses to displacement. They anchor social life through repetition, affirm cultural continuity, and transform emotional vulnerability into communal strength.

Clothing, another layer of everyday expression, reflected both continuity and change. Talia (31, female) continued to shop at Syrian stores and maintain her dress style from Syria, while Huda (33, female) spoke of adapting to Turkish fashion: "I started dressing more like Turkish women—it just happened naturally." These choices reflect different strategies for spatial integration or symbolic attachment.

Resilience also emerged from meaningful social roles. Several women spoke about gathering with others not just for companionship but to ensure their children grew up in a "normal" environment. Roula (33, female) explained: "So we gather not for ourselves, but for our kids—we want them to feel a sense of community and build good relationships."

When asked what gave life meaning, responses ranged from family to personal conviction. Talia (31, female) and Fares (40, male) both cited their children's wellbeing and education as central motivations. Leena (31, female) expressed a similar drive: ensuring her children grew up "without seeing war." Huda (33, female), by contrast, pointed to her continued political faith: "The revolution is still the most important thing in my life."

These reflections are not abstract. They represent the quiet labor of holding life together—through rituals, repetitions, and reconfigurations. As Farouk (36, male) put it, the core of his resilience was simply "Patience. Patience was the most important thing for me and it brought me comfort—because there was nothing else I could do."

5.4.2. Narrative as Healing

Narratives are not only tools of representation but also acts of meaning-making, resilience, and reclamation. For many participants in this study, the process of telling their stories, in an intimate one-on-one setting, became a space for emotional release and reflective healing. The interviews, particularly in their later stages, opened affective channels through which participants revisited past traumas, affirmed their survival, and reframed their identities as agents rather than passive victims. In this sense, narrative

functioned not merely as testimony, but as a coping mechanism and an existential practice.

Several participants described the interview experience itself as therapeutic. Razan (35, female) and Nahla (30, female), after recounting their migration stories and the hardships of life in Türkiye, both noted that the interview had felt like a form of therapy. Nahla reflected: "I hadn't really thought about all of this before. But now that you asked, I started to reflect — and new thoughts, new realizations came to mind." Here, the act of speaking not only reveals but also generates knowledge—both about the self and about one's lived experiences. Michel de Certeau's framing of everyday practices as spaces of articulation is particularly apt here: by narrating, participants claimed their voice within a landscape that often renders them voiceless.

In many accounts, telling the story was deeply intertwined with the articulation of pain. Nadia (32, female) stated: "I've been through so many periods of depression, felt overwhelming loneliness, and lived under psychological pressure and fear." Huda (33, female), a former detainee in Assad regime prisons in Syria, recounted living with the psychological aftermath of trauma: "Honestly, I was dealing with mental health issues too. I had PTSD from the detention experience, the sudden flight, and the lack of family or community support." These expressions of vulnerability highlight how narrative allows for the containment and externalization of suffering—a form of affective processing essential to psychological resilience.

Some participants described how storytelling became a source of strength, a way to reclaim agency in the face of injustice. Matar (37, female), a survivor of war and a master's student in Türkiye, shared how she used her academic platform to raise awareness about the Syrian revolution: "Being able to explain what was happening in Syria to people who had no connection to it—that was a huge achievement for me." Matar described her academic journey not only as an educational pursuit but as an affirmation of her survival: "At this program, I felt special as a Syrian student who had survived war and massacres." In these instances, narrative became a vehicle of symbolic capital, enabling participants to transform loss into purpose. . Similarly, Ammar (34, male) said

his goal was to contribute something meaningful to the world after all he had endured: "I want to leave a mark—especially after everything I've been through: war, displacement, exile."

Narratives of war and displacement frequently resurfaced, often bearing heavy emotional weight. Leena (31, female) recalled the destruction of her childhood home in Syria: "The building I told you about, the one where all our childhood memories lived—because of the war, it was bombed and destroyed." For Ayman (43, male), a survivor of Assad's notorious Saydnaya prison, memory served as a compass for resilience: "Whenever something difficult happens, I remind myself: 'Ayman, you were in Assad's prisons. You survived Saydnaya. You came out alive.'" This invocation of survival functioned as both a psychological anchor and a moral orientation, allowing him to contextualize present hardship within a broader trajectory of endurance.

Huda (33, female) recounted how joining an initiative that supports former detainees allowed her to transform trauma into solidarity: "That's where I felt I belonged. That space matched my identity. I could grow there. I felt I could make a real difference." Her words illustrate how narrating past suffering within a supportive, mission-driven context can become a powerful form of collective healing.

Faith also emerged as a source of existential meaning and resilience. Ayman (43, male) attributed his survival and success to divine will: "All success comes from Allah. When a person places their trust in Allah, He will bring the whole world to their feet." Leena (31, female) similarly emphasized the protective power of prayer and parental blessings, while Huda (33, female) recounted how, at her lowest point, her commitment to the Syrian revolution kept her from self-harm: "It's like God put this thought and a blessing in me — a sense of duty not to harm the image of the revolution."

Across these narratives, storytelling emerges as a practice that allows participants to reposition themselves—not as passive recipients of suffering but as reflective, articulate, and resilient agents. Through narrative, they reconstruct fractured temporalities, bind together the past and present, and imagine a future not solely defined by displacement or trauma. In doing so, they affirm not just their survival, but their humanity.

CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to understand how Syrian refugees in Türkiye navigate the uncertainties of everyday life. Drawing on a dual theoretical framework—social capital theory (Bourdieu, Putnam, Coleman) and the theory of everyday life (de Certeau, Lefebvre)—the study examined how displaced individuals actively respond to instability through situated practices that generate rhythm, meaning, and connection. Rather than viewing refugees through a binary of resilience or vulnerability, this research positions agency as fluid, embodied, and deeply relational.

Rather than framing refugee agency as either resistance or passivity, the findings point to a third mode: tactical negotiation, enacted through linguistic strategies, digital navigation, affective routines, and recalibrated social ties. These actions—subtle, embodied, and situational—highlight how refugees in Türkiye reassemble life through context-bound improvisation. They neither fully assimilate into dominant structures nor remain fixed in displacement; instead, they craft hybrid rhythms of continuity that straddle rupture and reinvention.

Three central insights emerge from the findings. First, refugee agency operates tactically—rooted in micro-decisions, contextual cues, and embodied improvisation. Participants described adjusting their accent, altering their dress style, selectively using language, or navigating institutions through informal means. These everyday maneuvers align with de Certeau's (1984) notion of tactics as adaptive actions embedded in constraint. Such tactics illuminate how agency is not heroic or oppositional, but negotiated through relational awareness, strategic silence, and subtle assertions. This understanding challenges policy discourses in Türkiye that depict Syrians as passive recipients of state hospitality (Danış & Parla, 2009; Yıldız & Uzgören, 2016) by instead revealing them as situated actors navigating multiple registers of visibility and risk.

Second, the findings underscore the emotional dimensions of refugee life—often neglected in Türkiye-based migration literature. Using Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis, the study shows how participants attempt to restore continuity and coherence through

seemingly mundane acts: cooking traditional food, celebrating holidays in exile, or recreating communal gatherings. These practices are not simply nostalgic; they are efforts to reinhabit disrupted time, reassert affective presence, and forge livable space within displacement.

Third, the study rethinks social capital not as a static resource but as a dynamic and emotionally mediated process shaped by the lived realities of exile. While Putnam's (2000) distinction between bonding and bridging capital offers a useful heuristic, the findings suggest that these ties are constantly in motion—shaped by affective needs, social pressures, and strategic calculations. Intra-community solidarity—particularly among women—emerged as a critical form of support in the absence of extended family, providing both emotional stability and practical assistance in navigating everyday challenges. Participants described how these networks helped them secure housing, childcare, and informal protection, forming kin-like constellations of care and trust.

At the same time, many also engaged in cautious efforts to build bridging ties with Turkish neighbors, employers, teachers, or NGO workers. These relationships were often fragile—marked by ambivalence, racialized encounters, or uneven expectations. Trust was not given freely but had to be negotiated through repeated interaction, often in the shadow of past rejection or fear of instrumentalization. In this context, Bourdieu's (1986) notion of capital conversion helps illuminate how participants leveraged linguistic fluency, social ties, and reputational credibility to access social goods. However, the findings also point to the limits of Bourdieu's structural emphasis, which risks overlooking the affective labor and emotional fragility embedded in such exchanges. Coleman's (1988) focus on reciprocity, obligation, and network function therefore offers a valuable complement, making visible the interpersonal and ethical dimensions of social capital under duress.

Beyond these core themes, the findings also highlight the central role of digital technologies as both infrastructure and tactic. Participants used WhatsApp, Google Translate, YouTube, and Facebook groups not just for communication but to compensate for institutional gaps, access knowledge, and foster a sense of control. Especially for those unfamiliar with digital tools prior to migration, learning to navigate platforms became

part of their adaptation repertoire. These practices complicate mainstream portrayals of digital tech as merely tools of surveillance or mobility, revealing instead their embeddedness in daily rhythms of survival, care, and connection (Memişoğlu & Ilgit, 2017).

Narrative itself also emerged as a mode of agency. Many participants described the interview process as an opportunity for reflection, naming experiences that had previously remained unspoken. In this sense, storytelling was not just descriptive but performative: a way to reclaim authorship over one's life story. Here, everyday narration functions as a political act, resonating with Lefebvre's view of repetition as a space for critique and de Certeau's emphasis on speech as spatial appropriation. The very act of speaking—and being heard—becomes a subtle but powerful form of resistance against silencing structures.

This research brings de Certeau's tactics, Lefebvre's rhythms, and social capital theory into productive dialogue with lived experience, arguing for a more relational, affective, and practice-oriented understanding of displacement. In doing so, the study redirects scholarly focus away from macro integration models and toward the micropolitics of everyday endurance.

The study's scope is limited by its geographic focus on İstanbul and its purposive sample of fifteen participants, most of whom had previous work or educational experience. As a result, it does not claim statistical generalizability but rather offers analytical depth into a particular refugee population navigating urban life. The reliance on self-reported narratives also carries inherent limitations, including emotional selectivity, strategic silence, or retrospective framing. However, these are not flaws to be corrected but constitutive features of narrative-based inquiry—revealing not only what happened, but how participants want it to be understood.

Future research could build on this work by expanding to other regions of Türkiye, incorporating comparative legal statuses, or adopting longitudinal approaches to trace how everyday tactics shift across time. Studies could also examine intergenerational dynamics or explore how new forms of digital mediation reconfigure patterns of inclusion

and exclusion. Importantly, future work should continue to take seriously the textures of daily life—not merely as background to policy but as a central arena where agency, belonging, and identity are continuously shaped.

Taken together, this thesis affirms that refugee life is not defined solely by precarity, but by the quiet, persistent labor of meaning-making. Syrian refugees in Türkiye are not only surviving—they are reconstituting life through rhythm, memory, relation, and resistance. Their stories remind us that even in displacement, people craft presence—not in opposition to power, but often within and despite it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Result of the Evaluation by the Ethics Committee

Ethics Board Approval is available in the printed version of this dissertation.

Appendix B. Demographic Information of the Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Arrival Year	Occupation	Education	Family Status
Omar	35	Male	2014	Journalist	Bachelor's degree	Married, No kids
Nahla	30	Female	2020	Legal Administrator	Some university education	Married, No kids
Yasser	39	Male	2015	High School English Teacher	Bachelor's degree	Single, No kids
Nadia	32	Female	2015	Managing Editor	Bachelor's degree	Married, 2 kids
Farouk	36	Male	2013	Foreign Trade Officer	High school diploma	Married, 2 kids
Matar	37	Female	2017	Education Consultant	Master's degree	Single, No kids
Ammar	34	Male	2017	Filmmaker	Bachelor's degree	Married, No kids
Razan	35	Female	2013	Translator	Some university education	Married, No kids
Roula	33	Female	2014	Book Translator	Some university education	Married, 2 kids
Leena	31	Female	2016	Housewife, Not Employed	Bachelor's degree	Married, 2 kids
Shadi	33	Male	2017	Auto electrician	Middle school	Married, 2 kids
Fares	40	Male	2017	Car Rental Company Owner	Bachelor's degree	Married, 2 kids
Ayman	43	Male	2013	Surgeon	Medical degree	Married, 3 kids

| Huda | 33 | Female | 2012 | Social Worker | Bachelor's degree | Married, 2 kids |
| Talia | 31 | Female | 2017 | Housewife, Not Employed | Some university education | Married, 2 kids |